

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2007

COMMUNITY SERVICES FORUM ON POVERTY

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning, I'm going to call the Standing Committee on Community Services Forum on Poverty to order. I want to welcome you all today. Some of you have come under very difficult travelling conditions, and we really appreciate the effort you've put into joining us today. I'm going to invite the members of the standing committee, or their replacements, to introduce themselves. Then I want to give you a little bit of background about the forum, and then we'd like to hear from you.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Now many of you I recognize from the first forum, but I do want to just give a little bit of background to today's meeting. You'll remember that over a year ago, on January 12th and 13th, we had the first Forum on Poverty in this very room. One thing the standing committee recognized is that the underlying issue or cause of many of the symptoms and problems and issues that we were hearing about at various meetings of the Standing Committee on Community Services seemed to have in common, was the fact that the people affected suffered from inadequate incomes. So we decided to talk to the people who work year-round on these issues and with this particular portion of our population, to try to get a better understanding - as a committee - and to see if there was a role for us in taking action on some of these problems.

So we heard last year from approximately 25 different organizations, agencies and community groups - many of them actually coalitions representing large numbers of organizations. We also heard from individuals who were impacted by living in impoverished situations. We wanted to hear and to learn more about the context of poverty in Nova Scotia and we certainly did get that information and it was a bleak picture. We heard things like, Nova Scotians were the poorest of the poor across Canada - that even though our economy here in Nova Scotia is growing, so is the gap between the rich and the poor. We heard that 16.1 per cent of Nova Scotians are low income; that 40,000 children in Nova Scotia live in poverty and half in single-parent families; that almost 50 per cent of food bank users were youth under the age of 18; and that one in six women were living in poverty.

So we had a round table discussion with representatives from the various groups, and the next day we held in this room part of a meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services. We decided to take action on a number of recommendations. I just want to remind people what we did. We chose the seven recommendations that seemed to be most common to all the presentations and we thought that perhaps these were issues that could actually be acted upon in last Spring's budget. So we sent letters off to the Premier and to the Minister of Community Services at that time on those seven recommendations.

I want you to know that this committee is made up of representatives from all three Parties, and our actions last year were unanimously endorsed by all members of the committee. So we sent off those seven recommendations. We also sent a letter to the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations and we recommended at that time that the Keep the Heat program should be expanded so that low-income Nova Scotians whose heat was included in their rent would be eligible for the rebate.

[9:15 a.m.]

We sent a letter off to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission asking whether or not adequate nutrition and housing are considered basic human rights under the federal and provincial legislation - human rights legislation. And we sent a letter to the House Speaker asking if there were other options, other avenues that a standing committee could pursue to help the Legislature take action on this serious crisis.

Now you all realize that we had an election last June and the composition of our committee changed and we wanted to reaffirm our commitment to pursuing poverty issues - that's one of the reasons we're meeting here today. It's a chance for us to get an update from some of the organizations that presented to us a year

ago; it's a chance for some of our newer members to be briefed on those issues; and it's also a way possibly for the committee to look at opportunities to impact on this year's budget in ways that could possibly alleviate some of the suffering of Nova Scotians.

So we're here, we want to hear, we'd like to hear what has happened - the good-news stories. We understand that some things have changed, so we'd like to be updated on those. We'd like to have further analysis of some of the issues and conditions that were described to us last year. We'd like to hear - because it's a year later - whether there's any new information that we should have or new models of possibly working together that the committee would benefit from knowing about. If you have suggestions for further action that we can take within our somewhat limited mandate - we do have the ability to influence and make suggestions - we'd be very interested to hear your suggestions on that as well.

We thank you again for coming. I think most of you have a copy of the agenda. Those witnesses are not in any official order. So I'm going to ask, if anyone has any time restrictions that would suggest that perhaps we need to hear from you earlier rather than later - most of you have representatives here for the whole day. Is there anyone who's just going to be here for the early part of the morning? (Interruption)

Lucille, would you like to go first, just to give yourself a little more flexibility? Why don't we start with you, then. Please come up to the table. I'm going to remind everyone - we have a new mic system, but it's still somewhat sensitive; you have to keep a minimum distance of about six inches. So we encourage everyone to speak up, so that everyone in the room can hear.

MS. LUCILLE HARPER: Do you mind if I stand?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Not at all.

MS. HARPER: I think better on my feet.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Perhaps you could introduce yourself.

MS. HARPER: My name is Lucille Harper, and I work with the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre. I'm here today with Della Chaban, who works at The Women's Place in Bridgetown. We're here representing women's centres in Nova Scotia. There are eight women's centres in Nova Scotia, most of us being in rural areas. We serve very rural communities. So part of what we want to talk about today is the rural poverty perspective, knowing that it's very difficult

for people from rural areas to get to these tables and to be able to talk about poverty.

I think, Marilyn, you've summed up, very well, a bit of an overview of the crisis situation in our province right now around poverty. I wish we could say there had been a lot of progress in the last year. The progress has been minimal. I think we need to make a lot more. So I'm really happy that you have reconvened people today to have further discussion about this, because I think we have come to a realization right now in this country that the environment is a crisis issue, and what we haven't come to the realization of is that poverty is a crisis issue. We need to make that as poignant and as real and as present in people's minds as the environment is.

I want to start off a little bit with giving some issues that we wanted to bring forward. One is an environmental issue to a certain extent, because it's my understanding that the energy efficiency kits that were promised to income assistance recipients, at least in our area, have not been distributed. When we did a follow-up call - we were very excited when those were going to come out, so we had called both the Lions and the Kinsmen in our areas to say, would you be willing to install these in people's homes, who are not able to do that themselves? They said, sure, they were great, they were ready to do that. Our follow-up call on that a couple of weeks ago, we were told that those kits would probably be distributed in early March. Well, we called one of the coldest days of the year, and the fact that those kits are going to be distributed in early March speaks for itself - I don't think I have to say too much more about that. That's really not good enough.

Some of the things I'm just going to go through briefly, but I do want to talk about rural poverty. Of course, we need an increased minimum wage. What we know now is that a job is not a way out of poverty necessarily, that the increase we're seeing in poverty in Canada, and certainly in Nova Scotia, is really among the working poor. So the fact that someone is working full-time, full-year, does not guarantee that they are not going to be living in poverty and, in some ways, it complicates their poverty, because when they're working they have all of the complications of trying to get to work, et cetera, and still remain living in poverty.

We want that minimum wage to be increased to the market basket measure because when we look at low-income cut-offs, what we see is that they do not adequately represent the depth of rural poverty because they don't include transportation. So when you look at low-income cut-offs and you look at the urban-rural difference, it looks as though those living in urban areas are living in a deeper level of poverty than those in rural areas. When you add in transportation,

which of course, if you're living in a rural area, transportation is absolutely essential, that flips and you see that people who are living in rural areas are actually living in a deeper level of poverty. We have no public transportation system.

If there's one thing that you could do to make a significant difference in the ability of people to move forward in their lives living in rural areas, it would be to implement a rural transportation system that works. Without it, people can't access training, they can't access education opportunities, they can't access employment opportunities, they can't get to physician appointments, it's difficult to go grocery shopping, et cetera. So when you're living in poverty and you're dependent upon a neighbour for a ride, you might be able to get to town once a week to get your groceries, but you can't schedule an appointment. So you can't schedule an appointment with a physician, you can't schedule an appointment even with your worker at Community Services, because you don't know whether or not you're going to be able to make that appointment. So those are really big issues.

Affordable housing is huge, that's very much portrayed as an urban issue and not as a rural issue, and it's a rural issue. Current programs that require groups that are trying to build affordable housing to police the incomes of the people who are living in that housing are not good enough, that's not okay. We need to be able to provide affordable housing for people who are living on low incomes, income assistance recipients, so that when their income rises they aren't penalized, or they aren't asked to move out of that housing. That's a really huge issue as well. Our understanding is that's going to be further complicated by the recent cuts to the federal program.

Downloading to charities is huge, so what we've seen in particular, and there will be other people here, I know, who'll be talking about some of those issues, but when you can't heat your house and you're spending such a huge amount of your income on heat and you're not even going to get your energy package until March, what happens, as we know, is people can't afford food, they can't afford the basic necessities of life, lots of times they can't even afford their heat. So what happens in our women's centres is people come to us - poverty is one of the biggest issues that we see and the complications around poverty, which are many - people come to us looking for some kind of help in getting some of their expenses covered, particularly heat and emergency expenses.

What happens is we've been able to go to charities. The Kinsmen in our community happen to be fantastic and they raise quite a bit of money and they've really made that available. They have been running out of money, the charities don't have money now. They don't have money, because the downloading to the

charities has been so significant that they just don't have it. The Kinsmen said to us last year, the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre cost us \$25,000 - well, we didn't actually cost them \$25,000, but the \$25,000 was spent on emergency needs for people, women and children who came through the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and we were able to move them along and get some support through the Kinsmen Club and the Lions Club.

That's just not happening, because the charities are overstretched and it's increasingly difficult for the helping organizations, be they women's centres and the other community-based charities, to be able to cover that need. That's not where the need should be covered, that needs to be covered by adequate wages, by adequate social assistance. That's not the role of our charities, to be providing essentially what should be fair wages and government programs.

Mental health is another huge issue which is again complicated in rural areas. Poverty complicates mental health issues and we know that there are many reasons that people are not able to work. I've always said poverty is really depressing, it really is. Poverty wears one's well-being down to a depth that almost no other issue does, because it is so difficult to get out of it. For women who have mental health conditions to begin with, who don't have the supports that are there, the mental health services in all of our communities are hugely overstretched and they are non-existent in the rural communities, they are just non-existent.

What we've seen happen at our women's centres is that with policies and programs that are essentially population-based, and services don't have enough staff to cover the rural areas, then what happens is decisions get made to put the services and to load the service providers into the larger population-based areas. So the more sparsely populated areas, like many of our rural counties - and I'm thinking about Guysborough in my own mind in particular, as well as Cape Breton - it means that it's more and more difficult to get the very services that are needed in those areas. So it really begins to complicate mental health issues.

There is an incredible lack of suitable housing, for example, for people who have mental health issues living in the city. Well, you can imagine what it's like in rural Guysborough. So how are we going to address that? It's just so much not a part of people's thinking. You know rural issues have kind of been my mantra for the last couple of years and I can't tell you how immediately dismissed they are. So I want to get back a little bit, too.

The other thing that's really complicating poverty and complicating the landscape in many ways in rural areas is out-migration. Out-migration is a huge issue for Nova Scotia and we all know that. The out-migration from the rural

areas has been so significant that we've lost infrastructure, we've lost schools, public services, post offices, gas stations, et cetera. We have deteriorating roads, we've got loss of a tax base, so the municipalities are having a harder time.

The charities that are trying to raise money to provide some of these other supports, they've lost the people that they can raise the money from in order to be able to provide these supports. So what we're left with in the rural communities is an older population, less educated, less skilled, higher levels of disabilities, lower health outcomes, and a changing family and community structure. What is happening now is that in many situations - it's not that this hasn't been happening in Nova Scotia for decades, it has, but now it's sort of like the global warming - this has increased to the point where we cannot sustain this in Nova Scotia any longer and nobody is talking about it.

[9:30 a.m.]

So we've got this changing family structure where in a two-parent family, one of the parents, if it's a man - often it's a man - he's leaving to go out West. So he leaves to go out for a number of weeks at a time. So now we've got these small rural communities, not only have we had the skilled, et cetera, leave, but now we've got these communities where women are trying to hold together the family, hold together the household, do all of the community work that's required in order to keep the community going, whether it's the parent-teacher groups or the church groups or whatever it is, the impact on women has been absolutely enormous.

When you don't have those services and when you don't have that rural infrastructure, the pressure on women to do that unpaid, caring work, both in home and in community, has reached a point where women can't do it: (a) there aren't enough women to do it anymore; (b) many of the families that are there are living in poverty, so they don't even have the resources, because it costs money to do that kind of unpaid work.

That's hugely significant right now in our rural areas, and what's happening with the changing family structure is that if any of you know Fort McMurray, there are huge drug issues out there, so the issues that are coming back to our communities are now more complicated as well, and sometimes the men don't come back, they just stay out there and then the women are trying to set up a whole new life on their own with their children, with no partner and no external money coming in.

That's some of the picture of what's happening. When we have urban-centric policies, we're hurting rural communities. As I've said, it has a disproportionate impact on women. I was just talking with Leo earlier, there is a

very good report that has been put out by a Senate Committee. It's called Understanding Freefall: The Challenge of the Rural Poor. It's looking at the whole issue of rural poverty. It's really worth reading. It's an interim report, and right now the Senate Committee is travelling around the country and meeting with people from rural areas. They're going to be in Nova Scotia on February 22nd and 23rd. I really encourage those of you who have rural constituencies, and most of you do, I'm sure, to try to find the people in your areas who really should be talking to that committee about rural poverty, because I think we need to have the Nova Scotia voice in there.

That kind of brings me down to what do we need. I'm going to turn this over to Della after I do this, because she has an excellent analysis around these issues as well.

What do we need? We need a provincial and federal poverty reduction strategy that is developed with women's groups and anti-poverty advocates and strategies that are cognizant of and sensitive to rural realities. If we don't solve our rural issues, then we're going to be in really rough straits in this province.

An adequate minimum wage that keeps people living above poverty lines, real poverty lines.

A guaranteed livable income. This is a concept that has been gaining some momentum recently. I think that if we had one policy that would allow us to put a hold on out-migration, it would be a guaranteed liveable income. Now what we do after that, I think, requires some creativity and requires some discussion with our communities and requires some innovation on the part of the province as to how we revitalize our small communities, but do we not have a huge opportunity now with sustainable energy, is that not something that we could really be looking at in very creative ways that could be rural-based types of initiatives? A guaranteed livable income would allow our people to stay here.

I've been gathering out-migration stories. Some of you probably know Hyland Fraser, because Hyland was an MLA here. He was from Antigonish. I ran into Hyland the other day, and I hadn't seen him in ages. I said, oh, hi, Hyland, how are you doing? I haven't seen you in ages. He said, well, I've moved out West. I said, what, you've moved out West? Now here's somebody who was a municipal councillor - he was a real community person. He was warden of the municipality for a number of years, and then he was an MLA for one term. Very dedicated to his community, lived there for generations, had 12 kids. He said, I've got 12 kids, they all live in Alberta. We packed up, sold the family farm, moved to Alberta.

I thought, oh my gosh, if that's not the story, when you've got a family that has been so dedicated and put so much into their rural communities, to have that kind of - it just really struck me as a story, one story of many, many stories, and this is the picture that's happening right now. It really is at a crisis state.

So guaranteed livable income, social assistance policies that address the needs and protect 16- to 19-year-old youth who are unable to live at home, and again with a rural focus, so that we're not forcing our kids to come into the cities.

I guess one of the bright spots that the women's centre did want to mention was the fact that - and we see beginnings as bright - at the recent Progressive Conservative Party Convention there is a resolution that's calling upon the government to reduce the clawback on social assistance. So we do see that as if that actually went forward and if that was actually done, then that's a bright spot and it would be helpful, but it's so small compared to what we want to do.

So I'm going to sit down, pass it over to Della and really encourage, plead with you to put a focus on rural in the way that we haven't done it before, because pretty soon our rural communities are not going to be there at all. I usually don't speak in such general terms, I usually focus almost exclusively and specifically on women and when I'm saying this, this has such a disproportionate impact on women, and that's another discussion for another time, but I just wanted to say that. Over to you.

MS. DELLA LONGMIRE: Thank you, Lucille. The three western area women's centres have done a huge amount of research around pensionable income for senior women. I can echo everything that Lucille has said here, it's happening at The Women's Place in Bridgetown exactly the same, all the same things are the same. The greater risk is to senior women who are living way below poverty standards. If you're getting Old Age and the Supplement, you're getting around \$1,100 a month. Increasingly old housing stock in the areas where women are very vulnerable, the out-migration that's happening is affecting older women disproportionately more than any other women that I deal with.

The other thing I would like to say is that because of what's happening in our communities, I had an incident at the women's centre on Monday, before I left to do some meetings, and what would have taken, a year ago, three phone calls, took us eight phone calls - from one place to another place to another place - to actually get help for an individual who was a senior woman who had run out of oil. Those are the challenges.

So we have a wonderful report that I can make sure all of you have and we've come up with some recommendations, the three women's centres have broadened our base to two other women's centres - one in Central Nova and on the Eastern Shore, to continue the work. We have a proposal in to the Status of Women Canada, but everything that Lucille has said is deepened, the risks are greater, and all the challenges are more for senior women living in rural Nova Scotia. So thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Do members of the committee have any questions to clarify any points or add anything? Leo.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Lucille and Della, thanks for coming in today. I know Lucille has appeared before our standing committee and the Forum on Poverty last year, and certainly is a very strong voice for women and rural issues. Are you located right in the Town of Antigonish, in terms of your centre, Lucille?

MS. HARPER: Yes, we're located in the town and we now have an outreach program where we're delivering services one day a week each in Sherbrooke, Guysborough and Canso.

MR. GLAVINE: I asked that question because I was wondering if there were any university students that would possibly ever visit your centre, because it was interesting that a food bank just started for the first time in Wolfville and I can assure you it's not just going to be the local residents who will be visiting, from what I hear of the needs of university students, especially during second term when the money is running pretty dry.

I'm just wondering, do you have any association with the St. F.X. student body in terms of the work of the women's centre?

MS. HARPER: Well, certainly we work a lot with St. F.X. students. One of the programs we have at the women's centre, we have a health clinic, so one day a week we have a physician and a nurse practitioner, and that service in particular is extremely well used by the students for many, many issues, not necessarily related to poverty but certainly related to mental health, certainly related to sexual assault, certainly related to many other issues that we see in the community to which that population is particularly vulnerable, and we do talk with students as well around the fact that they are - not all of them but a good number of them are - really scraping by and trying to make ends meet.

Who we really see in that situation are single mothers who are trying to go to university, and that's a huge challenge financially. So beyond everything that's

required to do their course work, et cetera, and raise young children and not have transportation and all of the complications around that, the financial strain is huge and we've had a number of women who have not been able to continue their studies because they can't afford to do it.

Not only that, women trying to get to community college who are single mothers, there's no transportation. So even though Community Services says we'll give you a paltry amount a month for transportation, if there's no transportation you can't get there. So trying to organize reliable rides to get either to Port Hawkesbury or to get to Stellarton is sometimes an overwhelming barrier and the women just can't do it. So the barriers to education are significant, and they are financial as well as logistical. In rural areas the logistics are always as significant as the financial and significantly complicate the financial, so I can't emphasize enough what that difference is.

I think it was Darrell Dexter, actually, who did an excellent article a number of months ago in The Halifax ChronicleHerald that was looking at the rate of participation of students in universities and found that when you're living in a community where you can walk to university or you've got a public transportation system, the participation rate is significantly higher; whereas if you're living in a rural community and you have to find the transportation to get there, it's much more likely that you're not going to be going to university. So once again, when we look at our rural areas and what happens with this, it's huge.

[9:45 a.m.]

One other thing I want to say about education, because that just struck me as well, we're working on a project at our women's centre right now that's trying to look at the outcomes for single parents, single women, who are going through either community college or university, and to look at their outcomes. So what kinds of jobs are they going into, what kinds of streams are they being pushed into, is this something that's going to allow them to earn an income that's going to put them significantly above the poverty line? So that's a study that we're doing right now which is quite interesting, because women are often being streamed in community colleges, into low-paying types of work.

Having said that, we are working quite closely with people from community college. One of the stories was - and this was, of course, a class of men who were in a technical program - somebody from Alberta came in and they took the entire class - they were all men in the class, 21 in the class; I can't remember, it was a technical program - didn't even want them to graduate, and they scooped them all up and moved them all out to Alberta, every single one of them, and said, we'll finish your training out there. So when this is happening, the impact on women in the community is significant as well.

MS. LONGMIRE: I'd like to say, Leo, the fact that the human services and some of the courses moving from Middleton to Kingstec has made a huge difference to young women in the area who could live at home or live in the area and go to school. I'm sure that some of those young women are at that food bank, I have knowledge of that. So I think that's also a real big issue for our area.

MR. GLAVINE: Just one other question, if I may.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Very quickly, then I have Stephen. We do have to move on, because we have to be fair to the other presenters.

MR. GLAVINE: Della, I'm just wondering, I certainly have my own theories and observations, but have you lived in Bridgetown and rural Nova Scotia probably pretty well all your life?

MS. LONGMIRE: At least 15 years I've been in the area.

MR. GLAVINE: What do you see are the undermining and the underpinnings of what was a very, very strong and flourishing part of Nova Scotia life, and that was our rural communities? If you were identifying one or two things, what would you, personally, observe and have to say?

MS. LONGMIRE: The aging population is huge. I mean we all know the aging population in these areas and their life story and what's going on for that issue.

It's an interesting phenomenon, because most young people are having to move away. In my own family, I lost two grandnephews to the West, and it's an amazing thing to watch happen. So if you have an aging population on one hand and the young people moving on the other hand, it leaves a very - the vibrancy of the community. The stores are closing. I mean, if you know Annapolis Royal at all, as Stephen does, I think we've lost five stores or are about to lose five stores. So it's pretty amazing what's happening.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you very much, Della.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Stephen.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you for your presentation. You were speaking of alternative transportation in rural Nova Scotia. We have some in the Annapolis Valley, Trans County

Transportation Society and there's ACATS in different areas, is that what you're looking at? Is that the type of model or do you think there's a better model?

MS. LONGMIRE: I'm hoping there's a better model because it's difficult for people out in the very rural, rural, other than the floor of the Valley, to actually access that transportation, and when they can - sometimes they can't - we have a number of young women who volunteer at the centre who are using that system and they have to come in at 10 a.m. - one lives in Wilmot, one lives a little further up - they have to come to the centre at 10:00 a.m. and leave by 2:30 p.m. How do you hold a job when you can only get in certain places?

Now I know it has been very good running down through the floor of the Valley to Convergys on time, but there are other employers in the Valley as well.

MR. MCNEIL: The concept is right, it's just that it needs to be tweaked to improve the flexibility.

MS. LONGMIRE: Absolutely.

MR. MCNEIL: You also spoke of the example you used about a client coming in, needing eight phone calls to help to receive oil. From your clients, the working poor, families living in poverty, has removing the Keep the Heat program and taking off the HST been a help to your clients or been a hindrance, hurt them?

MS. LONGMIRE: Oh, it's been mixed. I don't think it's been a great help, to be honest, it just hasn't. One of the things that happens in the very rural part where we live is that a lot of these people are either living at home, because there's not a lot of places that they can live, and if there are young children involved one of the things that's happening is their family is taking up the slack because child care is a huge issue in our area, as you well know. If there's a child care facility in Annapolis Royal and you're trying to work in Middleton, the transportation issues do not connect and that's another issue for us.

MR. MCNEIL: I guess one of the things that we see a fair bit of from the constituency office has been that the \$250 that people were receiving for oil allowed them to buy it - removing the 8 per cent off it, if you don't have any money, you don't have any money. Cutting the price of oil in half, they still can't afford to buy it. It has been a big challenge particularly for the people living in poverty and the working poor. It's one of the reasons it was somewhat short-sighted by removing the Keep the Heat program, by government not keeping it in place, it disproportionately affected the very people that you're trying to help and that we should be here trying to help, the people who need our help the most, being affected.

Lucille, you mentioned something - this will be my final question, Madam Chairman - you mentioned about an increase in minimum wage. What would you like to see it at?

MS. HARPER: Okay, let me just say - can I just say one thing, that people who are living in poverty are not living in R2000 homes, so . . .

MR. MCNEIL: People living in poverty in the Annapolis Valley are not living in R2000 homes either.

MS. HARPER: No, so what I'm saying is, I think if we looked at the amount of - the cost of heat is often the poorer the housing, the higher the heat costs; the poorer the housing, the more likely that there are people who are living in poverty there. So programs that only help a little bit keep people really still at a level of desperation that's just not okay. We just need to be so much more creative around this and so much more fundamental in our approach to addressing this. Anyway, what was that question?

MR. MCNEIL: You spoke about a minimum wage, you wanted an increase in the minimum wage. Where would you like it?

MS. HARPER: Where would I like it to be? I'd like it to be at \$12 an hour.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I want to interrupt for a minute, perhaps we do need to wind this part up. I realize now I've got to be much more formal about how much time, because otherwise the other presenters won't have a chance, so could we just quickly . . .

MS. HARPER: And I appreciate that. I just want to say the thing about minimum wage is that it's reprehensible that somebody is working full-time, full-year, and living in poverty, and that's a policy. That's a policy where what we're saying is that you can go out, you can work 40 hours a week and it's okay for you to be living in poverty; it's fine with the Government of Nova Scotia, that's perfectly acceptable.

I think that's wrong; I think it's wrong morally and I think it's stupid, because what that does is it doesn't allow people to participate fully in our society and fully in our communities. It's very difficult for people who are living in poverty to be able to participate and to be able to build communities in the way we need to be able to build and sustain families in communities in order to move ahead.

On that, one of the ways that Ireland moved from being one of the poorest countries in Europe to one of the countries with the most dynamic economies was by increasing their minimum wage to a place where people could live with dignity, could participate, could build. So what I hear now is we're trying to beg for a minimum wage that keeps people 2 cents above the poverty line, and I think that's really misguided thinking. I think we need to have a minimum wage where people are living at a level where they can fully participate and where they want to stay in Nova Scotia, so I think \$12 an hour.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Lucille and Della, we really appreciate you coming in today.

Is there anyone else who might have to leave early? Darcy and Gary, okay. We'll come up first with Darcy and then we'll go on to the Public Good Society for the third presentation.

MS. DARCY HARVEY: Thanks, everyone. I'm Darcy Harvey, I work at Community Action on Homelessness. I'm actually here today speaking on behalf of Community Action on Homelessness, the Community Advocates Network and the Affordable Energy Coalition. These groups all know the reality of poverty, and together they represent organizations working across the entire province and work daily in assisting Nova Scotians caught in the seemingly inescapable cycle of poverty. As I said, I represent all these groups today, not because they do not think that speaking about the poverty they see is important, or to diminish what important work and attention to poverty is being paid by the government, but because the need and number of poor in this province is so great that agencies find it so difficult to find the time, particularly on shorter notice, to come to meetings such as this.

It is well-known knowledge that little has happened to reduce poverty in the province in the last year, not only by DCS but by the government as a whole. We have seen Nova Scotia Power increases happen across the province, without an increase in the standard of living, in regard to minimum wage or income assistance rates. We see income assistance rates that, despite minimal increases over the last year, are still drastically below the poverty line and even in real dollars, lower than they were before the amalgamation in 2001, which is really sad.

We see that people on minimum wage here in this province, as Lucille said, are living drastically below the poverty line and that a recent report available through the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association showed that individuals here in HRM, working minimum wage, would have to be making nearly double

their wages in order to afford their housing rental costs without paying more than 30 per cent of their income towards those costs.

Another recent report showed that Sydney is among one of the least affordable places in the country, in terms of housing affordability. Nearly 56 per cent of individuals in Sydney are paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent; here in Halifax it's close to 50 per cent. We also see that despite the fact that Community Services income assistance cases have decreased, we still see poverty increasing in the province, which points to the need to look beyond community - certainly there are policies and issues that are contentious around why those cases are decreasing, but we know that those individuals who are off assistance are more likely being pushed into the minimum wage workforce and therefore still living in poverty because poverty has increased in this province, despite these so-called successes. People in low-wage jobs are forced to work most likely without health benefits and on assistance towards life's necessities.

We also see in the department now individuals who need things like hearing aids, like a new seat for a motorized scooter, for instance, being asked to prove that they've gone to a charity first, before the department will help them, being actually referred to social workers in the community saying oh, this social worker knows where the charities are, go to that person and seek out assistance from charities and then come back to us if you can't find something. That's again talking about downloading to charities, it's pretty bad.

[10:00 a.m.]

So this is why anti-poverty groups headed by this coalition have been working on poverty, finding the time along with the increased workload they face due to the large numbers of people forced to exist on insufficient income and make extremely tough choices daily, sacrificing their health and safety to maintain a roof over their head, and hopefully electricity and heat for their families.

These groups recognize that the only real changes in poverty rates will occur in this province through a provincial government-led poverty reduction strategy, such as that being implemented right now in Conservative-led Newfoundland. This government, along with others such as Quebec and recently New Brunswick, have not only recognized that poverty is an issue that affects the whole livelihood of a province, they have committed to making the changes necessary to see poverty reduced.

There can only be one recommendation toward affecting poverty in Nova Scotia, and that is for a provincial poverty reduction strategy that looks not only at

a single department, but looks at policies overall that maintain poverty for Nova Scotians.

All of our groups and other anti-poverty and front-line organizations from across the province will be coming together in early March to frame our vision for a poverty reduction strategy for Nova Scotia. Out of that two-day session, concrete recommendations for action will be produced. This coalition would be happy, after these recommendations come together, to meet with this committee again, as well as individual departments and Parties, with this information at that time. We are doing our work and taking action, and we're hoping that out of all this our government can be able to take advantage of some of our work that we are doing and incorporate it into theirs and really see some action happening.

I would also like to introduce some partners here today representing our three organizations. I have here with me for Community Action on Homelessness, Tom Frizzell and Robert Borden; speaking for the Affordable Energy Coalition later we have Laura Lannon; and for the Community Advocates Network, Anne Duffy. All have been affiliated in some way with our organizations and they are here to express their experience of changes in poverty over the last year and recommend recommendations for change as well. So I'm going to say thank you and pass it on to Tom.

MR. TOM FRIZZELL: My name is Tom Frizzell. I'm a member of the action group, which is part of the Community Action on Homelessness. The only reason I come here this morning is to just talk about the meat and potatoes. Darcy explained to me what's going on here and that it was held last year, too, so I was really amazed listening to Della and to Lucille - my God, there's some good stuff there.

In what seems like another life, I once worked for the federal government for many, many years. What I paid every two weeks in taxes was more than what I now receive. I have been on welfare for the past seven or eight years now from a serious illness; after three years my funds being gone, my home, my car, all those things that come with a decent income gone, my partner too. But it's not a "poor me", it's the fact that on \$427 a month I'll break it down for you and then I'll make the points I want to make. On \$427 a month which is given to me, I pay \$4 for a bank service, \$136 in rent - let me just fill that one out, that's because I live in social housing, Metro Non-Profit Housing. I'd be nowhere without that, nowhere. I couldn't survive in a room, I'd commit suicide. I could not, that's just me, I couldn't.

Sixty-five dollars cable, that's my entertainment. When I break it down and tell you what I have left, that's my entertainment, a TV, and I hate TV. I turn

it on sometimes and that's my entertainment; \$120 in food, \$30 a week. I used to do that in a day but, you know, \$120 a month; \$30 on a phone bill, \$10 on meds - roughly \$30 every three months, I get them every three months, but I budget my money - and \$32 for bus tickets, leaves me with \$30 at the end of all that.

Having said that, I don't smoke or drink. My God, I don't know where I'd get beer now in a tavern for \$30, I'd go dry, and I'm a guy who used to like beer. You know the reality is that that's a disgrace. Now it's not a "poor me" story, to use an appropriate pun, but as Lucille said, and I never heard it expressed that way, a guaranteed livable - forget this guaranteed minimum and forget minimum wage - a guaranteed livable income I think in this country.

Now I will say, first of all, I want to say I'm thankful to the Government of Nova Scotia that there's this drug program that allows me to get about \$600 in medications for \$30. I'm thankful for that. I'm thankful for the social housing I have to live in. Having met Robert recently and his circumstances and some of the people, you know, I'm thankful for my place, okay, but it's a disgrace that people are forced to survive in our province, a very wealthy province in my understanding, in many ways.

So with that said, with \$30 left over, that's the reality, okay? I cannot see any pluses there. I think we were given a \$4 or \$6 raise? I mean, it could be worse. I could be in places where if I open my mouth I'm shot by the government but you know, hey.

The thing I want to talk about is that you know social housing is the core. We need safe, social housing for all human beings, a basic human right, and along with that a guaranteed income. I think, you know - yes, monitored by the government. I don't believe that people just be given money and that they can - you know, no, it's monitored and I think that those checks and balances are quite appropriate. I haven't worked under government, I realize that sometimes decisions have to be made which are very hard, by decent, honest men, that most people in government are honest and decent. These decisions are hard, but I think social housing - for me, because I live in it, I'd be nowhere without it, on the income I have. A basic drug plan - I mean I have to look at calling my social worker, because I'm paying \$30 and maybe getting a reduction on that. That's taking money out of my pocket.

We hear a lot, as Lucille was mentioning, a very particular person on the environment issue. Well, poverty, too, is a crisis in our country as I understand it from talking with Darcy and Paul, hearing people coming to learn, you know, not about how poverty is a reality but how it affects people across our country. Lucille said that poverty wears one down. It does, it just - you know.

I mentioned being on medications; I take them for illness. I don't take tranquilizers - it's amazing that I don't have to be on a tranquilizer because sometimes I can get really, really uptight when I look at those realities.

I know about Ireland, I've studied that. I've looked at that and that's amazing what they've done with that country - you men and women are educated here - what they've done with that country, that's amazing, and one of those things being a livable wage for their citizens. I don't have the ability to tell you how you would break that down, but I think it's something that needs to be looked at from this group of folks here and be taken to the people in power. People deserve this as a basic human right.

As I say, when I look at the fact now in my life I can survive on \$427 a month, that's amazing. And by the way, Trevor mentioned \$120 a month, that's also backed up by the food bank. I won't tell you how it feels to have to go to a food bank, that's none of your business, you either feel it or you don't. Many times I'd rather rob a bank - I would, that's just me, the way I was brought up. But it's there and I have to avail myself of it.

I am grateful, as I say, though, for the housing and for the drug program that's in existence, but there need to be improvements and the links I make are more safe, affordable housing for people, for men and women. I can only speak for single people, I have no in-depth knowledge and experience with, say, mothers and children - that must be something else, the rates they're on. But the access to housing and any decent livable wage, and that's it, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Tom. We certainly appreciate you sharing your personal experience with us, it really brings a new awareness and level of reality that sometimes talking generally (Interruptions). Oh, for sure. Thank you.

MR. ROBERT BORDEN: My name is Robert Borden. I guess what you would call me is working poor. Right now I just lost my apartment and I'm down at Turning Point and I went to speak to one of the workers down there, and I guess you would call it a welfare worker that they have down there. Basically buddy just told me, well, you're a healthy man, why don't you go find a job? Well, I just told him, I lost my job, I got laid off and my unemployment ran out and I'm down here seeking help; it's the first time I've been here. He basically just told me, you're a healthy man, go find a job - that, I couldn't get over.

So I do what I do naturally - I go and look for a job. I get up every day at 4:30 a.m. and I go to these Labour Ready centres, casual labour. They pay a

minimum of \$7.15 an hour. You might get a day's work, you might get a week's work, but that's the only income I have at this time. To go and look for an apartment on something that you're just surviving day to day now, I find it hard. I've worked most of my life, with jobs at minimum wage, higher wages. Sometimes you run into a jam, but you keep going and you just do it. It's just part of something that's in you that you keep doing it.

What I hear that they give out on welfare, it kind of amazed me that people do live on that little bit of income, when I was so used to having a paycheque in my pocket every day and surviving on that and found it a little bit hard, even with my kids and that, they did a little bit better than me, because I suffered through because they're my kids. There's nothing I could do about that, I suffer, it doesn't matter.

But today, when I look at some of the guys who are down there, it amazes me. Some of them have mental problems and physical problems and stuff like that, that I can understand, but when you look at someone who's healthy, who's going out every day looking for a job, then you get penalized when you do find a job. They tell you, we can't help you because you have a job, and the money you do make is not enough to live on.

You have to have almost \$2,000 to find a decent apartment because they want the first month's rent, the last month's rent and damage deposit, and the minimum wage just is not making it, it's really not. You have to feed yourself every day, you're wasting your money, do you know what I mean, because you have to find shelter and then when you go and feed yourself and get bus money to go and look for a job, I mean you're just in that cycle and it seems you really can't get out of it. I find it hard nowadays, like I said, I've worked most of my life but today it's hard, I just can't seem to make it, I just can't get out of that cycle. It's kind of hard to do when you're only getting \$7.15 an hour.

I don't complain, I don't do nothing, I do what I have to do to survive. The welfare system and stuff like that, it's just amazing that I find that these people actually do it. I have to go on welfare pretty soon, as I was told, in order to get out. Okay, fine, but I won't stay on welfare. I'm just one of those guys who likes to work, but as most of these people said, the minimum wage down here, it's impossible, it really is. No matter what you do, you're not going to get ahead, you're going to stay under the poverty line. At \$7.15 an hour you're making less than \$6,000 a year almost. It's pretty near impossible to live a decent life on that type of wage that you have to suffer through and do without. That's basically all I have to say. Thank you for listening.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Robert. We really appreciate you coming in and speaking from the heart like that, it means a lot. Thank you.

So do we have any questions or comments? Trevor.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Just so everyone really fully understands - I'm sure we all do - I've known Tom Frizzell for probably the last 10 years and Tom walks through Dartmouth North with his head held high, he's a very proud man. He participates in a lot of local groups and as he just stated, if you do the math, it's a little over \$5,000 a year that he's living on. (Interruption) Well, \$5,124 - without a calculator, that's what I did the math at.

MR. FRIZZELL: No, I guarantee you, my slip arrived the other day from Community Services and its \$3,400 - anyway, it's \$3,400.

MR. ZINCK: What's quite ridiculous about that is two things. Where we actually set the poverty line, and I think it's up around \$21,000 a year now . . .

[10:15 a.m.]

MR. FRIZZELL: May I ask a question, Madam Chairman, what is the poverty line in this province for a single male or female? I don't know. What do you call that? What is the poverty line - does anyone know here?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't have those rates with me.

MR. ZINCK: Tom, I've seen it in and around \$19,000, I believe it has gone up to \$21,000.

MR. FRIZZELL: Okay, just curious. So on \$4,000 or \$5,000 . . .

MR. ZINCK: What I really want people to understand, and Della made mention and Lucille made mention, at a recent Capital Health AGM they came up with six key points that allowed an individual to have a healthy lifestyle, which would alleviate and take the burden off the health care system. Two of those key points were income and housing. For an individual such as Tom Frizzell, if we didn't have the existing housing that he rents from now in Dartmouth North, Tom Frizzell would not have a place to live in Dartmouth North, based on the income

he has and the shelter allowance he gets. Rents right now are around \$600 a month for a one bedroom. So Tom, coming here today, I can honestly say I've learned a little bit more about the man and why he's so proud. Thanks, Tom.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Any other questions or comments? Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: One quick comment for Ms. Harvey there is that actually 59.2 per cent of the people in Cape Breton pay more than 30 per cent for housing in Cape Breton - that was 56 per cent, it's the highest in the country - and 83 per cent of the seniors who live in Cape Breton live below poverty. Anybody who received minimum wage, like Mr. Borden said, receives - if he worked for \$7.15 an hour for 40 hours a week for 52 weeks, that's \$14,782. So he's still below the poverty line, working at minimum wage in the Province of Nova Scotia.

I do agree with living wages and stuff like that, but again, the government has spent millions of dollars on affordable housing in the Province of Nova Scotia and they're claiming that in Phase I in three years they've built 570 units, which I know not to be correct, and I'll not get into that argument today, but that's a fudged part. It's cooking the books as far as I'm concerned.

Again, we're here a second time, in the Forum on Poverty, and retaining about having a strategy for poverty in the Province of Nova Scotia. It's a good idea because you see other provinces working towards that initiative to make lives better for their citizens, but we also talk about child poverty. Child poverty has risen in the Province of Nova Scotia over the last 10 years, so now not only are we seeing families - even families on income assistance, their children are living in poverty and the families that are living poorer are living in poverty. So it's a spiral effect that affects the whole community.

Again, I thought it was somebody earlier who said that non-profit organizations and charities are being downloaded these services. When you have a government department telling somebody to go out and bring back two quotes from two charities in order to get even a wheelchair, for example - I don't have a wheelchair, I need a wheelchair, how am I going to get two quotes from two charities to bring to you? What am I going to do? It doesn't make any sense, some of the things in the policies.

The policies have to be changed, it has to be changed for 16- to 19-year olds. As an MLA, that's a big issue that I have in Cape Breton. I mean, on the phone constantly with the caseworkers and supervisors in a department, fighting for these issues - honestly, we're in desperate shape in the Province of Nova Scotia. We need to move ahead. Again, thank you for coming in. I just wanted to

point out that \$39.2 million is spent on affordable housing in Phase I in the Province of Nova Scotia and we haven't come close to the target of 1,500 that they said they were going to build; they're saying they built 570, but I know that's not even true. So thank you.

MS. HARVEY: I'd just like to point out as well that the request for proposals for Phase II of the Affordable Housing Program has come out now. However, they were months late. Originally they were supposed to come out last Spring, but they came out just recently, within the last couple of months.

MR. GOSSE: The deadline is today.

MS. HARVEY: Yes. The province also has access to the housing trust fund that was set aside through the federal deal last year. We've seen no movement on that yet from our province and now the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, which is the only federal or provincial national funding for homelessness in the country, is scheduled to end at the end of this March. They've announced two renewed years of funding for a new program, a homelessness partnership strategy, but have heard no word on the ground of when those funds will be available, what that program will look like and it's less than two months away now.

There's a concern, because here in Nova Scotia that program was delivered, particularly here in Halifax, through a community, as a community-based model, where representatives from organizations who have been working with homelessness and housing issues for years had a steering committee with all three levels of government sitting in ex-officio status, but recommendations come from community. We do a community plan where everyone working on these issues throughout the community has input into priorities and we don't know if that model will hold here. We're very concerned, given the track record that our provincial government has had in delivering the housing funds they receive from the government that if this money goes solely into the provincial hands that it's not going to get where it's needed as quickly as it's needed, and it is a huge issue for us right now.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I want to thank you all - Darcy, Tom and Robert - for coming, we really appreciate it. I hope you can stay for the rest of the day as well.

Gary, I think I suggested that you would be third, so we now have Gary Healey from the Public Good Society of Dartmouth.

MR. GARY HEALEY: Good morning, Madam Chairman and honourable committee members. My name is Gary Healey, I am Program Coordinator with the Public Good Society of Dartmouth. I'd like to begin by thanking Madam Chairman and the committee for the opportunity to discuss this critical issue in this wonderful forum. What Mora has just passed out actually, is a final report by our society on research we recently conducted in downtown Dartmouth. I hate to use the words "focused on" but our population for the sample came from Feeding Others of Dartmouth, which is a soup kitchen in downtown Dartmouth. That's where we found the population to conduct the survey.

The reason this survey evolved - as this committee turned into a society, it had become accepted that in downtown Dartmouth there was a soup kitchen. It had been there for 20-plus years - it had just become part of the landscape. Nobody knew where these consumers came from, who these consumers were, what their situations were, what their circumstances were. So the Public Good Society decided that was information that needed to be known. It started to become more of its not just acceptable anymore to have a soup kitchen; why do we need to have this? Why is access to this increasing? The lines are getting longer.

So in an attempt to put perspective around that issue, we conducted the survey last April and the report that you have are the findings of that research. I'm just going to go through a general synopsis of that study we did, a brief introduction about the Public Good Society. We're a non-profit organization based in downtown Dartmouth. We are comprised of members from community-based social services, health and education sectors, interested citizens, business and government representatives. Currently on our board in ex officio capacity, we have two senior civil servants from the Department of Community Services, one being the Acting District Manager of the Portland District Office, and a casework supervisor.

The importance of pointing that out is that given the venue we're in today, and as Madam Chairman pointed to at the beginning, to discover how things have changed, what we've done differently or what we can do differently. The very structure of our organization does exactly that - we have at the table people who have not been at the table before. We have the business community, which has a huge stake in this issue; we have the Department of Community Services at the table; we have representation from community health boards at the table; we have two municipal councillors at the table; and a social policy analyst works in an ex officio capacity with our organization. So we have all of the pieces together - we're brand new, we're building, we're learning and we're moving forward. As I said, one of the reasons we came together was to get a handle on the consumers

using Feeding Others of Dartmouth and why they're there, so we conducted the survey.

Having gone through that, here's a little about what we learned from that research: 75 per cent of the respondents are receiving income assistance; 80 per cent of the respondents pay more than 50 per cent of their income to shelter, only one person fell below 50 per cent and that was at 46 per cent of income to shelter; 100 per cent pay more than 30 per cent; 52.8 per cent of respondents said they don't know where to get help for addictions and mental illness. This was an interesting fact as well: 53.5 per cent indicated having greater than Grade 12 education; 73.2 per cent indicated some type of health issue; and most interesting of all - and as we all know based on the Health Agency of Canada determinants of health and what it means to be healthy - 50.7 per cent do not feel like they are part of their community.

What we've drawn as valid conclusions based on our research - there are serious gaps and inequities in available supports. The Department of Community Services responsible for the well-being of most of those sampled has significant gaps in service delivery. Information exchange is sparse and it often happens at the street level. This information can be inaccurate, outdated or doesn't apply to each person the same way.

There have been numerous studies done in this same vein and many good recommendations have been made, much the same as this committee has done, and the provincial government has been slow to implement needed change.

Community Services is not alone. Based on research that we conducted, Addiction Services are not meeting express client needs. The most important factor in any vibrant, sustainable community is that all of its citizens be included. The underlying causes of needing to use emergency social services as core services have to be repaired in order to improve living standards. When people have a sense of value and belonging, they can do remarkable things and give back to society.

[10:30 a.m.]

We came up with some recommendations. These are pertinent to our organization, as well as to this committee's work. We believe a multi-pronged approach needs to be used to address the issues identified. One size does not fit all. There should be a community client- service improvement committee established to monitor and track client concerns. The Government of Nova Scotia needs to work towards a strategy aimed at poverty reduction; develop models and strategies to facilitate and support increased access to information and services

within government and community resource systems; continue changes to the Pharmacare Act to make it more accessible to the most vulnerable; strengthen access to the labour market and sustainable employment with improved transitional supports and increased incentives; utilize existing affordable housing funds and the Nova Scotia Housing Trust Fund to increase the number of affordable housing spaces.

As you can tell, this is but a snapshot of what is in that report. There is so much bubbling beneath the surface of these results, including higher education levels, health issues and combinations of health and addictions issues. The demographic structure of the sample was not balanced and gender was split two to one, males over females. Family structure is primarily single, at 90 per cent; education levels, 53.5 per cent reported higher than Grade 12 education; and 58.6 per cent of respondents were born here or consider HRM to be their hometown.

Going forward, it is the aim of the Public Good Society to truly partner with service providers in complementary roles to connect individuals with opportunities to improve their quality of life through participation and inclusion in the community and/or in the job market. As a part of that go-forward process, one of our next steps is to work towards having our recommendations implemented. The second phase of that next step process is to bridge the gaps between existing services and individuals trying to access those services.

Just to add to that last point, we have just had a project approved, through the Canada-Nova Scotia Skills and Learning Framework, which will do exactly what we just said. The program is called Connections that Work. It is aimed and designed to connect individuals who want to be employed with employment possibilities. Currently - based on this research - 92 per cent of respondents did not work, 86 per cent would like to, and 77.5 per cent had barriers to employment.

The aim and objective of this project is to help mitigate those barriers and improve access for those people who want to get from assistance to long-term, sustainable employment. That's a joint project and it is funded in total through the Department of Community Services. I think that's a wonderful step forward, it's a great good-news story, it's a positive approach, and it speaks to everything that we have attempted to do in the past year since we've been in existence. By conducting the research, identifying the issue, developing a go-forward strategy - now we have a project ready to hit the ground that will live to that aim.

Just as a side note - this is very similar to what the gentleman before me, Mr. Frizzell, said - I'd like to put some context to this particular presentation. This is not a "woe is me" story - I, myself, almost two years ago, was homeless. I lived in my car for 30 days, I didn't eat for 17 - soda crackers and water, that was it.

Because one person found out what was going on and said this is not acceptable, this cannot happen, I probably wouldn't be here.

In the intervening time frame, I have become educated in what poverty is. I have become educated in the struggle - the daily, hourly struggle of people who live in abject poverty. This is not an easy life, I know it well, and regardless of where my income level goes from now forward, I will always have had that experience. That will always temper how I approach things, how I approach people, and my perception and understanding of what they deal with and what they struggle with on a daily basis. As was already pointed out, Trevor, I think you're probably absolutely right with the LICO. It's probably in the \$21,000 range, it was high \$18,000 last year. I haven't seen the new numbers, but you're probably right.

My income two years ago was \$3,300 and that wasn't from Community Services, that was from EI. That was my yearly income, \$3,300. Another thing I'd like to throw in here, and it's less to do with the Public Good position and more to do with the residual effects of poverty and the Community Services issues, I'm a father, I have three children. Because of illness, my marriage broke down, which ended up leading me to be in the situation I was in. What I find completely unacceptable - when you are a father and you're in receipt of income assistance, there is no provision made for your children. There is no provision made for child support, and not because my former spouse is vindictive or mean-spirited - when I started to get back on my feet, I started to repay every month of child support that I missed. Not because somebody dictated to me to do that, but because that's what needed to be done. That was what my children were deprived of and that's the right thing to do.

I see no mention anywhere of this issue in any of these proceedings, hearings, meetings, forums, any of those things. When I mentioned that to the first income assistance worker I met with, I was laughed at - we don't deal with that, that's not considered an expense, that's not considered necessary. It's just food for thought.

Again, this is 97 per cent positive - it's a good-news day. It's great information, we have a positive relationship, we have an energetic group from the Department of Community Services that sees things differently and proceeds differently. I think on a collaborative level, that's what we need to do going forward. We need to make the thing work, be creative and do things that we know will work. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Gary. I'd just like to add that I've had the opportunity for the last couple of years to work alongside Gary, and he has

provided incredible leadership to the Public Good Society and also to the community of Dartmouth. We're so pleased to see you back on your feet and being the contributing, valuable member of our community that you always wanted to be. It just shows you another impact of poverty, because people are forced to disengage from their communities, their families and their neighbourhoods, and that's a loss to all of us. We need every citizen in this province to be functioning and operating as best they can, because it's only that collective effort that's going to allow us to prosper as a province and to make our communities healthy and safe and happy ones again. So thank you for all you've been doing, Gary, and it's very much appreciated.

I also want to recognize the Co-Chair of the Public Good Society who's sitting in the audience, Terry Brennan. He's a local businessman and developer in Dartmouth, and we're very pleased to have his leadership in that role as well. I heartily commend this collaborative model to any other community, working with government, both staff and politicians at all levels. I think it's old-fashioned, but it's innovative at the same time. The issues that we're working on in our communities are serious and big enough that we need to use all the assets and resources we have. I think you'll find that most politicians, if not all, and their staff are just as interested in these issues as community agencies and residents, so we need to work together, not against one another, to solve many of those issues. So thank you.

Are there any questions or comments in addition to my little commentary?
Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: Gary, thank you very much for coming in today and certainly your personal profile of what got you into a situation requiring provincial assistance is a very compelling area that we, as a committee, do need to investigate thoroughly and to make a recommendation moving forward. The work of the committee last year was, in my view, a very productive time where we did see three of the recommendations from our two days on the Forum on Poverty actually be advanced by all Parties, so that was good work but we still have so much more to do.

Recently we had the Nunn report come before us here in Nova Scotia and it certainly put challenges on the justice system, on education, community services and a number of our other delivery services in the province. In your work in the community, do you think, however, if we don't address some of the real issues around poverty and youth poverty, which I absolutely see so connected to crime and to theft and to break-ins and so on, do you share that kind of view and in a specific way, do you think that the Nunn report could come up short if we don't really address the poverty issues?

MR. HEALEY: I completely agree with you with the residual effect of poverty and where it can lead, especially when it concerns youth. Let's face it, folks - anybody in this room who is a parent, who lives a good lifestyle, is challenged as a parent. I lived a really good lifestyle and I was challenged as a parent trying to keep my kids on the straight and narrow and doing what they should be doing.

When your focus, as a parent, is to put food on the table from the food bank or from a neighbour or from somebody else, you aren't as focused on where your kids are, who they're spending time with - where did they get those new sneakers? That's not your focus, everything shifts, everything changes. So you're absolutely right - root causes. Band-aids are pretty, but they don't work. We need to get to the root causes of poverty, we need to acknowledge them and begin to work on them because as you said, how many more Nunn Commissions do we need? We don't, and the children are at risk if we don't get this issue solved.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Thank you very much, Gary, we appreciate all the work that you've been doing.

Okay, do we have any volunteers for who goes next? Please come forward.

[10:45 a.m.]

MR. MARC DUNNING: Good morning, my name is Marc Dunning and I'm here on behalf of the Affordable Energy Coalition. I would like to introduce our speaker for this morning, Laura Lannon. Laura is a member of the Affordable Energy Coalition and has dealt with and continues to deal with the issue of energy poverty and is here today to share her experiences with the committee in the hope that the committee can gain a better understanding of this important issue. Thank you.

MS. LAURA LANNON: Good morning, my name is Laura Lannon and I'm going to read what I wrote down so that I don't get confused. I'm a recipient of community services, I'm on disability, I've had a car accident, cancer and right now I have an undiagnosed bowel condition. I also have spina bifida and scoliosis along with high blood pressure that I'm dealing with. I work in a work options program to get work experience as well as an education.

As far as hiking the power rates up any more than what they already are is ridiculous. I've gone not only days but weeks with not eating, to pay for a light

bill, and this has happened more than once. The last time I went 18 days with no food and my power bill was only around \$100 or less, but Nova Scotia Power was threatening to put me into collections if I didn't pay the bill. So I took the money and I paid the bill and I went 18 days with no food.

I had just moved into a new residence that allowed me to have my power included in my rent and, as a result, my health deteriorated this time from not eating. I had to go to the hospital because my bowels had started to shut down and it took about two weeks to get them to start functioning again. I had seen me try to decide whether to pay for a power bill, eat or pay for medication, due to the power rates. This was before the big hikes had started. Now, with the hikes that are here, it's just ridiculous. If I didn't have my power hooked into my rent, I wouldn't have power, period. There just isn't the funds for it.

I know that there are some other problems and I know of some other people who have the same problems I do, and it's especially bad when you've got children to deal with. They don't understand that you're trying to make ends meet, make these decisions of whether you eat, pay for power and, God forbid, if you've got a sick kid who needs medication, whether they get it or not. There's no money and there's no place to turn to because the food banks are tapped out, the churches are tapped out, they're strapped for money. Some food banks will help you only once a month, if they'll do that; others will help you only once every three months.

Now the food bank that I had dealt with at the time happened to be with St. Vincent de Paul and they could only help you once every six months. When I contacted Carole Horne, who happens to be the field worker for St. Vincent de Paul, I had already gotten help within that six-month period. But I had told her I hadn't eaten in 18 days and she said, well, you know you're supposed to wait every six months and I said, I can't do it, I haven't eaten and I'm sick. So she talked with the parish that was involved in my area and they helped me out, but they told me that I couldn't get help again until Christmas. This was June or July, so I had quite awhile to go.

Having power rates go up again, it already is financially burdening us. To have them go up any more than what they already are - and people aren't making ends meet. They're not living in affordable housing, they're not living - and if you don't have affordable housing like there are some people who are in it, you know, their circumstances are a little bit better but not by much. If you're not in affordable housing, you're basically out of the loop - you either pay it or you pay higher rates for rent, if you want decent housing. To have decent housing, you're looking at least at \$600, if not more than that. That's not including your lights. I find that if you're paying higher rents, sometimes you can have your lights

included, but if your lights are included in a place, you're either paying higher rent or you're living in an area that's not quite as desirable. Usually there's high crime in the area as well - not always, but sometimes. That's where I'm living right now, a very high crime area.

But many people have to decide whether they eat today or pay for my power bill or do I get medication today or I pay for my power bill - this is not right. It's not fair, especially when one is on some type of government assistance, whether it be disability, seniors, regular city welfare or the working poor, or anybody else who fits into that category that I haven't mentioned.

I just got my T4 from Community Services yesterday and all I made was \$7,965.40. The year before I made \$7,100, and it was actually Trevor who told me six months ago that I was actually about \$12,000 below the poverty line, just to get to the poverty line. When I had gotten my T4 slip, that's even more than what the school board members who just got fired made. Where's the justice in that? Here they are making \$8,000, and here I'm making less than what they did in a year, to survive on.

I've gone anywhere from two to four days, if not more than that, without food. The food bank does help, but it doesn't give enough food to help people, especially if it happens to be a single person. I realize the food bank can only do what they do with what they have, they can only give out what they have, but sometimes you need more than just a couple of days of food. If you have health issues, like a blood pressure problem like I do, it doesn't accommodate it. You're living on canned goods and usually they're very processed, they're loaded with salt and MSG and if you've got health issues around MSG, again it doesn't accommodate it.

It's pretty hard to feed yourself healthily and as far as renting, if my power wasn't included in my rent, I wouldn't be able to pay for it. I don't live in a very desirable area; to live in a safe environment I'd have to be making a lot more on community services. To have a decent place you're looking at least at \$600, and there has to be a rent freeze on this as well, because every time you turn around the rents are going up. The year before last I looked at an apartment and it was \$500; I looked at the same apartment a year later and it was \$550, and it was just because the kids were coming back to school. Everything is going up, except what you receive on community services.

Now back in 1990 I was on community services with my daughter and I was getting only \$10 more than what I'm getting now than what I was back then, and that's 17 years ago. There have been no increases with community services, as far as what you get on a budget for a monthly income. I'm on a training allowance

because I work at work options and you can make \$200 a month, but Community Services takes \$50 of it because you're only allowed to have \$150 and then they take the rest. That \$50 could go to maybe a better place to live, food on my table, it could actually pay my light bill if I actually got into a place where I had to pay for lights.

One thing I'm concerned about is that I'm trying to get into NSCC this fall, to go down to Pictou County - there's no transportation down there as well. So if I'm going to be paying for my lights down there and rent, how am I supposed to be able to pay for transportation, too, when I can't function now, living in the city where there's transportation and not paying for lights at the present time, except in my rent? So I've got many concerns over the situation and with Community Services, I'm finding that information I need to have, they're not supplying it, or they pass you on to somebody else and it's like you go to that person and eventually you get frustrated because you're still not finding out what information you need to know. So I guess that's my soapbox for today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Laura, for sharing your story. It certainly illustrates to us how all these various aspects of poverty can impact on one person. We really appreciate you coming today and sharing that with us. Thank you.

Are there any questions or comments for Laura and Marc? Thank you for coming.

Now, Anne, do you want to come up next?

MS. ANNE DUFFY: Good morning. I'm Anne Duffy, I'm with the Community Advocates Network. I'm a single parent, disabled, with a grown child who is disabled. As my family has grown and my health has gotten worse, it seems to become more difficult. As of 2001 when they amalgamated, I was grandfathered into the system. When my child turned 18 in 2005, Community Services added her to my budget, but they took all my grandfathered-in expenses away from me. I also lost the family benefits, like the child tax benefit, and that was \$85 that I lost, so my budget for the last 18 months has been \$183 a month less than it was when my child was less than 18. So that being said, it's very, very difficult; you learn how to survive and re-budget, but it's really extremely difficult.

Now I'm finding it even more difficult, my child has started a course so now that my child is 19, they're leaving her on my cheque because she's taking a course to benefit her, to help her grow and to help her maybe get part-time, valid employment. But because of the fact that she's taking a course, they've left her on

my cheque, which normally she would have gotten a boarder rate on her own cheque. So all that impacts the whole family budget.

I'm finding it very difficult getting - I've asked for bus tickets for three months now for her to take her course. I mean if I wasn't disabled, I just couldn't survive, because I'm getting a medical transportation, which is now going to my daughter, and also I'm a diabetic so I'm getting diet allowance. Without those, I get \$690 a month for two of us. It's totally impossible if I was living on \$400-something, which is what I would be living on if I wasn't a diabetic and I didn't have medical reasons for transportation.

I mean it gets to be boggling as to why they would take - for instance, I was on family benefits and they've taken all those benefits away. It doesn't make any particular sense. So for 18 months it's very difficult and now, getting hold of a worker and having them really deal with and listen to you is almost an impossibility I'm finding, and I've been dealing with Community Services for years. I'm a community advocate in my neighbourhood because my neighbourhood is pretty well illiterate, so I read for people and help them deal with government, I do income tax and those kinds of things. The illiteracy level in some of these issues is huge in my neighbourhood, and I'm in low-income housing. Only for those issues, I would not be able to survive, and that's my story.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Anne, I appreciate you coming today. Are there any questions or comments?

If you had one or two recommendations to give us that would change and have a real positive impact on you, what would be your priorities?

MS. DUFFY: Well, I'm thinking having support for especially my child trying to improve herself would be great and even mental support or moral support, especially for her. I'm hoping it's going to be better for her in the future than it has been for our whole family, that's my hope and prayer here. She's with what they call an ACE Program, which is a Community Services program this year - last year it was a federal program - and it's amazing how much she's learning to be independent. But even for her to get independent, because she's got a roof over her head, they don't look at her as an emergency so for her to get an independent living space, it'll take two or three years, which I think is ridiculous. I could be dead in two or three years and then who takes care of her?

[11:00 a.m.]

It takes eight months, even on an emergency level, for people to get an independent living space, and that's if you're an emergency and don't have a roof

over your head. For her it may take two or three years. We have started the process because I've been in the community forever, it seems, and I do know some people who can help me make that transition quicker maybe than some - I shouldn't say that publicly, but it's true. If you know some people, they can help you make the transition of what you need quicker or easier.

Last year I lost my mother and if it wasn't for charities, I wouldn't have been able to go home to the funeral. That's how it works. Because I know certain people, I was able to get those expenses. What do people do who don't know? I have no idea how they survive and make it.

I think support for young people growing up is important, because most people who deal with my daughter think there's potential there for either part-time real work or full-time real work at her level, and I think that's amazing. As a parent, I think that's really - you know you have a lot of, I guess, respect for your daughter and a lot of hope and I don't know what you'd call it but you know you look at your own children as special, I guess. So I'm hoping that what they're looking forward for her in ACE becomes real and she gets a job and that she gets an independent space, that's my hope for my family.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So worrying about her future causes you a lot of additional stress, doesn't it?

MS. DUFFY: Yes, it does, and surviving on my little budget does, too, and if she could get bus tickets or - but there are programs, there is a YEP program out there now that's giving her a few bus tickets and whatnot. They look at how many times she goes to her course and they'll give her the two tickets. So some of that is working, but it's only because you know somebody who knows a group that can help you that it works. What happens if you don't know? You'd be a family that's lost.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming, we really appreciate it. Thanks, Anne.

MS. DUFFY: You're welcome.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So now we have representatives from the Face of Poverty, Elizabeth Brown and Carolyn Earle. Welcome.

MS. CAROLYN EARLE: I'm Carolyn Earle and this is Elizabeth Brown, we're Co-Chairs of the Face of Poverty Consultation. We're pleased to be able to meet again with the standing committee and meet the new members this morning. We understand that we've been asked to offer our opinions as to any progress that

has originated from the first Forum on Poverty and the recommendations stemming from that forum, any changes that have taken place in the past year to improve the situation of those Nova Scotians living in poverty.

The Face of Poverty Consultation is a group of representatives from various faith communities in the HRM area who have been working together now for some five years, doing advocacy and education around issues of poverty, which result in much activity and stress in our faith communities and which cause much suffering in all our communities and our province. We are volunteers and we offer our opinions and suggestions as a result of our own study, observation and experiences.

Since our presentation to this standing committee last year in January, so little has changed in the state of those living in poverty here in Nova Scotia that we could simply repeat the presentation we made in January 2006. Any changes which have been made could be classed as simply tinkering with the system. It's important this morning to indicate our frustration with this continuing tinkering which amounts to very little substantive change to the Employment Support and Income Assistance system, which is one of the four foci of the Department of Community Services.

Rather than repeating the whole of our 2006 presentation, we refer now to the conclusions in that paper. Many of our recommendations were included in those which went forward from the standing committee itself to the Department of Community Services and the Premier for action in the 2006-07 budget. These recommendations of the standing committee in turn became the substance of the petition to the Legislature, which was circulated among our faith groups and community groups. You may recall that copies of the petition, with some 2,800 signatures from approximately 80 groups located in various parts of the province, were tabled in the Legislature in early May by the chairperson of this standing committee.

MS. ELIZABETH BROWN: Politicians have said repeatedly that they need to hear from the citizens before they act, to bring about changes in the system which deal with issues of poverty. People are speaking and acting around poverty issues. We want to emphasize that many volunteers - workers in a variety of occupations, members of faith groups and service clubs, old and young Nova Scotians - give countless hours of their time, energy, enthusiasm, money, goods and services to help those in need, and we've heard reference to that earlier. This has demonstrated a tremendous public response to appeals from the Metro United Way, the IWK Telethon and Feed Nova Scotia, for example.

We now add to this list the many organizations from Nova Scotia and across the country which are now calling for an end to poverty, and there's a direction in this and an agreement. Poverty continues to be a scourge to the individual, to families, to communities in our nation. Statements, reports and calls for action have come from such organizations as Campaign 2000, Make Poverty History, the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the Canadian Labour Congress, the National Council of Welfare, the Canadian Association of Social Workers, Citizens for Public Justice, the United Nations Report on Poverty in Canada, the community health boards of the Capital Health District of Nova Scotia, and the Report on the Shortfall in Funding for Adequate Nutrition prepared by Dr. Patty Williams of Mount Saint Vincent.

A recent addition to this list are members of the Progressive Conservative Party here in Nova Scotia who, according to *The ChronicleHerald*, are now calling for some changes in the way the government conducts its business. Governor General Michaëlle Jean, when speaking to the Nova Scotia Legislature this week, noted that, "The success of Nova Scotia, like the success of Canada, is compromised when people within the community suffer from poverty or from discrimination of any kind."

To return to our 2006 recommendations with some additional comments developed over the past year - well, in 2006 first of all, we called for a review of the ESIA Program for the Department of Community Services. This program has been functioning since 2001, so it is time to review the whole situation. It's important to learn about best practices in other jurisdictions, to be innovative with programs and people, to focus on what is needed and helpful in individual cases. One size does not fit all. That was our recommendation in 2006.

MS. EARLE: Now in 2007, we are aware that a review has been in process in the department, but we are not aware of the results. Has any attention been given to best practices in other jurisdictions like Newfoundland and Labrador, where a poverty reduction strategy has been implemented or as in Ireland, where such a strategy is having an amazing success?

MS. BROWN: In 2006, we urged an increase in staffing numbers and in servicing continuing education of workers in all aspects of the ESIA Program, particularly at the intake level, and we urged that all social workers and caseworkers be required to undertake regular, professional development just as other professionals do.

MS. EARLE: And in 2007, it would appear from a reading of the business plan for Community Services for 2006-07 that staffing is an issue for the department and that staff satisfaction with their jobs and with the training

provided is not particularly positive - all of which is bound to have unfortunate consequences for persons looking to the system for help. At the same time, there is acknowledgement by Community Services that reduction in caseloads will be difficult as people's needs are becoming increasingly complex. Many have multiple barriers to employment and long-term interventions are required.

MS. BROWN: In 2006, we urged the immediate review of the clawback of any earnings made by individuals while in receipt of assistance - with relation to both the low-income cut-off and the Income Tax Act - in order to choose a more realistic incentive.

MS. EARLE: And in 2007, approximately 10 per cent of the population of Nova Scotia lives below the low-income cut-off and this would include persons who are dependent on Employment Support and Income Assistance. It's interesting to note that members of the PC Party at their recent convention have supported a resolution which asks for softening of the assistance clawback. When people see that employment is an advantage for them financially, they are certain to be more interested in employment.

MS. BROWN: In 2006, we urged the reinstatement of the allowance for each child when setting the rate of assistance for families in Nova Scotia in order that the full benefit of the national tax benefit can be received.

MS. EARLE: In 2007, families need to be able to ensure that their children are well sheltered, fed and clothed in order for the children to benefit from their time in school and to participate in all school and community activities, along with their friends and neighbours. Isolation and stigma are not good for children; poverty is not good for children.

MS. BROWN: In 2006, we urged an increase in shelter allowances that would make it possible for persons to be housed in safe, affordable, sustainable situations.

MS. EARLE: In 2007, it is true that there have been increases in the shelter allowances in the past year, but very small increases - increases which might be characterized more as tinkering with the totals. There is a crying need for more housing for low- to moderate-income Nova Scotians to rent, to own, to repair. The fact remains that the shelter rates paid do not allow persons to obtain adequate accommodation for themselves and their families. Are the federal funds being used to their best advantage? It is clear that jurisdictional disputes do not help people?

In the year 2006, have more people been better housed? Are more people safe and warm and dry? Here again, The ChronicleHerald reports that the

members of the PC Party have passed a resolution asking for help so that low income tenants may become homeowners. And in 2006, we urged an increase in the minimum wage for Nova Scotians to \$9 per hour. This will encourage people to work their way out of poverty.

MS. BROWN: In 2007, we have had some correspondence with the Department of Environment and Labour on the issue of the minimum wage and we are aware that a recommendation is going forward to the minister to raise the minimum wage to \$7.60 an hour as of the first of April 2007. Unfortunately, this is still well below the national average for the minimum wage, which is \$7.74 per hour, and which no doubt will rise in many provinces and territories as the year unfolds.

[11:15 a.m.]

Unfortunately, it still means that anyone working full-time for a year will remain below the low-income cut-off figure for living in HRM - approximately \$5,000 below that figure. Five thousand dollars would buy a lot of groceries or shoes or school trips or even telephone service. Unfortunately, it still means that there will continue to be working poor in Nova Scotia. It's important to note that people in groups all across the country are calling for a minimum wage of at least \$10. Citizens who can stand on their own feet make a contribution to society.

MS. EARLE: From 2006, we urged an expansion to sustainable early childhood education and care programs so that there are more spaces, more subsidized spaces, more portable spaces, higher salaries for professionally trained early childhood educators, and longer and more flexible hours of operation in more centres.

MS. BROWN: In 2007, the loss of the proposed federal program in this whole area of comprehensive early childhood education is devastating. Investment in early childhood education is most necessary to the development of citizens who can make a contribution to our society. Has the department given consideration to providing child care and education programs that operate during evenings and weekends, when women in particular are often called upon to work?

MS. EARLE: From 2006, we urge removal of the Nova Scotia portion of the HST on family necessities such as children's clothing, school supplies, and fuel and basic utilities such as the basic telephone service.

MS. BROWN: And we continue. We lament the fact that not every person in Nova Scotia who wishes to have a telephone is able to have one without being able to prove special need. Can you imagine trying to run your home without a

telephone? Why should others have to do this? How do you answer the phone when there's a possibility of a job? What phone can you leave when you're in an office? What about their concerns for health, safety, employment and family relationships?

There has been some negative reaction to the recent information newsletters mailed to all households in Nova Scotia by the government. It is interesting to consider that the estimated cost of this for four issues per year to 400,000 households in Nova Scotia will have a cost of about \$232,000 - and that would provide approximately 650 households with basic telephone services, at \$30 a month for a year.

MS. EARLE: From the year 2006, we urge serious consideration of the implementation of a guaranteed annual income in Nova Scotia.

MS. BROWN: And we look at it now and we made this recommendation last year and we have learned since then about a number of locations across Canada where the idea is being given very serious consideration in an expanded form as a guaranteed livable income, and you've heard that this morning. The committee recommending an increase in the minimum wage has a fourth recommendation in their report, which reads, "The Committee recommends that the Province adopt a multifaceted approach like the one used in Ireland in dealing with the problems of the working poor." Ireland has been very successful in reducing the numbers of people living in poverty, and this is the best practice and would surely deserve serious study in this province.

The mission statement of the Department of Community Services is "to ensure that basic needs are met" and it is "committed to a sustainable social support system." The guaranteed livable income would be one way to accomplish this end. It seems to the Face of Poverty that the department may have indicated the emphasis when the Welfare Act was entitled Employment Support first, preceding the Income Assistance. This gives more support to the idea that it is to act as a last resort for persons who are in need of help, whether of a long-term or short-term nature.

Many of us are of the opinion that the assistance is given by the department to fulfill the responsibility we have as citizens to care for each other. It is one of the critical uses of the taxpayers' money. Not everyone is asking for their taxes to be cut. When they see the effects of poverty on their fellow citizens, some people are asking if the best use is being made of our tax dollars.

As well, jurisdictional disputes do not help people. We urge the Government of Nova Scotia to make people its priority. We urge that all

departments of the government come together to consider what the people of Nova Scotia are saying to them, to develop a poverty reduction strategy with specific goals and figures that can be measured and accounted for, and thus to act to end poverty in Nova Scotia right now. Thank you for this opportunity to share our opinions on these critical issues for Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That was a very comprehensive analysis. I do want to give credit to the two of you. I know that you attend most of the meetings of the Standing Committee on Community Services and we appreciate your interest and the time and effort that you put into this. Are there any questions or clarifications that you'd like to make, members? Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: No, just a clarification on the telephone issue. You're absolutely right, that when people try to get a hand up and get off the system, they can't leave a resumé because they haven't got a phone that they could get called back for a job interview. I've noticed lately within the department itself that I've been telling constituents of mine to get a doctor's letter for medical reasons for a telephone. Now the department is even denying them with a letter, saying that the doctor's notes are not specific enough to obtain the telephone. I've had one as recent as this week that said to me, now you have the department, the caseworkers are saying that the doctor's medical support is not a sufficient enough specific use of the telephone. I find that to be deplorable within the department.

Also the caseload in Cape Breton which I represent - the caseloads are quite heavy across the province but in Cape Breton specifically, they have one caseworker who is for single persons. I find that the only department in Nova Scotia is in Sydney, where they have one caseworker for single people. It's funny, as an MLA when you're in your office and people come in and ask and you know who the caseworker is before you know their problem, because you've seen it over the last four years when they're coming in that it's the same individual, but the reason being that caseworker handles single people only.

The letters that I received back from the department lately are, many people are living above their means. The problem is that they're living above their means. From the department that - I find it funny, but that's the letters you get back, that the rent is too high, so that person is living above their means. That's why they don't - you know. Then you wonder about the overpayment part of it, that \$45 a month. I've seen that so often over the years because they're accumulating the overpayment all the time from the department because they're behind - because it's their favourite saying now in the department, living above their means. I find that's not acceptable to me and the people that I represent anyway.

Also, you find a lot of people are having difficulties, especially the seniors living at home and trying to stay at home, are having difficulty heating their homes and making decisions between either taking their medication or heating their home. I find that today to be another - like I had said earlier, 83 per cent of the seniors live in poverty in Cape Breton and the decision to either take medication or keep warm is quite a reality today in society in Cape Breton.

I wonder if we need more caseworkers in the Department of Community Services. Some of the recommendations - the work that you've done over the years is very important to the committee and to the province. In your presentation, you made reference to two Progressive Conservative Party recommendations in the recent news. I'm just wondering, are you hopeful that they're going to reach the floor of the Legislature?

MS. BROWN: I don't know whether we answer this or not. I think maybe with enough pressure, after this meeting in one way or another, whether it's through the press - I mean obviously there has to be constant discussion and maybe it'll get through. I don't know how many balloons I'm putting up there.

MS. EARLE: Obviously we're not elected representatives . . .

MS. BROWN: We'll push them, though.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Leo, did you . . .

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you, Elizabeth and Carolyn, for being here today. Despite some of the setbacks I know that you've encountered along the way, you still have lots of fight and spirit for this important cause, and I commend you for that. You come here armed with lots of good ideas, some very concrete suggestions, and certainly as a committee we will examine those. I certainly will bring them forth in the coming days and I look forward to estimates on the budget and back in the House during Question Period. If government goes out publicly to make a statement as they did recently, then they need to be held accountable for that.

Just one little area, I was wondering if you had given any thought to the minimum wage, in terms of looking at it from the point of view of perhaps a student or youth wage and then a wage for a working adult. One of the things you hear about minimum wage going up, I certainly as an MLA - and I'm not saying that I agree with them one iota at all, but one of the groups of people that I often hear from is the fast food industry, that if the minimum wage goes up I'm going to have to lay off another person. I'm just wondering, do we perhaps need in the province to take a look at a student wage and then an adult who is a family income

earner and whether or not this may be a way, from a point of view of legislation, to move forward?

MS. EARLE: Well, I don't know whether we have too much information on that, but I noticed in the report from the minimum wage committee that they're going to study the issue of tips and people who receive tips, again, to see whether that will have some effect on a minimum wage. There was mention in that about what percentage of people on minimum wage were living at home with their parents, but they don't draw any conclusions from it that I can immediately recall. However, I think one thing we want to say about some of the places that are paying the minimum wage is, we want to remember that they're paying their shareholders. So that's also something to consider.

MS. BROWN: This is the kind of information that the Centre for Policy Alternatives has done a fair amount of work on, the minimum wage. The effect of raising the minimum wage is that it raises the level throughout the community, and that tends to be a good thing. I just don't have the facts and figures here but rather than it being a complete downer and the business about whether it's the mom and pop store or whether it's the corporation like Tim Hortons, that's something you consider.

MR. GLAVINE: Just one other quick question. I was wondering now that we're into the heart of winter here in Nova Scotia and we have lost the heat rebate program - which, in my view, is a mistake - I'm just wondering, are your church communities involved in any way in assisting people who aren't able to get that next requirement for basic heat?

MS. BROWN: Can I answer? In just checking a few people in some churches, one of the major questions is coming to the churches and why are they coming to the churches, because again this is getting into the community where a lot of the stuff is being downloaded, in a sense, to the community organizations.

Yes, I spoke to somebody in one church, 10 or 15 calls one day and most of it was getting help with the power bill or the heat, and often they're linked one to the other. Their response is, first of all, why are you coming to us? It is a major issue with a lot of people right now and, as you know, the two are linked.

[11:30 a.m.]

I was horrified to discover that - now this is not the Keep the Heat, but the money that goes out through the Salvation Army, where you can get help (Interruption) Yes. But however, if you've been helped in the last five years, you can't get any help.

MR. GLAVINE: That's right.

MS. BROWN: And it goes on. I was talking to the man in charge - I said, have I heard you correctly? He said, unfortunately, you have. I was appalled. So I think there needs to be some work done on them. I'm probably talking off-the-cuff when I shouldn't be. Most certainly in another area, I know there are 20 or 30 people a day asking for help in one of our church outfits, and a lot of it has to do around those basic things that you mentioned, Leo. Thanks.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Steven and then Gordie.

MR. MCNEIL: Thank you both for your presentation. It's nice to see you on the floor, as opposed to in the gallery. My question is around a follow-up that Leo asked; did those church groups, organizations, say that they've seen an increase this year in people requesting support?

MS. BROWN: Yes.

MR. MCNEIL: Isn't it comforting to know that wealthy Nova Scotians have an 8 per cent cut on their home heating costs and poor Nova Scotians are in worse shape than they've ever been?

MS. BROWN: Are you being ironic?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, I'm being facetious when I say that.

MS. BROWN: I know, it's the reality and it's pretty hard to keep up your faith in the fact - are we a community that cares about others? Is that part of our democracy? Joe Howe - gosh, I read something about him last night, I wonder why - and the need. He basically said, when I think of what I'm doing, I have to say to myself, is it right, is it true, is it good for the people? Of course he was thinking about - I know, it was his libel trial, but anyway. Joe Howe - you can quote him.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just before Gordie asks his question, I just want to let people in the audience know that we're a little ahead of schedule, so I'm actually going to open it up so someone who perhaps hasn't had a chance to formally present, if you have a particular issue or comment you want to make, we'll give you some time to come up to the podium and make your comment. So

just to give you a few minutes to prepare yourselves, if you'd like to take that opportunity. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: Just earlier in your presentation you made reference to the review of the Department of Community Services and to let you know where that's at. We've tried to get that under the FOI and since that report is in draft form, it's exempt through the freedom of information, so nobody can have access to it. So we do know of hundreds of reports over the years that have fell by the wayside. So just for your information, we have no idea when that review and that report is going to be made available, even as MLAs, because of where it's at right now.

MS. BROWN: I think I saw a date of October 26th, it was pretty vague what was happening.

MS. EARLE: We'll watch for it.

MR. GOSSE: So will I be watching. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Gordie. Any other questions or comments from committee members? So I'm just wondering, would anyone in the audience like to add anything or make a comment?

Thank you very much, you've given us an excellent presentation and we appreciate your ongoing and continuing interest in what the committee is doing. Thanks, Elizabeth and Carolyn.

MS. LONGMIRE: I just wanted to make one point, because I didn't get the opportunity before . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I know that we've met you before but just for the sake of the recording, could you re-introduce yourself.

MS. LONGMIRE: Yes, I'm Della Longmire from The Women's Place in Bridgetown. One of the points that I wanted to make about accessing help around heat, it's pretty difficult if the way that you obtain your heat is with a jerry can at the local garage. I just wanted to make that point, because there are a number of people out there in rural Nova Scotia and that's how they're getting their oil supply. So thanks.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Della. Does anyone else want to add anything or make a comment? Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: I was going to ask Marc to come up to ask a question around the Affordable Energy Coalition, if I may, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sure, if he's willing.

MR. GLAVINE: One of the developments that we've seen here with Nova Scotia Power and approved by the URB is that the Power Corporation will now have that control to raise rates, based on the cost of energy for Nova Scotia Power. We've yet to see that certainly unfold and happen. I'm wondering, from the Affordable Energy Coalition's perspective, do you have a concern or a number of concerns around that development and will you be addressing that as we go forward?

MR. DUNNING: Well, I think you're talking about the fuel adjustment mechanism, if I'm right. I guess our biggest concern with that is just that basically that would be treating energy costs the same as we deal with gasoline, for example, and we would just have to flow with the market and there would really be no opportunity to have the hearings that we just finished having in January, there would be no opportunity to challenge them and say they're high. If they go down, that's great; if they go up, I mean how does that affect someone who can't even afford to pay for them now? So we have big concerns with that.

Our understanding is that at least what came out of the URB is that they're just going to enter into discussions about the FAM and certainly not to say that it's automatically going to happen. We would hope for the reasons I just said that it really wouldn't, because we're concerned that there is just no control, there is no opportunity to go back and argue that. It's just too high again, we're just stuck with whatever the market has to give. That's great when it's good, but it hurts a lot when it's bad. So those are our thoughts on that.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just a minute, Marc, if you don't mind taking another question. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: I wonder if the Affordable Energy Coalition has any concerns about what type of fuel Nova Scotia Power is now going to burn, if the rates are going to be based on cheaper fuels. So I wonder now, we see New Brunswick in the news lately going to what they call petcoke. Nova Scotia has been burning petcoke now for a number of years, it's a lot cheaper than burning coal. I'm wondering, do you have any concerns around the environmental use of different fossil fuels burned in generating stations?

MR. DUNNING: Well, I think there's the obvious environmental impacts and I know from a cost point of view, from a customer point of view, if they're burning something cheaper, that's obviously great from a power bill point of view. From an environmental point of view, I think that's your question, it's a different thing.

To be honest, I don't really know a whole lot about their plans with respect to that, but if you can give me some more information, I don't know.

MR. GOSSE: I just noticed in the news lately that in New Brunswick now they have gone before their Legislature asking if they can burn petcoke. Petcoke is a derivative of the process of Bunker C, turning it into oil or gas. There are some harmful chemicals in petcoke, and New Brunswick is doing that, but we in Nova Scotia have been burning petcoke for a number of years now within the Nova Scotia plants. That's a cheaper fuel, so that keeps the rate down. So if there's something out there now for them to buy that's even cheaper, is Nova Scotia Power heading that way.

MR. DUNNING: Well, I know that they're looking at alternatives all the time and we always hear them talk about this or looking at all these different things and it's great to say it, but we haven't seen any real action on going seriously down an alternative energy route, and I think that's really something we need to do. We're on the coast, we've got access to wind and waves and everything else, so it would be nice to see, but really we haven't seen a whole lot in that direction.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Marc. Does anyone else want to make a comment? Yes, just re-introduce yourself.

MS. LANNON: My name is Laura Lannon and there was something that I didn't mention before, I sort of got ahead of myself with what I was reading. Personally, myself, being on community services, you don't know exactly what is available to help you get off the system. I didn't expect to be on community services as long as I have been but with cancer and a car accident, that's unexpected.

With Community Services, trying to get information from them as to what is available, not a lot of recipients know what's available and how to go about getting the help, how to get the education. For me, myself, trying to get into a GED course was very hard for me to find out where to go to or where to get help from. As far as training facilities, there was no information, or I didn't get any information from Community Services to be able to help me get myself off the

system, which I'm hoping to do shortly. If there was more information available to recipients or the communities themselves, I mean I think it would help people to be able to help themselves.

I know a lot of people don't like being on community services, but I know that personally I'm grateful that I have community services for what little I do get. But I don't want to be there. I want to be self-sufficient and reliable and dependable, that I can do this on my own, for myself, and feel like a viable part of the community. But being in the situation that I am, it doesn't always make you feel that way. Your self-esteem goes down when you're on community services, especially when you're not getting enough to eat, you don't have a safe environment to live in and you're worrying where the next meal is coming from or where the next bit of money is going to be to pay that power bill or whatever bill, or where you're going to get some medication that you may need that Community Services doesn't pay for.

So I guess this was where I wanted to go with this that I hadn't said before, so thank you very much for your time.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Laura, and I think there are a couple questions for you, if you don't mind. Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Not really a question, Laura, but in reference to what you're discussing, I know that back in October it was mentioned by my colleague, I believe, the member for Preston, the budget debate and the Supply debates back in July, it was mentioned by myself and again by myself in October to the deputy minister, one of the things that I've found that I think fundamentally should change with the process, and we have to remember that the Department of Community Services is the last resort for an individual to approach. However, it is, I believe, the responsibility of any government to take care of its people.

In saying that, we've looked at and we've discussed at great lengths the amount of caseload that is put on individual caseworkers. We have spoken with many caseworkers who find themselves stressed, social workers as well, within the department. Personally, if I was to make one recommendation to the department it would be that when an individual approaches the government or the department for that needed help, it's like you say, you're at your lowest point, your self-esteem is at a certain level.

What I would like to see, and it takes a vision of a government to carry this out, a change in policy perhaps, is when an individual approaches the department, they are assigned a caseworker. That caseworker then works with that individual as an individual and takes him through - and we know that there are programs,

there are avenues for an individual to go, but again, they're at a certain point in their life where they might not be able to understand - and Mr. Healey had made mention of it as well - might not recognize where to go for that extra help, even though it may be there.

What I would like to recommend, as I have in the past, is that there is the ability of a caseworker to put an individual on a monitoring program, a three-month, six-month, nine-month, 12-month program, to work with that individual, and they could start it tomorrow, take five cases a week, and revisit the situations that those individuals are in then and work with them, push them in the avenues. What it does is it allows the individual who is at that point in their lives where they're reaching out for that desperate need of help, to know that they have support, that it's not just a cheque that's going to come every month, which as we know is inadequate.

[11:45 a.m.]

I will in the coming months, when the budget is out, make that recommendation to the department again, and I think it's much needed. I think for individuals in our society who don't recognize the fact that poverty exists in our society, I think they would recognize and appreciate that their tax dollars are actually being used that way. What happens is eventually those caseloads go away because the department has either front-loaded funds or worked with that individual to get him beyond the point that they're at. But merely writing a cheque, which again is inadequate, and saying here you go, there are programs out there for you, find them, and hopefully you'll be off the system.

So I support you and will be expressing those to the minister next month.

MS. LANNON: Thank you. I mean, talking about poverty, Time Life magazine said two years ago that they classified Canada as a Third World country because we can't feed our own people and I thought that just blew my mind. So hopefully we can switch that around and supposedly we're supposed to be one of the richest countries in the world. So I'm hoping that we're going to be able to start looking after our own people, that we can feed them, whether it be a man, woman or a child, nobody has to go hungry. Hopefully we can help ourselves, especially here in Nova Scotia where it seems to be so prevalent. All you have to do is go to the food banks whenever they're open and you'll see it. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Laura, we appreciate you adding those comments.

MS. HARPER: One thing that I didn't put on the agenda on behalf of CONNECT!, is the Canada Social Transfer, because I think this is another area where we could really benefit in Nova Scotia is if we had a strength in Canada Social Transfer that was adequate to cover the social services and the social programs that it is meant to cover. So one of the things that we've talked about certainly as women's centres and also within the broader community is the need for a Canada Social Transfer that is designated for specific social services and social programs and that has standards and conditions attached to it.

Now we've had many discussions around this. We want a Canada Social Transfer not at the expense of equalization, so I think that's a really important piece. We really see a role for Nova Scotia to take a leadership position at the federal-provincial and territorial tables around this discussion, because what this can do then is it can ensure that there is a federal transfer of funding to the province specifically to deal with some of the social issues that we've been talking about. It also holds our federal government accountable for having a social welfare agenda, because social policies are really off the federal agenda as far as I can see. So that's one thing.

The other thing that I wanted to just mention that hasn't been mentioned and I think I'll mention this, is the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, we haven't really had a full discussion at our own table around this. Poverty makes single-parent women in particular, because it is mostly women who are single parents, living on income assistance, incredibly vulnerable to child protection. We have seen huge problems with child protection systems.

What happens, we've seen many instances where, for various reasons, women have put their children in voluntary care, either because in one case there has been a physical illness that has made it impossible for them to look after their children for what they thought was a short period of time. What has happened is through any number of complications and events, they have never been able to get their children back.

One of the things that I think is absolutely reprehensible is the very punitive nature of our social assistance system that maintains the level of poverty, makes it very difficult for people to provide the kinds of supports that they need to provide for their children and for their families, as well as for themselves, particularly in cases such as illness. What I think makes me possibly the most angry in all of this is the money that we spend, that we are willing to spend on child protection services, lawyers, judges, mental health, foster care, programs like women's centres that are trying to provide some advocacy to women, et cetera, which is hundreds of thousands of dollars per case, and we aren't prepared

to put those supports up front to single parents to enable them to be able to look after their kids in the way they need to look after them.

I can tell you, and I know this is not true across the board in Nova Scotia, which is why I want to speak specifically from our area, but what we have seen is that once someone enters that system, it's an absolute nightmare and it keep re-creating issues, so that when a woman has lost her children, of course she's in a state of panic about that, she meets barrier after barrier, not even getting a clear case plan, which makes her angry. That anger is then interpreted as her needing anger management, or she's crazy, which is further reason for keeping her children away from her.

There are an awful lot of horror stories there and one of the things I'd really love to see is I'd really love to see a time that was spent specifically in looking at that system and what's happening there, because there are huge problems and we need to make changes in that, because it's absolutely inhumane.

I don't think that very many of us who are parents, if we were put in the situation that many of the women that I see are put in, would be able to hold onto our children. I think that we, too, would be seen as failing parents and have our children removed. So I see parents every day who deeply love and are deeply committed to their children, who have lost their children and who are not able to get them back. So I just wanted to add that one to the list.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Lucille. Trevor, do you have a question for Lucille?

MR. ZINCK: Just a comment, Lucille, in regard to what you just brought up. I have to agree strongly with you, I've been doing this now for nine months and I can't count the number of cases I've come in contact with, many of which a lot of the parties and individual MLAs have had to deal with over the past and I guess as a new person, they wanted to have renewed faith that someone is listening.

One of my concerns with the Children's Aid Society and that part of the department is that amongst other things and issues that parents have to deal with, it is the actual child who is caught up into the system. The process that child, that individual who has been taken away for whatever reason, has to then go through - whether they're in temporary care of the department, they move on to a foster family, or a series of foster families.

I understand that there are psychiatrists and doctors provided for these children, but I can't help but think that once a child is apprehended, someday they

may walk into my office and say to me, what has happened, and I need help. I think that if we were able to, and I agree with you to front-load some of the funds. You know you talk to - I've recently met with some legal aid lawyers around particular cases and the frustration and the amount of effort that they can actually put forth to help an individual get their children back is slim to none. It's defenceless.

One particular case I'm dealing with now, there are five children who are in question and the parents have been deemed incapable, crazy, don't go near them. I've met with them several times. I've met with them in my office, in my home, and now what happens for me is, I'm frustrated because I can't even ask the department questions regarding certain procedures and policies. I'm hoping to get inside and actually take a look, but I definitely think it's something this committee should undertake and have that part of the department in to have questioned.

MS. HARPER: I really appreciate that, because it absolutely begs the question around the best interests of the child. The damage that's done to the child in this system, I think, really needs to be well documented, because it's huge. Not the least of which the children end up angry with their parents - and that again is used against the parents - and they are angry with the parents because they feel their parents have abandoned them.

So you've got these parents who are working as hard as they can to try to figure out how they can jump through all of the hoops which keep changing, in order to get their children back, and all the children understand is that their parents have left them, abandoned them and don't care, and nothing could be further from the truth. The damage that's done to those kids is huge. It's one more of those sort of hidden issues that's hugely complicated by poverty. That's not to say for one second that we don't need child protection, because absolutely we do, we need to protect our children. So that's not to say we don't need it, I think we just need to make it appropriate and we need to put up front the programs and supports in place.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Gordie. Lucille, do you mind taking another question?

MR. GOSSE: Thank you, I'm actually just looking for your opinion on this question. The Children's Aid Societies of Nova Scotia fall under nine separate boards within the province. Do you think it's time that the minister and the Department of Community Services look at taking over the Children's Aids departments in the Province of Nova Scotia?

MS. HARPER: I don't know, because in our area we don't have Children's Aid. We have Child Protection and it's a mess. So when I talk to some of my sister centres, it sounds to me as though the working relationships with some of the Children's Aid Societies are much more positive than they have been in working with Child Protection Services. So I think that's a really good question to ask and I think it's a good question to ask a committee that's really focused on looking at some of those issues.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Anne.

MS. DUFFY: Yes, my comment is on something Mr. Zinck said just a few minutes ago about caseworkers and social assistance. They, for the most part, know what the policies are and what clients are entitled to, but they are not forthcoming with what you're entitled to. They tell you the minimum of what they need to know, what the minimum rules and regulations are and the minimum support financially you can get from them. But the moral and mental and what other things are available to make your life get off the system - workers don't want to give you that information. It's like they own the financial purse or whatever it is that they're told to do, but it's a minimum they give their clients. If they don't have an advocate or a non-profit organization that knows to help them through it all, it's not happening for the clients. Caseworkers should maybe be in the assistance mode, but they're not really and that was something that I sort of picked up from what Mr. Zinck was saying.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If you would just wait there, I think Gordie has a comment or a question for you.

MR. GOSSE: I've raised this with the minister on a number of occasions and what I'm saying is that when you walk into the Department of Community Services, there should be a - well, they'll tell you to have a pamphlet, but there should be some kind of brochure indicating to people - because when they're desperate and they come into that office under a lot of stress and sometimes not thinking properly, there should be a brochure available advising them what's available.

I understand what you're saying there about special diets or telephones or anything else - they're not told that. This is a lot of what I do - I become an advocate for people in the community. They come to me and say, well, you know - and I mentioned earlier about doctors' letters not being sufficient enough for a phone, but I think it's time that the department had brochures available for people when they came in, or gave them a Web site that they could go to, because I actually have the policy printed off.

MS. DUFFY: They'll tell you about a Web site, but if I'm a client, and I'm on assistance myself, I have a computer that's not hooked up to e-mail or the Net. So telling me about a Web site is like maybe a foreign language of some kind - not to me, but to a lot of people and they don't have access to the policy, which is what, 400 pages long or something and you've got to be able to download some of that and you've got to know how to do that kind of thing and people don't.

The Community Advocates Network has just released a mini-manual, which may help some people, but then you've got to go to a non-profit organization and get that material in order to be able to deal with the Department of Community Services. That's a lot for a person in need to jump through those kinds of hoops.

MR. GOSSE: I think every MLA, all 52 MLAs in the Province of Nova Scotia, should have that information available in their office - along with the Department of Community Services offices - for the constituents that they represent, to hand them over to those people in their time of need, and you're absolutely right.

[12:00 noon]

MS. DUFFY: The Community Advocates Network has a mini-manual, if anybody needs it. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think there's one more question from Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: I hope you didn't or weren't confused by my comments there, Anne. This is one of my pet peeves with the system, I guess early on, just being new to this role. I have a sales background and I used to have to travel this province and visit 100 different businesses in a period of a week and at the end of the week, if I hadn't made a visit to each individual, on Monday morning I heard from my boss. So I had to change things, I had to tweak things so that I could accommodate everyone.

I guess my hope is that we can have that vision to actually go in and help people when they're at that point, because it's beyond computers and Web sites, it's beyond pamphlets. It's an individual who is at a certain point in their life to reach out as a last resort, to go to the department - I know Tom Frizzell made mention earlier about how embarrassing it is to go to a food bank. I understand that, I help out at a food bank every Wednesday and I know what it's like. So if we're able to take that individual through the process and, as I suggested, we could start tomorrow. If I have 100 caseloads, start tomorrow with five. Go visit five individuals in the period of a day and see where they're at in their lives and

see where we can take them and put them on that program and give them that added support.

You talk about your daughter - your daughter needs someone, many individuals around her think she has potential. Well, let's harness that, along with helping you as well. Ultimately, you have to live as well because you wouldn't be able to take care of your daughter.

We need to change the process. It has to become a hand-up instead of a handout because the handout is just not enough and we know that and we've known it for years. I've talked over the last nine months with several bureaucrats who have worked in the department for more than 20 years and have said to me personally, things have not changed in 20 years. So what does that tell us? We have to have the vision and change the process, work with individuals.

MS. DUFFY: If anything, it has gotten worse, as far as what do you tell a client, what do you tell a customer and how much.

MR. ZINCK: As Gordie said, a lot of us end up in that role. When a client walks into my office, it's up to me to find out. The first thing we do is, okay, what are you entitled to right now? What are you getting and how much more can we get? You know you talk about special diet - are you getting the maximum for special diet?

MS. DUFFY: If you don't ask, you don't get and they don't tell you.

MR. ZINCK: Absolutely, it's like going to the bank. The bank is not going to tell you that they have these services or can do this, you have to have that knowledge prior. I guess my point is that when you're at that point, and I found myself there a little over 10 years ago when I lost my job, and it was embarrassing to call the department - my parents forced me because I couldn't pay for my apartment and when they told me what I had got or was entitled to as an individual male, I hung up the phone, called my parents back and said, I've got to do this on my own because they're not prepared to get me past the point where I'm at.

We all know that no one wants to be at that point. The government has a responsibility. I really believe that society has a responsibility to lift those individuals up and if we can do it at the beginning of the process, I think there's a chance, an opportunity for an individual to get off the system. Right now, with just a monthly cheque, it's not going to cut it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Anne. I want to thank you all for coming to the morning session. I just want to remind you, in case you don't know, there's an afternoon session where we'll be doing a round table with representatives from the groups that presented this morning. That starts at 1:30 p.m. and we're scheduled to go to 4:30 p.m., but we'll see how the timing goes. So I encourage you all to come back this afternoon, I think it's going to be really interesting, there's going to be a really good exchange of views and recommendations, and hopefully we'll get some suggestions about what action both our committee can take and recommendations that we can pass along to the provincial government.

So thank you very much, it's been a most interesting and stimulating morning and we'll see you back here at 1:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 12:05 p.m.]