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COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thursday, April 19, 2007

Committee Room 1

Services For Persons With Disabilities

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ms. Marilyn More (Chairman)
Hon. Ronald Chisholm
Hon. Leonard Goucher
Mr. Patrick Dunn
Mr. Gordon Gosse
Mr. Trevor Zinck
Mr. Keith Colwell
Mr. Leo Glavine
Mr. Stephen McNeil

[Mr. Stephen McNeil was replaced by Mr. Wayne Gaudet.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Rhonda Neatt
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Ms. Judith Ferguson
Deputy Minister

Ms. Mildred Hayward
Director - SPD Program

Ms. Lorna MacPherson
Coordinator - Direct Family Support and Assessments

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Marilyn More

MS. MARILYN MORE: I want to welcome everyone to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services. Today, we're dealing with the topic of services for persons with disabilities and we're very pleased to have with us the Deputy Minister of Community Services and her staff. Before I ask you to introduce yourself and other members of your department perhaps we'll introduce ourselves. Leo, would you like to start?

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you members.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Thank you Madam Chairman and good afternoon to the committee. As I believe you already know, my name is Judith Ferguson and I have the privilege of being the Deputy Minister of the Department of Community Services. I'm very pleased to be joined today by two representatives from the department to provide information and answer questions about services for persons with disabilities.

I'm very excited to be speaking about this particular topic this afternoon because as you will hear in a few moments, we have some very exciting initiatives going on in the department.

As deputy minister, I am very fortunate to work with an exceptional team of people and I'd like to begin by introducing two of them to you. Mildred Hayward is the Director of Services for Persons with Disabilities - Mildred has held this position since 2005, she has a Master of Education and a Master of Public Administration and has been working with people with disabilities for over 20 years. Lorna MacPherson is the Coordinator of Direct Family Support and Assessments, she is a Registered Social Worker and has been employed with the Department of Community Services for more than 20 years, 17 of those years specifically in programs related to children, youth, and adults with disabilities.

Services for persons with disabilities provides voluntary residential and day programs for approximately 4,800 individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities or long-term mental illness. Residential services include a range of options from in-home support for families, caring for a family member with a disability in their own home, to 24-hour residential support. Our objective is to promote and offer a range of programs that can support people at various stages of their development and independence.

Our programs include unlicensed community-based homes, licensed homes for special care and adult service centres. Our unlicensed community-based homes include four programs; alternative family support which offers a supportive living environment in a family-like setting, direct family support which provides support to families who are caring for children or adult family members with disabilities at home, and the independent living support program which provides supports and services to individuals who are semi-independent. This program will provide up to 21 hours per week to help with activities like laundry, shopping, banking, meal preparation and maintaining a household.

We also have the Small Option Program where support is provided for up to three individuals with disabilities in a purchased or rented home. Trained staff are provided on a full-time basis through a combination of live-in and shift models. Our licensed homes for special care include residential care facilities, group homes, developmental residences, adult residential centres and regional rehabilitation centres.

As I know you are aware, we also have adult service centres. There are 30 adult service centres that provide services to approximately 1,800 clients. These centres provide employment supports and skills training to Nova Scotians with disabilities. Several centres provide individual day programming that includes recreational and leisure opportunities to Nova Scotians unable to fully participate in regular employment programs.

We have consulted with service providers, with clients and with their families to respond to their needs in a practical, responsible and caring way. Our goal, and the goal and commitment of Minister Streach, is to ensure that we better meet the needs of all of our clients and I'm happy to say that we are making significant progress. We have implemented three new and expanded programs and we are wrapping up our funding strategy and residential review.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide information on the Services for Persons with Disabilities Program in Nova Scotia. We are always looking for new ways to improve our programs and services in the department and we look forward to providing you with more specific information in response to your questions today. I do want to say that my opening comments are briefer than normal because I want to use the majority of our time this afternoon to have Millie and Lorna provide you with an overview of the department's Services for Persons with Disabilities framework and to outline some of the progress that we are making on behalf of individuals and their families. So thank you very much, Madam Chairman, and I'll now turn it over to Millie to begin the presentation.

[1:15 p.m.]

MS. MILDRED HAYWARD: Madam Chairman and committee members, I believe you have a copy of our slides in front of you and I would like to take you through those slides. What we are working on, and we have consulted a number of people, is a program framework for persons with disabilities for the services that we provide to ensure that we provide the most appropriate services and supports. The department is committed to offering services and supports to children and adults with disabilities that promote and foster independence and inclusion in their communities wherever possible. We have developed this program framework to guide us for the next three to five years. Our goal is to enable individuals with disabilities to live to their fullest potential within their communities.

Our objectives: We are committed to enhancing a social support system that builds on community inclusiveness and promotes independence, self-reliance and security for individuals with disabilities. We will achieve this through the provision of a continuum or range of supports and services through leadership and collaborative relationships with individuals, families, support networks, service providers, communities, and other government departments.

We have developed some guiding principles and a number of these guiding principles came out of the consultation - the province-wide consultation that occurred back in 2003-04 - and these are guiding us as we move ahead in developing services for persons with disabilities. Certainly fostering independence and self-reliance is very important, building on community inclusiveness, person-centred planning or individual planning, strong leadership and working collaboratively across government, with our service providers with people with disabilities. With the various community groups, developing a sustainable and equitable range of supports that provide the least intrusive environment, being accountable, transparent, and maintaining open communication and accessing research and best practices to guide our development.

The mandate of our program area - we do serve children, youth and adults across a lifespan. We provide services and support, as I said, to those three groups - children, youth and adults. Right now, we serve approximately 4,800 individuals province-wide. We do serve three populations: people with physical disabilities; those with intellectual

disabilities; and individuals living with long-term mental illness. So it's those three groups that we have to ensure all of our programs are able to meet the needs.

Since 2005, our budget has increased significantly, which is certainly highlighting the importance that government is placing on services for persons with disabilities and the bar graph in front of you will show the amount of that increase is essentially around \$32.4 million since 2005.

So this framework really has four components - promotion of independence for individuals with disabilities, ensuring we provide the support services and the support of housing, the main component is residential services, and investment in our staff resources with our service providers and for our department as well, our regional offices.

We have a number of initiatives underway, showing leadership in the sector and helping members of the sector with showing leadership as well is quite significant for us to move forward. We are continuing our consultations that we started with the CSA - the former Community Supports for Adults was the name of this program area - for some time. We are investing in programs and supports, staff, in our service providers, strengthening the continuum or the range of residential options that will be available.

We will be enhancing our legislation and policy, our Homes for Special Care Act, which we share with the Department of Health, needs to be updated and that is on our list to be done this year as well. We have a number of our processes that we need to update and enhance, like our assessment and individual support planning processes. We're working collaboratively across government and within the department, strengthening governance across the system and accessing the research and best practices to guide our development.

The next three or four slides are initiatives and the timelines that have been associated with them. It also will tell you what we have accomplished to date since we started with the renewal. As I said, it was called the CSA renewal initially - it is now Services for Persons with Disabilities.

The summary document from the original consultations was released in December, 2004. Since then we have implemented the Direct Family Support Program for adults and that complemented the Direct Family Support Program for children that was in place. Those programs were enhanced. That was completed in January 2005.

In January, 2006, we implemented the Independent Living Support Program in our Eastern Region - the Cape Breton Region - and we're quite pleased with the uptake in that program. We now have 26 individuals who are thrilled to be in the independent living situations, in their own apartments. They're provided with supports so that can be successful for them.

We also, in June, 2006, implemented our Alternative Family Support Program. That program really is an enhancement to our old Community Residence Program. We have a number of new individuals set up in that program as well.

We will be implementing the Independent Living Support Program in our Western and Central Regions before this fiscal year is finished. We're starting in the Fall of 2007. We've also completed a review of our adult service centres across the province and we have identified the areas that we need to address there to enhance capacity as well. This year we will be working with the Directions Council to ensure that we approach that in the most effective way.

We've added some new staff to our regional offices so that we are able to respond to the needs that are being identified and, of course, we are investing in training and staff conferences for our staff.

For our service providers, we did initiate a consultation around our funding methodology last year and Bill Hogg, the former Deputy Minister of Finance, kindly agreed to conduct that review for us. We are now waiting for that report to be finalized but we know we need a funding methodology for our service providers. In the meantime, we are also working on developing staffing guidelines for our homes to enhance and to make sure really that we have most appropriate staff levels in our homes to provide the support to individuals with disabilities. We are utilizing service agreements now that more clearly define all of our roles, what the role of the department is and the role of our service providers, as well as individuals with disabilities.

We are conducting an infrastructure review of a number of our homes across the province. We know that a number of them are quite aged and we need to determine how we can rehabilitate some of those homes. We are also working very closely with the Department of Health to expand home care into our homes as well.

In the meantime, we are just getting towards the end of finalizing our residential review where we were given a very specific time period, six months, to complete a comprehensive review of our residential system. We are now almost ready to submit that report within a few days and we will be making recommendations for how we can improve our overall system.

As I mentioned, our homes for special care legislation will be updated within the next year and because of that we will be enhancing our policies and procedures as well. We are looking at our eligibility criteria and the individual support planning and new procedures that will be developed along with that. Again, I mention that we are collaborating with other departments across government, which is very important, because the Departments of Education, Health and Justice are all involved in supporting individuals with disabilities as well.

Governance of our system is very important and we have looked at that, as well, in our residential review. We need to look at best practices. We need to be able to define our roles and responsibilities and work with our service providers to enhance training and development as well.

The last one, again, is around best practices research, ensuring that we are monitoring our programs and that we are evaluating as well. So we are just quite busy right now. We are quite pleased to be at this stage in the development of services for persons with disabilities. It is a very exciting time for this program area.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Are you prepared for questions now? Who would like to start? Pat and then Keith.

MR. PATRICK DUNN: The first question I have is concerning - there are 30 centres across the province, serving approximately 1,700 clients. These adult service centres, are they in a situation where the services that are being provided every adult centre - do they sort of look after their own needs of their individual cases in that particular centre compared to having the same services in every one of the 30 centres across the province? So basically, I guess, what I'm asking is an individual centre - with the people who are involved in that centre, the programs that they have - are they programs that are consistent right across the province? Every centre is offering the same programs or do they adapt their programs to the individual needs of the people in a particular centre?

MS. HAYWARD: A number of the adult service centres do have similar programs. They're not all built on the same model. There are some similarities and a number of the centres, certainly from what we have observed, are very innovative and are operating under best practices for individuals with disabilities, certainly the individual support planning that they do. They assess the needs of the individual client and look at the type of programming and what supports that person will need. Is that consistent across the province? I believe the individual support planning is but, in some areas we know we have to help them to enhance those programs.

MR. DUNN: Within their programs, are some of these centres or all of these centres doing some fundraising in order to carry out some of their programs they wish to do in the various centres?

MS. HAYWARD: Yes. That is the model for most of those centres because they are supporting individuals to learn employment skills, to learn life skills and they do engage in a number of activities that would help prepare individuals to go into the workforce. They also offer a workshop type model and it is run as a business as well and some of the individuals in those adult service centres are in a work situation.

MR. DUNN: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Keith Colwell.

MR. KEITH COLWELL: I'm going to pass my time to Mr. Gaudet.

MR. WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you. I wanted to thank you deputy and staff. I wanted to focus a little bit on the independent living service that the department is currently involved with. You have indicated that you have implemented the project in eastern Nova Scotia in January of last year. I guess I'm just curious, what was your budget available? You indicated in your opening comments that you had 26 people in the program, how these individuals - did they have to notify the department to be in the program or did the department reach out to them? I'm just curious how that worked out.

At the same time, do you have more room for more people to join the program? Where I'm going with this is in looking at your calendar, you're looking at establishing a program for western Nova Scotia, where I'm from, so I'm just curious from your experience in the eastern part basically how was that project set up?

[1:30 p.m.]

MS. HAYWARD: This is one of, I would say, our most successful projects for persons with disabilities. We made a public announcement that this program was available in the eastern region, we made contact with our service providers and we actually put out a request for proposals because we wanted a certain number of service providers to be involved. This program provides up to 21 hours of support to individuals with disabilities and those are people who can be very independent, they just need a little bit of support to help them develop certain types of skills, whether that's using transportation in the community or learning how to do banking or home maintenance, those types of things. So we work with our regional office, with our service providers, and we also looked at our waiting list to look at the type of people that were waiting for services from us. There were some people who were in other residential options that could move on to independence and this was our first opportunity to be able to offer that to them.

Initially when we went to the eastern region we had funding for 12 of those types of situations and the uptake has been so incredible there that we expanded that funding to accommodate 26 and we have more funding in our budget this year for that program. I neglected to mention that we have just rolled out in the northern region and by the Fall we will be into the western region, that's where we go next, then it will be the central region.

The experience in Cape Breton has been incredible for those who have been able to move into that type - they're on their own, they have their own apartment, it is their home and very positive feedback.

MR. GAUDET: Madam Chairman, I was going to touch on that positive feedback. What kind of reception have you received from the individuals who are currently in the program?

MS. HAYWARD: If I had thought, I would have brought some letters that came from individuals with disabilities and they were very pleased to finally have the opportunity to demonstrate their independence. Also, from our service providers, it has been quite an awakening for them as well because we sometimes as a society can be overprotective of individuals with disabilities. This has allowed all of us to give people with disabilities the opportunity to be independent.

MR. GAUDET: You indicated earlier that these individuals qualified up to 21 hours. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

MS. HAYWARD: The support that we've asked the service providers to provide are around skill development. For example, some people do not know how to access transportation - if there's a bus system in the community, they need to learn how to access that system themselves. Some of them haven't gone to a bank machine before, so the service provider would help them learn how to use a bank machine. Those types of things, we call them instrumental activities of daily living. It's the activities that most of us would take for granted but sometimes they haven't had the opportunity to learn those skills. It is actually running a home, how do you prepare a meal for yourself, how do you do grocery shopping, those types of things and that's what we're helping them with.

MR. GAUDET: Who determines that 21 hours is the maximum available to them?

MS. HAYWARD: That's a decision that's made in conjunction with the person who wants to move into that type of living arrangement with a service provider who will work with them and with the care coordinator in the region. It is very collaborative, we use our individual support planning process in that situation and the individual with the disability is the one saying, this is what I feel I need right now and that may fluctuate over time.

MR. GAUDET: I just have one final question, Madam Chairman. Are people asked to register with the regional office for the provider?

MS. HAYWARD: It's with our regional office.

MR. GAUDET: So the regional office would know who these individuals are in their communities, so why is there an emphasis placed on the individuals to register? I don't understand.

MS. HAYWARD: I assumed you were talking about to ensure that they are eligible for our services. They would have to be eligible for our services, that's what I mean.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Madam Chairman, thank you and thank you to the deputy minister and staff for coming in today.

I want to start off with the stated goal to enable individuals with disabilities to live their fullest potential within their community. Just wondering as a large piece policy issue, we're still hearing a great demand for de-institutionalization of people with mental and physical disabilities. In my area, we have the Waterville Rehabilitation Centre and I'm just wondering where institutions like that fit in the current model and the role that they will probably continue to have?

MS. FERGUSON: What we are working on developing in the department is a continuum of services for persons from the least intrusive - the things that Millie talked about earlier like direct family support, alternate family support, independent living - through our continuum of residential options. Our intention would be that facilities like Kings in your riding would continue to be part of our continuum, for clients and individuals who have more complex needs. So a facility like Kings would be at the highest end of our continuum whereas the type of programming that Millie talked about would be our least intrusive. So, obviously, our goal would be to ensure that clients transition through to and fulfill the maximum amount of independence that they can have.

So there may be opportunities sometimes determining what kind of needs the clients require at that particular time. There may be a need for a facility like Kings. However, the goal would be - obviously throughout the program, the aim would be to transition through to a piece in the continuum that is the most independent for that individual. So those places will continue to play a role but they are at the highest end for the individuals with the highest and most complex needs.

I guess I should just add one thing. Part of what we are looking at in the department in trying to ensure that we do - through the residential review and part of this programming - really put a focus on independence and to make sure that, in terms of the department, we really have a focus on transitioning clients through to ensure that independence focus is really a key of all of the planning that we do.

MR. GLAVINE: Also, picking up there with those very high needs but living in a home setting. I guess the adult service centres are basically the sheltered workshops, I guess. Is that true? We get lots of terminology thrown around.

There always seems to be a waiting list. I know I get calls, talking about The Flower Cart and the Beehive in Aylesford as just offering tremendous programs and I visit both those places and I am familiar with the work that goes on there. Have you reviewed the need for such facilities and trying to get people moving in. I hear of cases - talk about mandatory retirement - they are close to 70 before they will leave some of these centres, which I think is fabulous, but it also creates the bottleneck for those who leave school at age 21 and need to do something productive and engaging. I am just wondering if you have reviewed that need across the province?

MS. FERGUSON: We have been looking at that and I will let Millie or Lorna speak to this a little bit; they can give more details. We have had a review going on of our adult service centres. We have travelled around the province. We have met with the service providers. They provide fantastic service and are certainly an integral part of the services we provide and the discussion I just had around independence and being able to transition, they are a huge piece of that and we know that. So as we have been looking at our continuum and developing all of the components, they are a big piece of that. So part of the review was to look at where we are, identify the gaps and put some planning in place in terms of being able to better address the need. Certainly, when you look at the three new programs that we have introduced, the Direct Family Support, Alternative Family Support and the Independent Living, the adult service centres play a huge part in terms of the daily living of individuals. So maybe Millie or Lorna can speak more to the specifics of the review.

MS. HAYWARD: Certainly when we did that review, the capacity issue is very significant right across the province and it is something that we have to address. There are a number of issues and we are trying to prioritize those right now. The staffing in those centres is also an issue because sometimes the centres can take more people but they don't have the number of staff that they require. So that is an issue that has been identified and we are trying to address, again, through developing staffing guidelines.

Just recently we have had some funding available that we have had to put to fire and life safety issues, essentially. We had fires in two of our major centres, one in Sydney and one in the Amherst area. There was a significant infusion of funding that was required there to get them back on their feet. So we are quite pleased about that.

MR. GLAVINE: How are we doing?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just one quick one.

MR. GLAVINE: Okay, just one quick one, then - something I had written down that I needed to check. The department - in terms of providing loans or funding to allow retrofitting or renovations to existing homes to make it wheelchair accessible, what's the funding level and the availability of that for Nova Scotians?

MS. HAYWARD: For people with disabilities?

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, people with a disability, in other words, even due to an accident that need now to renovate their homes to make them wheelchair accessible. What program is available to assist those who would need those kinds of renovations to their homes?

MS. FERGUSON: So, not necessarily individuals who would qualify for services for persons with disabilities?

MR. GLAVINE: That's right, yes.

MS. FERGUSON: But specifically, people outside? We have some specific housing programs - sorry, I didn't bring that detail with me, but I can certainly provide that to you in terms of the department specifically for those kinds of services. I'd be happy to get that information for you.

MR. GLAVINE: And the process of applying, as well, that would be part of that information?

MS. FERGUSON: That's right. I can get you the whole package on the application process and the services we provide.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you very much.

MS. FERGUSON: You're very welcome.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: I'd like to say thank you for coming today. First of all, I'd like to say, the fire was in Glace Bay. It was the crossroads in Glace Bay, not in Sydney, where the money was spent.

Also, I'd like to touch on the adult service centres. You did say you have 1,800 clients served by 30 centres. I do know the work of the majority of centres in Cape Breton. As a parent of a son who attends a centre, I'm quite aware of the issues in those centres. For example, they talked about waiting lists.

I'll give you an example of the Horizon Achievement Centre in Sydney. They have 38 people on the list right now, waiting to get into that centre - four years to wait to get into that centre. A four year waiting list. Each year we graduate children - as we saw the issue in the news recently about children staying in school until they're 21, the reason being their parents want them in there because they can't get into these centres. There's a four-year waiting list in Cape Breton for people with disabilities.

These centres have been frozen for 12 years. Is that not true? A 12-year freeze on funding for these centres. That's the truth in this matter. I want to know how many people are on a waiting list for these adult service centre programs across the whole of Nova Scotia - how many people are on a waiting list?

[1:45 p.m.]

MS. HAYWARD: I don't have that number with me. I know there is a number of people waiting. Just to speak to one point that you raised, the 18 to 21 year old group has been a significant issue for us. In two regions, we are working with the Department of

Education to address that particular issue as well. We have funded the ACE program here in the metro region for the second year in a row. We're also working with the Strait Regional School Board right now because we know there are around 35 to 38 students with disabilities coming out of that school system in June who require adult services, so we're working with the school board, with the Department of Education and other partners, such as the Nova Scotia Community College and some of the adult service centres in that area to expand our programs there as well.

We can certainly get the information on the number across the province, other than that, who are waiting for services and we can provide that information to you.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you, that would be greatly appreciated. I just know in my area that 38 are waiting and that's a four year wait.

I'd like to touch an instance a colleague had mentioned earlier, do they fund-raise? I don't know how many cinnamon rolls they have to sell to the Marine Atlantic to keep their facility open - they raise over \$200,000 a year at this centre to keep it open. These are our most vulnerable people - is this a human rights issue? We're not providing these programs that are much needed for those who are less fortunate than ourselves? We've fallen so far behind that I feel that we need new, modern legislation to deal with this. You know, review, review, review - we've been hearing that for years, a 12-year freeze. The cost of insurance, rent, lights, heat, wages - all of those issues are just above and beyond. All of these adult service centres in this province. The strain on the staff and the administrations of constantly fundraising and constantly fundraising to keep their doors open for these members of our society. I'm just wondering, when will the adult service centres get some help to continue operating in this province?

MS. FERGUSON: Part of what we're doing through the residential review and what we're doing through the adult service centre review is looking at where we feel we have the gaps in the system and putting a plan in place to provide some sustainable funding to the centres. We won't be able to do everything at the beginning, but we are in the process of developing a plan and, as Millie said, we were fortunate to be able to provide some significant amounts of funding to two centres in particular, but we do know there's an issue with that. We do know the important role that they play and, I guess I would say underscored by that, the programs that we recently introduced are going to have more of an impact in terms of the role of the adult service centres.

So we've completed the review and now we're looking at coming up with a plan to sustain, shore up, and with the goal of increasing the capacity of the centre. So we recognize that there's a concern and there's a problem and we're looking in terms of what the department can do to put a plan together to begin to address that.

MR. GOSSE: I know a review again, and I know these centres cringe when they hear that word - review again - and the reason being, it has been 12 years. I understand their frustration and the frustration of many parents with children with disabilities and

adults with disabilities, you know, not being able to access those programs. I just find that they're constantly fundraising, I would like to know in another sense, you know, it's a review again. So there's actually no timeline or date set for when they're going to receive any operational funding to actually expand their services or deal with some of the waiting times, so there's actually not a timeline, and I know that these people sat on this review. Most of these centres sat on this review to give their input, valuable input.

MS. FERGUSON: Yes.

MR. GOSSE: But they feel that the input is still under review after all these years, so they're just wondering, and you're talking about government cooperation between different departments. Has your department talked about procurement for government contracts for these centres to give them a percentage of the government contracts in the Province of Nova Scotia to alleviate some of this hardship? You know what I mean by that. I will give you an example of the energy kit that the government sent around. They have, say, 15 per cent of that contract done at the Prescott Centre here in Halifax or 15 per cent of the Cape Breton done in Cape Breton. That much needed contract would actually keep that centre open and pay for some of the insurance, heat and lights. So have you actually been looking at a policy to develop procurement for adult service centres in the Province of Nova Scotia and making sure that they get some of the government contracts?

MS. HAYWARD: That is certainly a recommendation that came out of the review that was done. I think it's important just to back up for a minute. You talk about 12 years since these service centres have had funding. I think for our department, what we have recognized is since the municipal exchange of services for persons with disabilities to the provincial government, there has been some significant lapse, I guess would be the best word. What happened when the governance exchange, or the responsibility for the programs and services for persons with disabilities moved to the province, that was the same time that the de-institutionalization movement started to occur in Nova Scotia. It was occurring across North America and in Europe. That consumed the department and there was a closure of a number of the large institutions in Nova Scotia and at the Children's Training Centre, those types of institutions, and that has consumed the department for a number of years.

It was in 2002-03, and a little bit before that I guess, that the department finally started to be able to say, okay, what do we have and where are the gaps in the services that we're offering to people with disabilities. That's when they started with the consultation. We have the adult service centres, our service providers across the province, all of our residential services. We needed to look at all of that and we do admit we haven't been able to do what has needed to be done for services for persons with disabilities, but that is changing. Our program framework is taking us forward, we have the information to help us move ahead. It's not going to happen overnight - we have just recently invested over \$1.5 million in some of the adult service centres across the province and in the past few years we've also had to look at their whole salary framework for their staff. We've looked at that for our staff in our residential services as well.

It's a huge system, it's very complex and it's going to take us some time to change the whole system. Right now, step by step, we are saying this is what we're going to do. The independent living programs were the start and we're continuing on. We will work from our residential report as well to move this ahead and to ensure that we have the services that we need in place.

MR. GOSSE: One quick one. Adult service centres - the rumour out here now in the rumour mill is if you don't hear a rumour in Cape Breton by 9 o'clock, start one. E-waste, is that going to be the way of the future for these adult service centres? Have they actually put proposals together to deal with the e-waste - what I mean is computers and that sort of stuff - is there a proposal incoming right now for those centres to deal with e-waste in the Province of Nova Scotia?

MS. HAYWARD: I have been advised that a letter is going to the Premier's office - I'm not sure if it's there yet - suggesting that the Directions Council for Nova Scotia and all the centres would certainly like to take that on.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you. I think it would be a good start and some self-sufficiency in those centres.

MADAM CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Trevor Zinck. Leo, perhaps you can take over the Chair and let me have a spot.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Thank you Madam Chair and thank you deputy and your staff for coming in today. Very important issue especially here in Nova Scotia with our disabled population and growing. I want to touch a little bit on the small options. We've heard over the last several months about the so-called moratorium that's been in existence for going on 12 years. We know that the review is up, Millie, you've made mention that it's going to be finalized and put on the table.

I had an opportunity last Saturday - as I made mention before the meeting - to visit with our newest small option home in the metro area. It was a situation where several families got together wanting to unveil the program to the department in previous years and were denied. We, as a Party, brought it to the forefront in November and now we have some happy individuals that are benefitting from that home, some families that are very happy. Spending time in that home on Saturday and seeing how many families and how many lives were affected by it was just tremendous. Out of that experience - and congratulations to the department for taking that step to look at that proposal and consider it - but out of the conversations I had on Saturday came several questions along the lines of what would actually come out of this review. One of the questions was, was it just a review to basically clarify and state to the department and to the minister exactly where the services were at or, out of this review is it a possibility? There is a need because we hear it constantly, is there going to be an opportunity for more small options homes to be built or, was it just an examination of the actual services that are provided today?

MS. FERGUSON: Maybe I'll start that and these guys can jump in. The review from 2003 forward kind of evolved, I guess that's the best thing to say, as the renewal process evolved along. What it has turned out to be and what we're really pleased that it's turned out to be is really a comprehensive look at everything we are providing across the province; how we're providing it, where we're providing it, to whom we're providing it. So when we say it's a residential review it's really much more than a residential review, it's really about the types of residences, the types of services, where they are, how we're providing them, who's providing them.

So it really has turned out to be - and I think this is a really good thing - a very comprehensive review with the aim being, I think you heard Millie talk earlier - we're really trying to refocus the program in the department in terms of what are the kinds of things we should be looking at. You heard Millie speak to kind of the themes and the focus of the department so the goal of that review is looking at what we have now but, more importantly, building a continuum in terms of what we see our needs to be in the future and how can we best serve individuals in the system to ensure that they are able to maximize their own independence. That's why it's taking longer and that's why it will be more complicated because we have a loftier goal in terms of what we would like to achieve down the road.

Small options homes will always be part of the continuum. They are an important part and they're a piece of that and they will always be a piece. We will look in terms of the needs across the province, how we can best provide the services, how we can provide them in the best way for the clients, and ensure we have a sustainable system. That is really the goal so it's going to be much more than just what's where. It's going to be how we deliver it and again, through a much more enlightened and progressive programming vision of what are the kinds of services we feel we need to provide in the department and how can we work better with the service providers to do that. The team and the departments in the regions and very much the service providers have all been working really hard together and have done some tremendous work in terms of helping us identify where we all think we need to go. I think the important thing is trying to go there together.

Now we will probably not be able to make everybody absolutely happy at the end of the day but having said that, I think the vision of where everybody wants to go with this, that we all are sharing the same vision. The important thing for us is how we get there and that's what the focus will be.

MR. ZINCK: Okay. The proposal that was put forward to the government, to the department itself, was a proposal that was actually saving the department money. Again I want to give the department credit in this respect for showing some vision and actually looking at this model again, and today adopting it. One of the other questions that the families that were affected by this had suggested - or didn't want to have happen - was perhaps this might have been a situation where there was some media attention put on the situation so the band-aid was immediately applied to do away with the negative.

Their question and I guess obviously it would be one of my questions, is the department going to continue to work along with this family, all the families that are involved - three different families - and would they consider using this situation as a model down the road for other families? The families that were coming into the home were seeing how happy the individuals were, the effect that it's going to have on them. These individuals are growing already and the parents would like to know that if this is as good as it is, is it perhaps going to be a model the department will take in consideration and that it wasn't just a situation where we have to put out a fire because somebody brought it to the media's attention?

[2:00 p.m.- Mr. Leo Glavine took the Chair.]

MS. HAYWARD: I don't know how to respond to that. The model that you're referring to, we haven't looked at it as a small option model - it's almost a self-managed care model. That is something that we are looking at for the future and once we table our report and I probably shouldn't say too much because Judith hasn't been briefed yet - our deputy or our minister - but those are the things we are looking at, creative ways to work with families to respond to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

We don't feel that we need to maintain a paternalistic or custodial approach to care and support for individuals with disabilities, that families should be very much involved. If there is a type of self-managed care program that we can develop then that is something that we will be looking at. Certainly this particular situation is a good example of that and how it can work. For people in a similar type of situation, over the next few months we will be looking at that.

MR. ZINCK: I think it's a wonderful model. It obviously leads to individuals obtaining more independence for sure because what we have - a lot of cases that come to us - with our aging population in Nova Scotia, parents are aging and their concern is that their children have a place to go, that their children are going to have an opportunity for the dignity and respect to go on and have some sort of lifestyle that they can put forward themselves, instead of having a parent guide it. As you know, through many of the conversations, parents get tired and they want to know, but we do have a situation where parents are aging.

I'll finish with one last question. Throughout this whole cycle and dealing with the individuals in this particular case, one of the suggestions put forward, one of the options that the department unfolds is the alternative families situation where perhaps sometimes they get an alternative family put in place for respite care or permanent care. I'm wondering, how many alternative families are registered and ready to accept clients now and how many are in the process of being trained and what kind of training do those families get to deal with some of the children that they might take into their care?

MS. HAYWARD: We have actually 172 alternate family homes across the province right now. We have been able to make 24 new placements in those homes in the

past few months. We are developing and I've almost completed the development of the training program, it's a full training manual for alternate families. We will have our staff trainer work with our program coordinator to meet with families across the province. There is specific training that is developed because we are very interested in making the right match for families. Certain families can work and have individuals with certain types of disabilities, we want to make sure there is a good match there, it is very key.

MR. ZINCK: Obviously, because we want the individual affected by the disability to have that opportunity to grow, therefore we need that situation that's going to garner that. One real quick last one is, how many adults with disabilities are currently waiting for small options homes, approximately?

MS. HAYWARD: I'm trying to break down the list in my head. There are approximately 400 individuals in total across the province not just for small options, for all types of residential options, all types of services for persons with disabilities. I'm sorry, I can't recall the exact number just for small options. When we work with individuals with disabilities, we look at the different types of options available. It's not just a small options home, that may not work for everyone. What we have to look at is the range of services available and try to find the most appropriate setting.

For some people a small options home may work and for others it doesn't, so that's why it is so important for us to expand that range of options.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Zinck. Marilyn.

MS. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Chairman, I have to say I share the increasing frustration out there with the slow pace of the improvements to services for people with disabilities. When I talk to clients, to their advocates and to families and the service providers, they're almost reaching the level of outrage in terms of the slow pace and the impact that has on the clients.

I sat perhaps a month ago at a consultation that the Disabled Persons Commission held in Truro. A mother gave the story of her young adult son and it was a very powerful story. He has been on a wait list for years and will continue to be on the wait list for years and she ended up by looking at everyone in the room and said, my son is treated less respectfully in this province than a prisoner - now can you explain that to me? And there was utter silence in the room. She went on to explain and describe all the programs and services that someone who breaks the law and is sentenced in this province gets compared to her son. It was an amazing experience and it really transformed my sense of immediacy in terms of how quickly we have to deal with these things.

Now, unfortunately, I have a young man in my own constituency who is falling through the cracks. I understand some of the progress that has been made but when I look at the impact of the various freezes and the caps on funding and the growing wait list and

I see across from me in my office, occasionally, the families describing to me the daily results of that, we have to do more. We really do.

Now, I have to start off by telling you, I have permission of this family, not to mention his name but to give you a quick synopsis of his situation and just to illustrate the Catch-22 that families are in. He's a 24-year-old man who has the cognitive development of a one-year-old child. He is dearly loved and well looked after in his family home by his parents and care providers who are hired under some funding through the Department of Health. Originally, he was in the Department of Community Services and I'm sure you all know who I'm talking about. This family could not have done more for their son and they have saved our province hundreds of thousands of dollars through their daily care over the last 24 years.

They can no longer provide the level of care he needs in the family home with the \$2,200 cap. That's the same cap that is provided, and was originally in your department through in-home support. When that program was transferred to Health, the cap stayed on and I understand that your new creation, the Direct Family Support Program, will have the same cap. If this family is forced to put their son into a placement with full care, it will cost the Department of Community Services up to \$7,000 to \$10,000 a month compared to the \$2,200 the family is doing it for. They need an increase in funding, not to \$7,000 to \$10,000 but a modest increase in order to keep him at home. Now he is caught in this trade-off where one department is pushing the responsibility to the other and back and forth, back and forth, and everyone is relying on this artificial, probably 12-year-old limit of \$2,200 a day.

So what is going to happen to families like this while we wait for the roll-out of the programs that you have been describing to us today? To me, common sense dictates that we increase the cap in order to keep him home. It's best for his needs and it saves us money. I can't understand where the breakdown in logic, in decision making has come about. I've tried to deal with it through the Minister of Health, I've tried to deal with it through senior officials in your own department. Where does this family go? It has been appealed. I went to the appeal with them. The appeal was lost because he is currently a client of Health and your limit is going to be the same. It's bouncing this young man back and forth all the time. Where is the hope for the family?

MS. MACPHERSON: As you know, I can't speak to any specifics and you understand that. Situations that you describe that inform us with changes that we need to make to our programs are really what is behind the revision of policies, the looking at jurisdictional research. We want to support families to the extent that we can. The Direct Family Support Program, when we implemented that to include adults with disabilities living at home, it was a very positive move on behalf of our department to do that. We are continuing to look at the program. We are looking at how we can enhance it to make it more responsive to families. There is no quick answer.

The residential review - as Millie has said and we've talked about - is going to inform us of the need for respite services and programs for families. We want families to be able to stay together, if that's what families choose and individuals choose, to live at home with their families. It is not an easy fix. The implementation of direct family support was a very key start in moving in the right direction and all we can say to you this afternoon is that the commitment is to not stop at any piece of the work, it is to continue to move forward in a way that is responsive and demonstrates that we hear what families say.

MS. MORE: That's not very comforting. This family is falling through the cracks, the mother's health is being impacted. We may end up with two clients instead of one between the two systems of Community Services and Health.

I think the Department of Health and the Department of Community Services has a responsibility to look after these clients now, not just looking into the future, so something has to be done immediately.

MS. MACPHERSON: And I'm happy to talk with you either afterwards or we can discuss it in more detail and provide whatever assistance we can.

MS. MORE: I'd certainly be willing to discuss it but I want to see some action on this, it just doesn't make sense. It undermines my faith in your discussion about collaboration between departments, about the most vulnerable clients getting the most resources. I know that there are clients in this province through your department who are getting the maximum, up to \$7,000 or \$10,000 a month to pay for their care. Where is the transparency around who gets the money? How come some families and clients don't get the money and others do? There has to be some sort of criteria or rationalization that looks fair and makes sense to everyone, from politicians to clients and their families. Believe me, we can't get there fast enough. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn.

MR. PATRICK DUNN: Mr. Chairman, I don't have a question, just some comments. I appreciate your difficult decisions and attempts to work at developing sustainable support systems across the province and so on. I would just like to make a few comments about Summer Street Industries in New Glasgow. Yes, they do have people on the waiting list and they would love to have more funding, et cetera. However, their staff, board and volunteers are absolutely marvellous, I would like to think of that particular facility as a model for the province.

They do just wonderful work not only in the facility but outside, very innovative, creative. They take advantage of the new high school that is minutes away from them, North Nova Education Centre - they have a program through the school where high school students are coming to the centre to work with many individuals. The program has been a great success. They also work with the Grade 12 leadership credit course, students involved in that, so they are doing a lot of wonderful things and it's actually a real nice place to visit,

to go in and see the staff and mingle with the people working there on a day to day basis. I just wanted to mention those things while I had the opportunity, it's a great centre.

[2:15 p.m. Ms. Marilyn More resumed the Chair.]

MS. HAYWARD: And they're certainly recognized as leaders.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Gordie and then Leo.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Madam Chairman, I'll go to another issue that I have around mobility wheelchairs. We all know, as legislators, of the Abilities Foundation and I don't know if they have adequate funding or they do not have adequate funding for wheelchairs but what really bothers me is when they come in my office and tell me the department is forcing them to be turned down twice by charities - two charities have to turn them down for them to actually get help for a wheelchair. Do you think this is treating people with disabilities with dignity?

MS. FERGUSON: I can speak directly to that. It is the policy within our Income Assistance Program that where there are organizations in the community that are known to assist with that, that the clients make representations to those organizations. However, what I would like to say is that it has been brought to our attention recently that in circumstances and in areas of the province where we know the organizations simply aren't able to assist, the clients are not required to make inquiries to those organizations and we have training to go out in the not too distant future on that very point.

MR. GOSSE: Good, I'm glad to hear that, because I find it degrading to go to the Kiwanis and the Kinsmen - great organizations - and sending people to these organizations and have them turned down for funding, I mean that's not dignity and respect for these people. I'm glad that maybe something is going to be done in that respect, I'm really glad. The only other one I would like to ask is, is there going to be any more funding for the Abilities Foundation to deal with this issue?

MS. MACPHERSON: I will try to answer that. We're looking at the program with the Abilities Foundation and there's an evaluation underway to see how it has worked and to see what the next steps will be in terms of developing the program and expanding it.

MR. GOSSE: One more quick one, if you don't mind. Now, we talked earlier about the adult residential centres and my colleague had mentioned residential care facilities and small group homes. Is there a process underway similar to long-term care to assess the facility requirements?

MS. HAYWARD: Yes.

MR. GOSSE: And when can we expect that?

MS. HAYWARD: The report that I referred to earlier, the residential review report, that is the report where we have outlined our recommendations and a strategy to move us forward. We have looked at capacity, how we can increase capacity, and where we need to increase capacity in our residential system. That report will be tabled with our deputy within a few days and then we're briefing our minister early in May. That briefing has been set up for her and it has to go through those processes first.

MR. GOSSE: And then we'll see it at the press release. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Madam Chairman, one of the areas that is getting quite a bit of attention today is the youth in the Small Option Homes that work very often in close conjunction with schools. Some of these facilities do have extremely challenging cases and we know that not all of the youth workers certainly have the backgrounds to deal with serious psychological and mental health problems. In light of the Nunn report, I'm wondering what are going to be some further requirements and developments within the small options concept of dealing with youth with extreme disabilities?

MS. FERGUSON: Well, as you know, part of the Nunn strategy is actually developing a youth strategy and so the Department of Community Services is responsible for that in conjunction - there are five government departments that are working on that. We have committed to deliver a youth strategy in June of this year and we will be looking at all of the issues around that, including the mental health piece - in fact, the challenges in all of the departments - so I would anticipate that there may be some recommendations around those pieces coming out and forming part of the strategy.

MR. GLAVINE: So CAYAC is safe for now but it may undergo some transformation, would that be fair to say?

MS. FERGUSON: Right. There's now the Children and Youth Action Committee and there will be an executive director directly responsible for the Nunn response and the youth strategy and there will be regional coordinators as part of that piece because really what this is is a coordination effort in terms of that strategy which obviously will cross a number of departments, and we will all work together in terms of that. So we'll see that coming forward in the next couple of months.

MR. GLAVINE: In the budget there is new money and provision for an in-home support program. Is that more relating to the medical side, the Department of Health, or will it be delivered through Community Services?

MS. HAYWARD: In our budget there is an in-home support program . . .

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, there is one now.

MS. HAYWARD: . . . that's with Health right now, that's coming back to Community Services - we are working on that. The new money that was in our budget this year, \$800,000, is a program for seniors.

MR. GLAVINE: So it will be just seniors here, will it? In other words, a family member who wants to look after a senior in their home but may have to cut back work or give up work, is that where that direct funding is going to be placed?

MS. HAYWARD: The information that we were given was that it was a program to help caregivers maintain their family members in their home. Right now we're going through a process of developing exactly what that program is. We have to be ready for implementation by July 1st. This is a new program for us so within a very short period we will have that program developed.

MR. GLAVINE: I'm asking because it is there for seniors, but I have two cases right now in my constituency where one has MS and the other has Lou Gehrig's and two gentlemen who were in the Forces got through early to look after their spouses. They can get some VON home care, but when they talk about the dignity of having looked after their partner up to this point, and would like to continue to do so but have financial constraints because of it - because they had to leave their work early, they don't have a full pension and quality of life with extra requirements - is the in-home support program able to accommodate somebody like that?

I know of one of the two cases where I think \$3,000 or something a month is placed in a bank account to look after the worker who will come in and assist - he's willing to do it for one-third of that. I don't understand why our programs really can't take on more individualization and flexibility when they are cost-saving to the taxpayer. This is where my colleague was referring to a moment ago. I mean the policy book so often is actually restrictive on the good side of both the family and the taxpayer. So it's not like somebody wanting to have more money in the family account.

These things are very easily determined - I can call the MP's office and find out exactly how much income is coming into the home - do I need to be fighting for this individual or not? The same way with your department, full access to monies available and that. Why aren't we working more, especially with people with disabilities? When I see that man wheel his wife into my office - and my colleague here is familiar with one of those cases - because he'd like to maybe go back to Cape Breton where they are both from, why isn't there more accommodation, I guess is my question.

MS. MACPHERSON: The Department of Health and our department, we obviously are talking about our initiatives, but there are a number of new programs, both with the Department of Health and Services for Persons with Disabilities. The Department of Health, their newest program is a self-managed care model that they have.

We talked about the old In-Home Support Program - and it is confusing because several programs have had the same name - that was previously with our department that went to the Department of Health in 2000. There were a number of clients that were in that program who became clients of the Department of Health. As a result of the new programs and the new initiatives with the Services for Persons With Disabilities Program, as well as the new programs with Health, a review of all of those clients has been undertaken in an effort to determine what is the most appropriate program for them to access.

I don't know if this answers your question, but what I would say is that we need to go back over decisions that have been made in the past in light of the improvements and enhancements that we have made to determine, along with families and individuals, what is the most appropriate program to meet their needs. So, I hope . . .

MS. FERGUSON: . . . and I think, to Lorna's point, we have been doing a lot of work with the Department of Health, again, to rationalize our own services, and we talk a lot with Health about providing a continuum of care - not between the two departments but among the two departments - in terms of looking at the services that both departments provide. Looking at the improvements that have been made, looking at the gaps that we have, and trying to ensure, as best we can, that we are providing a continuum that makes sense, that is easy to navigate, that makes sense to the families, to the clients, and to the individuals in the system. We aren't there yet, but we have made some good progress and we have identified some areas that we need to focus on to ensure that we can provide better service for Nova Scotians.

So part of Lorna's discussion is, now that we have these new departments, what makes sense in terms of the services that both departments provide? How can we provide them better - how can we provide them in a way that, again, there is a continuum, and that people shouldn't have to be worried where they are getting their services from? We shouldn't have to worry about that - people should just simply have access to the services and we should be providing the best client service that we can provide. So we have been doing a lot of work with Health in that regard. We know we have some more to do, but that is the ultimate goal and people are extremely committed in both departments to reaching that goal because we know that is really what we should be doing in terms of providing service.

[2:30 p.m.]

So it's not an answer to your specific question, but what I would like you to know is we do recognize that - we know there are some gaps in the system and we see it as our role to ensure that we address the gaps in a way that makes sense from both departments.

MR. GLAVINE: Just a quick comment. I know there are maybe some other questions. You have hit on, perhaps, what I would conclude after four years in the job of an MLA - that navigating the system is really a piece that resonates. There isn't a month goes by that there isn't some kind of roadblock which really - again, a common-sense look

at a family situation, you know, could bring a great deal of relief for them, and many times it's a more economical approach for everybody as well. I'm hoping that kind of responsiveness will be seen, it will be available for families to engage in.

MS. FERGUSON: That's our hope as well, and I can also say to you that is the hope of the Department of Health because they are very committed to the same thing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just before Trevor starts, we probably have another 10 or 12 minutes for questioning and then we will give the deputy a chance to make some closing remarks. We have 10 or 12 minutes of committee business to do before the end of the meeting.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Why do individuals, who are disabled, have to liquidate or eliminate any sort of savings that they might have in order to access services?

MS. MACPHERSON: Our program, Services for Persons with Disabilities, the legislative and regulatory authority is the Social Assistance Act, so that is the underpinning. I can only say that the requirement is, the policy, there is a financial eligibility and it is a requirement that we work within that.

MR. ZINCK: You know, you mentioned the Act. Obviously it's outdated, it originates back to the municipalities, we're long gone past that - is the department pushing for new legislation? They're dealing with a disability and they didn't want that disability - they're born with it - so why should they have to liquidate everything and have nothing before they actually have services provided? They shouldn't have to give up everything to have a service.

MS. HAYWARD: The Homes for Special Care Act is the legislation that our department and the Department of Health is working with right now, and that dates back to 1989. It's not reflective of our current environment and that is why it is on our list of initiatives to start work on revisions to that Act this year.

MR. ZINCK: The Social Assistance Act as well?

MS. HAYWARD: No. My responsibility is for the Homes for Special Care Act and I can't speak to the Social Assistance Act. In this Act we have to look at how the financial eligibility piece is dealt with - we will be consulting with our colleagues who deal with the Social Assistance Act as well in that.

MR. ZINCK: An individual, disabled or disadvantaged, is participating in the community the same as we all do. When it comes to a point where they end up finding a companion and marrying they automatically lose the benefits. It doesn't seem fair. Am I right in saying that - the benefits don't continue. They're indeed affected by it; they're cut back or even eliminated?

MS. MACPHERSON: Again, that goes back to the legislation. There is the financial eligibility and the income coming into that family home would determine if the individual is eligible or not.

MR. ZINCK: In other provinces they've set up pension trusts sometimes up to \$100,000. The federal government is also calling for the possibility of setting up disabled funds so families can leave behind trusts for their children. This province claws back 100 per cent, and they haven't come out and actually said they will exempt the Henson Trusts. Why haven't we done that and is that something you want to push for?

MS. HAYWARD: Certainly the question of process has come up a couple of times since I've been with the department. It is on our list of the policies that we have to look at. That will occur as we go through our legislation and new policy development.

MS. FERGUSON: I think you raise a good point and it is an issue that we've addressed before. We know we have to look at it, and we will be doing that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gaudet.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to come back, Ms. Hayward, to looking for clarification on this new home care program that you indicated the department is looking at implementing around July 1st. Is the program a revised in-home support program to help caregivers look after seniors? That's my first question.

MS. HAYWARD: That is what we're working from.

MR. GAUDET: So with a budget of \$800,000, will this program be available province-wide or will this program be available for determined regions?

MS. HAYWARD: It is our understanding that there are a couple of specific regions that are being looked at. It's being considered as a pilot project right now. We need to, by the end of this year, be able to make a recommendation on where that program goes from here - how it grows, the number of people that will access the program, and the types of services that they will be looking for. This is very new to us, we're just starting to develop the program, and we have a significant amount of work to do to get that ready now for July 1st.

MR. GAUDET: It's a new program, but it's an old program because basically what I'm hearing is it is pretty well the same program that we had back in the mid-1990s.

I'm just curious, in terms of accessing this program, I know it's early in the game, not knowing exactly where the program will be made available. In terms of how does one go about applying, has there been any discussions in terms of how the program will be made available?

MS. HAYWARD: We are going through that whole process right now.

MR. GAUDET: So nothing's been determined?

MS. HAYWARD: No.

MS. FERGUSON: Not at this point. Once we have, we will certainly make all that information available.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm just going to ask one question from the Chair. It's fairly factual and it's about the demonstration project with the Abilities Foundation - that would be adult wheelchair recycling. I think a number of us have had inquiries about the restrictive criteria for that. Apparently, a couple of the problem areas seem to be that the majority of the money is earmarked for clients of the Department of Community Services, people who are on social assistance. So, the balance of the money really only allows, for example, the ability for that fund to provide 20 power wheelchairs for the rest of the population.

First of all, I'm wondering where that criteria about most of the money going for people on social assistance came from? Also, the other problem area seems to be that if you have any private health insurance at all, you're not eligible to apply for a wheelchair. This means that a person with disabilities, possibly living on \$12,000 a year, who might be entitled through a small, private health insurance program for, let's say, \$1,500 towards a power wheelchair and they have to make it up out of \$12,000 somehow. For example, the person I'm thinking of, I think the estimate was \$8,000 for the power wheelchair and she gets \$1,500 from private insurance, but she's not eligible to apply to the fund. Whereas, someone who is making possibly \$20,000 but has no private insurance is able to get the wheelchair fully paid for. I don't necessarily want answers, but I think those challenges need to be looked at in terms of the fund really having the greatest impact on the people who need it the most.

MS. FERGUSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Those are good comments. We'll look into those. I can say that an advisory committee made up of community organizations and community groups develop the guidelines and criteria for the program, the eligibility criteria. But those are excellent points and we'll look into those in terms of the evaluation of the program. So, thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We just need to look at the impact of those initial decisions and make sure it's still going in the right direction.

MS. FERGUSON: And I think that's exactly why we need to have an evaluation and make some determinations around that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Would you like to take this opportunity to make a few closing remarks?

MS. FERGUSON: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. First of all, I'd like to say thank you very much for the opportunity to come this afternoon. I hope what you've heard this afternoon from Millie and Lorna and I, is a commitment on behalf of the department to continue the work we've started in terms of our Services for Persons with Disabilities Program. We are very excited about the work that's happened, but we certainly recognize that we have significant work to do and we're prepared to do that in a timely way, in a sustainable way and in a transparent way.

We have tried very hard throughout the process to have meaningful consultation processes and we've taken the feedback that we've heard very seriously and we hope that as people see the programs developed, they will see that they have actually heard and been instructed by the comments that we've heard.

It's a busy time for our staff in that particular division, but it is a top priority for the department in terms of moving forward. I'd like to say thank you very much for your comments today, for your concern today and if there are any issues that come out of this that people would like to talk about, we'd be more than happy to answer any questions that we could and to speak more about any of the programs or the ongoing processes that we have as we continue to roll them out over the next little while. Thank you very much for the opportunity this afternoon.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, deputy, and we certainly appreciate your time and the time of your staff for coming here this afternoon. I'm sure you hear the stories about the suffering that's going on in our provinces as much as we do. I'm sure you can share that concern. We wish you well and hope that you can work even faster. Thank you so much.

If the committee members could stay behind, we do have some business that we have to deal with. Now, an issue arose towards the end of our last meeting about availability of members for standing committee meetings when the Legislature is sitting. I'm just wondering, is this something we might defer to our organizational meeting in September or do you want to deal with it today?

MR. KEITH COLWELL: We should probably deal with it now.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Does someone want to speak on the issue? I mean the one precedent we have is that the Public Accounts Committee meets every week whether the session is in or not. So we're asking whether we can meet once a month. Yes, minister.

HON. RONALD CHISHOLM: Madam Chairman, I'm not sure of this but I know the Human Resources Committee is legislated to meet at least once a month, but they could just meet to do the appointments to ABCs. I don't know about the Public Accounts

Committee, but I do know for me, as a Cabinet Minister during the House session, it's just a tremendous difficulty to get here and, you know, if we are going to continue, or I'm still going to be on the Community Services Committee at the time when the House is sitting, to be honest about it, if I can't get somebody to replace me, I'm just not going to be here. That's just basically the way it is. I mean it's just a tremendous effort to try to get to them.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: I certainly have valued this committee, in particular, and the witnesses and so on who do come in. I mean I would be almost willing to look at one session once a month during the summer as opposed to doing what we do right now. I think, you know, especially in a minority government, speaking as one of the old hands, the sessions are short but intense. We have days in the House from 10:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. and you pack everything in there with the Law Amendments Committee, et cetera, you know, and to see ministers, I mean the day of the Resources Committee, when Minister d'Entremont was here for two hours and then went to the House for four hours on estimates on Health. I think it's simply asking too much of people and not to diminish the work of the committees whatsoever, but I think during the session of the House our committees, except for the Public Accounts Committee, should be recessed.

[2:45 p.m.]

MR. ZINCK: I don't want to ruffle feathers but I want to make a point. I'm new and I don't know if it has ever happened before, so you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I just want to remind everyone that to my knowledge this is the first time that there has ever been committees that had ministers assigned to them. I mean, that goes right back to the appointments made by your Leader and that really has put our committees at a disadvantage, not just during the times of the Legislature. I mean, you're missing a member today and he has missed several times. Is it priorities? You know, okay, but just to simply say it that way, I just want to make that point that, you know, ministers are sitting here now and there was a precedent set by the appointment and now the committees are going to potentially suffer. I do appreciate the workload and I understand that. (Interruption)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just a minute, we'll have Keith and then the minister.

MR. COLWELL: Yes. I would like to see the committees stop meeting during the legislative session. There's so much going on, they are so compressed now, and regardless of the ministers being on the committees or not, that's immaterial to me. They've taken the responsibilities and they take them seriously I know, but I think it's just too much of a workload. I mean we've got caucus meetings prior to the Legislature meeting. We've got meetings to get prepared for bills and do all the different things we have to do. I think it's appropriate to recess these meetings during the time of the Legislature sitting unless there's some really pressing thing that we have to discuss, but most of the things can wait until we get those things finished.

As far as the Public Accounts Committee meeting every week, it does not meet every week when the Legislature is in session. Meetings have been dropped and we haven't met on some mornings and I can remember when the NDP was away on their caucus meeting that it wasn't dropped at that time, we didn't have a meeting; not just the NDP but other caucuses as well. So there is not a precedent there that it meets every week.

So I think it is time, we've talked about it in other committees I'm on and unless there is something really urgent we have to discuss at a particular committee, I think the workload is just too great for everybody to continue with this the way it is.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister.

MR. CHISHOLM: Thank you again, Madam Chairman. I guess the situation that we find ourselves in, as a government, we are a minority government and we just didn't have enough members to be able to attend all the committee meetings, so we had to put Cabinet Ministers in, in order to make the committee structure work.

I do believe that the only committee that is really mandated to meet on a monthly basis is the Human Resources Committee and I believe that is by legislation. I stand to be corrected on that but I believe that's how it works.

I remember back when we had a majority government, the Human Resources Committee would meet during the House session just to do the ABCs and that's all we were mandated to do. We didn't have witnesses in, we had witnesses in after the House rose.

So as I said before, it is a tremendous effort, I can tell you, and the last 18 days we spent in the Legislature I had to cancel meetings in order to be here for meetings - not that this isn't an important committee, I'm not trying to go there, but I agree with my colleagues that during the House session I don't believe we should meet.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I have Gordie, Trevor, and then I'd like to make a comment.

MR. GOSSE; I saw this trend happening two months ago. I told my colleagues at my own caucus meeting, and they know this, that this was going to happen, that they were going to get rid of - the general public now say that we don't sit enough in the Legislature, we sit 18 days here and there, now we're going to go and do away with committees because we all have heavy work schedules.

We all have heavy work schedules, nobody says that we don't. We are away from our families, we are in the Legislature, we do long hours but the people of Nova Scotia elected a minority government in this province and they expect us to do the work. I don't know if they've ever cancelled committees before, during the Legislature, in the history of this province, I'm not sure. I'd like to look into that - I'd like to get my caucus Leader and

I asked him to do that for me, to be honest with you. I've asked the Legislative Library to do that, to find out if we've ever cancelled committees while the Legislature was sitting.

I know we all have heavy workloads but I mean now, again, we don't sit enough as it is, in the general public's eyes. now we're not going to have committee meetings in all committees because of the workloads.

The arrangement that we have is a minority government, none of us had a choice on that. That's the way the public of Nova Scotia voted in 2003 and 2006. We all have heavy workloads but I'm in disagreement with that. I just think that if we do cut out the meetings when the House is sitting, that's two other meetings we won't have in the Community Services Committee, which means we'll only have maybe four meetings or five for the whole year because we don't meet in July and August. Now we don't meet in October and November, because the House is sitting, then we don't meet in March and April because the House is sitting, or December because of Christmas, we'll end up with three or four meetings and I don't think the people of Nova Scotia or anybody else want to have that happen. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Just to go back to my original point, and again it's something you have to take back to your Leader, and something that we all should look at in the future, as Parties, this was an unprecedentedly large Cabinet that was set up. That's why we have the problem, not because your Party ran out of people to sit on committees. The Premier made a huge Cabinet, which forced him to have ministers on the committee.

If we're going to do this - I understand the budget and if we're going to have ministers sitting on a committee, I understand that busy time of year and I can appreciate that. If we do do it, I say do it just during the budget time but in the Fall, when we're doing legislation, it's not as pressing on us all to be in the House at that time. I don't think we should drop the Fall session. If we're going to vote at this, hopefully we can all look at that.

The budget time is busy for all of us, absolutely, no question, but the Fall session is really not as busy for us to commit to a once-a-month meeting. It really isn't.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I appreciate how hard we all work. I'm as stressed as everyone during the sessions in trying to accommodate all the requests that come in for my time and your time. But, I think we can take great satisfaction in the work we've done as a standing committee over the last number of years. We have a small committees' staff. Even if we met over the summer, we'd be juggling vacations. I'd rather pace the workload out over a full year rather than have it concentrated in certain times of the year.

As well, most of the organizations that come before us as witnesses have a different level of operation during the summer. They may not be as available and they really see our

committee as their main opportunity to get across the value of their work and get their concerns before members of the Legislature. I think we have a serious responsibility here and I'd really like to see us meet as regularly as possible.

MR. DUNN: Just one quick comment. I'm strongly in favour of not sitting as a committee when the House is sitting.

MR. GLAVINE: Is there a motion?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, there's not and we probably should have had one before we started this discussion, but sometimes you can reach a consensus if you don't have a motion on. That's why I let the discussion go on, so we are ready for a motion.

MR. GLAVINE: Okay I will. Just sort of a background note first, I think maybe there is a compromise here that can be reached. The Fall session tends to be short anyway, the Spring this year, because of extraordinary circumstances of a leadership and so forth and get in and get out relatively quickly. I would move that during the Spring session of the Legislature that committees, other than those mandated by the Legislature that. . .

MR. GAUDET: Can't do that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, just apply to our committee.

MR. GLAVINE: Just apply to our committee? Okay, sorry. I would re-phrase that. During the Spring session of the Legislature that the Standing Committee on Community Services not meet.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Seconder?

MR. ZINCK: Can I just make an amendment to that? Maybe if we say budget session instead of Spring session? (Interruptions)

MR. GLAVINE: That will always be in the Spring.

MR. ZINCK: I don't want to get hung up on words.

MR. GAUDET: Minority governments, that comes with it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So, are we saying Spring or budget?

MR. GLAVINE: Budget.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Budget session. Okay, is there a seconder?

MR. ZINCK: I'll second that.

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

The motion is carried.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Let's move on. There's been a request from the Valley Autism Association to meet with us. I think we may have discussed this at the last meeting. We decided that, yes, we would meet with them, but we would broaden it to cover the entire province and bring in some other regional or provincial organizations. We're planning to do that in June.

MR. GLAVINE: If I could update, there has been a development and that is in June now, the national conference on autism is going to take place. Regardless of the federal election or whatever, there's a commitment from the federal government to hold a national conference, therefore, people from the Valley and from Autism Nova Scotia will be participating in this. They would then prefer that possibly September, but more appropriately, October, which has Autism Week, they would then like to come and present and see the next steps of where the province needs to move. They would make recommendations to this committee to advocate on their behalf.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: In view of the fact that we've already set up September as our organizational meeting, can I have agreement that we'll move autism to October?

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Okay, thank you.

That does free up June, then. Because today was focused entirely on provincially-funded programs through the Department of Community Services, we did discuss that we may want to have a follow-up meeting on the issue of disabilities and talk to some of the community groups and provincial organizations and agencies who work with people with disabilities. Do you want to have that meeting in June? Yes. Okay.

Now we've mentioned Leo, are there some other organizations that people would like to have come before us? I think we might break up the hour and a half into small segments and invite each of them to make a presentation and then we can ask questions.

MR. GOSSE: The one I brought up earlier, Abilities Foundation.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, definitely. There are a number of them out there so if you have suggestions why don't you e-mail them to Rhonda and we can put together the invitation list. Is that appropriate?

So our regular meeting date is the third Thursday of the month in the morning so you can set those aside for June, September and October. Next month, we're going to have the National Council of Welfare - the Nova Scotia member is Gail MacDougall and the immediate past president is John Murphy from the Valley. We were thinking of inviting both of them to give us an update on their most recent report and be a little bit more specific about where Nova Scotia fits in the national profile and also be able to give us some relevant and up to date statistics on poverty and welfare in our province. So is that agreeable to everyone? One of them anyhow, we will invite John as soon as possible. So that's going to be May 24th from 9:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Is there any further business?

Yes, we need to know how you want to deal with this - we ran out of time at the Forum on Poverty and there were recommendations that came from Gordie and the NDP caucus that we wanted to consider. We added them at the time because we knew we didn't have time to discuss them, we said we would put them on the continuing agenda and that they would be noted in the record. I'm just wondering, since we're going to be dealing with poverty at the next meeting through the National Council of Welfare, do you think we might just take perhaps 15 or 20 minutes at the end of the meeting and deal with this so that it doesn't continue to go on into the Fall? Leo?

MR. GLAVINE: If we're having two people from the National Council of Welfare, with the scope of the work that they do and the knowledge they are able to bring to us, I would like to see the full two hours dedicated to that program and then take time to look after this. If we're asking these people to come in who are doing some travelling across the country and so on we should avail ourselves and give them full opportunity and then add this on at 11:00 a.m.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's one option, the other option is our organizational meeting in September is usually shorter than two hours. We could have the second hour to continue our discussion on poverty if you are willing.

MR. GLAVINE: That sounds good.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, let's defer these to our organizational meeting in September. Great, any other business? Just don't forget this invitation. This group is excellent, the Youth in Care have been in front of us a couple of times. I encourage anyone who can to go to this event.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:01 p.m.]