

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, January 8, 2008**

**Committee Room 1**

**Child and Youth At Risk Strategy**

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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

In Attendance:  
Ms. Charlene Rice  
Legislative Committee Clerk

## **WITNESSES**

### **MEMBERS OF THE CHILD AND YOUTH SOCIAL POLICY COMMITTEE**

#### Department of Community Services

Mr. Robert Wright - Executive Director, Child and Youth Strategy  
Ms. Marika Lathem - Director, Family & Youth Services

#### Department of Education

Mr. Alan Lowe - Senior Executive Director, Public Schools

#### Department of Justice

Mr. Fred Honsberger - Executive Director, Correctional Services  
Ms. Judith McPhee - Senior Director, Strategic Initiatives

#### Department of Health Promotion and Protection

Ms. Heather Christian - Director, Healthy Development

#### Department of Health

Ms. Linda Smith - Executive Director, Mental Health,  
Child Health and Addiction Treatment Services

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2008**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to call the Standing Committee on Community Services to order. We have a very interesting topic today, the Child and Youth at Risk Strategy and we're very pleased to have a number of representatives from the interdepartmental committee.

I think perhaps we'll start by introducing the members of our committee and then Mr. Wright, perhaps everyone could introduce themselves from your end.

[ The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much and congratulations on your relatively new position. Mr. Wright.

MR. ROBERT WRIGHT: Well thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to thank you and members of the Legislature Standing Committee on Community Services for the opportunity to speak to you about the Child and Youth at Risk Strategy today. As I begin the brief presentation, I'd like to take a moment to have my colleagues introduce themselves, of course.

As you know, the Child and Youth at Risk Strategy is an initiative of five key departments under the leadership of the Department of Community Services, so perhaps I'll just have my colleagues introduce themselves and the departments that they represent.

MS. LINDA SMITH: I'm Linda Smith, Executive Director with the Department of Health. The areas that are reporting to me are mental health, addictions and children's services. I'm pleased to be here.

MS. JUDITH MCPHEE: Hello, I'm Judith McPhee, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives with the Department of Justice. My main portfolio at this point in time is our response to the Nunn Commission.

MS. DEBORAH LANGILLE: My name is Deborah Langille. I'm with the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation, Director of Performance Accountability.

MS. MARIKA LATHEM: Good afternoon. I'm Marika Lathem and I'm the Director of Family and Youth Services with Community Services.

MR. ALAN LOWE: Good afternoon. I'm Alan Lowe, Senior Executive Director of Public Schools, Department of Education.

MS. HEATHER CHRISTIAN: Good afternoon. I'm Heather Christian and I'm Director of Healthy Development, Department of Health Promotion and Protection.

MR. FRED HONSBURGER; Hello, I'm Fred Honsburger, Executive Director of Correctional Services, Department of Justice.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I understand we have a number of other people who are on the committee or involved in the strategy.

MR. WRIGHT: The members who you see with me and directly behind me are the members of the actual committee and we have some other people who are observing with us today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. WRIGHT: In the remainder of the time allotted, I'd like to lead you through a whirlwind tour of a few slides which we prepared as an overview of the strategy. I hope they'll provide us with an introductory context for your questions.

I guess first, we should start with the question, what is the child and youth strategy? It's a comprehensive, multi-year strategy that is designed to guide our efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth and families. I say it is a comprehensive, multi-year strategy - most folk would understand that it was one of the recommendations that came out of the Nunn Commission. I will talk a little bit today about some of the activities that are coming

out of the strategy but I always like to say that we shouldn't confuse the activities with the actual strategy, which is this comprehensive, multi-year, directional document.

The strategy is also a further signal of government's commitment to work in a collaborative fashion across departments. This kind of corporate work that involves multiple departments is something that we're seeing a lot more of these days and certainly the Child and Youth Strategy is a piece of work that is very consistent with that way of operating. As part of our presentation today you'll see, I will make some comments about the first year implementation plan for models that will act as a catalyst for the collaboration and change that the strategy is signalling.

We should see the Child and Youth Strategy within the context of this corporate initiative of government - termed the new Nova Scotia - which has two main elements, the concept of social prosperity and economic prosperity; of course, the Child and Youth Strategy being one of those pillars of the social prosperity end. The strategy is a partnership of government departments - an attempt in this slide to just show that there are a number of components of this. There are members of Cabinet - Ministers of Government - who represent the five key departments, those being Health, Education, Community Services, Justice, and Health Promotion and Protection; the Minister of Community Services being the chair of that group. So representing those departments, we have a committee of deputy ministers called the Child and Youth Social Policy Committee who meet with the senior officials that you see before you today; who are the legs of the initiative, if you will.

The strategy is oriented under a vision to see improvements in the health and safety outcomes for children and youth. That vision is followed by goals to see that children and youth are well cared for, supported in making successful life transitions and engaged in ways that support their successful development and their understanding and acceptance of responsibilities, and their actions. Another goal of the strategy is that families are supported in ways that help them to meet their needs and their responsibilities for their children.

An interesting part of our strategy is that in addition to articulating our vision and goals, we've articulated a clear expected outcome. This is an attempt to make the work of the strategy come alive in measurable and observable outcomes for children and youth. This is very consistent with what we would see in health, we'd call determinants of health. By focussing on those issues that are known to be the determinants of health, we hope that we'll be able to make significant strides toward achieving the goal of the strategy.

The strategy is broken down into five key directions and the activities coming out of the strategy then are nestled underneath those five key directions. Those five key directions include building a strong foundation - you can think of that as the prevention arm of the strategy; identifying problems and helping early - which would be kind of the early intervention branch of the strategy; coordinating programs and services - this is that work of collaboration that Justice Nunn spoke so keenly about, the need for government departments to work more closely together in coordinating and collaborating among the

departments and the many services that are currently available for children and youth and families; another branch is improving access and closing gaps.

Recognizing that there is a large sector of health and human service delivery that focuses attention on children, youth and families, there's a lot that's there. However, part of the work that we need to undertake is to assess and clearly identify what exists on that continuum of services and to identify where the gaps are in service delivery. So improving access to what exists and identifying what does not exist and filling those gaps will be a large piece of work under the strategy.

Then finally, engaging youth and promoting shared accountability. Certainly, in the document, *Our Kids Are Worth It: Strategy for Children and Youth*, you will see the language of youth engagement in that document, the idea that part of the work that we must do in order to provide young people with opportunities to be safe and well cared for and to make successful transitions is to ensure that youth are more fully engaged as active participants in their lives and in choosing their futures and as more active citizens, if you will.

You'll see in the PowerPoint under each of those branches, activities are articulated. These are the initiatives or pilots or models that we are announcing and have begun implementing as the first year implementation of the Child and Youth Strategy. Social Policy Research - that's why Deborah is with us today - we are working to develop a strong partnership with the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation to help us in our efforts to build our capacity for social science, looking at the child and youth sector, and for evaluation of the programs and services we deliver.

[1:15 p.m.]

Then the others - Parenting Journey, Family Help Expansion, Wrap Around Services, Schools Plus - I'm sure we'll have plenty of opportunity to answer questions about those specific initiatives as time permits.

We also have, in this part of the announcement, we provided the public with a map of those initiatives that are currently being considered as Phase I of the implementation and it shows both the initiatives and roughly geographically where they will be located.

Then finally, just to give you some key progress to date, the Executive Director of the Child and Youth Strategy has been hired, so I'm pleased to be here and to say that. I was hired in late April to begin to shepherd this work.

Regional specialists are envisioned as part of this role and we are in the process of putting in place the four regional specialists for each of the four regions of the province: eastern, western, central and northern.

Our pilot projects and initiatives are at various stages of rolling out, as we speak.

The Child and Youth Social Policy Committee of deputy ministers, along with the working group of senior officials, are currently working on developing long-term work plans.

Finally, we are working on developing a relationship, a working relationship with those folks in the regions of the province who will be the actual implementers of the various programs and services that we identify as key to fulfilling the objectives of this strategy.

So those would be my opening comments. I trust that the time was sufficient and we're here to answer any questions you might have.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. You're probably familiar with our format: the members of the standing committee do a round of questions and then if we have time, we do a second round of questions. I would ask whoever responds or whoever answers the question, if you're not already in front of a mic perhaps you wouldn't mind standing at the fourth mic that's available there.

Just to let committee members know, we do have some agenda items to decide for upcoming meetings and so we'll probably finish the questioning around 2:45 p.m., so that will give us 15 minutes to deal with our housekeeping details. So who would like to start with a question? Pat.

MR. PATRICK DUNN: Thank you for the presentation, it's nice to see everyone here. Just one question that I'd like to start off with. I believe in the Justice Nunn report, it was mentioning about access to mental services, and along with one of my colleagues across the way here, we spent a lot of our years in the school system. I found it very frustrating, as an administrator, that when I had a child in need, that access to mental health services was very difficult to get, unless I had an "in" or went in through the back door or whatever.

So I guess my question is, I'm assuming that hopefully access to mental health services will improve for all of our students who are in need, regardless of their age - if they're elementary, middle school or high school.

MR. WRIGHT: Perhaps I'll defer that question to Linda since she's here representing mental health.

MS. SMITH: Sure. First, I'd like to say that while we've all worked on the strategy and we really see that as coordinating things and improving all of our services, it's not going to do everything. I think the fact that you focused on sort of access to mental health services in our province, I think we've made some wonderful gains over the last five years of improving that but we still have a way to go.

We have focused, to some extent, on accessing services or lowering the wait times, particularly for children and youth in the last while, but again, I would say that there's work to be done.

I think many of you may know that we have developed a set of standards for mental health services in the province where we say that access to services, if you're urgent, should be within five days and a regular referral within 90 days, and then we've been monitoring that. In some parts of the province, we're able to meet the standard and in others we're not. Mental health, like all other health care services, there's a triage process, so those who need it the most and most urgently are seen first. So depending on the issue, sometimes the wait is longer than any of us would like.

Again, it's certainly something we're working on. We have increased funding, we've increased services, but we still have a way to go.

MR. LOWE: Thank you. You made the comment in the context of a school administrator or somebody working in the school, and that's one of the thrusts of the Schools Plus initiative, is to have access to these services rather than being a chore that uses up more and more time of the administrator. This will be facilitated by a facilitator, an access to mental health, but also to Community Services kinds of things and Justice when parole officers are involved and that kind of thing.

We're looking at the school as being a familiar place for parents and we're looking at it as support for teachers and administrators within the school so that they cannot use up their time making telephone calls, trying to get appointments and that kind of thing.

MR. DUNN: Perhaps just to follow up with just one more comment, again like within the school system - at least the school system that I was privy to and so on - I always thought it would be nice to have some services within the school itself; you know, in the guidance department, in the student services centre. The previous school that I was in, we had a health centre, we had a guidance office and so on, but these people are very, very busy. Some of these personnel are trained in certain areas and they're not trained to meet the needs of some of the individuals that we deal with and so on. Throughout my years, we always had a lack of the numbers of psychologists, having them available within our school system. They're spread very thin over school boards, or many schools and so on. That was always something that I felt there was always a great need in order to assist our youth who were experiencing difficulty in many areas. Anyway, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I have Trevor and then Leo.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: I want to thank all the members of the team who put together what I think right now we would consider a very important component in the success and future success of our province. So I want to thank everyone for the initial initiative and hopefully we can continue on, as Mr. Wright had stated, over the next number of years, to continue on the work, because I don't think it's ever going to slow down.

My first question, I guess this would be for Ms. Lathem. Currently when the province takes a child into care, there is a risk assessment done on the individual family that that child is being taken from. However, there's no risk assessment taken on when we actually, as a province, have the child in care, when the child comes into care. How is this strategy going to allow the 1,800-plus children who are in the care of the province now, to benefit from some of the initiatives that are going to be taken?

MS. LATHEM: I should clarify, I'm not the director of child welfare, so I can only provide the explanation in the context that I work in. I did bring some documents actually that Vicki Wood, Director of Child Welfare, provided for me. I guess in terms of kids who are in care of Community Services there was a huge piece of work that occurred over the past two years and essentially it really looked at the needs of kids around placement who are in the care of the child welfare system.

Out of that report - which I will provide everyone a copy of - there were some recommendations and they really do look at making sure that we have a variety of different options for children who are in care; that the one size fits all doesn't work in terms of placement; that we really take a look at training foster home care providers; and that we look at making sure that we've got really good service level agreements in place for the folks who look after kids in our residential facilities and that type of thing. That report essentially looks at a child welfare placement redesign kind of approach and it is currently in the works.

Most of us would agree that the best place for children to be raised is in the context of a family placement. That isn't always possible, so the department recognizes it has a huge responsibility to make sure that whatever kind of placements our children are in - in terms of the child welfare system - that they are the very, very best that we can provide for them. We recognize that we've got some work to do. As Linda said, in terms of her system, no doubt about it, we've got to do a better job for our kids in care because the outcomes, historically, haven't been particularly great - I shouldn't say haven't been great, but they can be improved. There is a document that I'm happy to share with you around what that work involves and the kinds of plans that we have in place to make that a better system. Does that answer your question?

MR. ZINCK: So you're confident that some of the initiatives that have been unveiled in the strategy can be used by the children who are in care now? The children in care can access those?

MS. LATHEM: Absolutely. I think that there's an arbitrary line or kind of an invisible line that defines kids in care and kids who aren't in care, but those kids move back and forth fluidly between those two systems. We have to make sure that the most important thing that we do is provide access to those services, irrespective of whether or not it's a child in care or a child that's out of care but might be tied to the child welfare system. I can speak for the programs that I'm involved in - we recognize that there's value in universal programming, meaning that the programs really should be available to all folks, or all kids

and all families. However, our primary responsibility and our primary objective really is to target those kids who are at risk. So absolutely, irrespective of whether or not you are in care or out of care, you can access those programs and services.

MR. WRIGHT: Maybe it would be helpful if I just pointed you to the Power Point to give you some indication of specific initiatives that may answer your question. For example, the Parenting Journey Program which is going to enhance resources that will help people in their homes to be better able to parent their children. This, I think, is a program that will certainly support families who are impacted by child welfare concerns. The interesting thing is that children who are in care are still children in our community and so anything that is done in terms of enhanced services and the education system and the like will touch the needs of those children and will enhance services to those children.

Very specifically though, recognizing that children who are involved in child welfare services often have very unique and particular needs, one of the initiatives that we are piloting here in the central region is a child welfare mental health services project. This is a project that is going to hire a team of mental health professionals - perhaps a psychologist, a social worker, but, you know, a team of mental health workers - whose job it will be to support and resource those folk in the child welfare system who are responsible for the care and the provision of services to children, so that we can bring the mental health expertise into the child welfare system.

I envision these individuals doing both direct service in terms of providing counselling and other clinical case management services to these children, as well as providing consultation and coordination of services to those children by working with child welfare workers, educators, early childhood educators and other individuals who are actively involved in the lives of children, foster parents, groups home workers and the like.

MR. ZINCK: My second question is, over the years we always talked about breaking down the silos and as MLAs, we've seen situations where we've contacted one department and were pushed off to another department; it's not ours. In the same respect, it usually follows with budget line questions as well. Giving credit to the government for acknowledging the fact that we've needed to break down the silos with respect to children and youth, how much confidence can you give us that the current government is actually going to, I guess, right now, be looking at the departments that are involved, allowing further consultation when it comes to doling out the funds in the next budget to further along this strategy?

[1:30 p.m.]

MR. WRIGHT: Can I just get you to clarify the question? The question is, how much confidence do I . . .

MR. ZINCK: How much confidence can you give us now, today, that this current government in taking the initial step of creating and bringing together the five departments

- how much confidence can we have today that those five departments, come budget discussion time, are also going to say this is our initiative, this is our part of the puzzle, we need funding for that? How much confidence can you give us that that has either taken place or is going to take place?

MR. WRIGHT: As I said in my introductory comments, I think that the Child and Youth Strategy is a very strong indicator that government is committed to working differently and that bringing down the silos and coordinating, collaborating across government departments is on the agenda - it is being clearly established as the way of working in government today. I'm quite confident, having worked with my colleagues from five departments over the last seven months, that at the service delivery level, we get it. At the deputy ministerial level and at the ministerial level, we get it. I know to get a group of people together to cheerlead in that fashion in one thing, but there are other very concrete things that are happening in terms of we have met, as senior officials, with our policy and financial folk because we needed to talk about the very concrete realities of business planning together and budget planning together and accountability reporting together, so that this is not just an initiative of words, but it is an initiative that brings with it concrete changes to the infrastructure of how we operate.

Having said that, there will be things that you will be happy that we have the Department of Health do on its own. There are some elements of that business you don't want to be involved in, but in terms of working together to promote outcomes for children, youth and families, absolutely, I am confident that government is not only providing the leadership, but also paying attention to the infrastructure and to those concrete and accountability issues necessary to hold us accountable for working in this new fashion.

MR. ZINCK: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you all for coming in today and Robert, I wish you the best in what shall prove to be a very interesting and challenging endeavour, I'm sure. I just want to make a bit of a comment, I guess, at first. I know this type of strategy is long overdue where we take the best from five departments and that was one of the main thrusts of the Nunn Commission, that we had to know what was going on among those who are trying to deliver help programs to our youth at risk. Is it my understanding, however, that the Department of Community Services takes ultimate responsibility or is it you, as director, and a team that will take the responsibility to make sure all of the programs and greater effectiveness for dealing with our youth at risk actually take place over the next while? How is it?

MR. WRIGHT: In my introductory comments, I tried to explain that these five government departments, of course, are represented in Cabinet by five government ministers and ultimately there is an accountability at that level for this work.

The Minister of Community Services shares that group of individuals and in that sense is the lead minister. Myself, as the executive director of the Child and Youth Strategy and of the senior officials you see working in attendance with me here today, as I described, we are kind of the legs of that strategy. So it would be our job to implement the directions as set, to actually do the concrete business of delivering the services and ensuring that they are coordinated and ensuring that we are assessing the needs, identifying gaps and filling those gaps.

I would say that we report to our deputies; our deputies, of course, to our ministers, and that the Minister of Community Services is ultimately the channel for accountability. But we all - each department - will have clearly identified those things that it is responsible for in supporting the strategy and in ensuring that their operations are organized in a way consistent with the goals outlined under this strategy.

MR. GLAVINE: I ask that question because I understand the structure and the part that the Minister of Community Services will play but I would - and if it's going to be a truly collaborative and collective body that does the administration to roll out and the assessments, I'm happy with that because unfortunately many MLAs of all Parties I don't believe have the greatest confidence in the Department of Community Services as a department that functions and tries to make programs work. We don't have a great history over the last four or five years.

That's why I would have preferred that the Department of Education - and I think that's where my colleague, the member for Pictou Centre was going with it - it is truly in the education domain that we get the first glimpses very often of children who are on the road to some degree of dysfunction within the home, the school community or the larger community.

I would have liked - even though as a former educator I realized some of the deficiencies there with timely response to things and so on - but I still thought it would have been the role of education to say, here are some of the initiatives that we are going to take and the school will be the nucleus and then programs emanate from the school to deal with these children because we have to improve services there and I think that's going to be critical to the success of the strategy.

If we take the end result of dysfunction and if I go and have my tour of the correctional centre in Waterville, 75 per cent of the young adults there have learning disabilities. I mean, if we don't make the schools the centre of some of the corrective measures, I harbour some real doubts about where the strategy is going to go. So how are you going to deal with that?

MR. WRIGHT: Well I would agree with you absolutely that educators - including early childhood educators - are sometimes quite often those individuals who see the evidence of children falling away the soonest, by virtue of the fact that almost 100 per cent

of the children in the Province of Nova Scotia are in schools, or spend some time in schools. So by virtue of having that captive audience, you see those children.

Having said that, when we look at things like determinants of health, education is a very important one but many of those determinants of health, I guess what I would say, would fall formally outside of the domain of the Department of Education, in terms of instruction and education. So I think that we all need to bring those areas where we are responsible and those areas where we have expertise, to the table to truly work collaboratively.

Having said that, as Dr. Lowe mentioned in his comments, we do see the coordinating of services around schools and delivering them through schools as one area that is critical to the work of the strategy. Our Schools Plus initiative, which is really about coordinating services - those services that currently exist and new services that we may deliver and develop - that coordinating those services around schools is certainly a large part of that model. So I think that your point is well taken.

Having said that, as well, we also need to recognize that not all children and youth are students and that we need to ensure that whatever services we're making available to students are available to children and youth who are there who aren't in school as well. So I guess those would be my comments.

MR. GLAVINE: One of the areas that I think can be a real strength of the strategy is the concept of the navigator. I think everybody I have spoken to about that idea feels very strongly about it. The question that I would have, or the wonderment certainly, as the program goes into the next phases, will five navigators really be enough in our province? What are your thoughts on that and how soon do you think that role will be filled?

MR. WRIGHT: I'll answer the second part first. How soon will they be filled? Fairly soon, within this fiscal year. So there only being three months left in the fiscal year, that's fairly soon. So we should have those navigators, the jobs posted, filled and the training for them, all that begun within this fiscal year, that would be my hope.

Recognizing that four regions with five navigators, the reality is that's a significant amount of geography for those folk to be covering. I would say that at this stage in the initial rollout of that particular project, the role of those navigators initially is going to be to define the scope of that work and to help us to identify a number of things. Not just answer the question, are five navigators enough, but also what programs and services are available for children and youth in the various regions of the province - how can we maximize the impact of those services? By that I mean, are there obvious synergies that we need to capitalize on? Are there some disconnects that we need to resolve?

Certainly answering the question, is five enough, or what other kinds of services need to be in place for us to truly have a continuum of services that fully meet the needs of children and youth, that these will be questions that will be asked, and not just with the

youth navigator project but with all the projects. So I guess I would say that I'm fairly confident that rolling out five initially is a way to start and that we will use the feedback we get from those navigators and from the evaluation of that project to give us further direction in terms of what programs and services may be needed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Keith.

MR. KEITH COLWELL: Yes, I too want to thank you for coming today and I think this process is a very positive process and hopefully if we can save one or two children out of the whole thing, it would be worth all of the effort as far as I'm concerned.

One big issue I run into all the time is again in the schools, and I think this is what this whole thing is coming back to. The parents come in and see me and they say, I've been trying to get my child assessed because of a learning disability or some other kind of disability. I've waited five years, it's too late now.

I had one parent come to me in tears one day and said, my son is in Grade 9, he shouldn't go into Grade 10. I met with the principal, the psychologist came in the day before the school closed and assessed the child, which was way too late. She had been trying to get an assessment since Grade 3, didn't have it done, and as a result the young man - a very nice young man, except he was having real serious behavioural problems. I'm sure unfortunately that individual has now gone into - let's put it this way - frequent visits to the police department, unnecessarily. He came from an excellent family - a family that cared very, very much about him and the other children they had. This young person had a learning disability, was not identified, was not addressed even though the parents had pushed and pushed and pushed for it. That's one example.

I've got another example of a lady who finally said, the devil with the system, and paid the money and had their child assessed and fortunately had it done soon enough that the child was - they really had been able to help the child. This is becoming more and more common.

Here's a system we have that unfortunately, if you have the money to hire the professionals, you get help. You can get help if you push hard enough, but then you've still got to push hard and that's not acceptable as far as I'm concerned. Then, if you have a single mother who is working - not on community services, not tied into those services - it's more difficult for those individuals where they're trying to look after the family, working full-time, even further difficult for them to do these things.

[1:45 p.m.]

I just want to know what you're going to do to address this issue. I think this is not just an isolated issue, I think this is a very, very serious issue and if we can get the help to these young people early enough, we can probably save a lot higher percentage of them.

I think we have to put the resources there. It's great to have navigators and I think that's a good idea, but I'd rather see some more psychologists in the schools available when they're needed - not in 3, 5, 10 years' time, but that year - so they can go in and address an issue and put the facilities in place to help that individual.

MR. WRIGHT: I'll make a couple of comments and then perhaps I'll ask a couple of my colleagues to speak. I'd agree with you that the early identification of children who are beginning to experience problems is key. There are a number of initiatives - well, identifying problems and helping early is one of the key directions of the Child and Youth Strategy, so there will be some significant energy poured into that.

I think one of the things that the Nunn Commission has done for us is that it has put prevention and early identification more squarely on the map, if you will, of those areas that require our attention. I think that was a very wise thing that Justice Nunn did; he did not only focus on what is happening with extremely out-of-control children, or children who are spiralling out of control, but he asked some questions about how did those kids get there and what do we need to do to prevent that.

So in terms of the initiatives that we're rolling out this year, I know that we have the Parenting Journey Program, which is a program that would bring resources to parents in their homes, early, even in the preschool years. We currently have public health resources that screen young children. We have a Healthy Beginnings program and we're expanding that to include parenting support that goes beyond the age of three, and we have the Family Help Expansion Program that we are rolling out in the Cape Breton region.

I know that in Education they are doing some initiatives around earlier identification of students with needs and perhaps I'd ask Alan just to speak to that briefly.

MR. LOWE: Yes, I agree with you that the early identification is crucial in education, particularly, and that we have a plan to introduce for all Primary children in Nova Scotia an early identification assessment. It's called Early Development Instrument and we're doing it first as a pilot in the South Shore board and it's an instrument where the classroom teacher assesses the educational level that the child is at - I mean, this is Primary - just how receptive they are to understanding things, as well as health and social issues that go with it.

We found from the Pre-Primary Program and the early educators that this has been invaluable for schools as they move into Primary and the history that goes with them. So in the Schools Plus, we're going to have that as part of the wrap-around kind of services, that it will start before Primary, that there will be a preschool component to it. Then there will be the Early Development Instrument assessment and we're also beginning to look at some of the work that's being done in New Brunswick in their continuous assessment through the Primary years that would indicate that there may be learning difficulties at the early grades.

I think you know, in talking to your constituents and the correspondence that we've had, that sometimes psychologists are reluctant to label a child as having a learning disability, particularly before Grade 3. The parents feel a great frustration in that because they know, they say we always knew there was a problem and we couldn't get the schools to focus on that, so we're going to be looking at that very carefully.

MR. COLWELL: That's good, I'm glad to hear that, and I know you're very well aware of this problem, but what about the young people who are already in the system? Who aren't just entering today but who are in the system, in Grade 2, 3, 4, 5, up to Grade 8 or 9 - and probably after Grade 9 you've lost them by then anyway, unfortunately. What steps are going to be taken to try to correct those problems, so we can get faster intervention and hopefully save some of these young people?

I've seen the results of really proactive steps that have been taken for individuals and it's a huge change. It really makes a difference in them becoming a productive member of society and for themselves, too, to have the pride and the ability to do things rather than being lost in the system and all the negative things that happen to an individual after that.

MR. LOWE: I can say that over the last five years, we've injected over \$8 million in funding to boards to increase the number of psychologists, resource teachers, speech pathologists and we're getting towards the targeted goals that we have, but we are looking now even to add to that and to guidance counsellors, especially at the elementary level.

So we do recognize that we were lacking in the numbers there in the schools in the supports that we had for them and we have increased the funding there but we're also hoping through the Schools Plus to identify best practices - you know, classroom teachers and so on can identify more early some of the signs that there are difficulties, more in-service training for teachers in the area of autism and some of the learning disabilities so that they are better able to know when to refer students early, and also some strategies that would be more effective. It's a big challenge.

MR. COLWELL: The other thing would be, as normally in any other sort of environment, is it a required reporting process that the teachers have to go through? I find the teachers are very supportive in this role - I have no complaints at all with the teachers. It seems to be that when it gets above the teachers it's either a financial situation with the board or a higher level administration problem that yes, we know the problem is there but we don't have the resources to address it. That's just as serious as not knowing.

Does the Department of Education have a requirement for the school boards to follow a process? Or are you looking at that when you identify a student, that the student is sort of not lost in the shuffle because there aren't resources to address that, and know for sure and the parents know that it's been spotted. There's a plan available, here's the plan, we may not be able to do it this year but next year this will start, or we'll start implementing a little bit of it this year and move into it next year, to really help the young people. Is there any criteria for that or is it just sort of hit and miss?

MR. LOWE: The special education coordinators from all of the boards, they are meeting and they're talking about these protocols, if you like, or procedures that would best serve students. There's a review again on the individual program planning protocol, for example, just the best way of understanding that and tailoring it to fit the individual student.

For example, I know this committee has heard before, in the autism and so on, about individual program planning. We have found that there's a spectrum of understanding across the province about what that is, so we're working to focus everybody to a common understanding of what that is, what the best procedures are and the concept of the earliest intervention possible, the best strategies to use. So we are looking at that because we know it does vary from place to place.

MR. WRIGHT: One of the things I would add to Alan's comments, I think it's important for us to recognize that the Child and Youth Strategy is a strategy that coordinates the efforts among five government departments. The children you speak of who are struggling in school for various reasons are also children who spend a significant amount of time in their homes and in their communities. If we aren't able to address the needs of those children in all of those domains, the progress and the work that is done in schools will not be enough.

I think we need to recognize that it's only as education, school boards work in conjunction with their communities, with the health, with recreation, with other branches and community agencies to ensure that children have that comprehensive set of supports that will help them to be healthy and well and make successful transitions in life.

I know that the comment began initially with some questions about what are we doing for early identification, but I thought perhaps our colleague from Health Promotion and Protection could try to answer a piece of that as well.

MS. CHRISTIAN: This has been a really good opportunity for me to hear from you folks today and some of the comments and questions. I think what's really critically important to recognize is that by the time children reach school, age five, there's been a lot of water under the bridge. Certainly the research would demonstrate to us that the earlier we are able to intervene, identify issues, the better. So some of the early intervention work that both the Departments of Health Promotion and Protection and Community Services are involved in is really critical and it is the coordination of those energies and those efforts that is absolutely essential.

Through the Early Childhood Development Initiative fund that has come through the federal government to our province since 2005, some monies have been earmarked to the Department of Health Promotion and Protection through our Healthy Beginnings program with the specific focus on enhanced home visiting, which is actually all the children who are born in this province are screened and identified for risks. It doesn't mean

that you meet all of those, but certainly there's an opportunity to identify early on what some of the risks might be within those families. Dollars have been earmarked to assess and then support between 5 and 6 per cent of the families in Nova Scotia. Now this is early days, but we are seeing some marked differences and I think you've seen some of the stuff in the media, even where parents have said that there have been significant differences.

If we can address those situations early on, to provide parents with the kinds of skills that they are asking for, to help them as their children are developing, to understand good growth and development, understand parenting principles, supports and around budgeting and whatnot, the program allows us to support those young families in helping nurture and strong family values and working with their kids.

So it's the beginnings, it's growing and the need will always be there, but the earlier that we really address those issues the better, and how we can coordinate that, together with many of the departments that are here today, the better as well. This strategy certainly talks about that.

One thing that it does talk about in the strategy is the whole concept of a well-child system and we need to look at how we navigate that, how we work that through. It's only early days, but we are seriously looking at how we can do that earlier and earlier on and how we can work across all of our systems, to coordinate those energies so that parents don't have to go to x, y and z, but how we coordinate those energies so that the child receives the services and supports early on and the families, really, of those children early on so that even before they've reached that pre-Primary they've got a better chance.

MR. COLWELL: Yes, I think it's very, very positive, the approach you're taking with this. Again, what kind of follow-up after you've identified - let's say you have a child who has been identified with some kind of a learning disability that can be corrected through proper intervention and working with the family and with the community, because it does all go together. The only one common thread that all the children have is really the school and the school can go and identify these things and typically would have more expertise than maybe the community would have, but it's all a package, the whole thing.

So what guarantees are we going to have under this program as you move forward, that indeed the support is going to be there for that student with whatever particular requirements they have? In some cases it may be very simple, in some cases very complex - what approach are you going to take in that area? How are you going to handle that?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, I would say that all children hold in common a number of things. Yes, they all attend school, virtually all come from families, all live within the context of communities. So I think we should see that shared responsibility, that families will, through this strategy, be given those services, those supports necessary for them to be able to fulfill their responsibilities in raising their children.

[2:00 p.m.]

Communities, we hope through the strategy, will be given the opportunity to be stronger and healthier places for families in which to raise children and yes, those institutions that are supported by government monies, including schools and hospitals and health systems, will have enhanced capacity to respond to the needs of children both in delivering primary services and in providing services for those with special risks and needs. So I guess I would say that children hold all of those things in common.

What guarantees are there? Well, I can say that this strategy, along with some other initiatives of the government, including the social policy initiatives that were announced, they are strong indicators that government is looking to work differently. Working across departments, sharing those responsibilities, working together to identify the needs and bring the resources necessary to meet the needs of children, youth and families, even when those needs don't fall neatly within the responsibility of a specific department - this is the work that we have been commissioned to do. I'm fairly confident thus far that government is committed to that work. Guarantees in life? I'm not sure I brought one, but I'm fairly confident.

MS. LATHEM: Robert, could I share something with you briefly? I won't take up very much time, I'm really conscious of the fact that other folks want to ask some questions, but I did want to share kind of in an effort to redeem Community Services. My section is brand new and we are actually one of the results of Justice Nunn's recommendations. He wanted a section that really just consolidated all the services for children, youth and families.

I'm the Director of Youth Services and Supports. I used to be the Director of Community Outreach, which was myself and an administration person. We now have a staff of 11 people - well, we have 11 positions, we have seven staff in place. We have four different program areas: Prevention Services; Youth Services and Supports; we have an Evaluation Policy Planning section that really looks at evaluating the current programs we have and really, as we're building new programs, to make sure that they're founded on research and best practices; and then we have a section called Volunteerism because out of the 200 programs that fall under my section, they're all community-based organizations, they're all non-profits. We have a piece that really is looking at building capacity in those organizations around board governance and that type of thing.

I also want to share that unfortunately, or I guess the reality is, that Community Services does have a tendency to get a bad rap, because primarily people think about income assistance and child welfare. We fund approximately \$20 million to \$24 million of programs and services that fund 200 organizations out in our community, everything from family resource programs, transition houses, Adsum House, Metro Turning Point, you name it, all those services are funded by our department.

The thing that we're trying to do now - and we now have the luxury, I guess, of having that new section - we're trying to consolidate all these organizations, trying to sort of map them on a continuum of services, figure out what it is they're doing, the outcomes they're providing for the dollars that we're funding and to make sure that the services they're delivering actually meet the needs of our kids, our youth and our families.

Sometimes I hear people talk about youth that are in trouble or youth that have problems and as Robert said, those kids come out of a context - sometimes it's a learning disability, sometimes it's family struggles. My section really is about building programs to make sure that there are those supports for families and for kids. Whether it is a Boys and Girls Club, a family support program - those are the services that come under my section. So Community Services is broader than just child welfare and I just wanted to share that.

MR. COLWELL: Madam Chairman, if I could just make one quick comment and then I'm done?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Real quick.

MR. COLWELL: What I want to really have clearly on the record here is that everybody we have dealt with in Community Services and the Department of Education in this province at the Civil Service level has been nothing but absolutely co-operative, helpful and have done everything they possibly could with the tools they have to work with to help families and youth. I just wanted to put that on the record and I want to be very clear that is where I stand on that issue and from working in government for a long time, I am very pleased with the reaction I get. Sometimes you don't have the tools you need to work with - that is the problem.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you for that, Keith. I think that Justice Nunn made that comment that in his work - and we need to understand that he was overseeing a commission that dealt with a very real tragedy - he did not find fault with the people, but we, both the officials that sit with me and with the people asking the questions, we are collectively responsible for organizing systems and delivering services that are designed to improve the well-being of the citizens of Nova Scotia. I have confidence that we all take that job very seriously, so thank you for your comment.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm actually going to insert myself here and ask a few questions, with the committee's indulgence. I think you're picking up that all the committee members want this strategy to work. Over the last several years we've heard from a number of community-based organizations about some of the challenges that they've been facing and working toward the outcomes you've expressed in the strategy. I guess if I could sum up - and I may be generalizing here - I think we're all impatient because many of us have been working in one way or another on some of these issues for many, many years, so we now want universal access to everything you're suggesting, yesterday. That's where we're coming from.

One of the concerns I had in reading over all the materials was the timeline that we're looking at. A lot of the areas that were suggested as good practices already and building on the current foundation and whatnot, many of them are restricted programs that are either based in certain geographical areas or they're pilots - I'm not talking about your new ones necessarily, I'll get to that in a minute - and they have limited impact. They're excellent for the small group of the population in terms of children and youth whose needs they meet, but very limited impact. Now we're talking about more pilot projects. How do we ensure that we don't use that as a delaying tactic, that we learn as quickly as possible that perhaps we don't need to get to the end of a pilot project to realize that yes, it works and we need to spread it throughout the province? How can we get that sense of urgency and that priority to what we're talking about here today?

MR. WRIGHT: I would say that both the Minister of Community Services and other ministers are on the record as saying that as we move forward in the strategy we're going to look at what we currently do, we're going to study the things that we are implementing. Those things that take root and are showing success we will stand behind; those things that don't, we will have to move aside in favour of other things, so I think that that sense of urgency is present. I think that we need to temper our urgency with a commitment to move in a way that is either following a successful path that has already been laid out or we need to move down paths and ensure they're successful as we move down them.

This is one of the reasons why we've made a conscious effort to build a research and evaluation component to this strategy from its initial days. It's absolutely critical that we invest our time and energy and our money into things that will actually make a difference in the lives of children, youth and families. The urgency is there, I guess part of my concern is that we move with urgency, but still rather deliberately and with some confidence that the things that we do will make a difference.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I guess I would like to suggest that many of the models that you're using in this strategy are not new - they've been proven either elsewhere or elsewhere in Nova Scotia. I think we need to build those known results into the process. Will your accountability mechanism account for how quickly you can get some of this change into place?

MR. WRIGHT: I believe that yes, moving things that exist and are successful in one area into other areas quickly is certainly something that we'll be attending to. One of the cautions that I would say is that I'm schooled in the murky business of social science, and unlike the laws of physics that tend to be static and apply equally everywhere, the laws of social science don't necessarily follow. Something that is absolutely fantastic and works marvelously in one place, even if everything is replicated perfectly, it will not necessarily function well in another place. So that's the caution that I always have in the back of my mind, particularly in a province that has diverse populations, diverse economies, diverse geographies and histories. We need to ensure that as we roll out something, even something

that is known to be successful in one area, that we still track it well and look for similar successes as we're rolling it out in another area.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I agree with you. My background is community social development, so I certainly understand what you're talking about, but I think that's all the more reason to put the resources and attention on some of our voluntary sector organizations that have been doing much of this work throughout the province and that have been begging for resources and extra people. Those programs are modified to meet the needs of particular communities and families within those communities, so I think that would be a good investment of resources.

I wanted to ask also about your connection to the other departments that aren't directly represented on your steering committee; for example, when various members were talking about navigation, access to information and whatnot. You may be familiar with the 211 proposal that is trying to gain a foothold in Nova Scotia. This would actually complement so nicely much of what you're talking about in terms of raising awareness and helping people connect with current programs and services, yet that is out of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations and there's no funding in this year's budget for that program. How can you encourage other departments to use as some of their budget priorities on initiatives that will facilitate your work?

MR. WRIGHT: When I say that this working across departments is the new way of operating, I think that departments other than the five represented here today have certainly caught that message and are doing a number of things that would be defined as cross-departmental kinds of work, that integrated work. We have had some overtures from folk from other departments and we certainly made overtures to folk in other departments where there are opportunities for us working together.

One keen example of that - just as an example, it's not an exhaustive example - is at the Department of Natural Resources, we've been in discussions with them. I think that a lot of folk may not see the natural connection between a Child and Youth Strategy and the Department of Natural Resources, but when we think about things like wilderness programming for children and youth and we think about things like wilderness programming for children and youth, and we think about programs that would enhance young people's skills in certain sectors including the outdoor sector, that the Department of Natural Resources is absolutely a natural partner for some of that work.

So I think that this way of operating is catching on in departments other than the social service departments or the health and human services sector and that we will certainly be looking to our colleagues in other departments for opportunities to work collaboratively together - the Departments of Natural Resources, Economic Development, Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, these being obvious departments.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I just wanted to finish by suggesting that I'd like to see your committee look at ways of formalizing the link with the Poverty Reduction

Strategy and also with the enhancement of the welfare of women and mothers in this province. I mean, it's all in the same basket and I am just a little worried - I know you're referring your report to the importance of reducing poverty and the impact on children and their moms in particular, but this whole area of helping women become more economically and socially independent and their health, it's so directly linked to how well children do in school and all the other outcomes that you're looking at.

For example, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I don't think, is represented on your committee and I think that would be a very natural addition because you have a lot of joint issues and joint interests there. So I would like to see some sort of formal relationship and continuous, regular involvement of some of these other departments. Perhaps the government Cabinet might say that if you can prove a direct link that helps this particular youth and children at risk strategy, we're going to give that higher priority in our budget process. I think that would be really good motivation for people to work together.

So thank you very much, I appreciate it. I think Gordie is next.

[2:15 p.m.]

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you for coming in today and I guess I'll say, long overdue for a Child and Youth Strategy in the province. I remember back in the 1990s there was a call for this, probably over 12 or 15 years ago.

As a former youth worker myself, I understand the cracks that the young people would fall through, as an executive director running a youth centre. I was glad to see the lady from Community Services get up and speak about the 200 separate agencies that they support within their department. These are most of the agencies that I guess I would be able to speak about in a sense, but even as an MLA you still get calls from mothers and fathers in your riding - a teenager out of control. I still don't have a button I can press to say well this is one-stop shopping or fix it all at this one number, although I did look at when you said earlier about the youth navigators in the system. I'm just wondering about the case planners, are any of those case planners hired to this date?

MR. WRIGHT: The youth navigators?

MR. GOSSE: And case planners. In the handouts we were given, I read the book and it said youth navigators and case planners. Are any of those people hired as of yet, or hired in this year upcoming?

MR. WRIGHT: I think there may be two initiatives; the ASIST Project, which is a wrap-around project about enhancing case planning for those extremely difficult to serve children; and the youth navigators.

As I mentioned, the youth navigators, we hope to have those roles filled and rolled out by the end of this fiscal year. Similarly, the ASIST Project which is currently in operation in one county, we hope to roll that out in four or five other locations and the rollout for that is similarly timed, over the next couple of months.

MR. GOSSE: Okay, another thing I read in the handout, and what we were given before the committee, was to engage youth and I think one of the headlines was, A Place to Belong. I remember when I worked at the youth centre the kids wrote a song, It's a Place Where I Belong. I think that's a song that they wrote when I was executive director. It said to go where they are. I remember the Dufferin Mall in Ontario was having problem years ago and actually built a youth centre within the mall. They do have one within the West Edmonton Mall, they have youth centres in there.

Since the committee has been getting started in all these non-profit organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs and the Heartland Youth Group and the Roots of Empathy and all these other different organizations, have they met with anybody within your committee so far? My heart is with the Whitney Pier Youth Club. It's a place that I started and built many years ago and it is still on the go and very successful, I consider it one of the most successful youth centres in the province. A very good friend of mine is still there running the youth centre.

I'd like to know, because I've known the struggle with people within the non-profit organizations. They say, well, you know if I had more time working with the young people. I'm a youth worker by trade, now I spend 70 per cent of my time writing grants and proposals - this is the complaint that I get most of the time from people in that organization and other organizations. Boy, if I had my hands free so I could actually do the work I am trained to do - those are some of the complaints that I hear. They would love to be able to free themselves up to actually sit down and counsel a young fellow who is out of control, sit down and get the help that they need or point the young fellow in the right direction. Yet those non-profit organizations, the most complaints are that they became very good proposal writers and expert proposal writers, just to keep the doors open.

So I am just wondering if the committee is going to look at those aspects, like Boys and Girls Clubs and youth centres and all those things, saying are they properly funded to provide the constructive programming that we need? I'm not talking about recreation - I'm talking about arts and crafts, I'm talking about theatre, I'm talking about music. I'm talking about all of those types of programs that make a well-rounded individual for our society today.

I always heard that youth don't care what you know until they know that you care. So I want to know if there's a committee that looked at any of that stuff.

MR. WRIGHT: I guess what I will say, yes, just in terms of introductory, the answer being yes. You'll notice from one of my earlier comments that I see certainly the

Department of Education, the partners that are here - we have a responsibility, but communities and families similarly have their role to play.

Really, when it comes to communities being healthy and strong and being places that can support the kinds of outcomes for children and youth that we're targeting, the communities need to have those services that you're speaking of. Certainly Whitney Pier is one of those 200 organizations that Marika spoke to earlier. One of the things we recognize is that as we work to build this continuum of service, or conceptualize it, many of the services already exist. Many of the players are already there but as we work to build them into a comprehensive infrastructure or continuum of service that will meet the various needs of children and youth, we need to identify and work with those non-profit agencies that are there and doing good work. We need to build on those that are doing good work, to help them to do better work, and we need to work very closely with those that frankly aren't doing such great work, to help them to either tool themselves to make a difference in the lives of children or youth, or to perhaps refocus their activities to do things that they might be better suited to do.

One of the things that we know, in terms of the determinants of health and children growing up, and certainly any young person who got on the wrong road and found their way back to the right road, quite often they won't necessarily refer to a particular program or service that they were involved in but they will call the name of someone and say that person made the difference in my life. Those people whose names they call are more likely to be someone active in their local community than they are, in many cases, in a formal system. So recognizing that, we certainly see the value.

MR. GOSSE: I like what you said earlier, because I've always said you have to diversify the programs to meet the community needs. In my community, as you mentioned Whitney Pier, it's such a diverse community of ethnic origins that we diversify the programs to meet the needs of many people in that community. I think that's a good strategy but finally - I guess I'm happy in one sense that the strategy is underway. I'm looking forward to see it develop and grow, as does everything else we do in the province. I'm looking forward to seeing the results down the road in the next generation because as I said, I even like the helpzone.ca line where I can actually tell some young fellow, aside from the Help Line, to go on that and if there's something in there that you can find or something I can help you with, I think that's a good start. Most of them are into the computers today and even a mother or father, it's not just single mothers and fathers, it's all kinds of families. There's a lot of stress today in the new age of technology and the young people we find in care today and young people we find in trouble with the law, or young people we find in trouble with education, come from all backgrounds and ways of life and they come with major problems.

I think we're, as a government, as a committee and yourself, your committee, looking forward and I wish you all the best. I know I'm looking forward to seeing some very positive results, not so much now, but in the future for our young people in this province. If they're going to be our future, I'm glad we're going in the right direction to

help them. You're right - I was probably one of those young fellows who was going the wrong way and here I am today, so I can sit back and name a person who was involved in my life who turned me around. I'd like to thank you for coming in today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I should have mentioned earlier, we have been joined by Minister Len Goucher. Welcome, Len.

HON. LEONARD GOUCHER: I apologize for being a couple of minutes late.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Not a problem, we're just finishing up round one of questions. Did you want to put anything in at this point? We're going to go into our short snapper round.

MR. GOUCHER: Just a real quick one, but I also want to make a comment. It's rather interesting when I listen to Mr. Lowe from the Education Department, I have a wife who just retired from 20-odd years of teaching and have another daughter in the education field as well. It is rather interesting, because I did a lot of volunteering in the classroom over in the Eastern Passage area where she taught most of her career and it is interesting, the early intervention and the way that the teachers can pick up on early problems. My wife taught everything from Primary to Grade 4 and I must say she, along with her colleagues, did a great job picking up on some of these issues that did arise with some of the children quite early on. She's had the opportunity and the benefit of looking at these young people as they progressed through the system and some of the most severe ones are in university and it does help.

The Education Department, I think, does get it - and I love that term, because my past portfolio was Tourism, Culture, and Heritage, and one of the things that was said is, you've got to "get it" and I like the fact that we do get it and as a government we get it as well.

Just a quick question, if I may, Madam Chairman. Where we're talking about early intervention now, will it affect programs and take the pressure off programs that are in place for older children? We're trying to work on the lower levels now, so I guess will that filter through and end up resulting in taking the pressure off the upper echelon - in other words, the older children as opposed to the younger ones - as the programs move through?

MR. WRIGHT: That's certainly our hope. I have had some experience in that, working directly in Child Protection, for example, it has been my experience that if we can discipline ourselves to invest significantly in early identification and prevention, we will see the payoffs. I think the challenge is that we see so many urgencies that we can expend our resources. I often take a message or lesson from people in the fire service. If there's a major forest fire, the people who fight forest fires do not deploy 100 per cent of their resources to fight that fire because then if there's a trash can on fire somewhere, they can't put it out and then very soon they'll have another major fire that they'll have to fight. So

they reserve some resources for putting out the little fires so they can avoid having to put out big fires.

I think that's the kind of discipline that we need to administer and I say that in all of our systems and in our communities as well. A parent with more than one child cannot expend all of their energies on the child with the problem, because soon they'll have two children with problems. We need to find ways of making those investments and securing those investments, because they are really investments in the future of those children.

MR. GOUCHER: Absolutely. Madam Chairman, thank you very much and I appreciate the attendance of all the staff here today and the people within the departments. I'm sure the future of our children and of those who need the help are in good hands and it's great to have you here, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Does anyone else want to ask a question in round one? (Interruption) Round two. We have 10 minutes for our short snappers and then I'm going to give Robert and his committee members perhaps five minutes to sum up or add anything that perhaps hasn't been brought up, and then we're going to move into our agenda-planning part of the meeting.

For round two I have Pat, Leo and Trevor.

MR. DUNN: Madam Chairman, just a few comments and maybe, if I don't have a senior's moment, I'll remember a question at the end of it. (Laughter) I'm very pleased with the direction of the strategy and very confident in the various departments involved in it. It is very comprehensive, looking at new and existing initiatives, but one thing I did like about it when I was reading through some information is we're looking at things a little differently than we've looked at before and I think that's the key to future success and so on.

[2:30 p.m.]

I'd like to use one example where a couple of years ago, filtering down through some of our school boards, our schools were asked to initiate and begin an in-school suspension program. Sometimes that can be a recipe for disaster for many reasons, because it takes special persons to be involved in such a program with a great understanding of youth and so on.

Back in 1991, I implemented a program in a junior/senior high school; an in-school suspension program which lasted for a few years. What was lacking in the program was the services that I needed mostly. We all know why these students are in in-school suspensions, it's a combination of a lot of things. While I was able to address their academic needs, I even went through a corporate partnership where they helped me out financially to get them more tutoring and more help, but the part I was missing was the mental health

issues and so on, that was the part that I wasn't really successful in, that was the key to success as far as making it a comprehensive and complete project.

I notice that many schools across the province now are back to in-school suspensions and I surely hope that all these parts are there because if they're not, I'm not so sure how successful they will be with that initiative.

The second thing I would like to mention is I was very interested in listening to the information and talk about preschoolers, because I've always thought if you hit the nursery schools prior to coming to Primary, that's one great thing, but the other great thing would be to address the little ones that are coming from low-income families who can't afford nursery school and all of a sudden the teachers in Primary meet them for the first time, they haven't been addressed. But anyway, it's really nice to hear the mention of home visits and so on to look at these children at risk and so on, and parenting skills and so on, trying to help with healthy family dynamics and so on.

The early development assessment is another great thing. I cringe a little when I think of Primary teachers with all their responsibilities, curriculum and outcomes and so on, some of those things have to be gently passed on and addressed in the right way so that it isn't looked upon as an extra burden. I know they realize it's a terrific thing, it's something that must be done, it's very useful and helpful, but sometimes if it's just thrown from an administrator of a school into their laps, do this, I always thought there was a better way to do this within the system and so on.

The question that I have is that some pilot programs in areas of the province, when the pilot comes to an end and you have a chance to review it, what is the next step? Are we going to have further pilots in other areas where there are no pilots? What happens then?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, I'd say that in terms of the next steps, we have a number of initiatives that we're rolling out really as catalysts of the strategy, to demonstrate how things work. We'll be looking at those and evaluating those in the next fiscal year. I anticipate that we will be, as resources are made available, expanding some of these pilots into other areas and we will no doubt have other kinds of initiatives that we bring forward.

In addition to those things, the mountain of services that currently exist, we'll also be looking at those and asking the question, how can we better integrate the services that already exist into this collaborative continuum of service. So there are a number of initiatives, a number of activities that I see ahead of us.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you, Madam Chair. There is a lot of depth and a lot of detail here in these initiatives and programs. I'm just wondering, are you going to be providing regular reports and updates and how will that be manifested for us to really take

a second look at here, because there will be a lot of eyes on this program as it does move along?

MR. WRIGHT: There are a number of things that have come out of the Nunn Commission that we will be reporting. Annually, I believe, you'll see a report from government updating the 34 recommendations coming out of the Nunn Commission. So that's one thing.

The child and youth social policy working group will report regularly on the strategy as well, to give the public updates in terms of how it's progressing. So we have yet to tidy up all of the reporting mechanisms but suffice to say, there will be regular reports.

One of the things that we hope to do as part of that regular reporting is not just to report on our activities, but to actually report on the outcomes. So when you see the outcome measures that we've articulated - the eight outcome measures that we've articulated in the strategy - it is our goal to report then on the wellness indicators of children and youth in the Province of Nova Scotia. So that we're able not only to say what have we been busy doing, but what has been the effect of what we've been doing, and are children, youth and their families actually improving or have we more work to do yet.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Two quick questions. One of the biggest problems that we hear of and some of the more serious cases that come to us is the fact that a youth at risk in particular when it comes to the voluntary nature of the services and the care that could be provided. The age of majority is still 18, I believe, in the province but yet we hear of 14-year olds walking out of group homes, or are signing themselves out of programs such as the Act, yet they're still in care of the minister. Can you explain or have you discovered as to why something like that could happen during your consultations?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, I guess I would say that the whole issue in terms of how do we define children and how do we define youth is a fairly complex one, in terms of when do young people get to make decisions for themselves, versus when do we have absolute authority over them - it's a fairly complex one.

I would say that with the introduction of secure care, as an example, we have recognized that the threshold at which the state can enforce its will over children to reside in certain places against their will and to be recipients of certain treatment against their will, that threshold is quite high. I don't think, just speaking from my experience working in the system, that lowering that threshold is necessarily the answer.

One of the things that we've heard in the Nunn Commission and its response and certainly one of the things that we've talked about around our table is the need to have services that are accessible and available and engaging to young people and their families;

it is critical. If there are young people and families who are in need of services, who are not in a category of person who can or should be compelled to receive services, then what we make available to those young people and to those families needs to be accessible to them where they are, not just geographically, but in terms of where they are emotionally and psychologically, in terms of ready for service.

So developing models of service that meet the needs of those children, youth and families is critical, voluntary services that can meet their needs and engage them where they are.

MS. SMITH: I'm wondering if I could just make a comment because you referred to the ACT program which is a mental health, in-patient service. Again, all of our services are voluntary, with only a few that would be involuntary and you would have to meet certain criteria. So being a youth doesn't negate that you still would have capacity to make your decisions. So if you didn't meet that test that you were in an involuntary mental health admission, then you're voluntary. So you would want to offer the services, as Robert said, and we'd want to do everything we could to engage them but we would not want to impose, nor could we impose, something on them if, in fact, they had capacity to make their own decisions. That's always a tough call and I think families often feel that if they're a certain age then the family gets to make all the decisions.

Six of the provinces in Canada do not have an age, it is based on your capacity, and most of us grow in and out of capacity and some of us cycle more rapidly than others.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have a minute and a half left with this section. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: Mine was just going to be a short one. What's in place now that we're offering young people who are at risk right now - services and co-operation that you guys are doing? So what is in place right now? What services . . .

MR. WRIGHT: Well, I would say that if you look at us there are oodles. Marika spoke of the 200-plus organizations that are funded. Some of those programs are youth-centred programs. I would say that some of the community recreation kinds of programs and the after-school programs aren't necessarily targeted for at-risk children but certainly their presence in their communities is an absolutely critical protective factor for at-risk kids.

The range of services that generally fall under the students services divisions within the Department of Education are there, psychological services and social work services. In addition to that, programs for children with special needs, like the Youth Pathways and Transitions programs, the O2 Programs, those exist.

Heather Christian talked about the early identification that is done of families and children at the prenatal and postnatal stages, and targeting and supporting families that have identified needs is currently occurring.

MS. CHRISTIAN: The other thing would be the youth health centres. We have almost 50 here in the province right now, in schools and in communities. So while it isn't for all youth, we've certainly seen it as an opportunity - oftentimes their first entry into the primary health care system, when they're looking and searching in terms of navigating through a very difficult system with someone they trust.

We talked about trust and the factor of trust and no nonsense and timely. What we do know with youth is they want service now. So the youth health centres, while they are not the be-all and the end-all, they certainly are another service that I think we need to speak to and have looked at supporting throughout this province. So that's just one other piece.

MR. WRIGHT: And that's a service that is located either in a school or in close proximity to a school, but of course every service offered by the Department of Justice could be determined as a service to children and youth at risk and Justice, through its crime prevention initiative, is beginning to branch out of its - I should say branch into the area of providing services that are of a crime prevention nature and, of course, in the Department of Health we have mental health service delivery and the like, so there is a mountain of things that currently exist, hundreds of millions of dollars that government is currently spending to meet the needs of children and youth, both from a population health perspective and targeted programs for families and children with special needs.

The job of the strategy is not to necessarily replace all of that, but as I've said, to bring down the silos, to get all of those things flying in formation to open up the lines of communication and for us to see what we deliver, not through the lens of our particular department, but in terms of the comprehensive and the spectrum of needs of families and children and youth. Shifting our orientation in that way and looking at what we provide from the perspective of the child, the youth and the family versus through our own lenses, is a monumental task that we're undertaking under the strategy.

[2:45 p.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Robert, my quick question is going to be, how do you define youth? Different pieces of legislation, different departments have a different age of majority that they work within, so for the sake of the strategy, what age group are you talking about?

MR. WRIGHT: That's a good question. I'd say that in terms of how we define youth our departments have different mandates in terms of the way we orient around services to children and youth versus service to adults, so in some ways departmentally we are driven by those legislative mandates. More broadly speaking, I would say that we've been looking at the idea of youth that we find in the Youth Secretariat, so that's up to the age of 24 or so. I say, or so, because I think certainly, particularly when we talk about services to children, youth and families, when we're working with young people they transition very naturally from being young people who are the subject of our attention as a

result of their own needs, to being young parents who are the subject of our attention by virtue of their entering into the family way, if you will.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I commend you and your committee for taking that broader definition, I think that would be very useful. We're obviously going to have to condense the latter part of our agenda. Robert, I'll give you a couple of minutes to wrap up, but I'm just wondering if anyone else on your committee who hasn't had a chance to make a point during the questioning, if they would like to bring up anything at this time. No, all right, if you wouldn't mind making a few closing remarks.

MR. WRIGHT: Just a few. Again, want to thank you for the opportunity. I've been very pleased in the time that I've been attached to the strategy to speak about it in any forum. I speak with a tremendous amount of confidence because I've been just so pleased with the work that has been going on. As I said earlier, I think that as a team of senior officials, we get the work that has been delegated to us by our deputy ministers, by our ministers, by government, and by our communities. Not everything has been done yet, but we are well underway. If we see the strategy as orienting ourselves to work differently, then we accept that that is a mammoth undertaking. Although we hope through the programs and the initiatives that we are spawning, we hope to have actual activity on the ground, even as we speak.

We recognize that the real work is a long-term, multi-year, strategic work and I think that being called to do that work is a real signal that government recognizes the need to do this comprehensively across government. When you speak of the need to make real and formal connections with the poverty strategy and with the other multi-departmental strategies, the crime reduction strategy, the drug strategy, the alcohol strategy, these things as we make those connections, I think we will see the work expand.

Around the table we heard others express concern about other populations and about other things that need to be the attention of the work, certainly the work around families, particularly the needs of women and mothers was expressed here.

I would go further to say that the role, if we think about supporting women and mothers and their need for support for economic independence and the like, we could also speak of the need of working with men and helping them to fulfill perhaps more their family obligations and to support them in taking that role.

I certainly have a keen concern about the needs of our various diverse communities in Nova Scotia. We are an increasingly diverse community in Nova Scotia and so meeting the culturally specific needs of Nova Scotians is something that will be on our radar. Of course historically and traditionally, we have struggled with, or we have worked to balance our initiatives both in urban Nova Scotia and rural Nova Scotia. So these challenges are part of the child and youth strategy.

I'm happy to take the opportunity to talk with you a little bit about it, to share with you what we're doing and to get ideas from you. We acknowledge this committee and other bodies like it as important parts of the constituency that we're responsive to. So we want to thank you for this opportunity and hope that we were able to provide you with the information that you are looking for today. So thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank each of the committee members and certainly our observers and I do want to recognize Leonard Preyra, the MLA for Halifax Citadel, who has joined us today as well.

The work that you're doing is going to be a critical legacy in our province and we respect that. We would invite you to come and give us annual updates, progress reports. We want to follow this very, very closely because we realize how important the work is that you are doing. So we wish you well and we hope things happen as quickly as possible. Thank you very much.

Certainly you're welcome to leave, I know you have very busy schedules. I'd invite the committee members to stay behind and we'll look at our agendas for the next few months and assign some of these topics.

If you, committee members, would pull out your list of witnesses and topics for upcoming meetings. In addition to the ones that we decided we would move forward on from our organizational meeting in the Fall, we've also received communication from three organizations at the bottom of that page, asking to appear before the committee; Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities, the Canadian Federation of Students, and the Provincial Autism Centre. So we need some direction, some consensus on whether or not we want to add these groups to our list of topics.

Now if I could ask a question, the Provincial Autism Centre, is that a government organization?

MR. GOUCHER: Is that the same one that we . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, apparently they were not included but I'm trying to find out, are they a community-based organization, like non-profit, or are they a government organization? Does anybody know?

MR. GLAVINE: Autism Nova Scotia is the provincial body, so this is an independent group I would think.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: They're a professionally run information resource centre, where parents, individuals with autism and professionals can exchange ideas and support. So it sounds as though they are like a non-profit group. Okay.

So the two things we have to do; we have to make a decision about whether to add them to our list and where on our list, and we need to assign some of these topics to specific dates so that Charlene can make arrangements for the witnesses. Any suggestions?

Well hearing none, do you want to add them to the bottom of our list?

MR. GLAVINE: I think we'd almost have to, really. We've got a lot of people who are wanting to be here.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, okay. Well we'll add them to the bottom. Is this the order in which you would like to deal with the topics?

Now, I have a suggestion, I'm really concerned about the 211 being so far down that it means if they come before us and we make any recommendations, that it is not going to impact on the next year's budget. So that's certainly one I'd like to see moved up, if at all possible.

MR. COLWELL: So, Madam Chairman, help me get this straight; we've already got - we have just seen an early learning childhood plan and . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, that's a different issue. So these are five new topics, plus the three we've just added.

MR. COLWELL: Okay. Now these five topics, without the three that have been added, we agreed on those before, correct?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, in September, I believe.

MR. COLWELL: And did we agree on the order they're going to be in before? I can't remember that meeting. I know I was here but I can't remember.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Somewhat.

MR. COLWELL: Okay. So first of all, I think we should deal with the five and see if we're going to change the order.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. COLWELL: Personally I've got no objection to shifting these around but I don't think I want to shift them too much, otherwise, if no one has any suggestions, we'll leave it the way it is.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so we would assign number one to February 5<sup>th</sup>; number two to March 4<sup>th</sup>; number three to April 1<sup>st</sup> and then I think we had decided that especially during budget discussions when the Legislature is in - I don't obviously know

when we're going to be meeting but if we do have a May meeting, then we'll assign that to number four. Otherwise, we have an option of meeting more frequently before April or we can bump that one off to September. I think we met in July last year, didn't we?

MR. GOUCHER: Well why don't we take those first three and leave it at that for now and go find what our schedule is going to be? We'll just take those three because those are the . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: All right, so we'll ask the clerk to organize the first three for the next three months and then we can take another look at it after that.

I just wanted to also bring to your notice that the 2006-07 annual report has been sent over to the Legislature so it will be tabled in the Spring session, okay? Are there any other questions or issues to bring forward? Yes, Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: Madam Chairman, when the provincial autism group were in, we had a motion that there be investigated having a working group for the autism and I'm just wondering about how we go about having a follow-up on that. Remember, Gordie, you seconded a motion for that and we're just wondering whether, from the chairman for this committee, we need to ask the Ministry of Health if that's going to be initiated.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The letter has been composed, it has been sent to the Minister of Health. I did have it here and we're waiting for a response back, yes. So it's in progress. Anything else? If not, the meeting is adjourned.

[The meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.]