

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, December 7, 2010

Committee Room 1

**Department of Community Services,
Private Licensed Administrators Association &
Non-Profit Directors Association**

Re: Child Care

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Jim Morton (Chairman)
Mr. Gary Ramey (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Leonard Preyra
Ms. Michele Raymond
Mr. Maurice Smith
Mr. Leo Glavine
Mr. Geoff MacLellan
Hon. Chris d'Entremont
Mr. Alfie MacLeod

[Mr. Leonard Preyra was replaced by Mr. Jim Boudreau.]
[Mr. Maurice Smith was replaced by Ms. Becky Kent.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Ms. Judith Ferguson, Deputy Minister
Mr. Virginia O'Connell, Director - Early Childhood Development Services
Mr. George Savoury, Executive Director -
Family and Community Supports and Child and Youth Strategy

Private Licensed Administrators Association

Ms. Heather Hansen-Dunbar, Chairperson, and Executive Director - Kids R Kids Day Care
Mr. Shane Beddow, Member and Director

Non-Profit Directors Association

Ms. Margo Kirk, Member, and Executive Director - University Children's Centre
Ms. Laurie St. Amour, Member, and Executive Director - Wolfville Children's Centre

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2010

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everybody. It's 9:02 a.m., and this is the Standing Committee on Community Services. We have a busy agenda this morning, as we frequently have here. We'll begin with the introduction of committee members.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have witnesses here this morning from the Department of Community Services, from the Private Licensed Administrators Association, and from the Non-Profit Directors Association. I think the way we will be proceeding is to have each of those groups present, have a brief opportunity for questions, and then we'll go to the next group - as a way of managing our time. Each group will have in the vicinity of 30, 35 or 40 minutes to make things work.

We will be starting with the Department of Community Services and Judith Ferguson, who has been a frequent guest. Welcome back.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: I'm happy to be back.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Judith is the Deputy Minister of Community Services. Could you introduce your staff, please?

MS. FERGUSON: Happily, Mr. Chairman. Good morning everybody, it's nice to be back again. I'm pleased this morning to have with me George Savoury, Executive Director of our Family and Community Supports Division and, I think, probably very well-known to most of you here. Also with me this morning is Virginia O'Connell, Director of our Early Childhood Development Services.

I know there are guests behind me, Mr. Chairman, and I don't know if you want to do those introductions now or when they actually do the presentation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we'll wait until they get to the microphone.

MS. FERGUSON: So, Mr. Chairman, we have put together - let me pull it up for you - a bit of a presentation and overview that we thought we would start with this morning. There is a fair bit of detail in it, so I think what I'll do is, in the interest of time, I'll go through it at a relatively high level and then if anyone has any questions around that, we're more than happy (Interruption) Brooke Armstrong, our trusty Communications Officer to make sure we know what we're doing. Are you ready to go? Okay.

So, members of the committee, I wanted to speak a little bit about the department's role in child care and there's really a three-pronged approach: to foster healthy child development, to offer programs and services to support families and the child care sector, and monitoring and licensing both our child care facilities and family home daycare agencies in accordance with our Act and regulations.

In terms of child care in Nova Scotia, there's an annual investment from the department of approximately \$50 million in early learning and child care and it's broken up over a number of programs. Currently, in Nova Scotia, we have approximately 397 licensed child care facilities, and you can see on the slide - I don't need to read it to everybody - in terms of spaces, approximately 15,000, and they're split approximately 50/50 between not-for-profit and our commercial centres. We have 10 family home daycare agencies with 90 approved provider homes caring for approximately 412 children, and 17 early intervention programs with approximately 650 children served.

I think it's important to note that we recognize that families across our province have diverse child care needs, and that in terms of the department's role we don't promote one type of child care over another - it's really about giving parents and families choices in terms of their child care. In the department we have tried to help address the need for rural spaces with our family home day care homes, and we can speak more to that during the presentation.

I apologize, it's kind of hard to see and we can provide separate maps that are clear for everybody, but we simply wanted to provide an indication of where our licensed child care and our early intervention programs are located across the province, to give everybody an indication of the locations across the province. So that's simply what that slide is all

about and you can see on the legend that's divided between the types of child care. So we can provide larger maps for people if that's helpful.

In terms of the early learning and child care plan, I want to touch on the highlights. There has been approximately \$154 million invested since 2005-2006; 40 expansion loans; 1,350 new licensed spaces; 120 repair and renovation loans; and 1,100 new subsidies. All of the subsidies are now portable, and portable subsidies make it easier for families to choose the right child care option for them and, even if they need to move, the subsidy goes with them. So we have found that this gives even more support to families in terms of obtaining child care in places that make sense for them, and recognizing that needs of families change and families move and that obviously child care is a very important piece for families.

In terms of our early learning and child care plan, we have a priority area, a check list. We have certain things that were priorities for the plan: increasing licensed child care spaces, decreasing the cost of child care for families, and assisting the sector to recruit and retain a stable child care workforce which we know - and we've heard first-hand from the sector - continues to be a significant challenge for them.

In 2005, with input from the child care sector, the department consulted with Nova Scotians to determine the priorities for child care and we tried, as best we could, to take those priorities into account when the plan was developed, and this is simply an overview of what has been done by the province to date to address the priority areas. So, again, I won't read from the slide, but just to give an indication that those were the priority areas and those are the types of things that we've been able to move forward.

In addition, the priorities included increasing our operational and program grant funding for our child care centres, providing more accessible choices for parents of children who have special needs, and increasing information for parents about early childhood development and child care.

In terms of current loans and grants, we have our Early Childhood Enhancement Grant; the majority of this funding is for salary enhancement and portions are also used for professional development and operational expenses. It combined the former Child Care Operating Grant and Stabilization Grant into one grant, and it helps address the urgent need for recruitment and retention and contributes to this strategy. We expend approximately \$16 million annually and provide assistance to approximately 382 centres.

In terms of our Supported Child Care Grant, and these are the monies to create and enhance inclusive child care programs for children with special needs, it is approximately \$3.9 million for 155 centres. In terms of our Family Home Agency Start-up and Operating Grants, this is to deliver regulated child care in a home setting, which I mentioned earlier is particularly helpful in our rural Nova Scotia settings. There is a \$5,000 start-up grant provided to our new family home daycare agencies and the operating grant monies depend on the number of homes that an agency has who are working with them.

We've also provided past loans and grants for specific types of ongoing projects. In terms of capital projects, we've done an Expansion Loan Program and a Repair and Renovation Loan Program. The expansion program has been to expand or replace buildings and increase child care spaces, and to date we've committed \$18.8 million for 42 centres and will create 1,300-plus new spaces - and this is since 2008, and 23 of these are still in progress to date. In our Repair and Renovation Loan Program, which has been offered to make necessary improvements for our centres, we spent approximately \$3 million and 129 centres have been approved since 2008, and 38 are still in progress.

In terms of other past loans and grants, we've had a Program Enhancement Grant which was a one-time grant to enhance programming and provided \$2.6 million for 358 centres; an Energy Upgrade Grant, which was a one-time grant to make energy-efficient improvements, \$1.3 million for 276 centres; and our Outdoor Playspace Grant, which was, again, another one-time grant, to create or improve outdoor play spaces at our centres. This was \$5.1 million and this went to 272 centres.

I'd like to speak for a few minutes on the Child Care Subsidy. We know and we hear on a consistent basis that it's very difficult for some families to cover the cost of child care, and the Child Care Subsidy helps eligible families pay for child care. Subsidies represent a significant break for Nova Scotia families who need affordable child care for their child, and for many - and we know this from also working obviously with our clients on income assistance - it makes a significant difference between going to work and going to school or not, in addition to the fact that obviously it is significant in terms of the development of the child.

There are more than 4,100 subsidies in the province and every year more than \$17 million is invested into this program. We currently have no subsidy wait list and 97 per cent of the subsidies are currently being used. Subsidies are accessed, as I said, by over 3,700 families and help about 4,600 children. Based on the statistics we currently have, 73 per cent of families are single-parent families, 23 per cent are two-parent families, 25 per cent of those using subsidies also are accessing our Employment Support and Income Assistance Services, and over 90 per cent of the families currently accessing subsidies have incomes of less than \$40,000 annually.

All of our subsidies are portable, which I already talked about, and we've reduced the minimum assessed daily parent fee by \$1 on June 1, 2010.

In terms of recruitment and retention, again, this is another issue that we hear when we speak with the sector, and I'm sure they'll speak to this themselves in terms of the challenges that they're facing. As part of the ELCC plan, we've developed and implemented a recruitment and retention strategy to assist the workforce. We've also developed an Early Childhood Education Assistance Program that supports full-time students pursuing their Early Childhood Education degrees or diplomas, a debt reduction incentive for graduates of the ECE Program of up to \$5,000 per year. There have been 50 participants in this program since 2008. We also have a continuing education program,

which makes funding available for eligible child care staff interested in furthering their education on a part-time basis while they're working in a licensed child care centre.

We certainly know that wages are an issue in the sector. We've heard it firsthand from staff of the child care centres and actually heard it recently in meetings with our minister. While we have done some work in terms of the grant and the recruitment and retention work that has been done, we certainly know that there is still more to do. I guess we would say, though, that that's the wage piece. Although the department certainly has a role to play in that, it's not solely the role of the department. I think as a society, including parents, we all must be willing to support child care staff in the way that they deserve. We will certainly do what we can to continue to support the sector with recruitment and retention programs and the grant, and we'll continue to talk to the sector about ways that we can help.

[9:15 a.m.]

In terms of training programs, we approve Early Childhood Education training programs delivered by career colleges. We do things like review and approve applications and make recommendations to the Department of Education. We provide funding for early childhood training and support programs. Currently eight institutions in Nova Scotia have been funded to deliver training and services to the early childhood sector, and the funding provides for things like site maintenance, professional development, student bursaries, mentoring, and coaching services.

I'm going to move for a moment to talk briefly about our early intervention programs. Early intervention programs offer a variety of services to families of children zero to six years of age at risk of developmental delays, so children with conditions like autism, Down Syndrome, or Attention Deficit Disorder. We've provided approximately 80 per cent of the funding since about 2000-01. In addition, we've invested an additional \$100,000 in 2010-11, approximately, bringing our total funding to approximately \$2.5 million on an annual basis. Obviously the early intervention programs are a significant part of the services that are provided across the province and provide very important and much-needed work for these children and their families.

We've heard at the department, and have heard for a number of years, that there really needs to be more communication around the types of services we provide, how people access our early childhood services. Two years ago, we launched a directory of licensed child care facilities that allows the public to search for licensed facilities across the province. The results provide basic information like capacity, address, and whether the centre is in compliance with the Daycare Act and regulations. While the licensing information is updated on a regular basis, it can sometimes take three to five days for changes to appear. This is something that we continue to work on, and we appreciate there are some challenges with that.

We've also provided and have started an awareness campaign because much of the public is unaware of the role that the department plays in child care. This was done specifically to increase awareness that the department oversees regulated child care and of the supports and services offered to families in the child care sector.

We've done print work online and outdoor advertising to assist parents to a new website outlining the steps they can use to find child care. To date, there have been more than 8,200 views of the main page of this communication strategy. We've also done some work developing e-mail lists for general correspondence with licensed centres. Communication is something that we struggle with on a regular basis and that we would like to do a better job with. In addition, it will limit the amount of paper that the centres received, which was based on the feedback we heard from them - that there's simply too much paper from the department. We understand and appreciate that. What we're looking at trying to do is find ways we can communicate more effectively and better with the centres. We're also working on an electronic newsletter to provide general sector information. We're not there yet, but we're working on some of those things.

We also work with the sector in terms of events like National Child Day and have communication with the sector and the public recognizing National Child Day, which is on November 20th. In terms of moving forward, it's our hope to continue to deliver funding in a meaningful way that benefits children, families, and child care professionals. In 2010-11, DCS will invest more than \$50 million in early learning and child care. I think it's fair to say that there's not a program that we have in the Department of Community Services that we would not like to have more funding for, but what we try very hard to do in all of our programs is to ensure that we spend the money that we have in a way that maximizes the resources that we have for the people who need those services.

In addition, some other things that we're looking at and have done, include an orientation to child care program for untrained staff that's in the preliminary stages of development; we hope to launch that in 2011. We've also developed and co-sponsored with our colleagues at Health Promotion and Protection food and nutrition standards. We've developed a draft food and nutrition policy for licensed facilities and family home daycares.

There was extensive consultation earlier this year about the policy and to help develop implementation tools. I can tell you that the consultation was very detailed. I read all of the consultation detail myself, and we had received an extensive amount of feedback that we've tried very hard to incorporate into the standards. We have an anticipated rollout of 2011.

As always, and as I said earlier, in all of our programs we're committed to looking for ways to improve child care in Nova Scotia and continue to support the sector. We feel we have made significant strides in terms of the Early Learning and Child Care Plan, but we understand and appreciate that there continue to be challenges and we hope to continue

to be able to work on them in a way to move the sector forward. We'll continue to work with the sector as we have done in the past.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you very much for your time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ferguson, that's a lot of information in a short time. That leaves us, I think, with a few minutes for questions. We probably have 15 or 16 minutes. Mr. Ramey.

MR. GARY RAMEY: How many questions are we allowed to ask? One?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would say, given our time and the number of people, one question, and then if we have additional time, we'll do another round.

MR. RAMEY: I have several questions, but I'll ask one. Thank you very much for the presentation. My question relates to how we are trying to meet the capacity and to address the needs of Nova Scotia families in the best possible way. I know when we were talking about poverty, and when we do talk about poverty, we look at poverty as not an issue related to one department. We look at poverty as an issue related to Health and Education and perhaps Justice. Several departments, really, could have some kind of input into that.

To what extent have you communicated with other departments - Education, I guess would be the best example - in relation to child care strategies? Or has that been done?

MS. FERGUSON: To your first comment, yes, we are working much better with our colleagues across a number of departments on a large number of issues. I mentioned the food and nutrition policy which we are working on with our colleagues at HPP. I would also say that any time we have any issues that we're moving forward or consultations on any piece and any program that we have, we would want to bring in our colleagues in other departments - both for their expertise, to make sure we're not doing anything that's in conflict with each other. Ginny can probably speak to more of the specifics on exactly if and when we have in child care.

I will tell you as a general piece, any time we're doing anything in the department where we think we need to bring our colleagues in from other departments, we do that on a regular basis. Also, as you're probably aware, there are a group of deputies termed the Better Health deputies that Kevin McNamara, the Deputy Minister of Health, and I co-chair with a number of our deputy colleagues who sit at that table. The role of that table is to really look at issues that impact all of the departments. I can certainly see an opportunity to have discussions about child care in terms of the impact at that table, but I'll turn it over to Ginny to look at any specific examples of where we have liaised with our colleagues.

MS. VIRGINIA O'CONNELL: Thank you, Judith. In the context of opportunities to meet with our colleagues across government in Nova Scotia, we actually meet on sort

of a monthly basis and at those meetings we do have representatives from Education, Justice, Health, and also the opportunity to have staff from HPP. So in the context of that, I think we're very much aware from the point of view of those working in government and looking at the poverty question, but also looking at how we can better develop a system of services for children and families. We've actually had some excellent discussions where, in the context of education, for example - I don't know whether you know, but we have many child care centres in schools.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, I'm aware of that.

MS. O'CONNELL: That really provides a wonderful opportunity for the children to become used to the school or even the schools to become used to children. We also know the importance, whether it's health education, Community Services, HPP, et cetera, that when we have more opportunities - and we certainly look forward to that, to create an opportunity, whether you call it a hub model or an opportunity, where you can have those services collectively - maybe not in the same space but working together to better support families, and we've had that opportunity for that discussion.

Even in Nova Scotia right now, we actually do have schools where we have family resource centres, child care centres, and we have some of our EI programs as well even located in child care centres. In that context we are certainly not only working with families in poverty but also families that are vulnerable. So yes, we are definitely at the table having those discussions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLellan.

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Judith, thanks so much for the presentation. I appreciate that. I just have a quick comment and question about some of the general strategies for the department. To look at those slides and the numbers, obviously the expenditures are staggering from a government perspective, and with that being said, it's never enough. I think that every group and the groups that are here, and what I hear in my constituency and all of our colleagues, there's always a shortfall. So I think in these economic conditions and in what the department faces in the massive demand on some of these programs, we have to razor down and identify specific pockets that we really have to work at.

One thing that I hear a lot of, certainly in Glace Bay and Cape Breton, is with the early intervention programs and those developmental years for the kids are absolutely vital for future development. If you're not protecting your 2- to 5-year-olds and getting them ready for school and getting them ready for society, and helping those families prepare for that transition, then I think it jeopardizes their future. So what I hear from some of the people at All Kids Services, or some of those groups, is that they haven't had a salary increase in a decade. The waiting lists are monstrous and, again, when you're talking about how important those services are, the waiting lists, what do we do to cut them down and just the overall funding stream on some of those specific organizations?

So there are three significant challenges and I don't think in the three minutes you have you can answer those, but specifically, from the department's perspective, is there a plan for staff salaries, for waiting lists, and for the overall funding? Is something being looked at, is there a way to streamline some of those allotments that are given to those programs and bump those up, or do we have to just live within what we have now?

MS. FERGUSON: We've met with the early intervention centres and we appreciate that they have some significant challenges. So I guess that's the first thing. We share your perspective. Certainly we see in the department every day how important the prevention piece is, and as I said, there are all kinds of places in the department where we wish we had additional funding and where we wish we didn't have wait lists. It's important for us, though, to use the money that we're investing now and work with our partners to make sure we're making the most of that money.

We have met with the early intervention programs, we have been doing some work with them around their funding piece and around looking at where they're having some challenges and working with them on that. Probably not in a way that people would say that's enough, but we are looking at that.

We are also looking and analysing the wait lists that the centres have and looking at putting some additional positions in where they are needed. Again, it probably will not eliminate the wait lists, but it will help with that, so we are looking at those two pieces and those two pieces of work are ongoing. Again, it won't totally deal with the problem, but certainly a recognition of the fact that they are facing some significant challenges and we want to do what we can within the fiscal realities that we have in the department to try and help them. So there will be some steps forward on that, that we are working on them with, but we will continue to work with them and do what we can to help them address the challenges.

I think, though, to your comment, it needs to be done within the fiscal envelope that the department has, and recognizing that, we have a number of programs that are facing some significant challenges.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I just want to make a point that we need to manage time and I've got a longer speakers list probably than we have time for. I should also have noted that after we had introductions, Ms. Becky Kent and Ms. Michele Raymond entered the room. The next speaker on my list is Ms. Kent.

[9:30 a.m.]

MS. BECKY KENT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm particularly pleased to be here with you, Judith and Virginia and George. After I agreed to fill in, I realized that you were coming and that's my background, early childhood - a preschool, actually, that I owned and operated a number of years ago. In fact, Virginia - not to date ourselves - I think you were part of my licensing many years ago, so I'm certainly happy

to be here and ask a couple of questions. I'm glad to see that Nova Scotia is putting more emphasis on this sector. I don't have to say it, but I will: Child care in our local communities is really so vital and such a key to the successes of the entire community. It affects everyone.

My question is, when I think back on my experience and certainly what I hear as a MLA and when we think about providing more centres that are operating, I think about the sometimes daunting task of a family or a particular person making the decision to actually go into this business. Most of them, I think, start out with some kind of - probably a child that is of an age where they would be in that sector, and people put their hearts and souls into it. I think about all of the information that is coming out here and the communication piece that you touched on.

What I am wondering is, I recall with licensing - and then you think of the financial side to get yourself going and be sustainable. Is there any kind of package or a key person within the department that a person or whatever, the business owner, could tap into? Either before, when trying to make a decision about entering the sector or, at the very least, upon receiving their licence, to educate them not only about the regulations - of course that's an element, that's just a given that has to happen - but about what is really available to operators out there that they can tap into, what perhaps has been available in the past.

I know these one-time things may have been, are one-time opportunities, but having a dialogue with someone within the department helps you understand what the challenges are that they are facing in their communities around operating in the sector. Is there someone in the department who is almost like that key contact who helps educate them at the beginning or throughout the process of being in the sector?

MS. O'CONNELL: I'm not sure in the context of when you stopped operating your actual facility, but in July of last year the department had the opportunity to divide the roles of licensing and consultation. Right now, in the context of licensing programs within the Department of Community Services, there are licensing officers, and then in the different program areas, such as early childhood development, we have early childhood development consultants.

What we've done is, we've divided the actual components of when someone is applying to operate a licensed facility or family home daycare agency. The first contact that the individual would have is now with a consultant who meets with the operator. We have a very detailed guide with respect to submitting a proposal to operate a licensed facility or a licensed family home daycare agency. The consultant is available to meet with them, review the documents. The documents themselves have other references together, other information, even from other departments in government.

In the context of if an individual was questioning even the financial piece, our consultants do have a lot of knowledge and information with respect to assisting facilities to prepare budgets. We have guidelines, for example, even a percentage of your budget

that should be going to food, et cetera, items like that. To be honest, our consultants are not Chartered Accountants, but in essence they can guide them and lead them. In the context of even operating the facility, for example, even the ages of children they wish to serve, because certain communities really have more school-age children, so why would you be operating a program maybe for infants? Plus, they provide them with all the other resources and materials that the proposed operator would need to know and would need to comply with.

Once we go through the proposal stage - many centres can take a year or more, depending on them - only at that point in time are they referred to licensing, to actually become a licensed facility. We've actually divided that role, plus through the context of operating the facility the consultant is available to meet with the operator as well to provide some guidance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, and in the interest of time, I think we're going to need to make a transition. Mr. MacLeod, I know you're next on my list, though. You'll maintain that position if you want to keep it.

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: It was such a good question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If any members of the committee have questions that we did not have time to pose this morning, there are other ways to submit those, and I'm sure the department would be happy to provide some responses.

MS. FERGUSON: I would just say to any of the members that we're happy to respond to questions any time. They can contact any of us or if they would like to meet with us to discuss the question in person, we're happy to do that too.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Are there any summary comments, Ms. Ferguson, that you would like to make?

MS. FERGUSON: No, Mr. Chairman, I just would like to say thank you very much for the opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for being here. We'll just take a moment, but please don't rush out of the room to make this transition. I think we're going to need all the minutes that we have. The next people on our agenda as witnesses will be the members of the Private Licensed Administrators Association, so we'll just arrange for people to change places.

[9:36 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[9:39 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, I think our next set of witnesses are ready. I'll reconvene our meeting from the short recess we had. As I mentioned before we recessed, our next witnesses are representing the Private Licensed Administrators Association. Welcome.

MS. HEATHER HANSEN-DUNBAR: Certainly. Thank you for the opportunity. This is my colleague, Shane Beddow. He is a director on the executive of our association and he's also an operator of a child care program in Hatchet Lake. My name is Heather Hansen-Dunbar, I'm the chairperson of our association, the Private Licensed Administrators Association of Nova Scotia Child Care Centres, which is really long so we call ourselves PLAA. We've been around for about 15 years with formal by-laws for maybe seven or eight. Thank you again for the opportunity.

The agenda looks really daunting considering the time. All of those things are in the slides, so we probably could just move along because we'll be covering all those things. Just a brief update, we did present before this committee in 2008. I understand it's a different generation of the committee.

Our association's primary purpose is to connect with each other as private child care programs. We share a common voice and common goals. Based upon the April 2010 directory information of all the licensed child care centres in the province, those that are private constitute 55 per cent and of all the spaces in the province - I will apologize - the number 67 is wrong, I need to change that. It's 63 per cent. My memory is not great, I was born in 1967 so the second I start to put a six, the seven just seems to follow, so it's 63 per cent of those spaces are in private child care centres.

With regard to communications, we communicate with our members mostly through e-mail. In the past year it's been really exciting in our association because the vision we had for our association was always very much networking about daily operational tasks as directors. The majority of our association's work has been about lobbying the government and affecting change so that we could get to our tasks. This year we've finally started to achieve our original goals of really networking about just day-to-day operations. We've been sharing a lot of costs through e-mail, how much we're paying for different things. We've just successfully done a huge amount of bulk buying together, as a group of centres, challenging each other, sharing information, developing online petitions and lobbying. Now that so many centres have e-mail and Web sites - that's really just a recent development. A lot of centres got Web sites in the past four or five years.

With regard to meetings, we have executive meetings, general meetings and meetings with the government. We have this past year met with the minister twice.

We wanted to comment about the working group. The working group was an advisory group representative of individuals in our field. It served in an advisory consultative role with the department offering direct interaction and communication on issues and tasks. The group dissolved in the past year. We feel it's a tremendous loss. The lack of a vehicle for direct participation and communication is disappointing. There have

been several cases this year when our members have specifically asked why it cannot be resurrected. While it's original task was completed, and that's what led to the dissolution, we ask for a new working group to be struck to recreate direct involvement with appropriate representation.

As Virginia mentioned, there's a new division of licensing and that just happened about 14, 15 months ago. The transition to the new processes and this division led to many questions and issues from our members. One example was the licensing checklist that inspectors would look for things in the centres. We had requested that this be posted and we were very happy that this was able to be achieved through ministerial request. Again, interpretation and consistency continue to be somewhat of a challenge, but not as bad as when the division first began. We see this as an exciting example of working together with the department with both ease and positive results. We were pleased that was able to be achieved.

In Judith's presentation - or the department's presentation - she mentioned about a lot of centres expanding and the increase of centres. We really were thinking that the determination for how centres get the grants and the factors involved in the selection - we'd like them to be more transparent. There are centres to be opened in unusual locations with declining populations and unclear needs assessments. Lengthy periods of time seem to pass without ground breaking. That does not meet the terms and conditions of the expansion grants. Retaining these grants should not be an option, because that would be a violation of the terms and conditions. These things need to be more transparent for the public, and we would like to see a section of the website dedicated to this.

[9:45 a.m.]

Again, with regard to needs assessment, while we understand that anybody who wants to open a daycare can open it where they choose, as long as they can meet the requirements for their business - and of course, that's free enterprise. As people who own private daycares, we would never flirt with the ability to open where people need to, but very often after you open it, you're applying for government grant money, particularly for staff salaries and wages. We believe a commitment that anyone applying for government grant money must be required to complete a detailed validation and needs assessment that must be built into the terms and conditions of the ECEG. Our position is that too many centres in areas with specific populations are negatively impacted, which could result in reduced capacity for all the centres in that area and therefore likely affect staffing.

The purpose of the government funds are to both stabilize and to recruit and retain staff, yet this would go against the purpose. The number one indicator of quality in an early childhood education program is low staff turnover, so you can see where that would negatively impact.

Recruitment and retention of early childhood educators - the increase in minimum wage has led to ECEs being closer to minimum wage than they have been in years. Centres

that have developed salary scales are fighting a difficult battle to take their scales to the next level, let alone retain their scales. Many centres have resorted to advertising abroad.

Predictions regarding meeting the trained requirement in the future are not good - here in Nova Scotia you have to have two-thirds of your staff trained. The end results, again, with staff turnover being the number one indicator for quality - quality would be negatively impacted.

Grant monies distribution. As numerous centres have opened this year and are slated to open with expansion grants, as well as increase in capacities, we are looking for answers with regard to the grant dispersal. We have been informed that the Department of Community Services will be cutting 5 per cent of its budget. With salaries being so seriously affected by minimum wage change, to decrease quantity delivered to ECEs would make staff retention go from challenging to dire. The grant should be increased rather than decreased, although obviously if they are facing cutbacks, we should lobby just to retain what we are given, even though we really, really want to ask for it to be increased. Children and families obviously would be negatively impacted by the staff changes effected if the grant changes and therefore the money changes with regard to delivery to the ECEs.

Enhanced program review - this is a new process that the department developed. Several of our members are partway through the process and shared the documents involved with some concerns. There are positive elements in the process, but the overall implications of the process and the documents utilized are riddled with some negative aspects. The process was unclear and not communicated to all daycares. The message and intent were unclear, the need to participate was unclear, and the ultimate goal and purpose were unclear. We met with the minister and head office about it and shared our perspective. It was an excellent meeting in that they listened well and they shared with us that it's a voluntary process. That was not something we were aware of, and so we understand that they're going to share more information with us. We recommended in the end that the process be put on hold, or cut, and that direct involvement in the development with purpose and goal being clear, that again if the working group were resurrected, or a new working group was struck, then maybe we could work together on developing something like that because the idea of enhancing programs in the province is something that obviously we would agree with, and of course the department does, seeing as how they're developing it. So it was a very good meeting and we know that more information is forthcoming from it, and that's all she wrote, or rather we wrote, sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you both. That leaves us a little more time for questioning than I thought we might have. I had begun a speaker's list in our last round, is that something we should adhere to? (Interruption) So that sounds, Mr. MacLeod, like you're ready with a question. So, please, you have the floor.

MR. MACLEOD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you both.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I could say though before you start, if you could limit yourselves to one question at a time, that might help the process along a bit.

MR. MACLEOD: No, there's no problem, I can limit - I'll just ask two questions in the same time. (Laughter) No, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you both for your presentation. I'm going to cut right to the chase. The working group has been a benefit in the past. You outlined a number of issues that still seem to be a challenge for both the private and non-profit sector. Do you feel that the working group would be a way of helping to meet those challenges on a level where everybody would have a better understanding so that it would be a better working relationship to make this program work for the most important people, and that's the children that you're looking after?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: I think that certainly from our association's perspective, we found involvement in the working group to be tremendously successful. Often times, if I give you an example directly from daycare, once you become a director of a daycare centre, even though you probably put in years and years in the classroom, it's not long afterwards that you very quickly sort of - you have the experience, but some of it fades because you're dealing with paper all the time.

So you might have a toddler teacher come and ask you a question and your suggestion might be quite good on paper but not necessarily good in practice. My previous boss is in the room and I remember one time I asked her a question about the toddlers and the answer she gave me was an awesome answer but it was very difficult to put it into practice. Of course, she had more experience than I, so maybe I just needed to give it a bit more effort. In relation to that, I know that the department, the people who work at head office, they have a huge amount of experience working with young children but, again, having that front-line participation is so key and we all share in the desire to move our quality forward.

So it was very successful and we have absolutely no doubt, I mean our members continually ask, and the main question they ask is, what happened to it? Why did it cease to exist? And so we try to answer that. As we've been told, their original task was completed and so that's why it ended, but we see it as nothing but . . .

MR. SHANE BEDDOW: Positive. I think we need to open the lines of communication between all the departments and the organizations, be it profit and commercial, to address anything that's going on currently in the sector, be it wages, funding cutbacks, how the funding is even distributed and calculated. We represent over 50 per cent and probably over 60 per cent of the spaces, but yet we have little voice in some of the direction and some of the decisions that are made that directly affect the parents and the children that we all deal with.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: I think even just practical implications when they come up with, for example, the enhanced program review. The idea of enhancing programs is - I mean who would argue with that? I don't think anyone would, but the practical - how

that's rolled out and delivered to the centres - to ask people who work daily in the centres and have some input there.

Judith had mentioned earlier about the new draft policy for food and nutrition and there truly was extensive consultation in numerous formats for that. So that was really beneficial and the work - I don't think the working group was involved in that, there was another group, the nutrition group - but that really is a great example of how there was a group with front line people involved as well as HPP, she said, and DCS. So having everybody, all the stakeholders, at the table developing something just seems to achieve a much better end result.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Raymond.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: Lots of questions and thank you very much for coming in to present. A couple of things very quickly, what percentage of private and licensed child care centres are, in fact, members of your association? Do you represent 100 per cent of them?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: No, 36 per cent currently are members, throughout the province.

MS. RAYMOND: So are there other similar associations representing the other 67 per cent?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: No.

MS. RAYMOND: So you're the only organized one?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: There is, or was, or still is an association of administrators in the Valley that is comprised of both non-profit and private. I believe it still exists. That is the end goal of our association, to form an administrator's association, as opposed to one that is specifically auspice-related.

MS. RAYMOND: All right. So you would, in fact, see yourselves as an organization of both private and non-profit, because I was wondering if you could elaborate a little bit on the differences and concerns, from your point of view. What are the significant things that make for a need for a particular working group?

MR. BEDDOW: From commercial versus non-profit? I would say a lot of it comes down to staff retention and probably mostly around wages, would it not be, where we're both faced with similar challenges?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Meaning the reason why we would both want a working group?

MR. BEDDOW: Well not just on wages. The working group would probably be to - all the challenges we're faced with, whether it be increasing, I'm struggling with this one. You are asking . . .

MS. RAYMOND: I guess what I'm really asking is, what is it that separates your concerns and the need for a working group from that of any other, a more umbrella group of people involved with early childhood education and child care?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: I don't see anything as being separate concerns. We haven't been able to sit down with the Non-Profit Directors Association and say, do you miss the working group? Did you feel the working group was beneficial? I mean we'd certainly be quite happy to do that. We perceived that they experienced a beneficial relationship having it.

MR. BEDDOW: Could you give an example of what would help the working group or what could have helped it? I guess the program . . .

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: The ELCC? ECEG? ABCD?

MR. BEDDOW: No, they're all the same. The program enhancement review was sent out and we jumped on board with this, as a private operator, but we didn't have any consultation with anyone other than just Community Services. Initially we thought it was going to be toward enhancing the programs that we delivered to our children, but in the end it seemed to be quite focused on the management side. I think if the working group had been established and we were involved in part of that creation, we could have probably maximized the benefit of the review and the time and resources.

Where it was implemented and then kind of rolled out to all of the private licensed daycares and non-profits, I don't feel that what the intent or the goal we could have got from that program review, we could have gotten if we had been involved. I think it's not focused on actually enhancing the programs, it's more focused on day to day operations. Therefore, if we had the working group established, and everyone was participating in how this was created, I think we could have probably rolled that out in a more productive manner. So without the working group it didn't really have the effect it could have had. That's one example of why we feel we should open the lines of communication.

Another one would be the new structure that they created for the funding. There has been some really unclear rationale of how the new funding was compared to the old funding, where they amalgamated both grants into one. A lot of centres struggle with even how it is calculated or how it even shows that it's going to allow for stronger retention staff.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: That's an excellent point. It's very mysterious, the formula is somewhat confusion and mysterious. I mean certainly I'm sure it was a daunting task to take the two grants and streamline them into one grant and shift the formula, but

previously, the working group had been involved in the development of the operating grant and how it would process. They had input and a bit of a voice.

MR. BEDDOW: Now it leaves question marks.

MS. RAYMOND: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll cross the floor to Mr. MacLellan.

MR. MACLELLAN: Thanks, folks, for the presentation. Just a very quick question, maybe you can elaborate on it, and you touched on it in the previous answer. What I've heard a lot, from some of the groups down home, is with respect to the wages and salaries. Can you paint a picture, using specifics, on how you compare some of the wages and salary issues? There's always competition for those people.

MR. BEDDOW: You mean in the sector?

MR. MACLELLAN: Right, so what do they face here? Where can they go, say, if they are marketing or they are recruiting overseas and those types of things and they're trying to retain. If I'm a childhood educator and I'm looking at some of those things, I'm with one of your groups, what are my options? Where you say it's getting closer to the minimum wage, so where are we falling behind and why should I go somewhere else, if I'm an employee?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Wow, I don't think we have near enough time to address that question.

MR. MACLELLAN: Is that right? It's Alfie's question; I just read it for him. (Laughter)

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Alfie, what a great question. We could really talk for a long time.

MR. MACLEOD: The answer would be shorter than the question.

MR. BEDDOW: It links to the whole idea of the government funding. I mean most of that funding goes towards the wages and it has been kind of set where all centres have been paying the standard rate of pay. When all of the grant funding came in, it caused that large gap to be created, where minimum wage was here and the salary was here. So it was a little more of incentive appeal, the same appeal, the same sector and then there would be that hope that the wage would go up accordingly.

[10:00 a.m.]

What has happened is, it is fairly much capped because, of course, we're in a difficult economy right now, so the funding is not increasing but yet the minimum wage is increasing. So therefore, believe it or not, some staff are moving from centre to centre over 10 cents to 20 cents an hour because one centre can afford 20 cents more than the other. Even though they have put five years in and have this great commitment with the parents and families, they are struggling in an economy where they have no choice but to move over 5 or 10 cents. Some people are even taking jobs - I'll give you an example - at a certain Tim Hortons because with the tips they make more than they make as an early ECE. That's the reality.

We have staff that will consider the travel distance from one centre to the other, to determine if they use less fuel because their salaries are so restrictive. Some of them are leaving the field altogether, and we're talking with 10 years experience.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: This is a topic at the majority of our member meetings. One of the things I mentioned how in our e-mails we're really networking and sharing a lot of information. I'd like to think that's because we're feeling very comfortable with each other, even though we're competitors but I don't really think that's the case. I think it's more the fact that people are so stressed and frustrated with the situation.

One of the e-mails that went around that a huge amount of information was shared was, what do you pay and what other benefits do you give? People were sharing things like, I give their birthday off with pay, I give this off, I give a day off every second week, so that I have a floater staff to cover that, so they have an extra day off. It was truly phenomenal, the amount of information that came from all of the centres sharing with regard to that.

Some of our members mentioned how teachers come to them, oftentimes near to tears, saying I have three jobs and at what point in time can I have just the one job? Oftentimes you have to deliver the message that unfortunately, unless you're in a relationship with a significant other who earns a really good salary, this is the picture that is painted by having this profession. It's really difficult.

It was great that Nova Scotia increased its minimum wage, I mean who is going to argue that, Nova Scotians should earn more but what it affected with regard to our profession is just really, it's a very bleak picture. It's quite embarrassing to be administrators of programs that our staff - that distance. You struggle for years to try to grow the distance between minimum wage and what your professionals earn and as you're trying to grow it, then in two years the percentage of jump for minimum wage was quite significant.

MR. BEDDOW: You would think adjust the wage accordingly but when you look at how a daycare operates, especially in our province, we're very much - it's very high

overhead. Property taxes, the increase in groceries You would do all the variables of changes in the run of a year but you are on a very set type of operation, you only have so many licensed child spaces. The only option you have is to raise your fees and I think we're already at a point where our fees are to the max that parents can afford. If we raise our fees to offset salaries, what is going to happen is most families can't afford that. Then you're going to create another larger problem.

[10:00 a.m.]

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: To retain the distance between minimum wage and what my staff were earning, with the percentage of increase that we had this past year, just to give a specific example, I would have had to increase the parent fees by \$2.65 per day. All of my families would have left, so needless to say, I didn't even consider doing anything remotely like that.

MR. BEDDOW: This probably links to another good point where the minimum wage is increasing and we have the stabilization or it's now the new formula and is set at a revenue. I don't really know if there's - and maybe it can be looked at, that as the demographics and the sector changes, if minimum wage increases yet the funding doesn't increase, well then obviously you have to look, the next following year, that those staff likely could see a pay decrease. Not a pay increase because the funding is kind of capped right now and if there are any reductions, what that means is all these ECEs are going to see basically a wage decrease, not a wage increase or even stability.

So when we're looking at the funding, if we're increasing our licenced child care spaces because there is a need in the province, which is basically the case that we all know, in certain pockets of population we need more child care spaces so if we licence another 500 spaces, that funding is split now 500 times less. So forget the fact that minimum wage is increasing, that that's a challenge we're faced with. The funding is capped so unless the funding is going to grow with the increase of spaces, that's another kind of affect to the current wages, which is going to actually make that matter worse that you're asking.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: So with regard to the grant, if you're cutting it up in pieces like a pie and everybody gets pieces of the pie now, are we going to just continue to cut them into - I mean, I like pie and . . .

MR. BEDDOW: Your staff is getting smart enough to follow the government funding so they see everything we post. We communicate every dollar out to the staff so they're very smart to see the trend so if they know that the funding is capped and they know that more spaces are open and they're very intuitive, it's going to make them less - you've used the word retention - the retention is going to be less. Because - let's really cut it down - the dollar that they bring home to feed their families is what matters to most of them. Most of them are staying because they love the industry and they're really in child care, but it comes to a point where they can't do that anymore.

MS. HANSEN-DUBAR: Just to conclude, the last comment that a lot of ECEs tell their operators and their directors is that, I love it here. I've been at numerous centres where I didn't feel happy or fulfilled but I need to leave here, this centre where I'm happy and fulfilled and go to a centre that I know I won't be happy and fulfilled at because of .25 cents per hour.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you both for that line of communication. The next questioner on my list is Ms. Kent.

MS. KENT: I have a very specific question about a particular slide and I wasn't able to jot down all of the references so if we could either pull the slide up and perhaps you could look at it. The title on the top of the slide was, Necessity of Needs Assessment for Child Care and it was about specific populations being negatively impacted. There it is, our position is that too many centres in areas with specific populations are negatively impacted. Can you give me a better understanding of what you're saying there? What specific populations and how do you describe negatively impacted?

MR. BEDDOW: We'll give two examples. I'm in a very remote area, 20 to 25 minutes out of Halifax, it's one highway.

MS. KENT: Which area?

MR. BEDDOW: Hatchet Lake. We applied for the expansion program, we expanded our centre - which was great - we did a full needs assessment, looked at our waiting list, we're the only centre in the area. We got the expansion approved, we opened our additional spaces, most of the them being infant care. We're a very small population, about 7,000 so it was a very good thing for the community. Then round two of the funding came out and a smaller centre that was in a very rural area, a little bit farther rural than we are, in a declining part of the area, to kind of justify the declining population they put a rec centre in our area. It probably just opened in June 2009 and I was heavily involved in that as well, my wife and I.

Our population is predicted to decline, not increase, so being a private business in the area and a child care centre, we were quite concerned knowing that this new centre was being given about a million dollar grant to expand its facility. They haven't broken ground yet, they're about to break ground but, already our waiting list is declining because they know that this new centre is going to open with infant space. Because there are only so many infants in our area, we're both going to suffer. We're now at the point where our infant program, which was full basically since the time we opened is now no longer full. So we're not even operating on a capacity on our infant space. Yet, if I was to bump to Bayers Lake or Halifax where the population is stronger and there are more feeders, some of those areas can handle the additional spaces and there's no impact.

I guess the question that we're trying to raise here is, if we're going to approve new centres to open or give additional funding, we have to make sure that there's going to be

no negative impact on the centres that are currently there. Because not only will the centres operate at less than 100 per cent capacity, you're going to have the staff retention problem, as well, because you're not going to be able to keep the staff .

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Because your grant is based on capacity as well, which is important but neither of those centres, Shane's centre nor the other centre, which where it is, it's much further down, in a community where the population is significantly aging and so it's quite disconcerting.

MS. KENT: Is your example a similar kind?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Mine is more general in that it's Sackville which the information we were given has a population of about 60,000. In the past year, numerous centres have opened there and there are some more about to open. So when you look at the population and the quantity of children in the appropriate age range, knowing how many centres already exist in Sackville and how many are about to open, knowing that all those centres will apply and the majority of them already get the ECEG, then they'll have government funds, yet likely not all of those centres will be at capacity - therefore, the grant money distributed to them will be less. Then the ECEs, for which there's a high turnover as we've already talked about, it will become even worse with regard to staff turnover.

So what we're suggesting is, by all means people should be able to open daycares where they choose - right next door to us if they so choose - but if they're going to be qualified for government money, then they should have needs assessments done. The words "detailed validation", we really feel that's important because when we look at these centres that are approved for expansion grants in declining areas, what kind of validation was done with regards to that needs assessment that was involved.

MS. KENT: Thank you very much, that helps me understand that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we have time for one more question. Mr. Ramey.

MR. RAMEY: Mr. Chairman, I apologize for having to go out there just on the very front end of what you were saying and I also apologize if you addressed the answer to my question when I was out because that's just not a good thing. Did you mention that you represent about 36 per cent of the private people and so there's 64 per cent unrepresented by you?

MR. BEDDOW: That are not actually an active part of the association.

MR. RAMEY: Correct. And then, of course, there's the non-profit. So I guess my question is, but you're all sort of in the same general business, right?

MR. BEDDOW: Yes.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: And with regard to our e-mail and all that information sharing, that is 100 per cent. When we say 36 per cent, that's 36 per cent that pay the \$25 a year to belong.

MR. RAMEY: Right.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: So when we do our communications, that is with 100 per cent, we have all the e-mails.

MR. RAMEY: So all centres are included?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: I would say at least 60 per cent communicate and answer the questions and share the information with regard to salary or bulk buying, or whatever, but only 36 per cent pay that \$25 a year.

MR. RAMEY: Well, that was sort of the crux of my question, since you're all in the same business - how do you communicate with each other and do you get really good response rates from everybody in the business, that sort of thing? Your answer to that I guess is it's pretty good.

MR. BEDDOW: Yes.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Yes, it's just a struggle to get somebody to put the \$25 in an envelope with a stamp, you know.

MR. BEDDOW: To give you an example, the volume, I think depending on what is circulated through the organization, if it's something that is not really a hot topic, you're going to get less involvement, less response, and less activity. But if it's something like program funding, or staff and retention, or training courses, it could be as high 80 per cent or 90 per cent involvement. So I think it really depends on what the topics are at hand, but actual registered members, we're about 36 per cent.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that brings - I would just like to follow up though, I'm interested in your opinion about why only 36 per cent, other than the difficulty getting the \$25 cheque written, but that seems like a small number?

MR. BEDDOW: Demographics is probably part of it as well. We're spread out all across the province because if you're talking 36 per cent, that's province-wide, and would that be part of it?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Our executive had been comprised of people from every single region. We had started to form chapters in other portions of Nova Scotia, and we still have that to some degree but not as formally. We literally had people having their general meetings and their executive meetings all around the province and I think just, probably just the daily commitment of daily operations in running a daycare, trying to find the time for those things. So I mean people really, really, I mean we even created a

Facebook group now that people can become members so they can have a discussion board and share that way.

I really think that people are finding it's hard to find the time and we haven't suggested as an association to e-mail the \$25. So I don't think if we were to somehow stress that they have to pay the \$25 to participate, even in the e-mail go-rounds, I think we would greatly achieve a massive membership increase. We're not overly concerned about getting their \$25 because it's a non-profit association. It's just about information sharing

As I mentioned earlier, our ultimate goal is really just to share as directors, because if we can save money buying toys as a group of private - what is it, \$100 a case for the stuff to spray on your drapes for them to be flame retardant and that wasn't in anybody's budget when we all started having to spray our drapes and our nap time things. If we were to get together with the non-profit directors, all these things, whether they're salaries or anything else, if we're achieving good results sharing information as private then to have a director's group overall, it would just be even more beneficial.

We don't have time to sit down and brainstorm about increasing our membership because we're trying to run and deliver quality programs to the children. If that were ever a concern of the Standing Committee, we certainly could do a serious membership drive, or if it was a concern of the department.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I am sorry that we need to move things along, but are there any final or summary comments that you would like to make?

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: Just thank you for the opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for being here. We will now make another brief transition and our next witnesses will be from the Non-Profit Directors Association.

[The committee recessed at 10:14 a.m.]

[The committee reconvened at 10:18 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Welcome back. We will reconvene after our second recess. I would like to welcome the representatives from the Non-Profit Directors Association. If you would begin, please, by introducing yourselves.

MS. LAURIE ST. AMOUR: My name is Laurie St. Amour, I'm the Executive Director of the Wolfville Children's Centre. I have been in Wolfville as a director there for 20 years.

MS. MARGO KIRK: My name is Margo Kirk. I'm the executive director of University Children's Centre at Dalhousie University.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Welcome to you both. I understand you have a presentation which you will present now and then we'll have another opportunity for questions.

MS. KIRK: Today we've been asked to lend our thoughts about the state of child care in Nova Scotia. As has been mentioned, we very much appreciate this opportunity. We last sat here in February 2008 when we were asked to comment on the Early Learning and Child Care Plan, which was initiated in 2006. At that time, commenting was a little difficult because communication was new, it was limited to generalizations only, and many of the initiatives were in such an infant state that it was difficult to make an informed analysis. Now the main investment phase has been completed and we're looking at what we're told is more a maintenance phase at the moment.

Certainly some positive changes have been made. ECE students have had several opportunities for tuition support to gain professional training. A program grant called the Supported Child Care Grant - it was mentioned earlier as well - was initiated to support centres who had yet to develop plans for inclusion. While it does not address the need for inclusion of children with severe special needs, or those children who are medically fragile, it does allow centres to include children from a broader spectrum of ability and need - something that was not supported before.

Unfortunately, there continue to be general themes and issues that we do have concern about. Disparity does still exist. To be perfectly frank, we have not witnessed any significant policy changes since the change in government, policy which might offer equal opportunities to all children or that might enhance and encourage more community engagement. Many children are in need of support, and missing out on experiences in the early years does have an impact for the rest of life. The effect and impact the environment has on us is a fascinating emerging field called epigenetics. This is the nature and nurture concept.

This may look like a slight digression, but it is curiously relevant. Here we have two butterflies, very different. But are they? These two butterflies are actually identical. Both have the same DNA, the same genetic makeup. The difference is the environment in which they grew. One grew and formed in a wet season, the other in a dry season. The message here is that environments count. Experiences count. When we look at children and their brain development, it is the experiences in the early years that have the most impact.

In this slide we see the sensitive periods in life, and they are early in life - vision, hearing, emotional control, language development, use of symbols, peer social skills, and number concepts. As you can see, all the peaks are actually at the three-year mark or younger. If we do not maximize our efforts in meeting the developmental needs of children at this early stage, if vulnerabilities exist or are allowed to grow or are not addressed, we will all pay for it down the road.

MS. ST. AMOUR: Life course problems need to be addressed. In general, in Nova Scotia, at least compared to other jurisdictions, we do not believe we have done a very

good job at tracking the data, assessing community and family needs, nor assessing the impact of new initiatives. When the stabilization grant was introduced across the board to both non-profit and commercial centres, and then the subsequent Child Care Operating Grant, increasing staff salaries and reducing costs to parents were the two main objectives.

For example, we were told that some centres had to charge higher fees or pay lower salaries because they did not get the same grant support as other centres. These grants should have essentially eliminated that argument. But what was the actual impact of these grant initiatives? Was there a parent fee reduction in any centre, and what was the total impact on salaries? This information has certainly not been made available and I wonder whether the data - by data, I do not mean generalizations or anecdotal stories - is even available in a meaningful way to the Department of Community Services.

These two grants have since been merged and now they go by the name of the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant (ECEG), which you've also heard about earlier this morning. This is the first full year of the grant and it's a perfect opportunity for a fresh start.

Meaningful questions need to be asked. All centres now receive a substantial amount of public funds. With that come responsibility and obligation, obligation to the communities they serve, to the parents, the staff, and children, as well as government and the general public. Therefore, all centres should be required to justify programs and expenditures. More opportunities should be created to work co-operatively with the department in a meaningful way.

Sadly, we, too, were very distressed to recently hear that the program review process has been put on hold, yet this significant decision was made without any consultation or discussion with any member of the NPDA that we're aware of. The NPDA, Non-Profit Directors Association, supports such a program which has the potential to strengthen our professional image in the community; offer us the opportunity to justify, qualify and improve our programs; and allow us to fulfill our obligation for transparency as we demonstrate the responsibility we own for the well being of children. If we are ever going to move ahead and prevent some of what is being shown in this particular slide, accepting responsibility and working in community partnership is a must.

There is one misconception that continues to persist that we would also like to address. The NPDA has long advocated for equal opportunity and this slide shows one very clear reason why. The research here - and it has been duplicated - clearly shows that vulnerability in children is not merely a function of socio-economic status, or what's more commonly termed as the SES. If we continue with our isolated or targeted programs and services approach, the majority of children will miss out.

Here we see that 31.9 per cent of vulnerable children fall within the lowest SES category, certainly a very large segment. However, if we only focus on that area alone, we are in reality missing over 60 per cent of the children who are also vulnerable. Some may

argue that, okay, let's not target on the SES, but what other criteria would you choose in order to assess the potential for being at risk or vulnerable? Living in a rural versus urban area? Single versus two-parent families? Level of education of parents? How do you assess the potential of whether a parent will read to a child or interact in a meaningful way? What about the importance of social experiences? Do we target single-child families?

The basic concept of a targeted approach is that someone is in and somebody is out; that's not choice. Many of these children have avoidable vulnerabilities - that is, with support and diverse early learning experience, that percentage can be reduced. Again, the potential to save on expenditures down the road is huge.

MS. KIRK: The NPDA is committed to the development of a comprehensive delivery system for early childhood services that is based on commonly accepted standards of quality practice. These standards include, but are not limited to, the occupational standards for early childhood educators. We have a vision of a comprehensive, well-supported system which involves families in the planning and delivery of services, a system that is designed to provide any child with the opportunity to participate in developmentally-appropriate experiences that support all areas of development. But we cannot continue to work in isolation and expect meaningful change.

We would urge the Department of Community Services to move forward and openly, visibly, publicly, and formally partner with other departments such as Health - this was mentioned as well earlier - Education, even Justice and Environment, to develop public policy based on sound research and which is monitored over time and where accountability for public funds is demonstrated in program delivery, high standards of practice, and transparent financial responsibility, which includes organizations in receipt of public funds submitting annual budgets as well as closing year-end statements.

Accepting public funds should equate to accepting the responsibility of public accountability with openness and with integrity. We do recognize that interdepartmental committees already exist, however we also recognize that the status quo is not working at any level of government. Action is required. Early childhood development crosses many department and government boundaries and jurisdictions. It could be the catalyst which gets us out of the financial rut that we are in. It is time to connect the dots. Certainly we have moved beyond the notion that children are a welfare issue or that we are merely discussing somewhere that the kids can go so that parents can work and study. We are discussing early human development, an issue relevant in all levels of society. We need collaboration and coordinated effort, not single-issue, unilateral decisions - no more ad hoc initiatives.

We would like to close with an example of some of the potential at our feet and the impact interactions can have. This slide shows an infant of about 12 days old. Look closely at her face, the focus she has on her sister. The eyes are wide open; the mouth is open; there is a connection. The sister turns away, the infant's mouth is now closed, the eyes are not as bright; the look is passive, flat. Certainly in this picture there are other things to look at,

other items that should or could grab the infant's attention, but it is the human contact that held meaningful attention.

[10:30 a.m.]

The sister turns back. The infant's eyes are focused, the face is expressive, and the mouth open; even the hand position has changed. This infant is developing the capacity to build relationships and interact with others at the age of about 12 days. If nurtured and supported within the family, as well as the community, we can only imagine what this life might bring. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, some interesting ideas. I was thinking as you were making your presentation, there is a very interesting book called *The Beak of the Finch*, which describes the evolution of finches in the Galapagos Islands and how evolving weather patterns change the actual physical structure of the birds, which certainly ties into the things you have been saying. I think there is a growing body of evidence to support some of the things you're talking about.

I began to notice the speakers list. About the only person I have on it at this point is Ms. Kent.

MS. KENT: Thank you very much for that. I enjoyed your whole presentation, I had the benefit of having it a little early. That really sends the message home very clearly about your comment, and I love this. I think I'm going to take it and use it. We're discussing early human development and how to best support the whole child within the context of his or her family and community. I think you've captured everything right there, so well done on that.

I have a question around your statement, in general in Nova Scotia, at least compared to other jurisdictions, we do not believe we've done a really good job at tracking, assessing community and family needs, et cetera. I've often said that when we face challenges and decision-making, do we have all the information we need to really get a sense, the picture of what we need to make a decision on? We're not always going to get it right. It evolves, it changes, and every facility, licensed or not, every situation might be a little different, but you seem to have a good handle on the data out of all the presenters here who we have heard. I'm sure others do, but perhaps they just haven't presented it.

I wonder if you can suggest or recommend today, in other jurisdictions, models that you know have been effective? I mean, there are research programs that may collect the data or not, but are you aware of any particular provinces or other jurisdictions that you know have had a really successful rollout of a data collection on this sector, that has really come in with the information that you need? Perhaps I'd like to think you may be aware of that, because you're saying that we haven't got it.

MS. KIRK: One of the tools that has been used across the country is called the EDI, which is the Early Development Initiative. It has been used extensively in British Columbia specifically, but there also is a national initiative. It has been used in just about every province and territory. Unfortunately, Nova Scotia is sort of last on the list when it comes to participation in the program.

The EDI is a population assessment tool, it is not an individual child assessment tool. It looks at several domains including cognitive development, peer relations, language and it is usually conducted on children who are just entering school - five year-olds, six year-olds, primary, kindergarten, whatever you want to call it. What it does is it can be used as a snapshot basically for looking back, what happened in the last five years that got to where we are now.

There have been some very specific studies again, especially in B.C. They've been using the EDI for quite a few years and one example I can think of specifically was in Revelstoke. Revelstoke was an area that had a fairly high percentage of vulnerable children. By vulnerable, I mean in one of the domains, at least one of the domains that is conducted with the EDI. They were able to reduce it and one of the first results of reducing the number of children who are vulnerable in the early years, they were also able to reduce the number of special needs teachers they needed in the elementary schools when the children were five, six, seven, eight and nine.

By supporting the children when they were two and three and the families, because it does have a family component as well as obviously children don't live in isolation - in their communities in those early years, they were able to save expenditures in the school system later on. One of the main supporters of using the EDI as a population assessment tool and as a community mapping tool was the Superintendent of Schools.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Kent. Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: As they often say, a picture is worth a thousand words and I think those last slides that you presented really told a story. I even noticed it in my own grandchildren - I have one that's four and one that's one - and I really do see that kind of interaction between the two boys. It's amazing how early they start to learn, it just blows my mind. It also blows my mind that 25 pounds can take 300 pounds and turn it into mush in two seconds, but that's another story altogether.

I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on the working group and the benefit of continuing the working group. We heard what the private operators had to say. I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on the value of a working group and having a working group continue and move on all the different facets of the organizations working together.

MS. KIRK: I sat on the working group for the last year of existence and to a certain extent, I did find it to be a very useful body. One of the main concerns I had with it though was that I felt there was a lot of constraint. I was there theoretically representing the Non-Profit Directors Association and therefore I felt I was there as a representative, not as an

individual. However, a lot of the information and the meetings frequently started out with this comment: Everything we're discussing here today is confidential. So I found it very difficult being a representative and not being in a position to share any information or really ask any detailed questions with my colleagues, which in some ways to me sort of defeated the purpose of having it as a consultation body.

I think if there was opportunity to work in that capacity again, I would like to see it really stronger on the consultation, information-sharing side, as opposed to a smaller discussion group, which in affect is what it evolved into, when I was there anyway. I think it's very important that - and we commented as well - we do need meaningful discussions, but I think the discussion also has to be open and not a closed entity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramey.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you for your presentation. I spent 32 years in the education system, I worked at the reading clinic at Mount Saint Vincent with elementary kids, but I taught in the junior and senior high school systems also at the University of Alberta. I did my doctoral dissertation on work related to cognitive development, so I get that. I guess it's safe to say that.

I've also met with Theresa Griffin and others around EDI and I get that too. My question is - and I don't know if you can encapsulate this or not, I think I get the drift from the slides of where you're going here - but what are the three - I'll give you three, you can do two if you want - what are the three top things that need to be done, in your opinion, to get us where we need to be?

MS. KIRK: You mentioned the EDI. I think we really do need some sort of community assessment tool to find out exactly where we are. I think it's a little hard to move forward if you don't know where you are and therefore assess where you've been when you get there.

As I said, it is a population-based tool. Unfortunately in Nova Scotia, I understand it's been more interpreted as an individual assessment tool and therefore there are questions about informed consent versus passive consent, that kind of discussion has been on the table for awhile. Some areas in Nova Scotia have done the EDI. Several areas recovered when they had Understanding the Early Years projects. There's a very interesting project that is now underway in Inverness. They actually had 100 per cent participation in the EDI and they have developed community forums, village summit kinds of approaches and are moving forward with a very holistic approach on what the community needs from their perspective.

MR. RAMEY: That data's been collected and is available now?

MS. KIRK: Yes, it is. They've done it twice. They had 100 per cent participation and one of the reasons for that was because the teachers and the schools were very strongly

on side and actually went out and lobbied to have that done. So they have some good data there to work with at the community level.

I think the whole concept of looking at the whole child and the early human development side of it I think is really significant. I think we need to move away from, as I said, the sort of little pockets of things going on here and there and really look at the community as a whole and how we as a public can support everybody in the community.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you. Were you in the room when I was talking about departments working together, like Justice and Education and so on?

MS. KIRK: Yes.

MR. RAMEY: I assume you agree with that.

MS. KIRK: Absolutely. I would take it even further. I know that a comment was mentioned about how they, when issues come up that might impact - I would say all issues impact and therefore there should be a very formal structure of interdepartmental relationships dealing with the early years.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you. I appreciate it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I've been paying attention to the room and I think the signals I've received would take me back to Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: I'm just curious, we heard again from the private sector about staff retention and wage issues and the like. I wonder what impact those challenges have on your sector as well?

MS. ST. AMOUR: If I could speak to the individual centre that I work for, most of my staff are 10 years plus, 15 years, 20 years - 80 per cent of our budget goes directly to salaries, which encapsulates the grants. Our particular centre has been grandparented so I can appreciate that funding has not increased for us. When these grants were collapsed into one, the criteria changed in how they were delivered. Some grants we received as far back as 20 years ago were based on a 90 per cent disbursement to salaries, which they were done. Then the next grant that came 10 years later, the Stabilization Grant, that was based on 80 per cent, I believe, and now this ECE grant, there has been criteria that 65 per cent of that grant can be used for salaries. So you're coming up with all kinds of different percentages on what should be dispersed, in terms of salaries and benefits. We do know that the number one quality indicator for any child care program is the staff, so that is your largest expenditure.

Looking at your overall budget and seeing where salaries lay in there may be a better benchmark for looking at how these grants are dispersed and how the health of the

centre is, in terms of retaining its own staff. I don't know if that quite answers your question.

MR. MACLEOD: So retention is not an issue.

MS. ST. AMOUR: It's not as much an issue for my particular centre, no. We do struggle to keep salaries current and ongoing. I can surely relate, or all of us can relate, to the fact that minimum wage has gone up, which is a great thing, but it does affect salary scale. However, that is something that you continually strive to always address.

We have to look at what the cost of care is. We know that the true cost of care is not being - because we are still a user-pay system, that's how child care is delivered, that the parent fee represents a component of the revenue and there are different abilities for families to be able to pay that. The more that fee goes up, then we start to lose ground with families that still need it.

[10:45 a.m.]

To me, an approach that is cross-departmental, that looks at the family, the child, our social policy in how we want to see ourselves, needs to take a leap, take a step forward so that it become part of the system. We were very close to that a few years ago, almost to the brink of a national system, in looking at how child care or early childhood education could be delivered not only in our province but in our country and we didn't quite make it. It would be, for me, that's where we need to go, we need to be supporting not just based on user-pay but based on an entitlement or knowing that early childhood education is good for all and needs to be given to all.

MR. MACLEOD: Thank you very much and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. MacLeod. I think we have time for one more question. Mr. MacLellan.

MR. MACLELLAN: Thank you, ladies, for your presentation. My question is similar to that of my friend and colleague, the member for Lunenburg West. It takes me a while to catch on so I just want to sort of reiterate his points, maybe, and get your feel. What I've learned, as the Opposition Critic for Community Services, is that the more you dig into these issues, the more complicated they get. I know for sure that the department and the legislators, the 52 MLAs, certainly the minister, we understand the gravity and the importance of these issues and when it comes to child development and early learning, they are a priority, I think, and they should be and probably more of a priority.

Every time there's a presentation, when we learn new information like today, it was very helpful and again, with the statistics and the information, it adds to that picture in my mind and certainly in the committee members' minds. Again, it becomes increasingly complicated. What would your advice be or what would your final words be for the committee to take away if you were the Minister of Community Services, or if you had 10

minutes with the minister and she said okay, list your priorities, what can we do? Your information is spot-on, your ideals and your philosophy on where we should go is great. What are your suggestions? Where do we start and what's our plan? That's Alfie's question.

MS. KIRK: That happened the last time, maybe he should be cut off with the questions. Wow, what a big question. As we mentioned, the Non-Profit Directors Association has a very long history and it has always supported a very open approach to early childhood development and a holistic one. I think one of the top priorities would be to join up the departments, to have something that is the main focus, the main priority is children under six. That would mean duplication of efforts might be eliminated, it would mean that everybody is looking at the same page as far as development and it would mean that perhaps funds could be streamlined or directed appropriately so that - again as I mentioned, the Revelstoke experience and the slide that showed the health of people later in life, that's reality. And Health is definitely struggling with their budget - everybody is - but Health is in very dire straits, and education is right behind.

So if there was some way to front-load the system, you're going to save - it may take a few years, but some of the returns would be immediate, some of the returns would be within five years, and some of the returns would be we don't have as many juveniles in juvenile hall right now. That would be a starting point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that probably takes us to the time that we have. Thank you very much for both the questions from the committee and for your presentation responses. Is there a summary of any kind that you would like to make, other than the one you just made?

MS. ST. AMOUR: We look forward to hearing what will come from . . .

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A good response.

MS. ST. AMOUR: And thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for being here. That brings us to the end of our witnesses, I think. The only other item that I have on the agenda is the date of our next meeting, unless any member of the committee has something else. Is there anything we've neglected? I think the only other item then is our next meeting on January 11, 2011, in the afternoon I think, Kim?

MS. KIM LANGILLE:(Legislative Committee Clerk) Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: At 1:00 p.m. Our witnesses on that occasion will . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: If the House isn't in session, Mr. Chairman. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Then we shall revert to the morning perhaps, but our witnesses on that occasion will be in relation to Child Protection and Adoption Services.

Thank you very much. We stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:51 a.m.]