

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

Committee Room 1

Nova Scotia Association of Women's Centres

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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[Mr. Jim Morton was replaced by Ms. Becky Kent.]
[Mr. Maurice Smith was replaced by Mr. Mat Whynott.]
[Mr. Brian Skabar was replaced by Mr. Leonard Preyra.]
[Mr. Geoff MacLellan was replaced by Mr. Andrew Younger.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Leadley
Administrative Support Clerk

WITNESSES

Nova Scotia Association of Women's Centres

Ms. Lucille Harper, Executive Director,
Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association

Ms. Bernadette MacDonald, Executive Director,
Tri-County Women's Centre

Ms. Jeanne Faye, Coordinator,
Women's Centres Connect!

Ms. Arlene MacDonald, Executive Director,
Pictou County Women's Centre

Ms. Della Longmire, Executive Director,
The Women's Place Resource Centre

Ms. Joanne Jefferson, Community Relations Coordinator
Second Story Women's Centre

Ms. Myrene Keating Owen, Executive Director,
LEA Place Women's Resource Centre

Ms. Louise Smith-Macdonald, Executive Director
Every Women's Centre

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2011

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. GARY RAMEY (Chairman): Good afternoon, we'll begin the meeting. First of all, I want to mention that my name is Gary Ramey. The chairman of this committee is Jim Morton. Jim had some surgery and is recovering - recovering well, I might add - but wasn't able to be here today. I'm the vice-chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services so I'll be chairing this meeting. Today we're hearing from the Nova Scotia Association of Women's Centres.

What I'd like to do just before we begin, if I may, is start perhaps on my left and just go around the table here and have everybody introduce himself or herself, so we know who is speaking to us and who we are speaking to.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I should mention that we have some new members on the committee. I'd like to mention that one new member is Ms. Karen Casey - welcome, Karen, to our committee - as well as Gary Burrill and Brian Skabar. Brian is actually in another meeting right now and has been replaced by another member.

Normally what we do at the meetings and if this is acceptable to the committee - if you have a presentation, we listen to your presentation first and then we have questions afterwards. Is that acceptable to you folks? Okay.

Just before we do that, I also want to make sure to welcome all members who are visiting with us today, including the canis domesticus here, the quadruped Molly, a beautiful dog off to the side there. I hope you enjoy your visit with us and some of us will be around for a few minutes afterwards, if you wish to speak to us. With that, I'll turn it over to our presenters.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: I have the privilege of starting the discussion and the topic around women's centres and what women's centres are all about here in Nova Scotia. As I'm going through our presentation, Jeanne is going to be moving the slides along.

The women's centres are independent, community-based and community-led organizations. We're all led by our communities with our community boards. We provide services and programs to women and adolescent girls, and on a very broad range of issues and crisis situations. That is really one of our major strengths - the fact that we are a very broad entry point for women and adolescent girls.

We are both women-centred and women-supportive. As you see from the map here, we have eight women's centres in Nova Scotia and all women's centres are represented here today. Louise Smith-Macdonald from Every Woman's Centre in Sydney is, we think, on the bus and will be here; she's hoping to represent herself here. We cover the province very well. There are certainly gaps in terms of where we see women's centres are needed, but we try to fill those gaps to the best of our ability.

Even though women's centres are autonomous organizations, we all can say that we do these three things: we do intervention services, we do prevention services, and community development. By those three entry points, we cover a lot of services and we cover a lot of needs in women's lives in our communities. So it's the balance between those three that gives us our strength.

I just wanted to talk about what that direct service looks like. One direct service is individual support counselling, where we see women one to one on a broad range of issues. That one-on-one counselling is a very important role for us, because it helps address the intervention at that entry point so it doesn't get bigger. If a woman is dealing with a mental health issue, if she's dealing with poverty, if she's dealing with having her power cut off, we're able to be there with our support counsellors and our intervention services so that it doesn't get bigger than it needs to get - so our individual support counselling, our crisis intervention, the information and referrals with our many community partners in our community.

We also do what we call individual advocacy and accompaniment. A woman may need accompaniment to a service, to court, to an appointment that she does not want a family member to go with her, so we can go with her. We'll be writing letters on her behalf and an example could be that she's dealing with child support and she doesn't know the

system, she doesn't know where to go, she doesn't know how to write the letter. We're there with her as her advocate and it's a very crucial role that we play in our communities.

Another part of those direct services is our programming. The programming within each women's centre is reflected as to the needs in that community. What we're doing in Yarmouth and in the Tri-County area is different from other communities. So we reflect what's needed in our community.

We do outreach as much as possible. We know the geography of Nova Scotia can be very challenging in terms of doing that outreach, so often we have to be looking at additional dollars in order to do that and do it well. We'll get into describing that a little more later.

We do community education on a very broad range of issues and concerns, and community development initiatives are a huge part of our work as well. It's balancing those three entry points: intervention, prevention, and community development.

So what are those entry points that we have that women come into the women's centres for? Poverty is huge. The people in this room know very well the situation in our province - poverty is a big issue in our communities. Economic concerns, education, training, workforce, parenting issues, relationships, sexual violence, family dynamics, and as you know, as well, mental health issues are very high in this province and we see it a lot at our women's centres.

We work with our community and government agencies. We get referrals from Mental Health and Addiction Services, so we work in partnership with those institutions that are maybe doing the more therapeutic counselling, and we're at the community level to assist with all of those other things that happen in a woman and her family's life.

We have women come from all economic backgrounds, all educational backgrounds; everyone uses women's centres in our community. We have women with long-term physical and cognitive disabilities, we have single mothers, teens at risk, and women who maybe don't have any major issues but something came up, like suddenly they're going through a separation or something came up in their lives, they come to women's centres. Maybe it's just about helping them find the service that's appropriate for them, but they see women's centres as that entry point to understanding the system.

I hope that has given you a snapshot of what women's centres do. We're a very valuable service in our community.

I'm going to turn it over now to Lucille, who will talk about the planning processes and sort of how we got from what has happened maybe in the last 10 years in terms of women's centres and our relationship with the provincial government.

MS. LUCILLE HARPER: Thank you. (Interruptions) We're just saying this is a little out of sync here, so let's put that one up first. Do you want to speak to that?

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: Yes, sure. This is a very good graph in terms of looking at our approach. In the middle we have women and adolescent girls and then we have our community development, intervention, and prevention. So within those three things we have, again, just a different way of looking at how we approach our work. We have the outreach programs, direct services, community development, and community education. From that circle we have one of those entry points that bring women into the circle and it really is everything from poverty to mental health issues.

Because the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre is very HRM-focused, of course, they can - women's centres are more and more leading the way in terms of addressing sexual violence in our community. The Antigonish Women's Centre has certainly set the bar in terms of services around sexual violence in the rural community in Nova Scotia and has gone to the point of changing and extending their name in recognition of that service that they provide. We work very closely with the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre and they are an incredible service in our community.

Something that we would really like to address with the Province of Nova Scotia is how we enhance and ensure that we have those services in our rural communities, so that women and adolescent girls feel safe to come forward when they've been sexually violated.

I'll turn it over to Lucille now to talk about the planning.

MS. LUCILLE HARPER: So I'm going to do a little walk through history for a few minutes. We've had women's centres in our province really since 1975; I believe Pictou County Women's Centre is one of the longest-standing women's centres in our province. Many of the rest of us developed in the early 1980s, so we've been around for a long time.

Over the years we've done a lot of planning in various ways with government and in collaboration with government. In part there has always been a question about how we can really fit women's centres within government services, partly because to date in our province there has not been a focus on women's services in particular. So we've tried to fit women's centres into different categories because we don't really have a focus clearly on the well-being of women in our province - certainly the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women which is an invaluable resource. But I just want to say that, in part, it has been some of the struggles over the years in how do we see women's centres, how do we support women's centres, what do women's centres really mean within the constellation of services within Nova Scotia.

[1:15 p.m.]

So since 1999 - prior to 1999, in 1998, we underwent a fairly extensive planning process with government in looking at what it is that women's centres do. Out of that, we submitted a planning report to the Department of Community Services, and a number of other departments that were around the table, that looked at the fact that women's centres don't clearly fall within any one given department. Some of our services really relate to health, so therefore to the Department of Health and Wellness; certainly around poverty and the work that we do with women on social assistance and with youth, under the Department of Community Services; some of the re-entry programs we do and training programs that we do, so Education, Labour and Workforce Development, et cetera.

It's because we're so multi-faceted and the fact that we're also situated primarily in rural communities that have made it so integral to not only the constellation of services, but the well-being of our communities. But that has been kind of a challenge for government to get its head around.

So we had done this whole report in 2000. In 2002-03, as some of you may recall, there was a redesign of services that was being undertaken by the Department of Community Services, and at that time there was a plan to reduce services in the province. So partly it was to reduce the number of transition houses that were available and because it wasn't clearly articulated, we weren't quite sure what would be happening with women's centres. There was an idea that maybe women's centres are so similar to transition houses that we could just fit them together. Well, that really pissed off women in the province. (Laughter)

So at that time there was a huge outcry from women across the province and from communities who said, we need our women's centres, we need our transition houses - these services are not the same. We need them both, we want to have them both. So we were sent away at that time to go ahead and do another planning process and to come back to the Department of Community Services with some of our recommendations around the needs for women's centres. We undertook a joint planning process with transition houses, women's centres, and men's intervention programs which very clearly distinguished what the three services were, what the three services did, and why each were required in order to address the multiplicity of issues relating to violence, poverty, et cetera, around the province.

One of the things that was very clearly identified within the planning report was that women's centres use a very effective multi-dimensional approach that ensures that not only immediate crises are addressed, but that it invests in capacity-building over the long term to prevent the use of more costly services. As Bernadette said, for example, we are a primary referral source for mental health so every day we receive referrals from mental health to our women's centre, particularly for anything that has to do with sexual violence or childhood sexual abuse, but also with numerous other issues as well.

Mental Health is really overstretched. They've got a long waiting list and the way they impart - part of the reason they value the women's centre is because we can work with women and keep them going in their lives by doing the day-to-day problem-solving. So were we not there to do that, those mental health issues in particular escalate to the point where then you are using very costly services, particularly if you have to admit someone to in-patients. We could do example after example of that but that's probably one that's good enough.

Women's centres are accessible, flexible, versatile, located in local communities, and our services are really designed to meet the needs of the women in our communities. When you come to a women's centre, you will see women from 13, 14, 15 years old all the way up to their 70s. Each woman has her own individual needs and those are met individually.

We're effective and we're cost-efficient both in the short term and in the long term, and I think that has been quite well recognized by government, that the services you get from women's centres are extremely cost-effective.

The other thing we do is we work very closely and co-operatively in our community with other agencies and we are an essential link in the service network, because we provide quality services, because of our expertise, and because we are a multi-issue entry point, which means you can come in, you don't have to have a particular issue. Perhaps someone is coming in because they require housing. That's great, we can deal with the housing issue, but the reason they're requiring housing is because their relationship has changed. The reason their relationship has changed is because there has been some form of abuse. So it's really kind of going through the different pieces so that we can work with a woman holistically. If women's centres weren't there, there would be a significant gap in this province in services for women and girls.

We were talking about - and I'll get back a little bit to collaboration, because right now we're hearing a lot about efficiencies and the need for collaboration in this current fiscal climate. We said, wow, I think we were the authors of collaboration. If we were to map out the partnerships of each of our women's centres within the community, they run very, very deeply and across all sectors.

The investment of Nova Scotia in women's centres enables tremendous opportunities for women and particularly as we see women coming in, in a period of crisis, being able to deal with that, being able to then say, okay, the crisis is over, now what is it that I need to do? Is it education? Is it retraining? Where do I need to go next to find the support to move there?

We've got stories of women coming in and eight years down the road - because it's not an easy process - coming in as a single mom, and eight years down the road they've got a university education, they're working, their lives are just completely different. That's because they've gotten the kind of support that they've gotten.

Women's centres are always at the margin of funding, so we've been chronically underfunded for many, many, many, many years. The demand for our services is increasing so there's an increased demand for our direct services, for doing outreach in more communities, certainly for sexual assault programming, for youth programs, for re-entry, and for new women's centres and satellites.

We hear a lot right now about whether it's the federal situation or the provincial fiscal situation. I guess what we really need to understand is that women's centres are the place that are really able to catch women who are falling through the cracks. So as there are cuts to services, as there's fewer staff in different departments, then as we go through particularly challenging economic times, as we cut rural infrastructure, as we pull services out of different communities because we need to rationalize services, et cetera - all that creates a concomitant increase in the demand on women's centres. So the requests for our services continue to rise. I think it's really important to know when we're talking about a rationalization of services that, in some ways, we really are the stop-gap measure.

There's a huge toll on the human resources of women's centres. Staff are spread very thin in order to be able to continue to meet the demands for our services. So in our planning reports it was recognized that core services of women's centres are distinct, essential, and integral to the community network of services and that we need full support and full funding in order to be able to continue to provide those services. That has been our ongoing struggle, to try to establish a level of funding that allows us to have the staffing that allows us to meet the demand. I really want to put that on the table at this time because I want to get back to that, but I'm almost done.

As I said, we are so good at collaborating. We collaborate in our communities, we collaborate with government, we participate wherever we're asked to participate - in consultations, in program review, et cetera. So as government departments are recognizing the need to work more cross-sectorial and to build and strengthen collaborative efforts, we're really there with you and willing to participate in that work. We need to recognize, as well, that women's centres are struggling right now, fiscally, to provide the services that we're providing. So we see opportunities to do future collaborations, we see opportunities for community development initiatives to advance long-term solutions to local socio-economic problems and really, as I say, because most of us are in rural communities, we understand rural so well. We understand what's happening in our rural communities and are so committed to keeping our rural communities alive and vibrant.

One of the things that we really recognize is that women are the lifeblood of our rural communities. It's not often recognized when it comes to policy or when it comes to supports, but you can take the men out of communities, which we do all across Nova Scotia and send them out West, or send them offshore, or send them to Ontario for parts of the year and they come back because the women are here and the families are here. When you take the women out of the communities, the community begins to die.

What's happening right now in our rural communities is that there are women who are struggling evermore to keep up with all of the volunteer, sort of lifeblood work of the communities. Whether it's the home and school or whether it's the hospital auxiliaries, or the church groups, or whatever it is that women do - which is a lot - along with getting people to where they need to go to get groceries and making sure this person has food when they're not well, et cetera. Yet we are really lacking in this province the kind of supports and the kind of vision that make it possible for women to continue doing that work. When we talk about women's centres, we're one of the organizations that really sees the need to be supporting women at all of the different levels in order to be able to keep our communities alive and vibrant.

We've heard Rick Williams a couple of times now doing his presentation on the fiscal situation of the province. We understand that at this time, there are some fiscal challenges. We're hearing again and again, efficiencies, collaboration, sometimes we're hearing about clustering of services, looking for duplication, et cetera.

[1:30 p.m.]

There has been a request that has come to the voluntary sector, which women's centres as not-for-profit organizations are certainly part of, to look within our own organizations for efficiencies and ways we can collaborate. What we want to say is that because we have been chronically underfunded for the length of time that we've been around, we're as efficient as you're going to get and we're the model for efficiency. Also, we are experts at collaborating. One of the things that we want to say is that what we need and what we need from the province at this time is to really support our organizations.

If you make a cut to the funding of women's centres, you are hurting the most vulnerable in our communities. So because we are so close to the line, you are removing supports for high-risk youth; you are removing supports for single mothers who are living in poverty; you are removing supports for people who have diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health issues; you are removing absolutely critical supports for survivors of sexual violence, childhood sexual abuse; and the list goes on within our communities. We're saying don't do this, because what you're going to do is you're going to undermine what is the basis, in many ways, of holding our communities together.

The other thing that I just want to add and then I'm done is that in the presentation that came from Rick Williams - okay, a presentation that was done by the Federation of Community Organizations, and you probably know all of this, identified that in the not-for-profit or the voluntary sector there are 35,000 people in Nova Scotia, taking out the biggies - I can't remember what he called them, the "quasies" like the health boards, et cetera - which is larger than forestry, larger than oil and gas. It's a huge sector and in that sector, 86 per cent of that sector are women. That sector is more highly educated than the sector across Canada, than the Canadian average and it's underpaid, it's more lowly paid than the sector in the national average. So here in Nova Scotia, you've got this highly educated, underpaid, very large sector that is doing critical work in this province.

Now, out of a \$9 billion budget, \$150 million is going to this sector; \$150 million out of a \$9 billion budget is pretty small when you're looking at the work that's being done. We fully understand that the province is committed - whether or not we agree that this is the right track - to balancing the budget in 2013-14. How you balance that budget is going to be really crucial to whether or not you are going to create a vibrant Nova Scotia or you're going to create larger and larger and larger pockets of people who are living in deep poverty, with issues that are going to be hugely costly too.

What we're saying is you are getting really good value for the dollar with women's services. You're getting excellent value for the dollar with women's centres and what we really need is the support in order to be able to do the work that we're doing. So we're looking for you to do that.

MS. JEANNE FAYE: I'm trying to get this woman to speak, I don't know if I can do that. No, I guess it's not going to happen, sorry about that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would you like to continue to try to have that come up right now?

MS. FAYE: No, that's okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are we ready to open the floor for questions? Just before I do that, I'd just like to mention to the committee that we have until 3:00 p.m. and I need about 10 minutes at the end for some regular housekeeping committee business. So we certainly can go as long as we want to up until that point, so hopefully we'll have plenty of time. I already have a speakers list. The first person who indicated was Mr. Whynott and then Ms. Casey after that.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: Thank you for coming today. I'm sure I can speak for everybody around this table here today on the work that you do. I certainly notice the importance that you play in the work that I do as an MLA, because we are sometimes the first point of contact for some people who are in a bad situation.

Also, my own personal experience - in fact, in 1992, my mother got me out of an abusive situation, lived in Chrysalis House for over two months, and I wouldn't be sitting where I am today if it wasn't for transition homes in this province - or my mom, of course. So I certainly understand the importance of the work that you do. My mom is a single parent of three boys - of course, my brothers are 20 years older than me - and the work that you do is incredible. Like I said, if it wasn't for the work that you did for my family, I wouldn't be here today, so I do appreciate that.

My question is around services in different parts of the province. You offer a lot of services but is there a service that is potentially maybe offered more in one part versus another part of the province? Or it pretty generic across Nova Scotia?

MS. HARPER: The services as described by Bernadette, which are the core services, so everybody offers counselling, everybody offers programming, so it's in the programming area where there are some differences across the province. For example, some women's centres offer transition to employment programs, others don't. Some women's centres have more services directly related to sexual violence than others. Some women's centres do a bit more work with youth or do work with youth a little bit differently. By and large, the services are the same, but it's in the programming that you would see some of those differences that really respond to the needs of the community.

MR. WHYNOTT: Are there areas of the province where one service would be used more than others? Rural versus urban, or do you see it differently between urban or rural?

MS. HARPER: We don't have an urban women's centre. I mean it depends on how you think about Sydney. (Laughter) So if Sydney is urban . . .

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: We'll leave it alone. That's a whole other committee meeting. (Laughter)

MS. HARPER: There's not a women's centre in Halifax. There is a women's centre in HRM, which is Sheet Harbour. I don't think Sheet Harbour thinks of itself as being urban or necessarily well able to serve downtown Halifax. There's a real need there, there's a real gap. We're really hoping that there will be a women's centre developed.

As far as one used more than another, all the women's centres are extremely well used. The way women's centres do their work is a little bit different depending on where they are, so some women's centres do more outreach, for example, but all of the women's centres are extremely well-used.

MR. WHYNOTT: Okay. Can I have just one more?

MR. CHAIRMAN: One more.

MR. WHYNOTT: I guess I want to go back to a particular change. In the most recent legislative session we saw a change in the Residential Tenancies Act, which I believe was around the issue of tenants who need to sever their lease due to domestic violence, that sort of thing, around financial obligations. What's your response to that change coming forward?

MS. HARPER: To keep someone who is trying to leave a situation of violence tied to a lease is really an untenable situation, so to change that to allow someone to be able to break a lease makes a lot of sense.

MR. WHYNOTT: Is it a good thing?

MS. HARPER: Yes, it's a good thing.

MR. WHYNOTT: Great.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Whynott. Ms. Casey.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to Bernadette and Lucille, thank you for your presentation. Well done and with passion, I have to tell you that.

You talked about the ability and the history you have of working with other agencies, government and community agencies. You will recall one of the recommendations in the Nunn report was looking at five major government agencies or departments working together because an overlap of services and I think you've identified that.

I guess my question to you is, in your working with government or in your ask of government, have you sensed any kind of a sharing of those resources that you would be looking for across those five departments?

MS. HARPER: Way back in 1998, the idea was to have multi-department funding that would come through one department, so it was to recognize that it would be very good for funding to come from Justice, Education, Health, Community Services and whatever it was that . . .

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: HPP.

MS. HARPER: Yes. So that was the model that was actually put forward in 1999-2000. It's interesting that it's those departments that really share, in some ways, a joint responsibility for the well-being of children, families, and individuals around the province.

With respect to the way women's centres are funded, no, there hasn't been a change in that. What that could look like, what has that looked like, really, coming out of the Nunn report and the Nunn Commission - it's interesting because we're sitting at a lot of tables that have come together around child and youth through there and seeing some quite positive things that have happened that have been cross-departmental in terms of collaboration. I think - and you can tell me whether I'm right or wrong - that departments are just beginning to learn how to collaborate within departments, let alone across departments and then with the broader community.

I think we've got some ways to go. If the outcome of that became multi-department funding that supported women's centres services or women's services in new and innovative ways, I think it could be positive. I really think we have a ways to go, though, around really putting sort of meat to the bones of collaboration, I would say. Is that . . .

MS. CASEY: Yes. Did you want to add something?

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: If I could just add to that, as well. It's our experience that a lot of that is happening at the community level and then the department representatives come to the community table to address some of that child and youth strategy, the Nunn Commission report. Our work with homeless youth in the tri-county area is a really good example of that. Now we have Addiction and Mental Health Services setting up an outreach office so that they can reach the street youth, the more highly vulnerable youth at the youth shelter.

[1:45 a.m.]

So as a community it's very action-oriented, it brings the departments to the table, to stop spinning their wheels and to be very action-oriented. That's the beauty of our role in doing community development, that we move that into the action stage and out of the blueprint and into real, concrete actions.

MS. CASEY: If I could, and I won't answer your question specifically but I think my observation would be the same as yours, that departments become very independent. I think the recommendation in the Nunn report was very clear - you have to break down those barriers and those silos, and the responsibility for bringing that recommendation to the table and to bring the departments together - the lead on that was Community Services.

I think what I'm hearing from you is that bringing those departments to the table is being driven by the communities rather than by - it's coming from the bottom up and if that's the way you have to get it, then all the more power to you. I think if we're looking at a time when we have to be careful about the resources we have and how we best use them, we can't have duplication of services, we can't have overlap and we can't have programs operating independent of or in competition, perhaps, for the funds.

I guess I would say to you, continue the drive from the bottom up, if that will make the difference. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Casey.

MS. HARPER: Can I just say, because I think you've got a really - I think you're opening a very important conversation and part of that conversation, you know, duplication gets sort of thrown around. You can look at services and say, aren't the Lions the same as the Kinsmen? When you get down to community it really is the need to understand the differences in what it is that particular organizations are providing and delivering. Where there's a lack of understanding often is at the government level. I just want to give one example around violence prevention programs with youth. Women's centres have been delivering healthy relationships programs for youth across the province, in schools, approved by the Department of Education, certainly for the healthy relationships for youth curriculum, et cetera.

When we see a recommendation coming from government that says, we really need to be delivering healthy relationships programs, what we say is that these programs are being delivered in parts of the province, for example, in some school boards, every single school has a program in that particular school board. That doesn't mean that all school boards have the programs, but certainly Tri-County has 12 schools, Antigonish has 10 schools and we could go around and could say how many schools have these programs now.

Why isn't somebody coming to us? We keep knocking at the door saying, we're doing these programs, can you please look at these programs and support these programs and take the best practices from what is happening in community and then deliver it, as opposed to saying, we need to deliver a program, we're going to develop one here and then go out and deliver it in the province and get rid of the ones that are already happening in the community.

When we're talking about the need to collaborate, that need to collaborate is really opening and recognizing what is already being done and valuing it, I think.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Younger.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Thank you very much. I want to ask a couple of questions related to things that came up in the presentation. One of them was, you had talked quite a bit about efficiencies in government and looking for efficiencies, and I tend to agree with you, you're probably about as efficient as you're ever going to get, maybe too efficient. What I'm wondering is when the government looks at cutting their budgets, for example - whether it's Community Services, Education or Health and Wellness - there are services that seem to disappear that people are still expecting. Have you found, historically, that people come to you looking for some of those services that are now no longer offered by government?

MS. HARPER: Does somebody over there want to speak to that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, if somebody is going to speak could they come up to the microphone so we can hear what they say. I apologize for having to get you to do that, but it's just that we can't get good audio if we don't have somebody at the table. Could I please have you introduce yourself to the group before you speak?

MS. ARLENE MACDONALD: Sure, my name is Arlene MacDonald and I'm with the Pictou County Women's Centre out of New Glasgow. When services by government are cut, a clear example in our community of New Glasgow, is our job re-entry program. There have been cuts to our local career centre, they're not doing the same work that they once did and so we are seeing people coming to us for some of the help that they probably would have offered at one point and they were a federally-funded organization and that whole transition to the province has had an effect on them, so that's a clear example.

In the schools, that was a really good example of what we're offering in the schools and getting calls from teachers to come in and do things that are part of their curriculum, but they're not able to offer for whatever reasons.

MR. YOUNGER: So do I assume correctly that you don't end up getting more budget from either the federal or the provincial money to help deliver these extra services?

MS. ARLENE MACDONALD: No, our services are very streamlined and they're run at bare bones.

MR. YOUNGER: So when these services are either downloaded by the government or effectively downloaded just because of community expectation, it might not be a government department calling you and saying, sorry, you need to offer this service, it just may be there is a void in the community, particularly in a rural community. What pressures does that place on your organization?

MS. HARPER: The pressures are huge in the rural communities. Another example, and we could speak almost anywhere for this - Sheet Harbour is another good example of when cuts are made or efficiencies are carried out in various departments a lot of decisions are made according to population. If you're going to start cutting staff, you will be pulling them out of the more rural parts. For example, Canso has lost all kinds of services, we're one of the few organizations that actually goes down to Canso and delivers a service one day a week. You see that pulling back and that retraction from the more rural parts of the different communities. In that case, we're absolutely asked to step in to provide a myriad of services.

The other place - and it's not so much a closing of service, but it's an over-stressed service - mental health is an area where there is a huge call for mental health services. They have really big waiting lists, so really the downloading pressure on the women's centres is very significant when it comes to mental health. What we're seeing increasingly is that, not only are many of the women we are seeing facing a number of different issues but their situations are complex, they take a long time to work through. The increase in complexity has been huge and then that, in itself, is another whole tax on the resources of women's centres because it's not a matter of providing somebody with some information. The level of support is really significant, it is ongoing and it can be long term.

For many women in all of our women's centres, we really become in some ways the home base. We can be the address, we can be the telephone number or the place where someone wants to come in and say, hey, I'm still alive, I'm still out there and to have someone say wow, it's good to see you. Those pieces are really significant and I think Sydney is one of the best examples of a home-base women's centre for many, many women in the community, but it's true for all women's centres. It's hard to say exactly what that correlation is, but it's clearly there, the demand for services.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: I'd also like to add to this discussion. For instance, we do a program for women dealing with addictions and our approach is a harm-reduction approach, so some of the women may still be using. Whereas the more professional services need women to be clean for X amount of weeks, that isn't our approach, our approach is harm reduction. We get referrals from the institutions to our program, because of our approach.

Is that a downloading? Maybe it is. Maybe the professional services need to look at their approach. Are we in a position to challenge that? I don't think so, but we're certainly in a situation where we can ensure that our program is inclusive and open so that it's a model that works with women. Street drugs is a huge problem in Yarmouth and all our rural areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Younger, do you have a short one?

MR. YOUNGER: Sure, I'll just ask one follow-up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. YOUNGER: I know that obviously as a result you spend a lot of time applying for funding and so forth at different levels of government, municipal, provincial, federal. I'm wondering what happens when you're successful, of course, getting funding at one level, but then you don't get it at another and I know women's centres are involved in this example, although it's more of a youth thing, SHIFT in Yarmouth, for example, you got federal funding to build a building, so you can have a building, but you can't offer the programs because the province can't or won't provide you the funding. I'm just wondering how much of an impact that is and maybe what the status of that is.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: Well right now we open the doors and as of last count, which was last Thursday, I believe, we had four youth who were using the SHIFT housing services. The community has released (Inaudible) in terms of fundraising and we are in a position where the federal government really wants us to succeed and we're looking at - it's called transitional funding, so we're looking at additional funding for the next fiscal year. We don't have that contract signed yet.

We don't have a per diem as such but we have the housing component that these youth would be given if they were put up at a hotel or something. Between the community fundraising and the dollars under the housing component of the ESIA policy, so we're just going one month at a time. The doors are open, we have trained staff and things are moving along.

I encourage all political Parties to really look at the Child and Youth Strategy, the Nunn report, which clearly identified homelessness as one of the underlying issues affecting youth in Nova Scotia. Again, the approach at SHIFT is a harm reduction model,

so it's not like three strikes and you're out. It's like working with the youth and helping them to develop those goals and healthy lifestyles and all of that.

I would just like to add, in terms of those dollars, I was just quickly adding up and I think we have - I wish Karen was here, who is keeping our books - I think we have about \$600,000 that is coming from different pots, not counting our operational funding from the province. It's an exercise in trust, in some ways, that the federal government looks at community and community organizations to carry out some of their mandates. So we have funding under the HPS - the Homelessness Partnering Strategy - we have funding under Health Canada, so they look to community to have that foundation that we have because of our operational funding. Then from that we lever funding because we have a basis of trust.

We're one of the larger employers - we have 22 people on staff and for Yarmouth that is pretty big. The not-for-profit sector is a huge generator of funds, so to take the underpinnings that keep us strong, to start to pull those out, you are starting to question the trust that the federal government has in us. We're an essential component in our community, not only to be helping women but to be an economic generator.

[2:00 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Younger. I am noticing on the clock there that we've got about one more hour until I have to start the basic committee business that we have. I've got a very robust speakers' list; you've generated a lot of questions here.

The next one, I'll just mention it's Mr. Preyra, Mr. Burrill, Mr. MacLeod, Mr. Whynott and Ms. Kent. We might put Ms. Kent before you because you've already had a kick at the can there, Mr. Whynott, but we'll make sure we get you in. Mr. Preyra.

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really have two comments and a question. Lucille and Bernadette, I know your presentation was cast as an explanation of what women's centres do but I think really on both sides of the table here we have no doubt that women's centres really serve a tremendous need in the community. There's no question that they're a vital resource. The question is, how do we integrate them better into providing services, maybe even rely less on women's centres to provide certain types of services?

I know that you, in particular, have done a lot on both the advocacy side and on the service side. The last time we met in Antigonish, I went over my notes of things that we had talked about and I just want to comment on them. You had identified the Employment Support and Income Assistance program as part of a challenge and the question of redesigning that, in particular, getting women and girls access to post-secondary education.

That process is now well underway and I'm not sure if you've been involved in those consultations but it was one of the things I had checked off as things that we needed to follow up on, the question of transition house funding, maybe improving it a little bit, putting in a more stable basis, setting up a domestic violence court, making the police more aware of sexual assault and strengthening that partnership, integrating immigrant women more into the community, providing services. I look at some of them and I said, we've sort of chipped away at some of that over the last couple of years and so you know some things are happening.

The housing strategy is another thing that you talked about. We haven't really made a lot of progress but it's still something that is in the works. Certainly the youth mental health issue is something that remains a problem. I think you were trying to get a house at the time. It's nice to see that some things we made progress on, but there's still a lot of work to be done. There's no question that the Antigonish women's centre, in particular, something I've seen, especially sexual assault - I forget the name of the room now but I see people coming through there. My point is, we have made some progress, but you're also doing great work and we really appreciate that.

I also wanted to have a little comment on my constituency in Halifax. I know we don't have a women's centre but I think in part, because of the different situations at the various women's centres - I think in Halifax in particular we do have a lot of specialized resources that are available. The university women's centres, for example, the sexual assault is Avalon, there's Adsum, so I think we have a huge advantage over the women's centres outside Halifax. You're a community health centre in general and I suspect that's mostly because you don't serve only women and girls, there are lots of other people I saw coming through your doors there, too, but it is an important service.

I have a question, though, a lot I can say by way of comment but I do have a question and that relates to the Nunn inquiry. The Nunn inquiry has come up now several times. One of the things Nunn said and I think if there's one thing that stands out in Nunn is that a lot of these services are available in various communities, maybe not as much in Yarmouth and Antigonish, but they are available. The lesson of Nunn was that we had a hard time connecting people to those services. I think that's where women's centres come in, to a certain extent, that they provide a useful navigation as well.

I want to ask you about integrating services. Lucille, you mentioned that a couple of times, about the difficulty governments have in integrating those services where, on the one hand, having the women's centres provide those services and, on the other hand, having the women's centres refer them to government and having government do it. Is there an integrated service delivery model, if I can use that phrase, that you like that works better or is there a women's centre where that integration occurs and it occurs well and is a model that we can build on?

MS. HARPER: I'm trying to understand a little bit, exactly what you are envisioning when you are saying integrated.

MR. PREYRA: I'm just trying to think of, like Nunn talked about youth mental health, for example. He said - I forget the phrase - the system missed several opportunities to help that family. So the question is, well, why didn't they get that service in time and what could we do to do early detection and prevention? It seems to me that the women's centres often, although they don't want to do it, end up meeting people in crisis situations, so what do we do in the early stages to integrate . . .

MS. HARPER: I think there are some examples, so is there a model that I know of? Not a model that I can say, oh, check out this Web site and there's a model.

I think one of the things that we have learned on the ground, as women's community, is the value of knowing - and this is part of the whole idea of integration - who is situated where, what their field of responsibility is, et cetera, and what is their role. So one of the integration models that we've been working on, certainly as women's centres, has to do with sexual assault response teams. I think that is a good model because on our sexual response teams we have the key services, institutions, agencies, in the community that somebody who would be a survivor of sexual violence could be in touch with. Certainly, it's the hospital emergency, the women's centre, the police and, in our community it is the university health and counselling centre, et cetera and then up the line it's Victim Services and Prosecution.

The way that works is that it's very clear what everybody's role is. The role of the police is really different than the role of the women's centre - as a matter of fact, their role is about finding evidence, doing investigation, et cetera. The way they work with the survivor is either going to advance their ability to do a very good investigation and to get the kind of information and evidence that they need to proceed with a successful trial, or it's not. The same with the emergency department, et cetera. Their role is really different than what our role is.

By everybody working together, being very clear about what we want to see as the end result which is the well-being of a survivor sexual violence - whether they go through a criminal justice process or not and knowing very clearly what those roles are and what the parameters of those roles are - it allows us to work together in an integrated way that really supports a survivor coming forward and going through the system, however far they want to go.

The spinoffs of that have been not only formal protocols for how we work together, but also protocols with the university around reporting, around alerting around sexual assaults, any number of other pieces that don't necessarily require those individuals sitting around the table, but that really impact mental health, that impact what's happening at the emergency department, et cetera. It's those kind of models that work well and I know that's the whole idea behind the Nunn Commission report, too - how do we put the well-being of the individual at the centre and then all work around it, letting go as much as possible of our own - what do I want to say - holding on to policies, protocols, practices

that get in the way of meeting the needs of that individual. There are different things that happen at community that we see that are very solid models in that way.

The other thing with the sexual assault response teams is because they're somewhat small, it really allows us to challenge each other around what did happen, what was said by this particular officer that was problematic in this particular situation that acted as a deterrent to this person going forth, whatever the situation is that allows us to really improve our own practices and to develop a broader understanding even of what the issues are.

Spinoffs of that have been bringing in the Internet Child Exploitation team (ICE) - I love that word, ICE team - from Yarmouth to do a presentation around child pornography on the Internet, et cetera, went into a number of schools in our area, et cetera. So those kinds of spinoffs from that kind of an integrated approach have been really important in developing services, educating community et cetera. I don't know if that really answers that question, but I think those models are there.

One of the things that I think in this province we need to be very wary of, whether we're talking a redesign of community services, et cetera, I think we have to be wary about chronic incrementalism, if I can quote my dear friend, Catherine Reid. Unless we have a really clear vision for where we want to go and what we want to do, we make tiny, tiny changes that really frustrate the general population because if we're increasing social assistance by \$2 a month - you want to go, what is that doing - we're not working toward a broader vision and what we're doing in some ways is using an awful lot of energy to do very little.

I think what you're saying, Leonard, and I think what my sense from you as a person, is that you are a big-picture person and would like to see change that really brings us closer to a humane, just and prosperous world, society, Nova Scotia, community. What we're lacking right now is, we're really lacking a vision for that, so what we end up with is these little pieces of what I think the perfect description is chronic incrementalism. That's very frustrating. I think some of what the frustration is in collaboration is also some of that chronic incrementalism, we're going to do this much but we're not really going to really open to a process where we really work together in new and different ways to get to a common vision.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Preyra, you're not going to ask another question, are you?

MR. PREYRA: I hear you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I still have four people on the list and I'm conscious of the length of the questions and the answers, and all the information, by the way, is valuable and well worth listening to. I would say if we really have more that we have to add after the initial question, perhaps we'd get together later or something, but just so that we're

aware that we don't have too much time left. Mr. Burrill, then Mr. MacLeod, then Ms. Kent and Mr. Whynott.

MR. GARY BURRILL: I was wondering if I could get you to go back and explain a little more about something. You were speaking about the advocacy work of women's centres and you were saying that at the core of that is poverty-related advocacy work. This is a world that is very familiar to MLAs - maybe especially to MLAs of rural, working-class areas.

I was wondering if you wouldn't mind explaining a little, what some of the main chunks of poverty-related advocacy work in women's centres are. For example, is the number one chunk, social assistance appeal-related advocacy?

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: Well, in terms of social assistance, it is certainly the rates. People cannot live in dignity with the level of employment support that there is - I mean income assistance. I don't know how they do it, none of us in this room knows how they do it.

[2:15 p.m.]

Our role, in terms of advocacy is two: we do the individual advocacy and we do the social advocacy. The social advocacy is when the Poverty Reduction Strategy was coming forward, we put together strong recommendations, in terms of how the province should go. Then with the individual advocacy, we go with the person to Community Services, or Community Services, actually many of them come right into the women's centre. Instead of having to figure out how the woman can get from our place to social assistance offices, they come here, they come into the women's centre.

I'll just give you an example of a woman who came in, she was referred by Mental Health. She really didn't have a mental health issue, but what she had was a poverty issue. She was isolated, had three children, her husband just walked away. He couldn't handle it - gone - so she was isolated to being poor. We worked with Community Services on it. One thing she really liked was photography so we got Community Services to assist her so she had that child care taken care of, so we worked with her on many levels. She is now in a program at the women's centre, called Moving Forward and she is doing fantastic. Now she is setting goals. She still has young children, she is still stuck in poverty but we've done the individual advocacy with her that has gotten her out of that slump.

MR. BURRILL: What I meant to ask was, really simply, is the biggest part of individual advocacy work related to social assistance?

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: A lot of it is related to poverty or economic issues. It could be money management, it could be housing, it is very broad - housing is huge.

MR. BURRILL: That's what I was just wanting to get you to explain a little bit about, the main strands of that.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: Okay, right. Well, it is broad. It's her mental health, it's her housing needs, it's her isolation, it's her need for supports - it's very complex. That's the beauty of the broad entry point that we have as women's centres, what we're able to deal with. If she's coming off some sort of addiction, then she can go into the program we have there or if she's dealing with self-esteem issues, if she's looking at things around her employment. We're really there for her as long as she needs us. Does that help?

MR. BURRILL: That's fine, thank you.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: That's our beauty.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Burrill. Mr. MacLeod.

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank you for your presentation today. I was very disturbed to hear you talk about the fact that when funding cuts come, it is usually done on a population basis so it means that it's done in a rural area first and foremost and when you talk about the centres that you have, there isn't a centre in Halifax. Probably the reason for that is there are many other different kinds of services and organizations that people can turn to but when you get into a rural area, it becomes very hard to identify places to go. When we hear the stories like Mat's, that's a story that unfortunately is all too common.

I want to cut to the chase. It's not a perfect world, we understand that - in a perfect world we'd be able to fund you for everything you needed. But if there was something, one particular area that we, as a government, could identify as being an area that would have the most impact on your clients to make their lives better - I'm sure you've gone through your list and you all know what you'd love to have but you also know what you need to have. I'm just wondering what area you would pick as being the area that needs to see the extra funding that will have the best and most important impact on the women and the children who use your centres?

MS. HARPER: That's a really good question because you can start, I mean you can go in any number of different areas and everybody around the table would probably have the same answer, as well as a different answer.

One of the most frustrating things, really, is the lack of public transportation and it's not a small one at all. Certainly in rural Guysborough, without public transportation and even with public transportation, trying to get to upgrading programs, trying to get to a community college, trying to get to work - you look at people, if there's two income-earners in the household and children and/or someone trying to go to school and they have to get the child to one place, one parent to another place and another parent to school and

they are all three different communities, the challenges in rural communities are significant.

How we look at that, I think we really need to change. I mean, what is going to happen with our rural schools? How can we better use our school bus systems, et cetera? That's certainly is a really big one.

Adequate employment in our rural communities, we just have to rethink what we're doing. The thing that I think would make the biggest difference in rural Nova Scotia, and probably everyone is going to blanch here but it really would and I think we could really look at it, is a guaranteed annual income. What that would do is allow people to stay in our rural communities.

I look around our communities, all these young people who are really wanting to farm. We hear all about food and security, the need for local food production, et cetera. If we've got anything, we've got land. Why can't we get land to these young people who want to farm? It just seems so simple to me that we would be able to do that. Why don't we have equipment co-op so that somebody doesn't have to go out and have a \$100,000 piece of equipment in order to be able to farm 10 or 15 acres or whatever it was.

If there was a guaranteed annual income and we had some of these other supports in place, suddenly we begin to revitalize our rural areas in ways that we can keep our local schools. Our local schools now, if we were doing a bit more electronically, et cetera, I think we could revitalize in many ways our rural communities which are in some ways the lifeblood of the province. So that's a long answer and I'll stop, but I think it's a really interesting question and I think it goes beyond sort of like what is the one thing, to what is the vision.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. MacLeod. I will come back to you if there's time.

MR. MACLEOD: Yes, please.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Kent.

MS. BECKY KENT: My question, I'm hoping it's fairly easy and it's leading to that whole vision because I think we all recognize that funding is one part of what you do and that request is not black and white, it's very complicated. I remember a slide and I just want you to help me understand what you're saying and what you're asking is around meetings with departments. Every time we talk, I can sit here and think of just about every department in government that you could possibly meet with that affects the work that you do, no question. Agriculture, right here - and that's a different department that most would not even have thought of, but how it affects the services and issues that you face which is in all the different communities.

What I wonder is, again, I see our role here, as MLAs, and certainly our role on the committee is, at the end of the day after you've done this presentation you're going to walk away and say, okay, what do you think we have achieved today. Mine is around a message that can get either through us or through staff who might be here, or a report to someone later in our government departments that can help move us toward that greater vision which, our government, I know our Opposition and you - it's about a healthier, more complete Nova Scotia.

So those meetings, can you give me a little sense of your services that you've had over 75 years - a snapshot - into where have you been with that dialogue? There's no question that dialogue has to be had, we believe that. When you hear the words "collaboration" and "consultation", that's real because we can't make good decisions without knowing what the real issues are out there.

Where have you been with those kinds of discussions, where are you right now? When you say we want to meet with departments, can you tell me what you see that unfolding like because that requires some commitments, it requires scheduling, it requires an understanding so that the blocks don't go up right away, no, they're not in our department, or that sort of thing? What do you envision there? Does that make sense? It's to get that message out beyond just this meeting and that's what I'm getting at.

MS. HARPER: I think it's a really good question. Before we came in here today we said, if we left this meeting what would we say that made it a good meeting? So it's interesting that you are framing it like that. I think with the departments, it is really looking at in some way together the multiplicity of issues that we've been talking about today, that we work with women and then in some ways, almost along the example of a sexual assault response team, having a multi-department response team that was focused on women.

One of our challenges and I just want to say that there is an exciting initiative that is happening in the province now and it's the reconstitution of the Women's Action Coalition of Nova Scotia, which is going to happen - the first general assembly is March 11th, so I'm getting around to that. It's going to be an invitation to women from around the province from all sectors to come together to really identify together what are primary issues for women, what are primary recommendations for government and to get women on a public agenda. We've been off the public agenda for a long time.

I think one of the first things with the key departments is to get women on the agenda in a very, very clear way. There has been a lot of effort around children and youth. Children and youth are not separate from their parents. Very often, not always, the primary caregiver is the mother. We see women certainly who are mothers, we see women who are grandmothers, we see single women, we see women are not on the agenda. If women were on the agenda and we could have that discussion together from the perspective of Health and Wellness, Community Services, Justice, et cetera, I think we would be able to answer that question as to what would be a process and what would be a way of working together that would make significant change in the province.

I think one of the real oversights has been the critical role that women play and how we support that. When we go to sort of the narrow economic solutions that tend to be primarily male-focused, we are really missing the economic drivers, in many ways, of the province which are women in those caring, sharing, nurturing roles, who tend to be not only the users of services, but also the ones who are holding together family, community, et cetera and allowing and supporting an economic drive.

MS. KENT: I'll just make a comment. It's more on a personal level in that it's funny, the way you just described it about children and youth and the female or the mother, or whatever the nurturing female role is. In our household, I have three teenage boys and it's not always fun and laughter, you have challenges and you might have occasions where quite often they're not as happy as they think they should be. One of our common themes actually that has come out is that my fiancé will often say, boys, just figure out a way to deal with this with mom because if momma's not happy, nobody is happy and it lends to that really, it's that message, so I think you're right on there. I can attest to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What could anybody possibly add to that? Mr. Whynott, do you want to go again or has your question been answered? Ms. Casey.

MS. CASEY: It is a very short question and it won't take long for you to answer it. My recollection in the Speech from the Throne and the 2010 budget in March, there was an additional \$500,000 allocated to women's centres and transition homes. My question to you is, how much of that money filtered down to women's centres and part b is, how did you use it?

[2:30 p.m.]

MS. HARPER: That money was divided. My understanding is, \$27,700 is what came to each of the women's centres in that portion, so forget how it was apportioned, we'll keep it short, 27 times eight. That money was to make up for what had been an inability of women's centres to increase staff salaries, so it was really targeted toward a very specific piece. We never get a funding increase, so we hadn't been able to increase staff salaries.

What that funding did not do in any way, shape or form was address the operational needs of women's centres, so we still continue to fall behind because we have no cost of living increase. It has been a grant and the grant has been for a very specific amount, so every year we have to absorb an increase in rent and we hadn't been able to do salary increases. We were so far behind other organizations doing a similar level of responsibility work that it was specifically to try to address some of that discrepancy.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: And it helped, but didn't address the entire situation.

MS. CASEY: Quickly, part b. Was that decision as to how you would use that \$27,000 made by each individual centre?

MS. HARPER: Yes.

MS. CASEY: So some may have used it for some salaries, some may have used it for something else?

MS. HARPER: It was requested for salaries, so as Women's Centres Connect, that was a priority that we had been bringing to government since 2003, really, since that planning document, as one of the things that we wanted to have addressed. Our request was focused specifically around that and my understanding is that most of the women's centres used most of the money for that, some had to do it in other ways, so it wasn't strictly that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? Is this a short question, Mr. Preyra? I do want to give them a bit of time to sum up as well. I know Mr. MacLeod has one as well. If it's a short question, Mr. Preyra and then Mr. MacLeod as well.

MR. PREYRA: Just a very short question. Lucille, you mentioned operations and funding for operations, and I just want to get a sense from you what you mean. I know over the years we've moved from providing core funding to the centres to providing project funding. When you say operations, do you mean providing more core funding or providing more funding for specific projects that you would like to take on or are currently supporting?

MS. HARPER: What we're talking about is our core funding. Project funding is individual to each women's centre and by and large we don't get very much project funding from the Department of Community Services, not too much really even from the provincial government, so it's primarily our core funding.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: So within that we call it our operating, so it's staffing, it's rent, programming. We just separated the staffing and the operating, that's all.

MS. HARPER: It does allow us, to Bernadette's point earlier on, what that core funding from the Department of Community Services does is allow us to leverage other funding whether it's private foundations, whether it's federal government funding, et cetera, which is a really important point around the \$150 million that comes to the not-for-profit sector because probably every not-for-profit is leveraging some other funding. If Bernadette is using \$170,000 core funding to leverage \$600,000 in other funding, that's really significant, that's a significant investment on the part of the . . .

MR. PREYRA: I have a comment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is it a short comment, Mr. Preyra?

MR. PREYRA: Yes. Just more specifically when we last met we were talking about the sexual assault centre, for example, which was involved in a partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness and there was an education program for young girls on dealing with bullying and things like that.

MS. HARPER: Yes, that's project funding.

MR. PREYRA: And then there was a male violence program that you were also involved in. I was wondering if you were looking for funding for those types of programs alongside core funding?

MS. HARPER: Absolutely. One of the challenges is to try to keep programs going so, for example, some of the work that we're doing in the schools around Healthy Relationships for Youth and we all do that a little bit differently in our communities and it's all funded a little bit differently, but I know in Antigonish, that funding is coming to an end so we've been able to do that for seven years, that funding is coming to an end.

It's an excellent program, it's a shame to lose it, but we don't have a place, there's not somebody out there who says, okay, this is our priority and we can keep it going. The same program has ongoing operational funding, that's not an issue, but some of the other pieces of work, the Transition to Employment programs, for example, are project funded. Is that the best way to be doing those programs?

When we have a program that has proven itself to be a very effective, value-added program, is the best way to be funding it through project funding, a year here, a year there, now go back and try to do something else, reshape it a little so you can get this part over here? Not really, it doesn't make sense. Should we be supporting those Transition to Employment programs and really building on them, evaluating, creating best practice, allowing us to deliver them across the province in a cohesive way? Absolutely. How do we get there? I think we get there through, in some ways, a vision, a will, and interdepartmental collaboration.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: Two-part question. Part one, when Ms. Casey talked about the \$27,000 and your response was it went toward wages, in your slides you said the financial burden and staff retention were two of your major problems. Has that helped slow that down? How far behind do you feel that you are still in salaries for staff to be able to maintain them? I would think that the type of skill sets that are required are developed a lot on the job and they're not something you're going to come out of a university or an institution with.

The second part is, how well-educated are the people out there who need to know your system? I mean, many women today know that you're there for them? Do they know that the services are available for them? Do they know that they have rights now and they don't have to put up with some of the stuff that before was accepted as being the way it was because, "I'm married and I'm supposed to put up with that"? I'm just wondering about retention and education of the general population.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: I'll just say that retention is a problem partly because we don't have a cost of living. There are other colleagues in other not-for-profit organizations who do have a cost of living, but we don't, we just got left off somehow. If you could support us in having cost of living put into our budget, we'd certainly appreciate that. With the sort of downloading that happens at the women's centres, we would really like to be able to hire more professional people on staff and we just can't afford the people with social work and things like that.

Our demand on having that intervention service is high and people within women's centres because we never know, you know, the rumour is out there that there are going to be cuts, so staff are always looking, so that's a problem for the not-for-profit. What was the second part of your question?

MR. MACLEOD: I'm wondering how well-educated the population is to it, what's available and away from the myths that used to be there? I hope I'm wrong, but there was a myth that if you're married there are certain things you have to put up with regardless and you shouldn't go looking for help, you should keep everything within your family door.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: Unfortunately we're still living within a very strong patriarchal system. In the system it takes many, many years for that to change. With hyper-sexualization and all those messages that young women are picking up now is a real problem in our social fabric, in terms of their vulnerability. Young women are getting the wrong messages and so are the young men. It's a challenge for us to do that education piece because their vulnerability is still there because the system is still so patriarchal.

MS. HARPER: But you're right, people need to know and that's an ongoing challenge, public education around all of the issues. A lot of people don't think we have poverty in our province.

MR. MACLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Fantastic, thank you for keeping within the time parameters. We are going to adjourn every so briefly at about 2:50 p.m., to allow people to leave while we do some rather mundane business. Before that, I'm told it's about 10 minutes, if there are any final comments or any final statement that any of the presenters would like to make to us as a parting shot before you leave the room, please feel free to do that. I will

stop it at 2:50 p.m., if it doesn't stop before then. If there is something that you'd like to say, we'd certainly like to hear it.

MS. HARPER: Could we use the 10 minutes just to invite our sister centres to comment. I know you've all been over there just burning to say something?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I will ask committee members. It's certainly acceptable to me, however, if somebody is going to speak or say something I'm afraid they'll have to come to the microphone so we can get a recording (Interruption) or we could give up a chair along the side.

MS. HARPER: Okay, I can give up my chair. What I'd really like to say though is thank you for the questions you've asked because those questions have really indicated that you've listened to what we've had to say. Thank you for being here. Thank you for caring. We are really here to make change in our province, certainly in the lives of women and girls, but in our province as a whole. We would welcome the opportunities to work together in whatever way makes sense to move forward to a just, equitable, healthy province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before that then, because when the 10 minutes is up or less than that now, I won't talk long, but I'll probably just be saying goodbye to people. I wanted to make sure that I thank all of you and all of you for coming and, of course, Molly. I want you to know that we have listened to what you've said. We know you do great work, it has been expressed around the table on all sides here and so I'm thanking specifically our presenters, Ms. Bernadette MacDonald, Ms. Arlene MacDonald, Ms. Harper and Ms. Faye - thank you so much. Whoever else comes up to speak, thank you as well. Please be cognizant that we have a light snow coming already, so if you're travelling back home be really careful, or if you're going a long way you might want to stay in the city or something.

Okay, I'll stop talking. Anybody who wants to come up to the mic, please feel free to comment.

MS. DELLA LONGMIRE: I'm Della Longmire, I work in Cornwallis Park. As you know, Annapolis County, in particular, is really suffering under some huge economic challenges right now. We've lost two major employers. One of the things that we've been able to do through the Lamps Program here in Nova Scotia, with the money that has come down from the federal government, is to take that money and work with the women in our community to start small business enterprises.

We've had the third round of that now, very successful I might say and one of the things that I did want to say is that we are very good at leveraging that federal money into our budgets. All the women's centres here, I'm sure, when we talked about Bernadette's centre and how much money she was able to leverage into the community, we have all done that.

What I'm working with is an aging population. Annapolis County has the largest aged population in Nova Scotia, and Bridgetown, itself, has the largest aged population in Canada. We're working with some very vulnerable women who are between 55 and upward, who are in between, before they can get social assistance, get their pensions, or work within their systems. It's really, really critical, if I could reiterate what Lucille was saying about an annual guaranteed living income, that's critical when you're looking at that aged population. So if we could work on something, that's what I'd like to work on.

[2:45 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Longmire.

MS. JOANNE JEFFERSON: My name is Joanne Jefferson, I'm here from Second Story Women's Centre, based in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. We serve Queens County and Lunenburg County. I just wanted to share with you a piece about an initiative that we're very proud of and excited about. The women's centre took leadership on this initiative, but it has so quickly developed into a community initiative that we recognize how timely it is and how much it is needed. We started in the Fall, launched a campaign called Making Change. We offered people the opportunity to take a pledge to end violence against women and girls in Lunenburg and Queens Counties. Gary Ramey was at our launch event and one of your fellow MLAs got up and spoke and revealed for the first time in public that she, herself, was a survivor of some significant violence in her life.

That set the tone for a kind of supportive, safe, inclusive and honest event which has spun off into a number of really important community initiatives, one is a collaboration with the Department of Education and the Schools Plus program that is the Forest Heights family of schools. We're going to be starting an elementary level healthy relationships program, there's a big gap there at the early elementary level to work with young kids to talk about what a healthy relationship looks like and to start those early development years with some good ideas.

We're also looking at forming a community coalition, so on March 11th, we're going to host a major community event, a meeting to look at how to best form that coalition. I think because this initiative started out as a partnership between the women's centre, Harbour House, which is our local transition house, and the RCMP and brought in a lot of other community organizations.

I think it is a great example of how (a) the women's centre provides leadership in community development, and (b) how much trust there is in our ability to lead and our ability to give over. We don't keep ownership of these projects, we give it over to the community. It's no longer a second-storey initiative, it's a Lunenburg and Queens County initiative. The response we got at the launch event alone really told us that people have a huge level of trust and support for what we're doing.

I just want to share that with you, that's pretty exciting work that still needs to be done. Violence is so ingrained in every aspect of the society, from what we buy in the grocery stores to what we watch on TV, to what we tell our children, to what we model for them. I think the murder of Tina Eisnor in New Germany in the Spring was a real hot point for a lot of people and we wanted to keep the level of awareness high so that it didn't just become a tragedy-focused awareness but that it was an overall, broad-based community awareness that we need to address these problems.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Jefferson. I can confirm that I definitely was at the launch of that and that was probably - and I'm not just saying this - one of the most moving events I was probably ever at in my life and there were many, many people there and I think they felt the same way. Laura Smith also sang at that and the whole thing was very moving, it really was.

Thank you, Ms. Jefferson, thank you, Ms. Longmire. (Interruption) Oh sorry.

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: I only have one minute, I know that. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're just glad that you made it here, so go ahead.

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: I'm heading back after this meeting. I'm the coordinator at Every Woman's Centre in Sydney. There are those who may think that Sydney certainly is a little more urban than some of the areas and we do have a few more services. I think the uniqueness of women's centres is that they can adapt to what their community needs. We work a lot with poverty issues and we've also developed housing. We have the only women's homeless shelter in Cape Breton and we also work in social purpose enterprise, which is a non-profit owning a non-profit.

Our goal is not just to work with women in poverty but somehow or other show ways of moving out of that. We are in our 12th year of operating a pre-employment program that has been really successful, as well as a social purpose enterprise, as well as developing other projects where women can explore owning their own business and small business and education that way. Poverty is still our number one issue and all that that encompasses but we do try to not just band-aid it but actually try to make some positive change in the community so that women are able to move along. Anyway, you've heard enough stories and thank you so much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald, thank you very much. I know you'd like to say something as well.

MS. MYRENE KEATING-OWEN: I promise I'll keep it really short. I work at LEA Place Women's Resource Centre in Sheet Harbour. I would be remiss not to say that when I'm given a mic to speak that I need to promote the services that are on the Eastern Shore and Musquodoboit Valley. We work in a geographic area about the size of P.E.I. at

times so when we talk about population and how government looks at the population and how funding is spent, communities like ours get hit right at the top.

It's really detrimental for services that are found in our community, being on the far side of HRM. Because of the population numbers that are played, we often see services being drawn from our area because the wait lists are so big in Halifax so therefore, we lose services for half a year to provide services in metro, so it becomes very frustrating. Things like that happen but I look forward to - this is a beginning of new relationships, to work forward to addressing some of those issues and thank you for your time today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you Ms. Keating-Owen and thanks to all of you for being such articulate spokespersons and being so passionate about what you do. Again, your work is recognized as being extremely important by all members of this committee.

Now if it pleases the committee, if we could just recess for about five minutes, then reconvene and just do a couple of housekeeping things. Thank you so much, be careful on the way home.

[2:52 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:59 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can we call the meeting back to order, please. There's just a couple of items here that we should talk about very quickly.

The first one is correspondence that came from the Kids First Association. The note related to that simply says that the correspondence was circulated to members recently and is on the agenda to simply acknowledge that committee members have received the correspondence. You all should have received that. Did you receive that, as well? I was going to say if you didn't, we'd make sure that you got it.

It goes on to say that this association was concerned with information provided by witnesses during the January meeting regarding child care, particularly the Early Development Instrument (EDI), and wanted to provide the committee with information that it had gathered which it felt would be of interest to the committee regarding the matter. So everybody has that, it has been distributed and I just wanted to make sure new members - that would be Mr. Skabar and Mr. Burrill - got it as well. That was one thing.

[3:00 p.m.]

The other one is a note I have here that says the presentation today that we just heard was slightly different than that forwarded to the members - I don't mean in a major way - and they're going to forward the updated version of that and that's what will be going on the Web site. Just in case you saw a slight discrepancy, it was related to that.

With relation to the next meeting, you'll notice it's on March 8th instead of March 1st. I just wanted members to recall that the reason the date was changed to March 8th, from March 1st, was because Leg. TV is doing some work on these committee rooms and they don't think it will be completed in time for us to meet here, so that's why the meeting is on March 8th as opposed to March 1st.

Barring that, I having nothing else. If somebody would like to move that the meeting be adjourned.

MR. MACLEOD: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. MacLeod. The meeting is adjourned. Thank you all for coming. Careful if you're driving.

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