

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, January 10, 2012**

**Committee Room 1**

**Alice Housing**

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Mr. Jim Morton (Chairman)  
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Mr. Keith Bain  
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[Mr. Brian Skabar was replaced by Mr. Mat Whynott]  
[Mr. Keith Bain was replaced by Hon. Chris d'Entremont]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille  
Legislative Committee Clerk

### **WITNESSES**

#### Alice Housing

Ms. Joanne Bernard, Executive Director  
Ms. Catherine Sanderson, Board of Directors  
Ms. Michelle Kelly, Board of Directors  
Ms. Pamela Harrison, Coordinator, Transition House Association of Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2012**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

1:00 P.M.

**CHAIRMAN**  
Mr. Jim Morton

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Good afternoon everyone, I think we'll get started. I have a clock here at the front of the room which says it's 1:33 p.m. and the clock on the wall says it's not quite 1:00 p.m., but I'll go by my clock at the moment since we have a quorum.

I'd like to welcome you here this afternoon. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services and I'd like to welcome our guests from Alice Housing. They'll have a chance to introduce themselves in a moment. Before I begin, before we have some introductions of our committee members, I'd like to welcome everybody who is in the room today.

I'd also like - as we've begun the practice - to give you an announcement about fire safety. This is just a quick note regarding fire evacuation procedures. Should there be a fire alarm - and I hope there will not be - please leave the committee room and walk to the hall where the elevators are located. There are two exit signs; one to the left and one to the right of the elevators. Both of these exits lead to stairs, which will take you down and out of the building. Once out of the building, please proceed to Parade Square and please remain at Parade Square until further instructions are provided.

Let's hope we don't need to use those, but particularly for those people who aren't familiar with the building, that might be important information in an emergency.

My name is Jim Morton, I chair the committee, and I think we'll now move to introductions of the committee members.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: As I said earlier, our guests today are from Alice Housing. I think it would be helpful if perhaps you could introduce yourselves and then I know that you're prepared to make a presentation. That will be the next thing that happens, followed by an opportunity for questions, so if you would introduce yourselves please.

[The committee witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Welcome to all of you.

MS. JOANNE BERNARD: Thank you. First off, I'd like to thank you for seeing us today and allowing us to make our presentation to the committee; I appreciate that, as we do at Alice Housing, on behalf of the board and staff, and most importantly, the women that we serve every day. I made this presentation six years ago - in fact, six years ago last month - and if we look at the six years that have passed since I made that presentation on behalf of Alice Housing, a lot has changed; unfortunately, much has not. Women are still dying in this province at the hands of their husbands, boyfriends, or intimate partners. Women are still seeking shelter at transition houses and second-stage housing in record numbers.

In terms of Alice Housing, we had a housing stock in 2006, when I made this presentation, of 25; it is now down to 18. There has been a domestic violence plan that was released in December 2010 after a year-long committee of both community members and government members working on a strategy, which resulted in that plan being circulated in December 2010. Has it made a difference in the lives of the women and children that call Alice Housing home? Not very much; not much on the front-line services at all.

After the presentation you'll be able to understand more of our financial crisis, our financial situation, and the fact that within five years this organization is not sustainable in spite of outstanding fiscal management by both management and the board of directors, and fundraising within the organization.

So let's start. The mission of Alice Housing is to provide safe second-stage housing and supportive counselling for women and children leaving domestic violence. It is one of the only programs within Nova Scotia that provides a comprehensive two-year program of women coming into safe housing, leaving domestic violence. Counselling is mandatory; women make changes.

Core programs - safe housing, of course, means that our units are 24-hour alarmed and staffed 24 hours in terms of on-call. For many of these women, their cases are

designated high-risk lethality, which means that they have identified through policing sources and themselves an ongoing need for security from the people that they're leaving.

Counselling - as I mentioned, individual counselling, group counselling. Our social worker has been working with women in the field for 35 years. Her reputation in this community is not comparable to anyone else's.

Support services and advocacy services - we routinely go to court with women. We advocate for them with schools, the medical profession, and the legal community.

Finally, developmental programs so that women can make a plan to move on, both with their lives and with what they want to do in terms of a career and self-sustainability for their future, for themselves, and for their children.

Non-core programs within Alice Housing. Many of you may be familiar with Healing the Bruises which, in the opinion of myself and many others, is the best work that's being done in the Province of Nova Scotia with children, in terms of children who have witnessed abuse and experienced abuse in the home. Lori Morgan has done an outstanding job in bringing the issues of children forth in terms of what they've seen, what they've experienced, so she ensures that the right service is provided to the right child at the right time.

We offer a food bank. We are under Feed Nova Scotia and a donations room. We do offer auricular acupuncture to each woman and to each child over eight years. We have a Christmas Angel and Back to School, where we help women with economic challenges during those times. We do outreach with women who have left Alice Housing on a very informal basis, because we simply do not have the staffing component to meet that need. We've put a few little quotes in there from our children.

Direct benefits of the programs of Alice Housing - which, by the way, has been working in this province since 1983. Outcomes show - and we measure them, we're known for measuring them. We are nationally recognized by the Donner Foundation for measuring our outcomes. My personal management motto is that if it matters, you measure it. Outcomes show that women and children are safer; women and children do not return to violent and abusive households. Our tracking shows that 83 per cent of women who leave after two years do not go back; the national average is 69 per cent. Children's coping and life skills increase, and we see a definite decrease in bullying by these children, self-harming behaviours, and behaviours in school.

Women develop an action-oriented life plan. It's critical that women learn the first year is dedicated to healing, the second year is dedicated to a life plan: what do you want to do with the rest of your life? Do you want to go back to school? Do you want to live your dreams? Many times they've been told they're not worthy, they're stupid - you'll never amount to anything.

Women learn and implement positive parenting skills because violence takes a woman's ability to parent proactively away from her; it's a reactive situation. Children can recover from witnessing or experiencing abuse, specifically young boys where we know if they are victims of domestic violence as a child, they are five times more likely to grow up and become an abuser.

The societal benefits - money invested in Alice Housing has a significant impact on the community. Since our beginning, we're now probably close to 1,000 families, resulting in reduced policing, enhanced family income - because these women do go back to school, they do leave the social assistance realm - and reduced health care costs. A major incidence of women going to emergency rooms in this province is due to domestic violence.

We provide over \$45,000 in affordable housing on our backs. We do not get subsidization from anyone else. We charge what income assistance charges for shelter rates because we never want rent to be a barrier for why women do not leave violence. For example, a four-bedroom townhouse in a great neighbourhood, with heat and hot water included, is \$630 a month. That is unheard of; it's about 40 per cent below market value. We will not raise rents on the backs of these women.

These are the bed nights that we've provided over the last couple of years. This is our work in the last year; we've done intakes of 76. Of course, intakes are the initial intake of whether or not a woman is going to be coming to our organization. The number of visits to our drop-in centre, phone admin support - we actually offer services informally to women who call, who don't want to use our services but need advocacy work.

Women's personal development workshops, like I said, which are mandatory - 54. Child and parent workshops - every time Lori sees a child, she sees a parent. She works with the parent as a team. She also meets with every teacher of every child. Participants and youth outings, those are our numbers.

We have wonderful community partnerships with the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, the Metro Interagency on Family Violence, Feed Nova Scotia, and the Federation of Community Organizations.

This is something that Marilyn More is quoted as saying at this very table six years ago, and we absolutely agree with her: "It just amazes me that your organization is providing probably the best chance of breaking the cycle of violence and poverty for the women you're able to accept of almost any other program that I know of in this province, and you're able to provide safe, affordable, quality housing with support services. That's as close to an ideal situation for women coming from family violence and poverty that I can think of." That's in the Hansard.

Supporting the Domestic Violence Action Plan that was released in December 2010. We are a partner in a community. We have proven success. I was an active member

of the DVAP committee for over a year. We look forward to working together to ensure women and children feel safer at home, which is one of the mandates of the action plan. We are well-qualified to achieve 20-plus outcomes of the recommendations.

Our Gift to the Community in 2010, *Healing the Bruises Through the Eyes of a Child*, launched October 20<sup>th</sup>. This book, written by our child and youth counsellor Lori Morgan, was a direct result of the work we did with the children. Out of the 379 children that came through our doors through intakes with their parents since 2006, only two had reported to their teachers of the abuse in the home. We wanted to change that. We wanted to help teachers have a tool in the classroom that would give them the ability to engage conversation with children.

Three thousand copies were printed. Alice Housing bore 40 per cent of that cost; we were able to fundraise 60 per cent of it. Nine hundred copies were given to 300 schools and I'm happy to say they're in every school in the elementary level from Yarmouth to Sydney. We also gave 500 copies to every organization under the Department of Community Services umbrella. We also gave them to every library and they were given to doctors, parents, teachers, police, VON, Family Courts, Dalhousie Legal Aid, the Department of Justice, and many more. Whoever wanted them, got them. We didn't make a nickel, we never sold a book.

Sustainable funding - we have none. Violence is increasing; this is our challenge. Demand for our services is increasing: a 16 per cent increase in phone support since 2006; a 36 per cent increase in 2010 in intakes. We have a wait list for family units, which is ongoing. Our ability to respond has decreased. We have a loss of seven units or 28 per cent of our housing stock since 2005 because of sustainability issues. We simply are not sustainable.

Financial situation - \$430,000 in annual operating costs. Government funding for per diems supports 9 per cent of the budget. This year it will be less than 9 per cent of the budget. We receive no core funding from any level of government. Steps taken by the board of directors over the last four years: we've sold two properties, reduced a full-time position to part-time, and cut costs during the budget process.

Our current funding arrangement with the Department of Community Services is \$9.75 per day, only for clients on income assistance. So if a woman is working, if she's on EI, if she's on disability, we receive absolutely nothing from the department to support her in her quest to leave domestic violence, and when women are put in a position where they are supported enough that they feel they need to go back and further their education - and we've had this a number of times over the last two years - if they go to an educational facility that's not supported by the Department of Community Services, they leave DCS and they take out student loans and thus we lose our per diem. So we worked so hard to get a woman to a point where she feels she can continue her education and financially we're penalized for it.

It has fluctuated from 2005. We used to get core funding of \$45,652. Since 2005, we have had a high of \$51,000 to a projected low of \$33,000, and that's being generous. My variance for November 30<sup>th</sup> shows \$25,000 given per diem since April 1<sup>st</sup>. We will not reach \$33,000 and that's not because of low occupancy; that's based on the source of income of the women that are staying with us.

Aging buildings with a rising maintenance cost. We're over \$12,000 budget. I have eight addresses that I have to pay property taxes on, I have eight addresses that I must maintain. Shelter enhancement is very inflexible in terms of allowing for general maintenance costs. It's something we're trying to work with the Department of Community Services to fix because the federal funding envelope for shelter enhancement does not marry very well with the Domestic Violence Action Plan.

Property taxes increased each year, in spite of tax exemption. I get a 75 per cent tax exemption from the city but still pay between \$7,000 and \$9,000 a year. The drop-in centre, which is located on Ochterloney Street, is not where someone stays or sleeps, so a discount on my business occupancy tax still results in a very high tax bill for that property. We have no ability to raise rents or costs. We are not going to do that, it's not on the table.

Funding sources. Fundraising, grants, third-party events, our own special events - 52 per cent; and rental income, about 25 per cent. The United Way grant - which is very unsustainable, especially in light of the fact that they are doing a major overhaul in who they're going to fund in September 2012 - we currently receive \$32,000 from them; and government funding is anywhere from 9 to 11 per cent.

Sustainable funding benefits. We know there's immediate safety for women and children. We focus on Alice Housing priorities of programming, service enhancements and client outreach. A long-term, sustainable funding plan is critical to continue the work of Alice Housing.

Government relations. Representatives from Alice Housing met with Minister Peterson-Rafuse on June 7, 2011, and presented our strategic plan and request for ongoing dialogue - that's what was requested in that meeting. Ongoing dialogue to help us come to some sort of agreement in the future - not this budget year - on what we could do to help with sustainability. A request for ongoing dialogue concerning our funding needs was denied in a six-sentence e-mail to me on November 1, 2011.

On December 6, 2011, I sat in the Day of Remembrance ceremonies and listened to Premier Dexter talk about the ongoing need to work smarter with community and to engage in dialogues so that together we could meet the challenges of women leaving domestic violence. For some reason, this just doesn't seem to go into the operational plan of what the government wants to do with their mandate on domestic violence.



To maintain current services for existing clients and increase the housing stock back to 2005 levels so that we don't have a waiting list for families, so that we can increase the need. To provide outreach support to ensure women stay strong and are successful after leaving - we do that informally, we have no professional fundraising on staff. I have a staff of four full-time, including myself and one part-time. I do the fundraising in addition to my board of directors and volunteers.

To sustain the programs which are available and cost-effective, Alice Housing is pursuing government commitment. We are requesting \$250,000 annually for the next three years. We're not requesting it this year; we weren't even requesting it next year. We just knew that there needed to be an ongoing dialogue to meet the needs of this organization. Otherwise, the Government of Nova Scotia will have to deliver this program within the next five years. Catherine, did you want to add?

MS. CATHERINE SANDERSON: I just wanted to emphasize what I have learned from being on the board and being involved with Alice Housing over the last three years. It seems so evident to me that Alice Housing seems to have a formula for success in terms of breaking the cycle of violence. Of course women and children need emergency shelters when they are escaping domestic violence, but the formula that Alice Housing offers is sustained subsidized housing and the counselling for women to get on their feet and actually get away from the abuser, as well as the counselling that the children receive - particularly the male children, where it's proven that male children involved in witnessing domestic violence turn into abusers themselves.

This formula we have managed to deliver for - how many years?

MS. BERNARD: Almost 30.

MS. SANDERSON: For 30-some years and of which we're really proud, particularly the Healing the Bruises program for the children. It's working; it's a proven success formula. In the Domestic Violence Action Plan, specifically the plan is to work with proven-success community agencies, in order to replicate that kind of solution for all Nova Scotians and, as Joanne mentioned, not just the women who are receiving income assistance from the Department of Community Services, women who are involved with very affluent families also experience serious and significant domestic violence and are being murdered in our province. We just can't countenance that this is going to be continuing.

We really feel that we have a solution, we want to dialogue. We're passionate about improving the situation of domestic violence in Nova Scotia and we want to be part of the Domestic Violence Action Plan. A partnership with government is what we're looking to arrange here, really.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you both for that comprehensive and forceful presentation. I've been keeping - is there more to your presentation at this point?

MS. BERNARD: Well, Pamela would like to add remarks, as well, on behalf of the Transition House Association.

MR. CHAIRMAN: At this point? You're certainly welcome to, if this is the right thing for you, Pamela.

MS. PAMELA HARRISON: Yes, I think it's probably appropriate, if that's all right with the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure, absolutely.

MS. HARRISON: Terrific. The Transition House Association of Nova Scotia provides crisis and shelter services, as well as a continuum of services at 13 locations across the province. In fact, in the history of Alice Housing, it was Bryony House in Halifax that was instrumental in recognizing the need for a continuum of care and support and was very important in the processes of developing Alice Housing.

As a community co-chair of the Domestic Violence Prevention Committee working group, THANS worked collaboratively with government and community to develop consensus-based recommendations to the deputy minister's leadership committee. During that very full 13 months, a lot of discussion took place around the continuum of care that is required to support women to move forward in their lives and, in particular, to mitigate the impact of intimate-partner violence on women and children.

Central to that continuum of care are second-stage housing programs. Here are statistics that really should be of concern to everybody in this room. Alice Housing has 19 units in the HRM serving a population of about 450,000. THANS supervises the rest of the second-stage housing units in the province, which number under 20. So if we're looking at a continuum of care, we're going to have to be very creative around how we can do that and support women moving forward in their significant life choices.

We support the work of Alice Housing because it provides comprehensive services for women and their families, in particular the extraordinarily successful Healing the Bruises program for children who have witnessed violence. That is another issue that we spoke about on an ongoing basis during the Domestic Violence Prevention Committee, and certainly is included in a number of the recommendations in the Domestic Violence Action Plan around ensuring that children have access to support services.

The Department of Justice has done a very good job at providing funding to a certain number of children, up to a certain amount of money, if there is a criminal case in the court. However, all children who witness really need to have support going forward.

We have statistics through the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System, from Bryony House in particular, from 1978 - that's 33 years. What we're seeing now is generational violence, so we're seeing names on our list of intakes this year, last year, and the years before of women who were little girls in our shelter, boys who are adults now, whose names are showing up on violence, as abusers, and not just for one woman but for many women.

You know when you have a statistical database and you can do some analyses, we're finding what I like to call - and this may be a little hard for you to hear - serial abusers. If you're seeing the same man's name on four or five different files over a 10-year period, that's a significant problem. We need children to get the guidance and support that they need, in particular, so that this generational activity of intimate-partner violence doesn't continue.

We will always have a need for crisis intervention in the work we do. In the rural areas we do it all, but in Halifax in particular, we're limited in our resources. Bryony House is at capacity, usually with a waiting list, and there just are limited resources in how we can provide outreach. Alice Housing is another example of exactly where we need to show some support, where women get guidance moving forward, that they have safety and security and support going forward for a maximum of two years. That makes a significant difference in women's lives.

We support Alice Housing's request for an increase in their core funding and we look forward to working with them in future collaborations. Thank you for allowing me to speak on their behalf.

MS. BERNARD: There are two more things I'd like to say. The first one being that we take women from all over Nova Scotia, including from other transition houses because the policing agencies in those areas and the transition house staff have identified a need for the women to leave the area due to safety. We also take women from out of province and across the country, based on our ability to help them, our space.

The second thing is I think we have - I'm sorry, it's 18 units, but God love you, we wish we had 19. I think what's really significant - and this will give you the idea of some of the status of the men we're dealing with here - in the last 14 months, with the small percentage of women that travel through Alice Housing, two of the abusers have been murdered in the community and a third one was charged with attempted murder while incarcerated. This is the level of violence that these women are leaving. These men are violent; they live violent lives, and in many cases they die violently. Now, to have three abusers in such high-profile, violent endings or charges out of the women we serve, the odds of that are astronomical, so we are dealing with very difficult, high-level-for-lethality cases here. I just wanted to make that point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we'll move to questions at this point, which I hope will allow the dialogue to continue. I've been keeping a speakers list that has begun during the course of your presentation and the first person on my list is Ms. Regan.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Thank you. I looked at your presentation yesterday and maybe I missed it - was there an indication of how long the waiting list is?

MS. BERNARD: No, there's not an indication. It's very difficult in a second-stage housing organization because you don't want to give false hope. Our program is two years long so women have that right to stay in their units for two years. I can't tell someone that in two months we'll have a space or tomorrow we'll have a space, so we're put in the position of having to offer a service that we really don't have of helping women find other housing. Some women, if they find it, they say, I want to come to Alice Housing, and that's the list we maintain.

MS. REGAN: So in December 2010, the government released the Domestic Violence Action Plan. You were consulted as part of the formulation of that plan?

MS. BERNARD: I was on the working committee for 13 months as one of the six community members, along with Pamela.

MS. HARRISON: I just want to clarify that. If by that you mean were we part of the development of the plan, no. We were part of the committee that made recommendations. The government developed the plan on their own.

MS. REGAN: So since its inception - since the plan was announced - have you seen any benefits as a result of the Domestic Violence Action Plan?

MS. BERNARD: Macro benefits in terms of the court program in Cape Breton, yes. In terms of front-line services that can be reflected on the lives of the women and children we serve, zero per cent.

MS. REGAN: So basically with the exception of the new court program up in Cape Breton, nothing. At the December 6<sup>th</sup> ceremony - this past December - the Premier talked about the importance of community and continuing collaboration and consultation. Has that been continuing?

MS. BERNARD: No. We met with the minister, as I said, in June and the three of us - Michelle, Catherine and I - were there and we did a presentation. We actually were asking for dialogue; we wanted continued dialogue so that we could work together as a community organization that's offering a service, that's not being offered by any other level of government, to work toward sustainability and a longer term plan. We were not asking - and we made it very clear we were not asking - for any new monies to come to us this year or even next year. Some statistics were asked by the minister, which I absolutely

gathered and forwarded to her in July. I then didn't hear anything until September. I asked again what the process was and what the progress was in terms of dialogue, as we were told during that June meeting that there would be continued dialogue.

I received an e-mail on November 1<sup>st</sup> with a byline that said "request for dialogue" and then six sentences saying that they couldn't help us at this time due to fiscal restraint. I was a little confused because she was actually saying no to a request that hadn't been made. We wanted to talk, we wanted to be able to put forth the ideas so that we could work with government through the Domestic Violence Action Plan and make a real difference about sustainability to an integral part of the action plan. It's about working smarter and those are the words that are in the Domestic Violence Action Plan: working smarter with community. We're really trying to work smart here but we need to talk.

MS. REGAN: When you were working on that plan, did you have the impression that the goals of Alice Housing would be supported by the government when that plan was - sorry, when you were in the consultations in advance of the plan development, which was done without you, were you under the impression that the goals and aspirations of Alice Housing and of these women who want to get out of domestic violence situations would, in fact, be supported by the government?

MS. BERNARD: Yes. I also want to add, too, you asked something else about the Domestic Violence Action Plan. The Status of Women have a wonderful Web site that is absolutely magnificent in terms of people or women seeking information about domestic violence, but I'm talking about the on-the-ground, front-line services that are offered at Alice Housing and know that the action plan has not had any impact whatsoever. In fact, our funding has decreased steadily since 2005.

MS. SANDERSON: Can I just add something. I made an effort to go in detail through the Domestic Violence Prevention Committee report to the government and the subsequent plan, the action plan that was developed. I was looking for areas where partnership would easily be able to be formulated between Alice Housing as a community agency and the various departments of government.

Subsequent to the response from Minister Peterson-Rafuse in November, we wrote a return letter from the board to the minister, pointing out that there are at least four areas in the action plan where we would like to lend assistance. They are: to set up a formal process and plans for joint case conferencing between government and community service providers - the action plan really wants to learn more about the issue of domestic violence and that's just one area where we can certainly provide information; and to provide more support and mentoring for at-risk male youth and children.

I think we have a good program, we want to share that again, as I mentioned before; we want to replicate that throughout the province. To provide an annual statistical report on the nature and extent of domestic violence - clearly we have some information that we want

to hand over to the government so that they can also measure and evaluate the success of their Domestic Violence Action Plan, what's working well and what's not; and to explore options to provide second-stage housing for Aboriginal women. We obviously want to provide our expertise to the government on that particular area of concern for the government, which is a big area of concern. Aboriginal women are more inclined to be victims of domestic violence in this province; we really feel we can help.

Another point that I made to the minister in the letter that was from the board was the book we launched, the *Healing the Bruises* book. That has automatically addressed four of the 10 actions that were listed in the action plan: build awareness, help people address domestic violence as it occurs; help service providers respond to the needs of child victims more effectively; improve supports for at-risk families and children; and improve education and training opportunities. This book is out there, well distributed across the province, and it will help in all of those areas. We are helping but we want to help more. We need to work in partnership.

MS. BERNARD: We're actually a charter member of the Second Stage Housing Alliance of Canada. I have actually shared our policies, our protocols, and our expertise with three other second-stages in the country that are just starting out in different provinces. I mean, we don't sit on this information. When asked, we share it gladly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think I'll go at this point to Mr. Ramey.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your presentation. You mentioned that you sometimes take clients from out of province. At any given time, I suppose there's no accurate way of predicting how many are going to be there at any given time. For instance, in 2011, how many would you have taken from other provinces?

MS. BERNARD: We took two from New Brunswick.

MR. RAMEY: Both from New Brunswick?

MS. BERNARD: Yes.

MR. RAMEY: When they come to you, do they come with any kind of funding stream attached to them from those other governments?

MS. BERNARD: No, they don't. They are moving from one province to another.

MR. RAMEY: To get away from awfulness, I take it.

MS. BERNARD: Yes. The recent one that we just took in December is actually on employment insurance, so we're not eligible for any funding for her.

MR. RAMEY: That's right, because of the way that works. The other question I had was in relation to - I think you cited three cases of some pretty nasty fellows who met an untimely end.

MS. BERNARD: Two of them did. The third was charged with attempted murder.

MR. RAMEY: That's right and the other one is almost as bad. In terms of providing security, that piqued my interest because they sound really hard core.

MS. BERNARD: They are.

MR. RAMEY: How do you provide security to the people who are in your places?

MS. BERNARD: All of our properties are undisclosed, which means you won't find their addresses anywhere. You won't find them in property records; you won't find them in taxes. They are undisclosed; we've made sure of that. Every single unit is equipped with kick-in and shatterproof doors and windows, and every single unit is individually alarmed and monitored by a 24/7 alarm company.

When a woman moves in, she provides us with a "safe" word. If the alarm goes off during the day, that goes to the monitoring station and they call her. If she doesn't answer the phone, if she does not provide her "safe" word or if a child answers the phone, police are automatically dispatched. Police have all of our addresses; they call them "hot addresses" so the response time is quicker. Staff is then dispatched. We are on-call 24/7, 365 days per year.

One of our apartment buildings actually has visual monitoring in each individual apartment so when a buzzer is rung to a woman's apartment she can visually see who is there so she doesn't buzz in someone she doesn't know. We have also just been successful through Shelter Enhancement of getting outdoor cameras for every property, which is long overdue.

MR. RAMEY: Fantastic. Can I just ask one little supplementary to that? The relationship with the - you mentioned the police, if the word doesn't come through, they're there very quickly.

MS. BERNARD: Police and fire, yes.

MR. RAMEY: Is the co-operation with those agencies top-notch?

MS. BERNARD: It is absolutely top-notch. We have a wonderful relationship with Randy Wood who is the community liaison officer in Dartmouth. The police actually come in twice a year and do safety planning with the women. They come to special events and dinners that we hold because oftentimes children see police in a very negative way and so

one of our outcomes is that we'd like to repair that damage. Also, the volunteers that we utilize within the Healing the Bruises program, every one of them is male. That's purposeful, so that young children can have a healthy relationship with adult men in a very significant way.

MR. RAMEY: I certainly applaud that work. I was listening - of all things - to a report on coyote behaviour when I was coming into the city this morning and they were talking about learned behaviours in the animal kingdom and how tough it is to get rid of learned behaviours, and based on people witnessing things and being around nastiness, it takes quite an effort to get rid of that. So I applaud you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

HON. KAREN CASEY: Thank you for the presentation and I thank you for the excellent support service out there that you're providing for women and children. You're to be commended for the strategies that you're using, the plan you're implementing, and the support you're given, have been given, and giving.

I have two questions, if I could; a follow-up to one that has already been asked and perhaps more explanation. You talked about the request for continued consultation with the minister. You talked about the minister - I think it was in November - sending back something to say no. I think if I understand what you said that perhaps that response was more based on the anticipated request for money, which had not been your initial request; it was a request to have continued dialogue. Am I clear on that?

MS. BERNARD: I was confused, Karen, because the actual subject line that she had written was called "request for ongoing dialogue" but the "no" was to money that really wasn't asked for. We really wanted dialogue to go forward in terms of what our needs were going to be in the next three to five years.

MS. CASEY: So my question would be, since you received that and since you believe it's not really the response to the request you had, which was for ongoing dialogue, has that request gone back to the minister to say look, we're not looking for money, we just want to have dialogue?

MS. BERNARD: Yes, it has, through the board of directors.

MS. CASEY: And what have you heard from that?

MS. SANDERSON: Well, we sent the letter in December.

MS. CASEY: So there has been no response from that at this point?

MS. SANDERSON: From the board, no, not yet.



MS. CASEY: From the minister?

MS. BERNARD: No.

MS. SANDERSON: We sent the letter from the board in December but we haven't got a response yet.

MS. CASEY: So you've not been denied that request to have the ongoing dialogue?

MS. BERNARD: Not that we know of.

MS. CASEY: My next question, if I could switch to your involvement with the schools. I'm obviously very pleased to hear that the schools have been an opportunity and an environment where messages can be sent home or sent to every child. We know that schools have provided wonderful opportunities for education on things beyond the school curriculum and I see this as one.

I guess my question would be, knowing that we have been advised through the Nunn report that we should be breaking down silos and working between Education, Community Services, Justice, Health and so on - has there been any kind of dialogue or support from the Department of Education for the book or the distribution of the book or the production of the book or anything, or are we still in our silos?

MS. BERNARD: Well, I met with the SchoolsPlus program in September and then I met again with the - I don't know who they were, they were Continuing Education folks, and then I did meet with Alex Bruce who works with the curriculum at the Department of Education, who was on the original Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy team for the 13-month committee.

The Department of Education and Minister Jennex were extraordinarily complimentary at our launch and spoke highly of the book. As a former teacher, she was well aware of the issues that we're dealing with.

They agreed, only because we had 3,000 books, to take 900. They have not approached us to have this book in the hands of every child between the ages of 7 and 11 in the province. There are three books given to 300 schools, so it is thinly spread. It will not be introduced into the curriculum.

I did write a letter to every principal in the province, including the French schools - that letter was translated, the book currently is not translated - telling them what our vision was, our gift to them and that this was no cost at all in terms of curricula-building within the Department of Education. There has not been ongoing dialogue with the Department of Education to have the book given to them for printing purposes so that more children would have access to it.

MS. CASEY: Do you have any idea how that book is being used in those schools?

MS. BERNARD: I do not.

MS. SANDERSON: Can I just add an additional answer to your question there concerning the silos and working with various departments. Back in May 2010, when the committee report had been forwarded to the government, I took that report and sent a proposal to the Department of Justice, which was actually coordinating the committee at the time, to outline the various areas where Alice Housing could assist with the recommendations that came out from the committee. We really had no further dialogue beyond that.

What we were trying to do was really get in there and help develop the action plan even more, have more involvement in developing the action plan, but we didn't have a response to our proposal.

MS. BERNARD: As Pamela has mentioned before, community was not involved in the development of the action plan.

MS. SANDERSON: But we had identified that we could help. There were 52 recommendations in a particular section of the report and we could help with developing 20 of those into an action plan, but we never heard anything back from the Department of Justice.

MS. BERNARD: Nor did any other community member of the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, just a few quick snappers. You know, through your presentation and even presentations that we received from you in the past, we continue to talk about violence increasing. Have you had to turn away people because your caseload tends to get too much? Or how do you take on that added load that seems to be continually thrown at you?

MS. BERNARD: Well, we don't have the capacity to do any formal outreach with the women who may come back and say, I'm at a tough spot; I don't want to come back into the program. Oftentimes when Bryony House had outreach, we would often refer there because it was a great resource in the community, but in terms of space, space is one of our big inhibitors. We can't under-house people. We can't squeeze five children and a woman into a two-bedroom apartment, it's just not manageable. We've actually reconfigured - I've actually knocked down walls in a two-bedroom and connected a two-bedroom to a one-bedroom to make a three-bedroom. We have done that when we can do it. When we sold something last year to help with sustainability costs, which actually didn't help us at all, we actually took two-bedroom apartments and bought three-bedroom flats because we

had a tremendous waiting list at that time. We closed on February 1<sup>st</sup> and they were filled on February 15<sup>th</sup> and they're still there. It's just an ongoing challenge for us.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: More on the funding side of things. Fifty-two per cent of your money has come from fundraising, or over 52 per cent really. I know that you're maybe not in this fiscal year asking necessarily for funding from the province, but how are you going to fundraise that gap now that it has been identified? I mean, you're looking at a gap of \$250,000 per year over the next three or four years and knowing where fundraising is at this point - everybody is out there knocking on doors looking for money - how do you envision trying to get that gap covered?

MS. BERNARD: It's very difficult. I've been executive director, next month I'll be going into my eighth year and I have been able to manage successful fundraisers. I'm not always going to be at Alice Housing and so the person who follows me is going to have to have the same skill set or they're going to have to divide the skills and that costs money and so it has been very difficult. I've had tremendous support from board members and tremendous support from volunteers in the community and companies and corporations who understand and value the services that we offer in their community. I mean, Healing the Bruises has never received a penny in government funding. It has been funded first through Emera and now through Medavie and we're not looking to the government to fund Healing the Bruises.

We don't consider Healing the Bruises a core program. We consider the safe housing and the women's program a core program because we have existed without Healing the Bruises for many years. Our core work is with the women and the safety, and Alice Housing saw the gap in 2005 and developed that program, so we're not even asking for money for Healing the Bruises. We want to take that responsibility on like we have been doing, so it's going to be very difficult.

The money that we have in our reserve right now is for the next two to three years. We cannot sustain the fundraising that we were doing now; it is just not sustainable. We don't have the professional staff to do it. We've just been lucky. Any world event affects everybody's fundraising abilities in this city. (Interruptions)

MS. MICHELLE KELLY: I think the board of directors should answer that question or a member of the board because I'm listening to Joanne and she refuses to say that the only reason that Alice Housing is here today is because of her, and because she raises that kind of money year after year for the board. I stayed on this year as a board member to solely focus on succession planning because we know Joanne is not staying, and if she doesn't, we're done, this organization folds.

Right now we're trying to figure out - and we're looking at things like, well, do we cut an ED position in favour of a professional fundraiser because this organization is only here because of the fundraising efforts it does. We've been so lucky to have Joanne do that

for us, but we know that we may not be able to do it next year or the year after and so the board is looking at that, but we don't know. So we have plan B, but plan B could fold at any time, so we're here today to say that plan A is really this partnership and this ongoing dialogue. So just to answer your question, Mr. d'Entremont, this idea of fundraising is this woman sitting here and if she leaves us, we could be in trouble.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Burrill.

MR. GARY BURRILL: I just want to try to understand the funding impossibility with greater precision. To a person who comes to this green, as many of us do, the nuts and bolts of how this works aren't immediately clear. For example, you were saying that - I think the number was seven - a number of houses had been lost over the last recent period because of unsustainability. Could you just explain to a beginner how, in fact, that works, what the nuts and bolts had been, what was lost that had previously been present in that way?

MS. BERNARD: The organization, before I became executive director, acquired a building in Dartmouth that it was not equipped to sustain, both maintenance-wise and staff-wise. It was bought with the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative monies, which was the federal homelessness monies that were available during Claudette Bradshaw's - that was her brainchild. They bought that particular building and it did not meet the needs of the organization and was actually costing the organization quite a bit.

So in 2007, because we had no money in the bank - when I arrived on the scene, they were two weeks away from laying staff off. They had been without an executive director for six months and they were scrambling. So one of the first things I did, besides implement a two-week fundraiser in a very short period of time, was to sell that building. Those monies we put into an investment fund because we owned the building outright.

That is a reserve fund and we knew that we could draw on that to meet the deficit situation which we were in each year. Because of my success in fundraising, which is not sustainable, we haven't really had to delve into that. That's why when we went to the minister we said, we're not in a crisis situation yet.

Our investments took a major hit in 2008, along with everybody else's. We don't have an endowment fund like other organizations; it's just not a reality. In 2010, because of a long waiting list, we decided to take the second property that was actually bought with the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative and flip that into larger units. We did that, but the difference between the two actually cost the organization more. So to meet the operational needs of the organization, we had to take out a small mortgage over a period of time, so it has added to it, but we were in a position where women were not getting services. We absolutely had to make that decision because our list was, at one point in time, eight families and two of them we identified as extraordinarily high-risk, so we made an

operational decision back in 2010, over the course of a couple of months. That's how we reached from 25 down to 18.

MR. BURRILL: That's really helpful, thanks, because to understand the part of the unsustainability that's operational and the part that came from a capital problem, that's helpful.

Could I ask you something about the programming? This is a new concept to me, I'm sure it must be to others, that a year is devoted in programming, second-year programming, to something called - did I hear you right? - the development of a life plan?

MS. BERNARD: When a woman comes to us, either from a transition house or other means, the first priority is safety and crisis processing, to get things stabilized. In those first months there are weekly counselling sessions, both individually and within groups. Over that year it then becomes - possibilities open as women are not under the thumb of violence and possibilities about changing the way they think, in terms of what their potential is, happens as well. I spent nine years on welfare, I know what it's like to live under the thumb of a bureaucratic system and not be able to say yes to your child. I didn't come from violence, but I moved into poverty, like many of these women do. So education in our program is the key.

We've had women who have gone through the New Opportunities for Women program, through humanities courses, through Women Unlimited. We have had women take welding programs and become welders; we have women become aviation mechanics, social services and human services; electronic technology; culinary. They have moved off welfare because we model a motto that talks about self-sufficiency, not depending on another relationship for financial sustainability and fulfilling dreams, because these women, for the first time, it's about them and that's what we want - to be about them. So the second year is we're supporting women as they're in school. We're being flexible with our counselling so that we do it later in the day after their classes. We're providing daycare so that they can come and participate in the programs.

MR. BURRILL: Thank you very much.

MS. BERNARD: One of the other things that I would like to mention - sorry, I don't mean to be pushy. Rising costs of electricity, water and heat are all three variables that we have absolutely no control over. When I first came to Alice Housing, we paid the electricity rates for the women, which is an unrealistic situation. You know many landlords don't include electricity, so back in 2007 we actually had to stop that, but we still light up all of our properties; we still run a drop-in centre; we still pay for heat and hot water. Our heating costs alone - the bills for the heating costs - are equivalent to what government funding we get from DCS. So the \$28,000 that I pay for heating costs this year will be covered by DCS and that will be it; no salaries, nothing else, no security, absolutely nothing; and those are costs that I can't cut.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I have been maintaining a speakers list; I don't have anyone else on it, but Mr. Prest would like to be on it.

MR. SIDNEY PREST: Are you people not registered as a non-profit organization?

MS. BERNARD: Yes, we are.

MR. PREST: So why are you paying property taxes?

MS. BERNARD: That's a very good question and that will go to the municipality.

MS. SANDERSON: It goes to the legislation around municipal taxation.

MS. BERNARD: We pay anywhere between \$7,000 and \$9,000 per year and that is with a 75 per cent discount, so we are very grateful to get that 75 per cent discount and every year I've asked for a 100 per cent discount and every year I'm denied that.

MR. PREST: You apply every year.

MS. BERNARD: Every year.

MS. SANDERSON: But every year the municipality grants us 75 per cent exemption.

MR. PREST: What else could be done in place of the funding for your organization that would be of major assistance to you? I mean, a lot of time, money doesn't solve the problem.

MS. SANDERSON: Okay.

MR. PREST: It doesn't; the problems don't go away just because more money is provided.

MS. SANDERSON: That's right. I guess my main point is, what needs to happen is that the cycle needs to be broken; the cycle of violence needs to be broken and we think that we can help to break the cycle so that in actual fact, what you will end up with is, in Nirvana, zero cost for domestic violence; that would be our dream.

MS. BERNARD: Mr. Prest, I absolutely agree with you, but talking costs nothing and we were denied that, so we need to move on from that; we need to be able to open a dialogue, but when you're talking a \$430,000 budget and only anywhere from \$22,000 to \$35,000 comes from government, money can help that.

MR. PREST: But there must be a deterrent that could be put in place to prevent a lot of these crimes and violence to even take place in the first place.

MS. BERNARD: Well, sir, I thought the Domestic Violence Action Plan was part of that.

MR. PREST: It almost seems like we're making a place to put the victims and our threats are still out there running loose.

MS. SANDERSON: Part of the action plan does provide for the pilot Domestic Violence Court Program that is being launched in Sydney, which will assist in those kinds of issues being brought out and people being punished for domestic violence, is what you're getting at. In my view, where the end will come is when the women themselves say, no, I'm not putting up with this. It's like bullying - well, similar to bullying. It will only be stopped when the women themselves, and all of society, say this is unacceptable.

MS. BERNARD: Well, I think the violence will stop when men stop perpetrating it. I think that's - I mean domestic violence in this province is clearly a feminine face and emergency shelters, transition houses, second-stage, are very much-needed services because men aren't stopping. So until that changes - and it's not going to change overnight - our services are needed. Otherwise, as Pamela says, you see a generational - we know that what we do and we know what Pamela's association does cut costs in the future because these women have a chance to escape this violence.

There are men's intervention programs that are working, as well, which are very well-funded by government. They're needed to be government-funded because they provide a service the same way that we do.

MS. HARRISON: Joanne, do you mind if I make a comment?

MS. BERNARD: Go ahead, Pamela.

MS. HARRISON: In response to your question, Mr. Prest, honestly, from my perspective, the element that is missing is that non-abusive men have to participate in this. We can't have any bystanders. Every single person who allows off-colour jokes, who allows sexist behaviour, who laughs at bad jokes, who ignores what is going on in front of them, is part of the problem.

We've come a long way - dare I say, the women's community, women's resources - in looking at how we seize the solution to the problem. But I don't think that there is any question at all unless men like you - good men - stand up and say that's not okay, we will not tolerate it. That certainly is something that's being - now, I don't want to disagree with my colleagues here but I will say that there are a number of initiatives under the Domestic Violence Action Plan that I think are going to address some of those things. I think it's

really important, you made a really important point that it's not just about responding to victims, because that's after the fact; it's how we prevent this in the first place. You have a part to play, as well, I guess is my message.

MR. PREST: Oh, yes, that's right. But I'm just . . .

MS. BERNARD: And this book has a part to play and that's why we did it.

MR. PREST: It's like the bar owners, the action they're taking downtown to declare the troublemakers before there's even - to try to eliminate that trouble, so it's preventive action, action that's certainly . . .

MS. BERNARD: Preventive, that was one of the things we looked at in the recommendations - prevention. But there are women in crisis now and we can look at prevention and there are programs, I'll agree with Pamela, within the Domestic Violence Action Plan that may help with prevention but for here and now, on the job, women living at Alice Housing, there is nothing that's helping them right now, except for this organization and the other community organizations within the area.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you - are you finished for now?

MR. PREST: For now, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think you sparked some very interesting, philosophical discussion which is important in this and maybe sparked some more questions, too, because my speakers list was down to zero and now it has three more, so we're not done yet. I hope you can stick around for a little while. Ms. Regan.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Prest had a good point in that there are preventive measures we can take but, at the same time - to use a fire analogy - we can't say the house is burning but we're not going to fight that fire until we figure out who set it and why. We have to fight the fire and the fire that we're fighting here is women who are being abused, women and children who are living in domestic violence, and we need to look at what they need now.

It seems to me that we're talking about women who go on to have careers, who gain better self-confidence and better self-image, who begin to take control of their lives. As a province we can either pay a bit now and get women back on their feet after this experience, or we can pay a lot more later; whether we have to pay for people who are on social assistance, whether we have to deal with children who have seen this kind of abuse and then grow up to become abusers themselves, and I would assume that there's probably a corollary for young women who grow up in abusive families, who think that is a normal relationship. Do you see daughters of women who have been abused coming back in?



MS. BERNARD: We actually had one family a couple of years ago and their son had been at Alice Housing as a child and the daughter had been at Bryony House as a child, so it was a unique situation of both original families having systematic cyclical violence.

When I wrote my annual general report last May, I got a phone call from a former client who had moved out West after completing two years here at NSCC and then moving to UCCB. She had been with us for two and a half years and then moved on. She was working out West and was very excited to tell me about the job, that she was working on the job site, and this was a 54-year-old woman who actually had to change her course of education from mechanics because the injury she had sustained from numerous beatings over a 30-year marriage had broken and damaged the muscles in her neck, so when she was up like this, she was in chronic pain. So she took that barrier, changed her course into environmental studies, went to UCCB and now lives out in Calgary.

The quote that she gave me that day - and I asked her if I could use it - she said: Joanne, I just got my first paycheque and they took more taxes out of me in two weeks than I made on welfare in one month, and I'm okay with that. I put that in my AGM report because that was her sense of pride. This is a woman who hadn't worked outside of the home, but at 53 years of age decided to move on with her life and who actually had come from B.C., put her finger on a map, landed on Halifax, spent six weeks at Bryony House and then came to Alice Housing. It's a perfect example of how the two organizations worked together for a success story.

There are many more women who have started at Bryony House, come to Alice Housing and then moved off the social assistance/welfare stream through upgrading their education. I might add that there are many wonderful programs within the Department of Community Services for women who are looking to get off social assistance; unfortunately not all of them are covered. Like if someone wants to go to Success College, my understanding is that's not covered. But there are many different career-seeking and different programs that are doing wonderful work with women who want to further their education.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Ramey.

MR. RAMEY: Just quickly, back to the money again. You mentioned that you get a 75 per cent tax break from the city on the properties.

MS. BERNARD: Yes.

MR. RAMEY: Has there ever been a request to the city or to the federal government? I'm just asking, because I have no idea if that would even be something that you'd be eligible for. Have you ever made requests to either of those levels of government for support?

MS. BERNARD: The federal government doesn't provide core funding to organizations; they give project funding. Healing the Bruises was started with federal justice money. I've applied over numerous years to the Homelessness Initiative to no avail. Also, the same with the city; they don't provide core funding to provincial organizations. I've applied for grant funding if I needed - for instance, the first year I was there, I made the Alice Housing drop-in centre accessible so that women with disabilities had a way to get in; that came through funding. I recently just received funding to replace the roof because the drop-in centre doesn't house anyone; it's not available for Shelter Enhancement funding so I have to pay for any upgrades that happen there.

I've asked every year for tax relief to the tune of 100 per cent and that has never been granted. The issue is the drop-in centre; it's charged at a commercial rate in downtown Dartmouth.

MS. SANDERSON: All non-profits are commercial.

MS. BERNARD: Because it doesn't house anybody and so that bill, even at 75 per cent, is in the vicinity of \$5,500 per year. I have actually tried to change that so that we're under what our other buildings are. I have - what's the word when you want to go back and say this isn't right?

MS. SANDERSON: Appeal.

MS. BERNARD: Yes, appeal, and my appeal was denied. I'm not good at . . .

MS. SANDERSON: It's a very tiny portion of the budget. The property taxes are a tiny, tiny portion of that.

MR. RAMEY: I understand - I gathered that.

MS. BERNARD: You know, I've cut out professional development to my staff. My two most recent acquisitions took significant pay cuts to come work at Alice Housing. I think that says a measure of the management, the board, and the work that we're doing that people want to work there. We make less than counterparts in other like-minded organizations. We have a benefit plan; we have no pension plan so that when our staff leave they have nothing.

We've cut costs; we took a full-time position and made it part-time. We've done all the tinkering and incremental changes we could make, without actually shutting the doors and turning the lights off. We get no breaks from Aliant, from Emera - in terms of Nova Scotia Power, or from the Halifax Water Commission on our utilities. In terms of heating oil, we are part of the DCS tendering thing under Wilsons, so it is cheaper per gallon or litre, which we just did a couple of years ago, but it's still a significant amount because these are older buildings. The upkeep - when somebody leaves after two years and it needs

to be maintained and painted, it is \$2,000 each time. Replacing a dryer for one of my units the other day cost \$400; we're \$12,000 over-budget in maintenance this year because our buildings are aging. We've been in business for 30 years; these buildings have been there before that.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Casey.

MS. CASEY: Thank you. If I could, I'd like to go back to the education and schools component. I know that we're talking here about the root cause, which Mr. Prest has raised - what is the root cause, the preventive kinds of things - and then the reactive response, which is your role, to respond to something that we wish we didn't have to, but it's there so you respond.

I know we have been very successful over the last number of years with the education component within our schools for things that were beyond the education curriculum - drinking and driving, smoking cessation, recycling, healthy foods, physically active lifestyle. There have been a number of initiatives where we have gone into our schools, educated the kids who went home and educated their parents, and those have worked.

My concern is - I know I asked the question and I don't expect you to be responsible for the answer, I know you've given me the answer - do we know where those books are in the schools? My concern is that maybe there's a very valuable educational tool out in the schools, collecting dust somewhere. I don't know that but I think it's important that we somehow find out where that tool is and how it might be effectively used so that we can begin an education with our population that will become the adults. You've said many young boys who witness violence become violent themselves later on.

Is there some way that we can get at the root cause and prevent things so that your organizations don't have to respond to so many? It's a long-term thing but I'm just thinking, is there a role for schools?

MS. BERNARD: There is, Karen, because schools are not obligated to use this resource and those three books may be sitting on a shelf, collecting dust. We know there's one school in Dartmouth where the principal absolutely refuses to let his teachers use it and they're using it behind his back. We know that because they've told us. So there will be principals who don't want to introduce this subject, in this form, in the classroom.

It is not in the curriculum. It is in every school and it is up to the principal or the teachers - teachers that have been overwhelmingly in favour of using this, including guidance counsellors. One of our clients - one of our current children - actually read this to his classmates in his school in Dartmouth, and that's a huge step. He basically came out to

his classmates and they had a two-day discussion on domestic violence in the home - what is healthy arguing between parents and what isn't.

At the end of the book there are 10 questions for engagement that parents can talk about and that teachers can talk about to students. So no, the Department of Education never used it as an official, formal part of their curriculum. They certainly could have, we certainly would have given them that resource to be able to do that. We were in the position of saying, look, this is our expertise and we're giving it to you; you can take it or leave it. They took it on that level.

MS. CASEY: If I could just add one follow-up question. Has the department been asked to endorse that? I know, as a principal in a school, you want to make sure that you are using a resource that the Department of Education has approved. Has the department been asked to endorse that as a teaching tool, which would allow principals, I think, to have a better comfort level when they were going out to use that? If that has not happened, it might be something to be considered.

MS. BERNARD: It did happen in the first meeting with the curriculum person and with Alex. We gave them the option of using it however they liked. We made it very clear that we would like this in the curriculum and be part of curriculum-based activities within the classroom. They chose to do the three books over - we were just going to give them the materials and give them the rights to print it, but that did not happen.

MS. CASEY: One last question. Were you given any explanation as to why this would not have been endorsed? Is there some reason why a Department of Education staff member might not be comfortable with it?

MS. BERNARD: There were some concerns around what they assumed was the origin of Julia. They didn't want to perpetuate a stereotype. They assumed this was a biracial child, when in actual fact it is based on a child that Lori counselled in Toronto who was half Asian and half Spanish. They assumed it was a biracial child with a White mother and so they didn't want to perpetuate the stereotype that Black men were beating their White wives. I got that. Every colour, every name, everything in this book was purposeful. The father, when he is shown, is actually hued in blue and not with any identifying characteristics unless you equate him to a Smurf or an Avatar. (Laughter) We were very purposeful in not offending any sensibilities around race, culture, anything like that. That came back to us twofold and that's when we said it's your choice; nothing is being changed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we may have come to the end of our questions. I don't see any other names - Ms. Regan, one more.

MS. REGAN: I think actually when I was down visiting the women's centre in Yarmouth, they told me about a program in either junior high or high school that was being

done - not through them but in conjunction with them - and they were going in to talk to kids about healthy relationships. I often wonder where our kids are getting their ideas of what a healthy relationship is. Well, they get it at home, but they're getting it from someplace else too. Not to harp on this - except I always do - but if they're getting their idea of what a healthy relationship is from a music video, it's completely skewed. I worry about kids today and it does seem to me it's one place where we're kind of dropping the ball.

MS. BERNARD: Well, Lori does go into the school system - as I know Transition House staff and family centre staff will when asked as well. It's a resource issue, whether or not the time is there. In terms of the impetus for that book, that was one of the reasons why Lori decided to write it. She spent two hours at a junior high school in Hammonds Plains and for two hours afterwards stayed another hour because there were some disclosures. So somebody who spent two hours with a stranger, children were safe enough with her talking about healthy relationships to disclose, and not the teacher they were spending 35 hours a week with. That is no reflection on the teacher; it's just that kids aren't seeing their teachers as safe people to talk about what's going on in the home.

MS. REGAN: Is there anything that we haven't asked you today that you'd like to leave us with?

MS. BERNARD: I don't believe so. I think we've covered everything. We named our business plan, of which I have copies here, of proven success and worthy of support. We're nationally recognized for the work we do. We're the most recognized organization east of Ontario by the Donner Canadian Foundation, which is the benchmark of measuring success of non-profits in Canada.

At some point in time, we talked at lunchtime, and the term you used, like we're sick of seeing our words out there, we need some help. We need some very real help within the next couple of years or this organization that has been in this community for years is not going to be able to fulfill the mandate that it has set for itself or the mandate that the government has set through its own legislation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Regan. I think that is the end of our questions. Ms. Bernard, you said that there is not something that you hadn't already said but are there closing remarks that anybody would like to make?

MS. BERNARD: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, well thank you very much for being here and for making a very, as I said at the beginning, a forceful and clear presentation, I think it was very helpful.

I think what we'll do is take a brief recess to allow our witnesses to pack up and leave the room. We have a bit more business to attend to before we adjourn today, so just a brief recess.

[2:21 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:28 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will reconvene. We've got a bit more business to do and we've probably got sufficient time to do it, I hope. Under Committee Business, we've received two pieces of correspondence. The first noted is a Face of Poverty Consultation letter that was dated November 24<sup>th</sup>. I think that has been distributed to everyone. It was a follow-up on the presentation that was made by Delores Feltmate of the Children and Youth in Crisis Working Group for the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada. You'll have noted that in this letter, Ms. Cushing asked us to ask the committee to support the changes to the Children and Family Services Act as proposed by Ms. Feltmate and her working group by recommending them to both the Minister of Community Services and the Minister of Justice. That recommendation related to children who are between the ages of 16 and 19 years of age in providing services to those children. Any discussion? Mr. Burrill.

MR. BURRILL: In response to this letter, I'd like to put a motion before the committee. I'd like to move that in the context of the present consideration of amendments to the Children and Family Services Act that is going on in the Department of Community Services, that the Minister of Community Services be asked to consider the proposal to define a child as a person under 19 years of age, as opposed to the present regime, 16 years of age, as this proposal had been presented here to the Standing Committee by the Children and Youth in Crisis Working Group of the Maritime Conference of the United Church.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Burrill. There has been a motion. Any discussion? Is that an acceptable direction? I'm seeing nods all around so I think we will move in that direction and refer the letter with our recommendation in that regard. Thank you, Mr. Burrill, for that clarity.

We also have received another letter from the Valley Restorative Justice organization, indicating that that group or the Coalition of Restorative Justice Agencies be offered the opportunity to meet before us at some future date. I bring the letter forward to see if there is a willingness to add them to our list of groups that wish to meet with us.

I actually received a sort of follow-up e-mail to this letter, indicating that they did not want to meet immediately but they would like to meet, so they've certainly suggested this is something that can be planned.

Thank you very much for that and we will add them to our list. Kim, I think you will let them know that that has occurred. Thank you.

I think that brings us to our next meeting date, February 7, 2012, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. I think I'm just going to let Kim speak in a moment to the fact that there are no witnesses beside that name at this moment.

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): There are two witnesses approved, one was the federal poverty report, which was on our schedule the last time and there was discussion about who was going to come as the witness because the person we had contacted indicated he didn't want to come and we're trying to figure out if he meant ever or just not then. I haven't heard back from them yet.

The other witness was the Retail Council of Canada and Feed Nova Scotia. They were approved as being maybe coming in on the same day. I have contacted them but I have not heard back from them as yet so it's just a matter of - the feelers have gone out, I just haven't heard back yet so I'm assuming that we will have somebody, I just don't know who that someone is at the moment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Casey.

MS. CASEY: I have a question, if you do hear back in the negative for both of those, then do we have a third - someone who is on our list who we could invite?

MS. LANGILLE: Yes. Well the only other thing - there was discussion at our last meeting when we chose witnesses about having Community Services kind of on the circular list, sort of thing, so I suppose that might be an option.

MS. CASEY: So that is one option that is still there for a future meeting?

MS. LANGILLE: Yes, but that's pretty much it, basically. I guess there's a question, if I hear back, let's say from the Retail Council and they can come but Feed Nova Scotia can't are we just going to go with one, or do we want to wait and have them both on the same day?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would think if the Retail Council of Canada could come, which might be of some difficulty for them but I don't know where some would be located, it would seem to me . . .

MS. LANGILLE: They have a local person.

MR. CHAIRMAN: . . . it would be reasonable to accept that as a plan, even if they would come in isolation. Would that be acceptable?

MS. LANGILLE: Or Feed Nova Scotia or whatever.

MS. CASEY: One or the other or both.

MS. LANGILLE: Yes, exactly.

MS. CASEY: My question was, if neither, then we would go to another.

MS. LANGILLE: Yes, that's my understanding.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any other business items that need to be brought to the attention of the committee today?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I move we adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So be it. We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:33 p.m]