

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

Red Room, Province House

Nova Scotia League For Equal Opportunities

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Jim Morton (Chairman)
Ms. Becky Kent (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Sid Prest
Mr. Gary Burrill
Ms. Michele Raymond
Hon. Karen Casey
Ms. Kelly Regan
Mr. Keith Bain
Mr. Eddie Orrell

[Mr. Keith Bain was replaced by Mr. Alfie MacLeod.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Nova Scotia League For Equal Opportunities

Mr. Ralph Ferguson,
Chair

Mr. Claredon Robicheau,
Treasurer

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2013

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to call the meeting to order. The clock that I can barely see at the front of the room says 9:04 a.m. so we're a bit behind our time. My name is Jim Morton, I'm the MLA for Kings North. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services and we're meeting this morning in the Red Room in Province House.

As we begin I'll mention that our witnesses this morning are from the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities but what I'd like to do to start, as we always do, is have members of the committee introduce themselves, beginning with our clerk.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We have two guests, one that we can see and one that we can't but I have been assured that the guest we can't hear can hear us at the moment. I'd like to just mention that Mr. Ralph Ferguson, the chairman of the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities, is with us and Mr. Claredon Robicheau, whom I understand is the treasurer at this moment of the organization, is also with us by phone. Good morning, Mr. Robicheau.

MR. CLAREDON ROBICHEAU: Good morning, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning. We heard you - not loudly, but I think we heard you clearly. We'll see if we need to adjust that a bit.

I would like to turn the floor over at this point to Mr. Ferguson to begin his presentation. As you're aware, Mr. Ferguson, what usually happens is that you will be free to take the time that you and Claredon need to make the presentation and then members of the committee will have questions and be interested in engaging in a discussion.

MR. RALPH FERGUSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. I'm very pleased to be here to present before you, the Standing Committee on Community Services.

For over 32 years now, the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities has worked diligently to ensure that Nova Scotia is a province in which people with disabilities can live, learn, and work with dignity in their home and community. Collaborating closely with our community and provincial partners, we've supported and advanced our mission, which is to identify and articulate the issues that impact people with disabilities here in the province in their daily lives and to formulate and propose workable solutions.

With over 20 per cent of our population being people with disabilities, we are committed to making disability issues a central consideration in all government and community initiatives. I have a handout here, and I'd like you to look at it because it graphically shows what 20 per cent of the population looks like. Our population is 945,437 in 2011 and 20 per cent of that is 189,067 according to my calculator. That's more people than live in Cape Breton, Alfie, a lot more.

In fact, if you look at the map, it's almost equivalent to - actually it's a little more than five counties: Antigonish, Pictou, Cumberland, Hants, and Colchester. I mentioned Colchester last - they're in the middle - because I know there are two representatives here from Colchester and nobody from the rest. Anyway, it's a big population that we're talking about.

As we look at the problem province-wide, people with disabilities in all these regions of our province continue to experience daily exclusion in their lives. They are too often unable to enjoy a sense of community because they cannot find affordable and accessible housing; they can't get the technical needs that they need, like wheelchairs and technical supports to name a couple; affordable and accessible transportation has been a problem and continues to be in some areas; and adequate home care supports that are successful enough to meet people's daily needs are too often unavailable.

People with disabilities, because of their disabilities, because they cannot obtain meaningful employment or - am I not speaking loud enough? (Interruption) Okay. They

are not able to get meaningful employment and so too often, they're living in poverty; 50 per cent of people with disabilities are more likely to be in poverty than others.

Strong and inclusive communities that we'd like to see in Nova Scotia include supports and a robust network of community supports for all the citizens, and we'd like to make sure that the supports that are needed for the disabled sections of those communities are also included.

I think it's important to recognize the assistance that government has been giving us over the years. It's also important to recognize the assistance that self-help organizations within the disability community themselves are doing. We're doing a lot ourselves and we want to continue to do such. The organizations I'm referring to are organizations like NSLEO, the Nova Scotia Independent Living Centre, the Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians, et cetera. With government help, we form a good partnership and as a result, the disability community has, over the last few decades, seen ourselves come forward with many improvements.

However, the future ability of many of our organizations right now is in jeopardy because of a cutback in federal funding to us. For many years, Service Canada has provided groups like ours with a small grant, which allowed us core funding to do those things that we do, and that has been a great help, but this year they decided to cut that. They cut us this year by one-third, they are going to cut by another one-third next year and down to zero by the following year, so that is pretty well all of our core funding. Understandably, that is going to require us to adjust and change our operations.

So to the questions I came here to answer - what is the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities all about and what does the league do? - I'd ask you to refer to handout No. 2, a copy of our charities report on the Revenue Canada charities Web site. You'll see that it summarizes our revenues in the circle graph and our expenses. At the top there are 10 activities that we've been involved with in the last year; they are listed. Actually we did more than that but there was only room to put 10 on.

I want to go over those 10 activities so that you'll understand exactly what we've been up to and the sort of things we do. The Provincial Access Awareness Nova Scotia program is a provincial program that a few years ago we were asked to take over the management of. We've done that and we've grown the program. The program includes about \$22,000 in scholarships for students with disabilities from across Nova Scotia that are awarded each year in what is called PAANS Week, which is provincial access awareness.

A couple of years ago - number 2 there, Poverty Reduction - we were asked to sit on a Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee for the province and to put in a disability voice to what was being said there. One of our members travelled to the committee for six months - every two weeks - to put in that input on how things were affecting people with disabilities

and what could be done to improve and so forth. That committee has been working since 2009. This year we are actually starting to see some positive results of that and we're quite pleased.

In these activities that we're involved in, some people in the past have called the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities an advocate - advocates. Other people call us a consumer organization: consumer of services, consumer of medical stuff. I don't like either of those terms; in my mind they just don't describe what NSLEO is all about. I like to refer to us as a catalyst. Think of the old Grade 5 science experiment where you had a beaker of water and you put oil on it, and it wouldn't mix until you put a little dish detergent in there. And then all of a sudden, you get inclusion. It would mix and that's what I like to think of NSLEO as: we're a catalyst.

We're a very small provincial organization. This year we've had to reduce our staff from two to one because of the financial cut that we suffered, and we've closed our physical office to save rent. We have a very small budget and thus we cannot do the heavy lifting that is required for all the big problems that people with disabilities across the province have. But we have had many successes, and we've done that as a catalyst. We get things going in our activities and that's basically what we're about.

One of the activities that we've been involved with is the Wheelchair Recycling Program. That's been a priority for NSLEO for 20 years, to get people wheelchairs. Back in 2003 the government of the day invested \$1 million in wheelchairs for children, and we were very pleased with that and got to sit on the committee with the Easter Seals Nova Scotia, which runs that committee. We've continuously worked with them and with government to expand the program. This year we were very pleased when, with the most recent budget where \$400,000, or almost that, was added, to allow wheelchairs for seniors over 65. That is just great because it allows them to stay in their homes and not move into seniors' housing quite so soon. So we think that's wonderful.

We have disability information-sharing sessions. We have conference calls with our members from across the province and twice a year we try to bring them together for a face-to-face to discuss the issues that people with disabilities are facing across the province, and share notes and solutions and see what we can do to further the cause.

Community-based transportation, there's a big one. Back in 1981, here in Halifax, the bus companies in Dartmouth and Halifax decided that they would amalgamate. We had some disability leaders in this area at the time - I think Don Kern, Shawn McCormick, Margaret Hiltz - and these people got together and said, if they're putting together these bus companies, we should put an Access-A-Bus in there, or try to get that included. And sure enough, they were able to do that. That was a great step forward for the province in the Metro area.

In 1996, two of our organizations in NSLEO, including one that was run by Claredon, who is on the line with us, and one down in Pictou County that Ron Levy ran - they started up a couple of community based transportation systems, known as Dial-A-Ride. In 1999 the government looked at all that and said, this is working, and they started a couple of pilots and now, today, that whole system has grown.

I'd like you to take a look at handout number three. From those small beginnings, we've now got all of these organizations, which are covering 76 per cent of the rural area of our province, and last year they put in 1.4 million kilometres in helpful drives to people with disabilities and seniors in the province.

That started with ourselves, the disabled community, pushing it and working with government and with the community and others. We've been able - in that system - to grow \$520,000 of provincial funding investment and provincial grants into \$2.3 million worth of service and equipment.

Public and disability member education and awareness - We provided telephone call-in service at our office and we will continue to do that, even though we don't have an office, where community and government leaders and the general public can call in for general information.

The Provincial Disability Strategy - that's one we're proud of. It actually began right here with this committee back in 2008. At that time - Jim wasn't the chairman, it was an MLA called Marilyn More. When our various groups came together and presented before her and the committee, she said, why don't you all get together so you can speak with a more unified voice? I was sitting in the room at the time and I said, well, that's a great idea, so I went back to NSLEO and NSLEO said, yes, okay we'll call a meeting of all the groups and call them all together. Sure enough, now as a result of that we have 20 disability groups working in partnership with government to form a provincial strategy or to advise on what should be in the provincial strategy. To be honest, we haven't gotten everything our own way and you wouldn't expect that we would, but we found that this initiative has had a significant influence on government policy formation and the initiative is continuing.

Caucus research papers - I don't have to tell you people very much about them. You know that every year we present a paper to all three caucuses, a research paper that we do. We just presented one to you in February and so I'm not going to say very much about that.

Emergency preparedness for people with disabilities and seniors - after Hurricane Juan and White Juan, we found after those storms that people with disabilities were just not prepared for emergencies. Some of our people were caught in upper stories of buildings and they didn't have electricity. I don't know if they didn't have running water, but they certainly didn't have hot water and their food wasn't adequate for a few days; it was a pretty bad scene. NSLEO led a committee consisting of emergency response professionals,

government representatives and various community partners in developing an information program, a booklet and training program to provide help for seniors and people with disabilities in times of disaster. That training program was put together and made available to everybody across the province who needed it.

The Number 10 activity on our Charities Report is United Nations disability treaty education. This is an initiative of our national organization, the Canadian Council on Disabilities of which NSLEO is an affiliate and so we're very supportive. In 2006, after more than a decade really of tough negotiations in the UN - I don't know if they're tougher there than here, but it took over a decade to get the wording down for this international treaty. They finally got it down and the treaty was passed and when a treaty is passed at the UN, it's an opportunity for countries to sign on to it. NSLEO knew two of the negotiators of that treaty on the Canadian team and they were both from Nova Scotia so we took the opportunity to introduce those two negotiators to the Foreign Affairs Minister, who was also from Nova Scotia at that time. They interested him in it, he hadn't heard of it before because he was brand new, and as a result, Canada was able to sign on to it in March 2007 on the very first day that the treaty came open for signatures. Again, NSLEO was a catalyst, we didn't do it but we took an initiative that led to it.

The Charities Report only provides so much room, as I said before, and a number of things didn't get included. One of the important initiatives that we have also done that got left off was involving tourism. We were a founding member of the Nova Scotia Access Committee which is now led by TIANS, the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia. The idea is to try to get hotel rooms and motel rooms, and transportation, you know try to get a disability lens on that to see if we couldn't improve the tourism for people with disabilities in this area.

Also back in 2008, we were asked to participate and became very involved in many public forums held across Nova Scotia to create a Nova Scotia Positive Aging Strategy. That activity now is reduced, it continues to be a concern for Nova Scotia LEO because - I want you to look at handout number four here, it's pretty self-explanatory. If you look at the figures up the top of that bar chart you'll see that the disability rates in Nova Scotia go way up with aging. We also know that by 2026 the rural population of Nova Scotia is predicted to double and if you look at that chart with that knowledge that the rural population is going to double, that's a big problem coming down the tubes. We think it's very important for ourselves, government, and others to work together to be cognizant that that is coming and work at solutions to the problems before they arise.

On the circle graph - just to quickly go over our revenues at Nova Scotia League - I want to show you that 14 per cent are receipted donations, that's in the red there on handout two; 37 per cent is government funding that actually comes from the provincial government; 49 per cent is from other charities, that's federal funding really and it's funnelled to us through the national body, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

That's what is being cut, that half of our revenue and it's being cut over the next two years down to zero.

We are getting by this year, as I said earlier, by reducing our staff from two to one but you can only reduce staff - you can't reduce it further than that. We've also cut out our rent, so we're going to get by this year, we're going to be able to continue with all these activities but next year and the following year are big question marks for us. We're going to try to enter into partnerships with other groups that are being cut because it's not just us it's all provincial organizations that have been receiving these federal funds, all amounts of federal funds, and we're going to try to partner to work where we can to do what we can, and we hope to do the best.

In closing, let me say our plan is to include in our board structure, representatives from many organizations because we are a cross-disability organization - we want to make sure that we continue to represent in Nova Scotia all the disability areas that there are. What's our need, what's our ask? I have to be straight about it - what we need in the future is money, dollars to continue. We could not have done those things that I've listed without dollars across the province to meet face-to-face, bringing our people together to discuss what the problems are and try to work out solutions, put the right policy in place, to educate ourselves and others on the many complex issues that are facing our 20 per cent of the population.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ralph.

Mr. Robicheau, I assume you are still with us - is there anything you'd like to add before we move into the discussion and question period?

MR. CLAREDON ROBICHEAU: I think Ralph did a great job, but on top of that maybe a few little other comments. A long history of 31 years, but one of them for sure is before my day - the elevator in the Legislature in Halifax; there's an elevator there, to go up to be able to listen to your debates. The Nova Scotia Building Code was one of the first policies we were able to get involved with before I became involved in this.

Some other things that we partnered with - and we don't take credit for - is the Independent Living Centre and the Lois Millers of the world who started self-managed home care. We were right behind her, cheering her on and helping along the way, because it's not just one person or organization - we work together and that was a great example of collaboration across the province to make that happen and make it important.

We also have a very good rapport with the Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission where we help each other - we can't be experts on all. It is a big province and there are a lot of big issues. The 18 organizations, federally, have been basically financially

caught by fiscal 2014-15 - 18 organizations across Canada - and those end up affecting the local groups.

We try to be the solution people; we're not the protesting kind. We've been accused of being soft on government sometimes, but I think all three political Parties we worked with since I came back from New Brunswick to my hometown here in 1992, that we can give that there was some good done on some programs and it was true community engagement, building foundations - and even one not mentioned enough today was employment. Many of us sit on Employment Nova Scotia, or Workability for people with disabilities - Mr. Orrell knows that well, his wife is Jane Orrell, who does a great job in Cape Breton - the collaborative partnership, when it works, where it's led by boards and to create employment for people, that they don't cost government money, they don't cost social money, they're not depressed, they're actively seeking employment, inclusion in society.

Those board members are many of our Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities and, in closing, some of this education is having - I just want to go personal here, that as a former bank manager in New Brunswick - I'm from Meteghan, Digby County. I was there 20 years, moved back to my hometown here in 1992. They took a former bank manager and built them a social policy, social enterprise, and this catalyst-forming organization that can educate and make people aware.

There are very complex issues there, and we try to be the solution people, so that's one of the gains of working together, that we can learn from each other. That's why in 2008 the Disabled Persons Commission asked for the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunity to take over Access Awareness Week. We kept the three or four people who were there, and we made it stronger, and as Ralph said, 22,000.

There are other things that we've done, but it's that mentorship to foster education and awareness on issues; it's the Nova Scotia government who asked us across the province when they were doing the seniors' Positive Aging Strategy that pretty well we had people placed across the province to help host it and make sure that people turned up. I would say the aging population disability rate is on the radar. We have to plant solution seeds now, and we're working diligently on that. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you both for the presentation to get us started. I was thinking I had a short speakers' list, and all of a sudden I have a longer one. I'll begin with Mr. Burrill.

MR. GARY BURRILL: Thank you, Mr. Ferguson. I was just wondering if I could think with you and Mr. Robicheau for a minute. Under the heading of this second point in your CRA charities review, the question of poverty reduction, the income question for persons with disabilities. By way of preamble, I will say that there's no greater argument for a program of guaranteed annual income than the situation of persons with disabilities in

Canada. As everyone knows, according to one's CPP contributions, if one is outside of paid employment, one is either reliant on a federal program - CPP disability - or on a provincial income assistance program.

We heard in this committee about 18 months ago from one of the co-chairs of the - I think very insightful on these questions - federal senate committee's 2009 report, which was called *A Call to Action on Poverty Housing and Homelessness*. In that report, one of the recommendations that received the most attention, and which Senator Eggleton spoke about here, was the recommendation that Canada is now in a position to establish - and ought to establish - a guaranteed annual income program for persons with disabilities. The central argument of the report on this front was that what Canada did some years ago with the incomes of seniors, and has been doing increasingly in recent years for the incomes of families with dependent children, the country is in a position to do and next needs to do about the incomes of persons with disabilities.

This recommendation engendered a lot of interest and discussion, and I was wondering if this question of a guaranteed annual income program for persons with disabilities is something that is on the screen at all of people in the circles of your organization, or is a part of the - you said you're not very fond of the word "advocacy," but whether it's a part of the kind of advocacy discussion that in the world of NSLEO - I was wondering if you had any thoughts on this?

MR. FERGUSON: That's a good question. This Guaranteed Annual Income has been discussed in the past. It is something that kind of came and sort of went. We didn't see it coming and so I think perhaps we've moved on in our thinking, but I don't think it's something that shouldn't be revisited because I think that there are certainly many people with disabilities and that's an option that should be considered.

I personally think, as well, that many people with disabilities have one or two disabilities maybe, but they are left with an awful lot of ability. I have a disability - a couple of them - but I think I have a lot of ability. Claredon, on the line there, has a huge disability, but tremendous ability, so while I would like to see a guaranteed income, I would also like to make sure that people are not encouraged to just sit back and do nothing. I don't know if that's making sense or not. I should, however, turn this over to Claredon because he's the one who was sitting on our Poverty Committee for a long time. What do you think, Claredon?

MR. ROBICHEAU: It is very much still on the table, nationally. I did read that 90-page report from Art Eggleton and heard him speak in Ottawa - I don't have a life. (Laughter) Definitely a positive thing and in light of the idea of the Old Age Security, where did that number come from that is \$13,000 per year? When you look at people in community services or even people on small Canada disability issues, it can be as little as \$6,000 to \$7,000 per year. You cannot live on \$6,000 to \$7,000 per year. Thirteen thousand dollars is not liveable, but it's better than \$6,000.

Also in that model of the Old Age Security level of \$13,000 - it might be up now to \$14,000 or \$15,000, I'm not sure - is a Saskatchewan model where if you make less than, let's say, \$1,100 in a month, the province supplements it for that month only. It's on a monthly basis, but the thing is it works well, but it's quite complex and a lot of paperwork.

You guys, as a committee, have seen Feed Nova Scotia at your table, Art Eggleton at your table and many of those. These are many disabled causes that made those people into poverty. Some is lack of work and employment, but many are disabled from even mental illness, et cetera. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities is very ready probably in the next six months to come out with - they got a grant to form a national poverty strategy for Canada. There has been a lot of consultation with provinces and, yes, that was probably the most exciting part for me.

For those who fall in the cracks, who don't have abilities to contribute to labour and gainful employment but are able to contribute to society as coaches, mentors or volunteer work at the Lions Club and contribute in many ways at church, etcetera. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think I'm going to go next to Ms. Casey and then to Mr. Orrell, just to give you a head's up. Ms. Casey.

MS. KAREN CASEY: Thank you for the presentation. I always am amazed at the work that you and your groups can do without any money. You talked about your contribution and your disability but that's certainly overshadowed by your abilities, so I first want to congratulate you and your members for that.

One of the issues that you mentioned briefly but I'd like to go back and perhaps dig a little deeper on is students with disabilities and, in particular, students who are of post-secondary age, students who have graduated from our public schools. Do you have any statistics on how many students have graduated from public school in this province and have gone on to post-secondary? Do you have any data on that, either past or current?

MR. FERGUSON: I don't have any statistics like that but one of our board members might be able to get that. Emily Duffett is the Nova Scotia chair for NEADS, the national disabled student education body and I could probably speak to her and get those statistics for you, if you wanted. I'm sorry, I can't provide them myself and I suspect Claredon would have the same difficulty. Do you know those statistics, Claredon?

MR. ROBICHAUD: NEADS is the place to go for that.

MS. CASEY: The purpose of my question is to see if there's any kind of a trend. We know you're talking about 20 per cent of the population so how many of those students who have disabilities are able to access our post-secondary education and are we seeing more of those, a greater percentage or a smaller percentage? I think that would help us. We're talking about transportation, about housing, about employment, about home care

and all of those things but we really need to invest in our young people and we need to make sure that opportunities are there for all of our graduates. I would be interested if there is any kind of a trend with respect to that.

I can either direct my question directly to NEADS or, if you could do that on my behalf, I'm sure it would be of interest to all members.

MR. FERGUSON: Okay, I'd like to also speak to something you just said there. I think that over the years, Nova Scotia has been pretty progressive in dealing with students going to post-secondary. I know it's much improved since I went to Dal. I went to Dal with no assistance or any such thing and now there are people who will actually translate text books and do things for people with disabilities and there is effort made to help them transition from college into work.

This idea of affordability - one of the problems we're looking at right now in the transportation of students and students getting to, not necessarily the universities but the community colleges around - they take these local bus services that we have and to try to keep the fares down to the point where they can afford to go to the community college is difficult because these bus companies have to run, if not at a profit, at least at a break-even.

Sometimes it's not very easy, on minimum wage, to be able to get from your house to the college and back, five days a week. It can take a big chunk out of any little bit of money you've got. The biggest concern we have is that our transportation must not only be accessible but affordable. We're looking at that, as a group, and we probably will be speaking to everybody further on that.

I will try to get some information from Emily for you on the other. I think, Kim, you'll give us a heads-up on that? Thanks.

MS. CASEY: Thank you very much, I'll watch for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Casey, and we will follow-up on assisting and getting that information back to committee members.

We will go now to Mr. Orrell and then to Ms. Kent.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you, gentlemen, for your presentation today. Earlier we talked about poverty reduction and a guaranteed income for people with disabilities. In your opinion, Mr. Ferguson, is that the best way to prevent poverty among the disabled population or would it be for better retraining, maybe more assistive devices in the workplace or more increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities who are able to - because we know there is more ability than there is disability?

MR. FERGUSON: I think people with disabilities - when we talk about them, they're not a homogeneous group. When you talk about people with disabilities, we've got a disability organization for every ache and pain, for every ailment, every disease. We're all different, and when we say 20 per cent you can't look at them as - it's all individuals. For a great many people, the training is the answer, but for a great many people it's not.

Somehow or other we've got to have a system that will individualize and look at just what the problem is for the individual and say, what does this person need? Some people will need training, some people will need help getting a job, and other people will need the blanket underneath them, the guaranteed income. I don't know how we work that out, but I see it myself, that these needs are here and we shouldn't put all our eggs in one basket, that we should say we want to help everybody, but we can't help them all the same way. I don't know if that makes sense or not.

MR. ORRELL: The reason I ask that question is, as Claredon said earlier, my wife is involved with EmployAbility Partnership in Sydney, and they deal with the disabled population and they do individual assessments and care plans - I come from a medical background. They say they find that they're able to employ a lot of people after finding out the disability, retraining, and/or restructuring, and/or assistive devices. It just seems like if we can do that with our employment shortages that we're going to run into over the next couple of years, these people are employable and can add a great deal to society.

MR. FERGUSON: It's a great idea. It just doesn't work for everybody.

MR. ORRELL: I guess my question is, how do we get that balance?

MR. FERGUSON: Wow, I wish I knew. We, however, NSLEO, want to work with you on that. As Claredon says, we're the solution people. We want to find a solution for that. Claredon, do you have anything to add to that? That's the poverty question.

MR. ROBICHEAU: Most definitely the employment societies: Sydney, Yarmouth, the Inclusive Employment Society. There's TEAM Work in Halifax, huge organization; Kentville, Truro, the nine organizations including Amherst, I think, is the Black employment society, which is also overlooking the persons with disability employment in Amherst. Tremendous board governance, board work - \$30 million from the feds that is no longer in Ottawa. It now goes from Ottawa to here, and now this province is in charge of it.

We are glad to have been around for 17 years, running this program with real people, real measurement to accountability, et cetera. I hate the word "silos," but Mr. Orrell, you're right. A lot of these people we're dealing with fall in the crack. We're the last resource. They come to us for employment.

Some of it is training, so let's go back to the employment education thing. I won't say 20 per cent, but quite a chunk is through employment, those who are EI eligible or non

EI eligible. We go through community colleges with them with a travel allowance, a babysitter allowance - basically, they almost leave tuition free. I know the ends from these is going to be that there's been a drastic increase the last 10 or so years to employment education to get them ready. There are also job coaches for these people, which is very valuable, where we take people with disabilities and their job coaches - mentoring these people on the job, because a person with disabilities have been watching TV for 10 years to interact with society - to work with co-workers without bullying, and with some respect.

It's a society thing, too, for a company who's never had a person with a disability to treat them with respect and that person with disability to treat the other people with respect. So I would say many employers for people with disabilities are not people that start up rich and they have a wheelchair-accessible van. The cost of living with disability, like the wheelchair program, many of the things we just said, of the above, services in this province and I'm sure the Disabled Persons Commission has a longer list but we know what that list is, I'm not going to go to the list now.

Those disabilities supports are very important to allow people with disabilities to have the ability to go to work, gainful employment or not, to participate in society and employment. Without these other programs like Self Managed Care, a community-based transportation or Dial-A-Ride, affordable housing, etcetera - it's a piece of the puzzle where if those weren't in place, those people would not be able to be more successful to go to work.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Claredon. Mr. Orrell has a follow-up question.

MR. ORRELL: We talked earlier about affordable housing for people with disabilities and Mr. Ferguson talked about the wheelchair as being able to keep in their home a little longer. When it gets to the point where a person with a disability can't stay in their home, is there enough housing that is accessible to accommodate these people when it is necessary to go into a home and they can't stay in their own home?

MR. ROBICHAUD: No. We have a tremendous shortage in Nova Scotia and everywhere, actually, of accessible housing. There are reasons of that. You have to get into the math on it. There is a provision in the National Building Code and unfortunately Nova Scotia's Building Code is a copy, almost, of the National Building Code, which says that when you build a house, it doesn't have to be accessible. Everything else has to be accessible but if you're building a house, it doesn't have to be.

People think that it costs a whole lot more to make a house accessible. In fact, it doesn't, it costs almost the same amount and sometimes it's cheaper because if you build a level entrance to a house, you don't have to put that expensive step on the front of it but this myth has grown up that it's very, very expensive to have an accessible house.

I've been advocating something, and others, which is called visitable housing. It's something that they have in England and some of the other European countries. If you want to build a house, the government says yes, you can build your house but there has to be one entrance where people with wheelchairs and walkers and so forth can get in. It's called visitability and you have to, on that level, have a washroom that they can use. They've done the math. It costs almost no difference, financially.

As a matter of fact, we're going to be having a meeting within the next week or so, I think, with the QEII people in the hopes that the new houses, those dream houses that they put out - those dream houses come out every year and I look at them and I say I wouldn't give you ten cents for them because I can't get in them - they are going to make them visitable and we'll be able to point at these beautiful houses that are at least visitable.

We'd like to see housing across the province with disability taken into account. It's not just physical disabilities but housing can be done in many different ways that help people with disabilities. For instance right over there, that door, if you were blind or almost blind - most people can see a little bit, most blind people - they'd just walk into that and think it was a wall. But you can paint dark around it so that when a blind person is coming and looks at that, they say, oh, that's a door, you can go through that. So, you know, there are little things like this that can be done to make housing accessible that don't cost a whole lot. But we don't pay any attention to that. Our architects, our housing designers don't seem to have that in their minds when they're designing houses for our province.

So it is a problem, and we don't have anywhere near enough - and it's one of the big problems that they have at the rehab centre. If somebody gets in a car accident and they're in the rehab centre for - I don't know how long it takes to recuperate from, say, an injury to the spine, but they get them to the point where they could go home in a wheelchair, but they can't get home because there's no way to get into the house. So, the government is spending I don't know how many hundreds of dollars a day to keep them in the rehab centre for a month or two extra until somehow or other they can fix up the house with a ramp - and generally the ramps, nobody knows how to make them, so they're not made to code, and it just drives me crazy.

Housing - I don't want to talk too much about it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe it's time to go to the next question, and I expect we can pursue some of this.

Just a comment, before I move to Ms. Kent, about guaranteed annual income and maybe employability and training. It just strikes me that, in case this comes up again, there's nothing inconsistent about guaranteed annual incomes and employability training or education. They can work very well together, and I think there's quite a lot of evidence to support that - maybe a growing body of evidence.

Ms. Kent.

MS. BECKY KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Robicheau. I think you're on the right track when you are describing yourselves as catalysts based on the many, many things that you have achieved and are continuing to work for. And, really, you're like a hub of connection - and I like that analogy.

What I want to do for a moment with my questioning is to kind of drill down to, really, at the end of the day what your needs are, because it's very clear that when you have that hit to your operational funding such with the cuts that are coming down from the federal government, you have a big challenge on your hands of trying to figure out where you're going next. I mean, I recognize that, and this . . .

MR. FERGUSON: I'm sorry, I'm not, I have a hearing problem and for some reason I'm not catching this.

MS. KENT: I said that I recognize that you have a significant challenge on your hands with your operational budgeting and your delivery of what you do with the funding cuts that are coming down federally. So I want to drill down a little bit so I understand where you are now so I can think more about where you need to get to in the future. So I have a few questions around that.

Okay, so, right now you are receiving just over \$35,000 annually from Community Services, and you've had that for 20 years. That's what we're seeing here in this presentation that you've given us. And the federal cuts to your core funding - what was the delivery of the message that you got, your organization got, from the federal government around why they're cutting that?

MR. BURRILL: Just before you answer, Mr. Ferguson, I just want to make sure. Were you able to hear Ms. Kent's second pass at this - were you able to hear what she had said?

MR. FERGUSON: Well, I'm sorry, I'm just not understanding what you're asking here.

MR. BURRILL: I just wanted to make clear that you had been able to hear what she said.

MR. FERGUSON: Yes, you're asking where we are with our finances right now.

MS. KENT: Yes, yes. So my specific question to you is: You've been cut; your federal funding is being cut over three years . . .

MR. FERGUSON: Yes.

MS. KENT: . . . starting this year. What did they tell you - what did the federal government tell you as to the rationale behind their cutting of that program?

MR. FERGUSON: They didn't give any rationale; they just said they're cutting.

MS. KENT: They didn't give you anything. It's just a cut.

MR. FERGUSON: Yes.

MS. KENT: There was no dialogue?

MR. FERGUSON: They really were not cutting off - I mean, they were, they said to our national office, we don't want you funding provincial groups anymore - provincial affiliates. I'm presuming that they said the same to Independent Living and they said the same to the Canadian Paraplegic Association and so forth. I mean, we just got it through down the tube that, hey, next year - or this year - you're going to be 33 per cent less on the blue, right here. Next year it's going to be down to one-third and the following year there is not going to be any blue there at all. The rest of the chart will be the same, but of course the others will spread out.

MS. KENT: And on this information we have that \$1 million was invested in 2003 - was that a one-time allotment to that particular program for wheelchairs?

MR. FERGUSON: You're talking about the children's wheelchair program?

MS. KENT: Yes.

MR. FERGUSON: That was an allotment that was made to provide wheelchairs for children and there were a lot of kids who didn't have wheelchairs. I remember one child down in our area who had a wheelchair. He had been provided with a wheelchair by - I think it might have been the Red Cross. He was about age 10 when he got the wheelchair and he was now age 11 and had almost doubled in size and was trying to get around in this tiny little wheelchair.

MS. KENT: So that \$1 million that was invested then - has that had a lifespan of 10 years since it happened or was that eaten up very quickly?

MR. FERGUSON: That was for the one year, I think.

MS. KENT: That was a one-time. Okay.

MR. FERGUSON: Yes - that was \$1 million a year, as I recall.

MS. KENT: So that wasn't \$1 million one year.

MR. FERGUSON: Claredon might be able to answer that better because he actually sits on that committee. Claredon, was that every year, the \$1 million?

MR. ROBICHEAU: Yes. So in 2003, the government of the day announced \$1 million. It ended up that it was over two years, so it basically was \$500,000 in 2003 for a wheelchair initiative program. They called it recycling because we hoped to eventually stop the people from hoarding old wheelchairs in their attics because they're scared nobody will give one back if they give it away.

So the \$500,000 in 2003, but the problem was that \$300,000 of that was already given through Community Services to people with disabilities, so we were left with \$200,000. Sitting at the table with Easter Seals, IWK, rehab, occupational therapists, the Disabled Persons Commission, et cetera, we chose that Easter Seals run it. We made sure that for children under 19 - and I'm the last one to mean test anything but when you're left with \$200,000 with a big province, for children - I'll say NSLEO but I did personally voice very loudly that threshold of income should be at least \$60,000 to \$70,000 for parents because when you have a child in a wheelchair, those parents are young. Those parents probably have a mortgage, a student loan, et cetera.

Then year three or four, there was a case of - what about from age 19 to age 64? That's when they got to \$1 million. Age 19 to 64, it's a lot more people because MS only hits you at 35, give or take. I have muscular dystrophy. There's young, but there's old too, and the disabling stuff at 50 - strokes, et cetera - so that has been going on to \$1 million for up to maybe last year. This provincial budget added \$400,000 because we were very concerned. Maybe not just a human rights case, but very concerned that age 64 and up was a big number and with the disability rate going up, how much was that number? They have a good number slicer at the Disabled Persons Commission, Mr. Burke MacCallum, and he crunched that out through demographic statistics and I'm glad to see it in the budget.

Can you imagine how ironic it was that this program, if you lived in a long-term care facility and the Red Cross provides you with a wheelchair, if you're living at home saving taxpayer dollars by living at home at age 64 and up, and you're saving dollars to long-term care facilities, you did not have access to the Easter Seals program. That's a bit of the history there and we're sitting at the table. Through our affiliates and other people like Ralph and I across the province, we make sure that goes back to the table because at the end of the day, never mind what political hat you wear - and I thank you guys for serving the public, I know the many phone calls you get every day, it's not fun - good news is hard to spread. The ChronicleHerald, that did make the front page, it made our front page for us that that was there. So that's part of it.

The other part about funding is, we're only guessing that Stephen Harper and the federal government looked at advocacy organization - education and awareness

organization is another fancy name for if you don't want to use the "a" word, because Service Canada, it has been a while now, you have to avoid the "a" word, but we changed it to awareness and education which is sometimes social change, and that's what you need to do. Some are guessing that some environmental groups had a little grant to help with greenhouse gas and the global warming but they also turned into, you can't build that pipeline to B.C. and the tar sands and all this stuff, so I think they looked at it and said we're funding organizations that are working against us.

I think never mind what government it would be, that's not fun to fund an organization that's working against you which is why NSLEO, I'm proud that in my 20 years out of 31 years, we've always taken the high road that throwing a rock and government bashing is so easy to do and people will pick up on it so easily, so that is why I use the corny word of we try to be the solution people. I think in my 21 years, three Parties at the table, there has been good and we just elevated some and we say the government of the day - without saying names - there's been good stuff, good-intentioned people.

When it comes to the issue of housing, yesterday Denise Peterson-Rafuse announced - I'm not saying politics here, I'm just saying what happened yesterday - a Nova Scotia housing strategy, which I think they're going to call Nova Scotia Housing, period. They're going to do community engagement, building foundations amongst people, not cement. It's a plan of action a bit but more of it, it's a framework for providing a plan. It's not etched in stone.

Does it have a dollar figure? Yes - all three political Parties have learned if you say something you better have a number on it, and people expect that. But it's \$500 million so it's \$50 million a year for the next 10 years. Some is from the feds, money and matching funds - that wasn't said, but that's okay. You know, let's do it right and let's do it with organization like Nova Scotia LEO who can go back to the community and engage them and see what we need, because we can't do what we've done in the past.

In the 1970s when we built all these - I was in Grade 11 - low-rent housing units across Nova Scotia with one little wheelchair room in the corner and two storeys high and to turn around 20 years later and spend \$300,000 to put an elevator for it to go to the second floor, those are the things we cannot afford to do again, to make those mistakes. It's got to be affordable, accessible and like Ralph says, it doesn't mean that it's more expensive but just good planning. It has to be environmentally friendly, as in heating and affordable. Affordable doesn't mean just the rent, but is it R2000 and can you change within the demographics?

Going back to your further question - I'm sorry, I apologize, being on the phone I have to go backwards here. You're right, we're losing \$72,000; next year, that will not be there. We lost \$30,000-some this year, next year from the feds is \$72,000.

The other point, too, that I'd like to reiterate - we thank you guys for the \$35,000 but that has not been indexed in 20 years, so that \$20,000 today should be \$60,000 to \$80,000 or more in indexing that number.

Going back to the problem, we have always been very much a working board. Yes, we had two staff and we saw the Disabled Persons Commission staff and bureaucrats out there, probably five years ago, to review the Access Awareness Week and see what we did. Her name was Andre - McConnell? - I forgot her name, but anyhow. They were amazed at what we did, with little funding but we're hands-on. There are the Ralph Fergusons out there and ourselves and many others - our dearest friend who passed away two years ago, the David Mooney people, and the Ron Levys of Pictou, who do this community engagement and all this volunteer work and hours and e-mails and getting ready for this today and that is free. That is above and beyond - we don't just throw it to the staff, there's a big working group.

The other thing is information sharing about educating and mentoring other people so that we can do that. If we don't exist, or we exist with our staff who is working from home now - we have a few conference calls, but if we can't afford to meet and dialogue face to face and educate the younger people coming behind Ralph and I who are starting to have a few grey hairs, who is going to do this? Who is government going to call for input engagement in community and this and that?

Don't take me wrong, the Disabled Persons Commission is doing some great work but they cannot do it all. They're talking about needing more staff, more staff. Some of the "more staff" they have is free - it is calling Ralph and Claredon and say, hi, what do you think of that? We have a great rapport with them and we work together in partnership, so basically the \$72,000 was bare bones. We're going to work smarter. We have just saved \$11,000 a year in rent and we're going to work from home but the bottom line - the \$35,100 from Community Services would be in the \$80,000 range, give or take, to continue to do what we have with one staff, it would still mean that the Ralph Fergusons and the Claredons of the world would be writing some of this literature you have here and would be doing hands-on with staff. That's okay, I'm willing to do that until I'm 105 years old and some are, but we need to mentor Claredon and Ralph's succession planning also.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Claredon. I'm just wondering if I could interject, I know I've still got a speakers' list and because I can't see you, I'm not able to signal that. I wonder if I could move to our next questioner, just so we can keep the dialogue going - are you comfortable with that?

MR. ROBICHAUD: Thank you.

MS. BECKY KENT: I'll defer to other people. I'll have an opportunity at this time at the end. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We'll go to Ms. Regan and then to Mr. MacLeod.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Merci, Claredon, thank you Ralph for coming in today. I'm sorry I have Rollie Thornhill's voice today.

To the point about the housing announced yesterday, Claredon, did you see any targets for housing for persons with disabilities in there?

MR. ROBICHEAU: It was mentioned in two lines.

MS. REGAN: Did they say what the number was, or the percentage?

MR. ROBICHEAU: No, and again, that's why I called it a framework for providing a plan. Some people are calling it a strategy. A strategy has measureable targets, everything to the dime. When I talk about a strategy in my world, it's like a spreadsheet of actions: who does it, how much it costs, and where it is. You've got five or six rows of that, if you follow me on paper from left to right: action, strategy, what's the cause and effect, and it's targeted where. That has not been delivered, which is why I don't call it a housing strategy. I call it a framework for providing a plan.

So right now it's going to be in the consultation engagement. There have been some people who spoke about some of the great stuff that's happening in this province about housing, but the great stuff is few, and we need way, way more. No, that wasn't targeted, and we keep prodding on how much, which is why we need to be at the table, and so does the poverty strategy, the Feed Nova Scotia's of the world, which is why we're on guard - not to mistrust, but nothing about us without us. We want to be along the route to make sure that they see this map of handout number four, so that this mistake doesn't happen again, and it also has a seniors lens. They're talking about new programs now called Age-Friendly Communities. The answer is, no, there is no target.

MS. REGAN: I'd actually like to ask some questions about the federal-provincial Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities. Do you gentlemen know if there has been any successful renegotiation of this agreement? The funding was due to cease on March 31st. Do you know whether there has been any renegotiation?

MR. ROBICHEAU: It's happening right now and it looks good that these tweaks on the opportunity fund are permanent and standing. I would say that's positively - we were concerned that maybe the partnership committees would be weakened, but we've proven that we're the better bang for the buck, with a lot of volunteers sitting at the board level. It is smart money spent, and it is a good investment.

MS. REGAN: Were you as an organization requested by government to provide feedback or suggestion on the LMA for persons with disabilities?

MR. ROBICHEAU: Something like 20 pages, yes. That was done at the provincial table, where nine of us were sitting at the table to make sure that the feds and the province knew the left hand from the right hand.

MS. REGAN: As you go through the most recent annual report produced by Labour and Advanced Education, which outlines in detail the funding initiatives contained within the Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities, you notice there is a lack of statistical information, the number of participants who retained or maintained employment as a result of various funding initiatives. I'm just wondering, have you been approached by the government for these statistics, or do they not exist?

MR. ROBICHEAU: They exist, and I am baffled at why they wouldn't flag those great numbers. I know in Nova Scotia, \$1.8 million of new income was created in the last five years. In Yarmouth, Tri-County, Digby, and Shelburne, we have exactly the number of phone calls, number of 400 and some clients, those who are successful, those who are in education. We track that very carefully, so I'm surprised that - we have the numbers, I'm surprised that they don't have it on paper because it's something worth bragging about so I'm a little surprised that that is not shining out there.

MS. REGAN: Okay, so you have some information. Can you tell us which programs in particular are really working well?

MR. ROBICHAUD: I would say there are three - which ones the most? The wage subsidy of 50 per cent for six months and that. There are some, unfortunately - we need to reach out and to personalize a little bit and maybe five to 10 years later when they are no longer clients, to see how they're doing, on that one we could do a better job. The success rate of people getting education is tremendous, as far as making sure they finish their community college or whatever. I'm sorry I don't have the numbers right in front of me but the two ones are education and the second one would be the wage subsidy for six months.

Some have abused it, some corporations, and that's why it's nice sometimes to have a board and a committee where we have ears to our community and not just numbers. We have grocery stores or lumber yards or whatever where they hire people with disabilities and the only intent is to have them subsidized for six months and then it's go home and don't come back, thank you for the subsidy.

It's done at the provincial level but also done at our level to say okay, that organization is cut off, that's wasting and taking advantage of the system. So we're working diligently to match the right person with the right employer who has intentions of keeping that person on.

MS. REGAN: I'll just ask one final question, if you don't mind. The government recently announced in the budget, an increase to the Nova Scotia Wheelchair Recycling Program. That would enable seniors 65 and older to access the program and that's good

news. We haven't heard any further details so I'm just wondering, we know the program is run by Easter Seals, do you, as an organization, have any ideas when seniors 65 and older would be able to access this program?

MR. ROBICHAUD: I would like an application tomorrow on the table to test the waters. We have to have a meeting very soon to see what the income threshold is going to be for that. Unfortunately, many of those seniors lived on fixed incomes. We want to make sure we don't subsidize wheelchairs for seniors over 65 who have a great former medical plan where the insurance is paying for the wheelchair, yet we're taking government money and public taxpayer dollars to subsidize something that insurance has.

For example, I have a fantastic bank insurance and they buy my wheelchairs; they buy everything I need. So I would say I'm going to predict there won't be much difference between ages 19 and 64. I did send an e-mail to ask when we are having a conference call or a meeting person-to-person because the good news is I do believe that \$400,000 is accurate. It will be testing the waters the first year. Are we going to have an avalanche of applications in the first year, yes or no? It might be.

The other part is we need to spread the good news to spread to seniors, maybe the New Horizons, the Lions Club, et cetera, that this program exists. That is difficult to do in any good news story but sorry about that, that's the next step.

MS. REGAN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That will bring us to Mr. MacLeod, and you're the last name on my speaker list. We do need to reserve a little bit of time for some committee business before our two hours is up.

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: I want to thank Ralph and Claredon for their presentation and as well for all the time that they put into the organization themselves and the other directors, because they are certainly strong advocates for their organization.

I just want to go back and talk a little bit, Ralph, about accessibility because you know that gets your motor revved up a little bit when we talk about accessibility. It's been my experience that some of the public places now that claim they're accessible because they have automatic doors or they might have a couple of grab bars in a washroom aren't truly accessible, and I wonder how your organization feels about that.

MR. FERGUSON: I would agree with you, there's a tremendous number of places that are semi-accessible, I suppose. You can get through the door maybe but the washrooms are not proper. I know big places that you go in and they've got a great washroom, they've installed inside and you go in with a wheelchair but with the wheelchair you can't reach back to the handle to close the door. You have to have another handle put somewhere close to the hinge you can close the door with. They forget to leave, so you go

into the washroom and you're left unable to close the door. It's little things like that, the men's washroom. I guess it doesn't make a whole lot of difference.

There are a lot of things that are left off. I know we have a tremendous number of stores and small businesses around our rural communities and you walk up to them and there's one step. It's over four inches, but it might as well be a flight of 20; you can't get in. Things that could be done so easily to correct, aren't so it's half done or overlooked. It's a big problem. It is better than it was; things are improving. Even government buildings are not perfect. We run into this and for years we've been trying to make them so but they're now in rented quarters and I guess the government has to deal with the landlord to make things better. Accessibility is a problem and it's going to be a problem for a long time.

We're an old province too. You go out to Vancouver and everything's just totally accessible or, on the prairies where everything's flat, it's so easy for them. But you get to Halifax or Pictou and other places around Nova Scotia, we're all on hills going up and so forth so we know it's a problem. We have to kind of live in society and try to deal with it the society we find and try to change things one step at a time. As Burke MacCallum says over at the Disabled Persons Commission, it's baby steps but we're getting there.

Accessibility will continue to be a problem - it continues to be on our radar, it continues to be something that we look at all the time. We go into a hotel to have a meeting or stay overnight and we make sure that if we see something we speak to the manager. We do what we can. That's all you can do.

I don't know if that answers you or not.

MR. MACLEOD: I think it does. I guess, with the greatest respect, most of us when we're not dealing with the challenge of a wheelchair or other disability, take a lot for granted. I've noticed over the last number of years since my wife has been in a wheelchair, I'm a lot more aware than I used to be.

MR. FERGUSON: Ask my wife, she sees everything too.

MR. MACLEOD: A couple of the issues that you mentioned are issues that I see as being a major issue. They do all these wonderful things to the washroom and then the hallway leading to it is not wide enough for you to actually make the turn in with your wheelchair, for example. I guess the awareness part and people bringing it to people's attention is something that we can do that doesn't really cost a lot, but if we mention the challenges that are being put forward to people . . .

MR. ROBICHEAU: Let me tell you something a little bit funny, Alfie. When we came into the room - speaking of awareness - Ann, the first thing she noticed here was the door at both ends are four-foot doors. She said, wow, were they ever ahead of their time. If you're used to it, yes, you see it - otherwise, if you're not used to it and you don't have a

wheelchair to go around in and you see a flight of stairs, you don't think anything of it. You just go up and you don't even see them. You come down, you don't see them - you walk away. You don't see that it's a barrier in the community for a lot of people. I could get into psychology on that one, but I won't. We have to try to continue to educate people so that they see it as best as they can.

MR. MACLEOD: As you mentioned, 20 per cent of the population is affected in one way or another so I think the education part is something that we all need to be a little more proactive in. I would hope that people would be more proactive before they actually have to be in situations like these.

MR. ROBICHEAU: We hope by coming here and educating you guys that you're going to go out into the community and maybe see some of these things and educate your communities. Spread it around a bit - spread the joy.

MR. MACLEOD: Normally we're good at spreading things. The other thing I notice when you're talking about accessible transportation, I know in our community that's a real challenge because we have a Handi-Trans system that only operates within the bounds of the old City of Sydney, yet people who are a block or 500 feet away from the old boundaries cannot get accessible transportation and there are really not many other ways of getting it besides the Handi-Trans in our area. I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on how we could improve that service because, again, not everybody is fortunate enough to have somebody able to take them around or get a wheelchair into a vehicle or whatever.

MR. FERGUSON: We have an organization - the Rural Transportation Association - and they're always good to talk to about anything like this. Claredon, where is that head office? Is that down in Windsor - the Rural Transportation Association?

MR. ROBICHEAU: Yes, all three political caucuses have met Kim Aker and myself for the Rural Transportation Association. Also, Kim Aker joined us for the NSLEO caucus presentation. Dear Marsha Finley from Sydney, we've talked many times and if there is a reason for me to go to Cape Breton someday, other than to enjoy your culture and food down there, is to go meet her because I think we need to plant a rural transportation seed in Sydney and outskirts, people who keep Sydney merchants and city hotels and CBRM alive and vibrant. People who live in long-term care facilities don't spend much money. If they're living at home, they shingle their roof so the home hardware store is busy, et cetera.

So Alfie, I hear you loud and clear that outside Sydney there needs to be a solution. I've talked to Marsha a few times and I'll be more than willing to talk to you after this about that solution. It is my forte. I've been at Rural Transportation - (inaudible) was the founding father of community-based transportation - and I would love to speak to that committee any day on that.

MR. MACLEOD: Thank you, Claredon. If you are coming to Cape Breton, I would be glad to help out in any way that I can. I'm sure there are others around the table who would want to do the same thing.

I'll go to my final question, Ralph, because I'm getting the look from the chairman. But you said, what is our ask or our need? More dollars, is what you say. Claredon has mentioned that the money hasn't been prorated over the last number of years. What do you think would be a reasonable ask from LEO to the province at this point?

MR. FERGUSON: At this time? Well, Claredon's going to shoot me if I say too little, isn't he - my treasurer? But I think we're getting by with one-third less of our federal funding now, and somehow or other - well, we're going to lose another third next year - if we could have one-third of that extra next year, it would keep us going for another year at the level we are now.

Also, as I said, I want to get into doing some ourselves, I want to start doing a little bit of fundraising. The difficulties when you go into fundraising, you use a lot of your time and effort trying to get donations that could be used for all these other things that we do. So that's a balance that somehow we have to find, to get the right support from government.

We want to continue working with government as partners, you know, and have government recognize that some of the things that we do would have to be done by them. If you try to get the Disabled Persons Commission, say, to do it, you're paying them big bucks in salaries to get the same thing done that we do for nothing - or not quite for nothing, but I think I'm making my point here. You know, we are giving a great bang for the buck in the sort of things that we are doing for our communities - yes, we'd like some extra money.

MR. MACLEOD: I guess probably what I heard a little bit from Claredon was that if you had the grant in 2013 dollars rather than 20 years ago . . .

MR. FERGUSON: Well, that's right; it hasn't changed in 20 years. We've lived with that, and gradually we've cut back on everything we could cut back on. We're down to the point now where we don't have an office and we only have one staff. Well, we'll live with that, too, and we'll do what we can, but you can't go too much lower. That's the message that we had to bring. It's a sad message, we didn't want to bring, but it's what we had to say this morning.

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

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I did give Mr. MacLeod the look, whatever that is, because we're getting - I'm feeling challenged for time. So I think what I'd like to do is give Ralph the last brief word before we wrap up this section of our meeting and reserve just a few minutes for our other committee business.

Ralph, is there a last word that you would like to have?

MR. FERGUSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief. I think you heard Claredon a few minutes ago say “nothing about us, without us.” And that’s kind of a motto that has been in our organization for quite a long time. We want the standing committee to understand that we don’t want to have governments or anybody necessarily doing things for us. What we want is to have governments and others doing things with us.

It’s not just that we want to be playing our part, either, which we do. We also feel it’s just absolutely essential that we be involved for disability initiatives to work properly, because we have this understanding, we’ve lived it. We’re smart enough to know and understand that we can’t get along and do these things without help. We need help from government and from others, but we want our governments and others to be likewise smart enough to know that they really can’t do it properly without our involvement.

What we really need to do is work in partnership. That’s how we’ve progressed over the last three decades and it’s the only way that we can continue to progress that we can’t succeed without each other, we need each other. That’s why it’s just so essential that we receive the support to allow this partnership to continue.

That’s all I’ll say. Thank you very much for having myself and Claredon. We’ve really appreciated the opportunity to come here and speak to you. I know that you have other work that you have to do, so I’m going to shut up and let you get on with it, I know you’re busy. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much and I would like to thank both of you, Ralph and Claredon, for being here today. Certainly what you’ve done is identified a set of needs that are important to you and I think important to all of us in Nova Scotia. I was particular struck, as I always am when I hear you present, with your commitment to be part of the solution. Your final words about partnerships are, I think, quite meaningful so certainly I appreciate that. Thank you for being here.

What I would like to do is just ask for a very brief recess so we can make this transition for 30 seconds, if that will do us, so that we can get back to the final part of our meeting. Thank you.

[10:46 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:49 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning again, folks. I think because time is precious and I’ve been reminded that we have many meetings today, and probably also need time for a little bit of sustenance somewhere during the course of the day, if I could bring you back to order, let’s finish the business we have.

I didn't - and I guess I seldom do - introduce the agenda itself because I know you all see it before the meeting but the only business left on our agenda is scheduling the next meeting, which is currently scheduled for June 4th, a month from today. The NDP caucus, I know, has a problem with that date because our caucus has scheduled a planning session which will fall on several days, including that date. We need to, I guess, propose an alternative date. We haven't picked one but we would like to suggest that we look for another date in June. Is that acceptable to those present?

I don't know if it's possible for us to go to the following Tuesday, which would . . .

MR. MACLEOD: That's election day. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, should it be election day, perhaps higher powers will decide whether this meeting happens or not.

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): Economic Development is meeting that day, but we could meet in the afternoon. We only have one conflict and that's Mr. Orrell. The other option would be June 13th, in the afternoon after Veterans Affairs, I suppose.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm just being advised that if we went to June 11th, there is a potential conflict in the afternoon with Economic Development, which I guess involves you, Mr. Orrell? Otherwise, it might be possible for Tuesday, June 11th.

MR. BURRILL: Why could we not organize the meeting in a time slot that would accommodate Mr. Orrell?

MS. LANGILLE: I don't think we can. There's a possibility that Economic Development may be doing a tour, which would take them away from Halifax. The option would be to have a replacement for Mr. Orrell attend the meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's acceptable to you, Mr. Orrell?

MR. ORRELL: I could get someone to fill in, it would be no problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, it sounds like we've got some agreement on June 11th, so let's aim for that. I think when the House is not in session we would typically meet at 1:00 p.m., between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. Let's aim for that. If there are difficulties, we will advise you as quickly as possible. If some should arise, of course, if there are those higher issues that get in the way, we'll all be aware of that.

The other thing I would like to mention is that it has been - if you recall last Fall when we were determining agenda items, we agreed that items should be reviewed with

caucus before we kind of pursue them here. That created some delay in our ability to set agenda.

I'd like to propose - I know in conferring with the clerk before this meeting began, we have a couple of items, two or three items still left on the agenda that we agreed on, so we have some things that could carry us forward but it would be very useful, I think, to replenish that list. What I'd like to propose is that by August 1st each caucus should submit ideas they would like to see pursued, witness ideas to the clerk by August 1st. That would give all of us a chance to confer with our caucuses, perhaps before this committee reconvenes for its September meeting, and perhaps it would just make the Fall period more efficient. Is that an acceptable direction? Ms. Casey.

MS. CASEY: I probably have it somewhere but what are the two agenda items or the few agenda items that are left over? Could you just review those?

MS. LANGILLE: The June meeting would be the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and then the two remaining items would be the Early Intervention Nova Scotia and then Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Network. Those are the only two that would be remaining after June.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think those are the ones we've agreed upon. Our plan was to proceed for June with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives but I think nothing would prevent us in September, the committee when it meets in September, from reviewing the overall list and setting some new priorities, if that seems appropriate.

Is there any other business that we should be attending to today?

Hearing none, I declare the meeting adjourned, and thank you very much for your participation today.

[The meeting adjourned at 10:54 a.m.]