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COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, June 2, 2015

Legislative Committees Office

Collaborative Partnership Network

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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[Mr. Eddie Orrell was replaced by Hon. Alfie MacLeod.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESS

Collaborative Partnership Network

Ms. Janice Ainsworth,
Co-Chair (CPN)

Ms. Margaret Matthews,
Treasurer (CPN)

Ms. Debbie Cook,
Secretary (CPN)

Mr. Marcus Jamieson,
Operations & Systems Manager (TEAM Work Cooperative)



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2015

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Patricia Arab

MADAM CHAIRMAN: This is the Standing Committee on Community Services. My name is Patricia Arab, I'm the MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park and chairman of this committee. I'd like to welcome our witnesses here today and all who are watching these proceedings.

We are going to be receiving a presentation today regarding the Collaborative Partnership Network, but before we move on to our witnesses, I'd ask our committee members who are present to introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'd like to remind all our committee members and those in attendance to please make sure their phones are switched to vibrate. These proceedings are recorded for transcription in Hansard. I'd also like to remind our committee members and our witnesses to wait until I have addressed you before responding. A lot of the time in our committees, we get into a question and answer dialogue so it's hard to break that flow, but for transcription purposes, I would ask - and bear with me because sometimes I get caught up in the conversation as well and I forget that it's my responsibility to address you as well.

Once again, welcome to our witnesses. I would ask, starting with Ms. Ainsworth, if she could introduce herself and her committee members.

MS. JANICE AINSWORTH: I'm Janice Ainsworth and I'm the co-chair for the Collaborative Partnership Network, and also the executive director of one of the agencies within that network in Halifax, called TEAM Work Cooperative.

To my right is Marcus Jamieson, who works at TEAM Work Cooperative as operations and systems manager; Margaret Matthews with the Collaborative Partnership Network as our treasurer; and Debbie Cook as our secretary.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Wonderful, thank you very much, Ms. Ainsworth. Whenever you're ready, I'll have you begin your presentation.

MS. AINSWORTH: Okay, thank you for the wonderful switch. We are the Collaborative Partnership Network and we work with people with disabilities. We're an employment centre and there are nine of us across the province. So within the last year one individual was walking close by one of our agencies and he was a person with Asperger's who had many skills in the IT field. He hadn't been working for about 10 years. He came into our organization and within a certain period of time, he's now gainfully employed. That's just the very skim of the surface, a small example of the type of clients, the type of people who are out there looking for work, people with disabilities.

We're a partnership that started in 2001, and in 2006 we became incorporated. Largely we did that - at the time we were a body that developed out of Service Canada that thought that the employment stats for people with disabilities were quite appalling, they were just not happening, so we formed this group of network agencies that work exclusively with people with disabilities to make a change.

There are nine agencies across the province and our job is to secure and maintain employment. We also work together as a body of nine. We started in 2001 and at the time probably not a lot of information about how to go about developing a service that was exclusive to people with disabilities so we had a lot of learning to do, pretty much pioneers in the field. We would collect and share best practices and talk about what works well and what doesn't. We cover most of the province with the exception of about two areas. That's just simply because some of the agencies that used to be there no longer exist.

In 1997 there was a needs project that was done with focus groups of people with disabilities and that's how all our agencies began. From that there was a report developed by people such as Joan Cummings and Charlie Macdonald that really designed what the services should look like, and that's the mission we've been following since our inception.

To date we've made a lot of progress in terms of a group. In 2008 we advocated for a program to help the sustainability for people with disabilities. It was called the Employment Maintenance Worker program. What that means is there are 15 counsellors who go out around the province and help people with disabilities sustain their employment. Marcus is going to talk more specifically about that so I won't go into that too much - it's

a specialized service delivery model that we developed over time that would help. It's a very confusing plethora of services that are out there for people with disabilities so for us it was about putting it all together in a way that makes sense for our clients, people with disabilities.

The Ability Employers - that's a group in Nova Scotia that is just so dynamic. It's an employer-led group that talks about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and encourages other employers to do the same. They talk a lot about the business case, what the good reasons are for hiring people with disabilities in our labour market today. We know we need every available source of skills and our people have skills so they really go out and promote people with disabilities. They also offer an employer education workplace series, disability confidence. Our minister has acknowledged that they win six or seven passport stamps every time they come for an educational series so they all received certificates last year from our minister. Every year they are going to have three or four different disability topic conversations that are of interest of the day.

Accommodation Coordinator in Sydney - this is a program that we'd like to extend beyond Sydney. This is for anybody with a disability who comes into our service who might need some assistive technology. They would have a meeting, an assessment with an Accommodation Coordinator and then develop a plan from there about how to use that assistive technology, which one would be the right fit for them and that has been quite a great program in Sydney that we'd like to extend elsewhere.

Provincial funding skills and training - there are many programs we have for skills training for people with disabilities, often linked to direct work experience so we fund all kinds of short-term training programs. A good example might be to make a direct link to employment, it could be in forklift training or a warehousing course. Those are highly in demand in our industry for sure.

Our results so far with the CPN is that for every year that the CPN is here, at least 1,000 jobs are secured by people with disabilities. This is what it could look for clients when they come into an agency and they are trying to find their way. They may be connected to a lot of other supports in the community and/or not and trying to find out how do they get connected, so just a visual of just how much of a mind-meld that can be if you are trying to find your way into employment. We like to say that we turn it into something that is much more manageable. So other than the supports that you need to connect with as an individual, so things like EI or income assistance, we sort out all the rest through case management services and all those services behind the scenes are what we do to make it easy.

At this time we probably have across the province about 2,700 people with disabilities who come into our office, looking for employment, with varying degrees of readiness. Sometimes they stay with us for a month or six months or a bit longer, to get some training and then eventually become employed.

With the work we do, for 50 per cent of everybody who does tap in and begins a plan with us, they do re-enter the labour market. That represents 20 million in estimated wages going back into the economy, so for every year that the CPN is here, \$20 million is returned back into the economy by way of the thousand jobs per year. A further \$10 million is saved on government programming. We'd just like to note that the wages people would earn would be at least double what they've earned on income assistance.

The spinoffs - we notice a trend now with employers contacting us looking for available labour and they want to hire people with disabilities. They want to expand their diversity pool of talent and they know what people with disabilities offer. The hospitality industry is a good example. If we had 100 people right now we could get them employed in the hospitality industry, so they're constantly calling. So there's a major shift in employers' openness and awareness to hire.

With our demographics as they are today, we know we have an aging population and we have a skills shortage and we have the available skilled talent. We also have the proven strategies that work. We've been here long enough now that we know the strategies that we can put in place to make employment possible for people.

Of course everybody is interested in the tax revenues that are generated and fewer burdens on the government programs. Probably everyone has heard that one in five people are disabled - or are reported to have a disability - in Nova Scotia, and we do have the highest population of people with disabilities in Nova Scotia at 20 per cent.

There seems to be, and maybe it's mostly anecdotal but the numbers do show - more and more people are willing to come forward, and what they need to do when they tap into service with any of our agencies is just simply self-identify as having a disability. That seems to be on the increase that people are less stigmatized to be able to come in and say, I am someone with a disability and I really need your help.

So we have more than a decade - almost 20 years now - of developing models that work. We're kind of at this cusp of gaining a lot of momentum in working with our employers and our service excellence models.

We're nine agencies, as I've said, and about 100 staff across the province. We have board volunteers. We're all organized by our boards and guided by our boards, and they are 200 in number. I would say about 80 or 90 per cent are people with disabilities so they help guide our way when we're developing or designing any programs and any of our involvements on a day-to-day basis with service.

Skills development training - and this is our report card from basically last year. Every year as a group we report on our joint success. We had 748 people realize the skills development training program with us, and 4,000 people tapped into our employment maintenance program - so looking for help sustaining their employment. That's the new

program I spoke of in 2008. Eight hundred and ninety-six employed or self-employed as of 2015 in just that one year, and the people served in Nova Scotia is 2,700; \$10.2 million in savings to government; \$18.9 million in wages earned, an estimate; and 68 per cent of Nova Scotia unemployed persons represents 135,585 people. So still a long way to go.

As we always say, a disability is something that can happen to anyone on any day. As you're driving to work or going about your daily life, we've seen this time and time again with many people who come into our organization. So that is our upside down pyramid.

Our basic operating budget for the whole province is \$4.6 million. We find this quite outstanding. The cost based on the employment outcomes is about \$5,000 a person to realize employment. So the total revenue benefit is \$29.2 million - that's putting together the wages and the savings to government. I suppose if you take away the budget cost, the return on investment is probably somewhere around \$25 million per year.

Now Marcus is going to take you through a little bit of information about the Employment Maintenance program, the sustainability program.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jamieson.

MR. MARCUS JAMIESON: As Janice mentioned, this program came on board in 2008. Before that we really didn't have the kind of wraparound service that we needed to provide support for people with disabilities who get employed and the employers. We were really missing an important component; clients would become employed and they would go off and work, and sometimes things didn't go well as a result of the disability and we weren't able to provide that support for the employer and for the client. This program has really helped us to support both the client and the employer.

The four main components are: the one-to-one transition services, the employer/manager education strategy planning, employment crisis, and the employment maintenance follow-up.

With the one-to-one transition, when a client first becomes employed, that's a really critical time to provide support around the disability for the employer and for the client. We can provide extra support with training to identify any challenges that may be related to the person's disability. We can go right in on-site with an employer and with the client and look at what the job tasks are and start working with both to make sure that transition into employment is going to be successful.

We ensure that the client is able to develop strategies that they can work independently. Our goal is for all of our clients to work in competitive employment where they're doing a job like anybody else but sometimes you just need to identify what kind of modification, what kind of strategies are needed for the client to be successful.

A lot of time it starts with the assessment, that's kind of the first thing we do. We go in and we kind of assess the situation, the job duties and the employer expectations, to make sure they're a good match - that the person's capabilities are a good match with what the job expectations and what the employer's expectations are. We'll often go in and look at the physical structure of the work environment, the scheduling. Scheduling can be a big thing to make sure that's a good fit for the person; are the demands going to be something that the client is able to meet; and then communication, making sure there are effective levels of communication and awareness.

We'll go in and ask questions such as, for example, is the furniture sufficiently spaced for someone to get around if there are some mobility issues? Is noise level a problem, for some of our clients who have anxiety or are on the autism spectrum or have a cognitive disability, the noise can actually be quite a distraction and it could be something that we wouldn't necessarily pick up. It could be a ticking sound that no one else would hear but someone with autism would really pick that up and it would actually affect their ability to do their job. So with our background we're able to come in and identify these things and develop a plan - maybe that person should sit somewhere else, maybe they should put something over their ears so that that clicking sound isn't going to affect their ability to do their job.

We also offer training with the employer and the clients, so during that training period we'll sit right with the client and go through the training process to make sure that - we have to know what the job is too. If we go in and we don't know what the job is, it's going to be kind of hard to support our clients as they go through that job, so that's really a critical time.

A simple kind of case scenario - we had a client who is on the autism spectrum who is working at the National Research Council. He had a university degree, it was his first big job and he started working. We were there for that transition for that first couple of weeks. It was quite interesting, when he started doing his work the employer, his supervisor, was giving him a lot of options: you can do this or you can do this or you can do that. For someone on the autism spectrum you really need to be very specific in what you want them to do, it has to be predictable. Our EMW was there and could see in this person's eyes that he wasn't picking up on what to do. He was actually getting stressed, and that's not something you would normally pick up if you're not used to working with someone with autism. We were able to take that supervisor to the side and say, you know what? Just tell him to do A, B and then C. Don't tell him to do A or B or C; just tell him to do A then B, then C. She said, well, I wish all my staff were like that. (Laughter)

But it kind of showed that a simple thing like that could be very easily missed by someone who doesn't have that kind of background but we were able to pick up on it right away. So she went back and said, okay, you're going to do this and you're going to do that, and you could see the anxiety just clear away - physically, you could see it change. Little

things like that are very important because if that wasn't addressed in the beginning, there may have been some issues down the road.

Education and strategy planning - really an important part to success is right from the get-go, if we have somebody who has been hired who has a disability, that we get in there and have some sort of education and awareness training with the employer. It really limits the chance of problems happening down the road, helps things to get off to a good start and really gets the employer to be kind of a disability-confident employer. It also helps to prevent crises down the road if the employers are aware of what to expect and how to work and what the best practices are of working with someone with a disability.

Then the co-workers feel confident as well, so when the person goes into the job they know that their co-workers are aware of their disability - the co-workers are aware of the disability and know what to expect. They have some sort of background. It just makes that whole transition a lot smoother and it helps with the retention down the road.

Starts with assessment of the job duties and capability of the new employee - so just making sure that the new employee is capable of doing the job. A lot of the retention kind of starts very early at the interview, making sure that it is a good fit, so we'll often use a travelling interview, is what we call it, where instead of a typical interview where I'm sitting on this side and the employee of the candidate is sitting on the other side and it's very formal, we'll suggest that instead of doing that, let's walk around and have an interview. Let's actually get them to do the job a little bit, and that will give you a better understanding of whether or not the person can do the job. For someone who has anxiety or mental illness or the autism spectrum, that takes a lot of the stress and anxiety of going through an interview - to walk around, sit down and actually do the job, and it gives the employer a really good idea of what the person can really do.

We provide specific disability training so if someone who is being hired with autism, we'll go in and give them training around autism. If it's around someone with cerebral palsy, we'll go in and give some specific disability training around that.

We had an individual who had a cognitive disability who started work at an ink cartridge place, and we went in and met with the whole staff. I think there was close to 50 people and did a full afternoon of awareness around the person's disability. We had a really good discussion - really good questions and answers. That person started and he needed a high level of support even with that, but the staff were able to really feel comfortable when this person started.

Despite that, there was an incident where the person said something a little bit inappropriate that he saw on YouTube and he decided that would be a good joke to say to his co-workers, not knowing that it was a little bit offensive. So we got a call that this had happened and we went in. It was quite remarkable. The co-workers already had a plan. They knew this person had this disability and this could be something that could happen

and they knew that there were supports there that we could make a plan around. So instead of it being a huge crisis of why did this person say this, they should know better - it was that understanding was there for us to go in. It made our work a lot easier, but a lot of that started with that education awareness that we did from the get-go.

Employment crisis - this is a really important part of our service that we provide. Individuals who are employed, we'd like to keep them employed. We don't want them to lose their attachment to the labour force and have to go look for work again; that's very difficult and challenging. We offer crisis support to clients who are already attached to us or for people who are new to us. We'll get someone who is new to our service and they'll come and say, you know what, I am having some trouble at work, can you help me? We'll get employers who will call us who are familiar with our service and ask us to come in to help out with someone who just has disclosed that they're having some challenges.

It's also one of our most challenging services we provide because we are walking into situations we may not know a lot about and they could present a lot of different types of challenges. So it starts with assessment of the situational elements in creating crises for the employer and employee. So we really go in, we do a 360 degree assessment of everything; we talk to the client, we talk to the employer, we try to get as much information as we can possibly get, ask a lot of questions, try to figure out what is causing the problem that is related to the person's disability that we can address. Sometimes it is not, sometimes we'll go in and it's something going on in the person's life, outside of work, that they need support in. It could be something going on in their personal life, it could be all kinds of things but if it's related to their disability we will provide that support and strategize around that. If it is something that is kind of outside of that, we look at the appropriate services to get that person back on track.

We provide recommendations and address individual training needs, job coaching or an organizational plan to change the environment. So we really try to develop a comprehensive plan that can be implemented with our help, with the employer and the client that is not going to change a huge amount of things for the employer. We don't want this to be a huge burden on them and usually the plans are actually quite simple. It could be a checklist, it could be some simple training, it could be a change of where the person is seated, it could be a change in the duties slightly. It's not often a huge plan that has to be implemented.

Some of the strategies we might use with the employer or with the client is role-playing. We'll role-play a situation so in a situation where the clients said some inappropriate things we were able to do some role-playing with them around that. We'll use common technology, like phones - it seems like everyone has a smartphone these days that helps a lot of people, we can do a lot of strategies around that. Best practices, cues and reminders, check-ins, task breakdowns, a lot of the times someone will have their job responsibilities and it will be a huge - you know you've got to do this, this and that and there won't be a lot of stuff in between. We'll help break that down; so we can take the job

responsibilities and break it down so it's very A to B to C and becomes more manageable chunks.

We have crises from time to time. Like I say, if we have the planning in place hopefully they don't happen but when they do happen, we move quickly, that's very important. Last year we had a person with a cognitive disability who is also an immigrant who was working in a warehouse, kind of a blue collar environment. He was trying to fit in with everyone and made a joke that he thought was funny but it wasn't, it was a little offensive. He didn't understand the social intricacies that a lot of us kind of take for granted - the who, where and when, when is it appropriate and who do you say something to. He was going to be let go. They called us and said this is not acceptable, we have policies around this, he is going to be let go. It was a Monday and they said he would be let go on a Friday. So we got in there and met with the employer and met with the individual and asked what happened. It came out that it was innocent, he was just trying to fit in. It was his first couple of weeks on the job, he was nervous, he was just trying to be one of the guys in this blue collar environment and it didn't work.

The EMW moved really quickly to develop a really comprehensive plan, offered the employer an awareness session with the co-workers so they better understood the person and where they were coming from. We did direct work with the client at the work site to develop some boundaries and some ground rules around this to help make it a little more black and white. We did some role-playing that went on at off-hours, after work we kind of sat down and talked about these to maybe come up with some other scenarios that might come along that we could look at. That person is still employed and that was last year.

This is just an example of kind of the flow in employment crises; this is a very challenging part of our service. We will have a client who comes in and is new to us, we'll have clients who come into crisis and they could be someone who's new or they could be someone who is already attached to us, this is one that is new and this is kind of the flow we would take somebody through.

There is a lot of work establishing rapport with the employer and with the client to get the information that we need to develop a plan. It's not always clear of what the challenges are, often in these situations the client is stressed and has a lot of anxiety, there's a lot of emotion involved and it could be on the same side of the employer. We have to sort through all that and figure it out to develop a plan as best we can. In some cases it's not a good fit for us to provide support. If the person has a lot of support in other areas that might be a better fit, if they have a union behind them, they might have some advocacy behind them, maybe it's better that they take the lead for this and we're just there to provide support around the specifics to the disability.

The last piece is the follow-up, follow-up. After we are successful and the person is employed there is still an element of follow-up that has to happen to make sure things

are going well. It isn't always just with the client, in fact, it's usually also with the employer because the client could be saying yes, everything's fine and the employer is saying no, things aren't fine. We have to make sure we're getting accurate information so it's about following up with both sides.

We go through a phasing-out where we're trying to develop natural supports and it's kind of what we're doing right from the get go. Even when we're doing training and awareness we're looking at who could possibly be a natural support for this person so once we're out and we're not there anymore and the person is working completely independently, if there were someone they could go to have questions who would that be, so that would be considered a natural onsite support.

We would go through a lot of check-ins during that follow-up so the check-ins for some people could be once a month, for others it could be once a week. The idea is that we're slowly phasing out where we don't have to do check-ins anymore. We always can return to support if needed. We recently got a call from one of the law offices who we had supported last year and there were some changes to the person's duties, some responsibilities and they were having some challenges so we went back in to help figure that out.

Part of the follow-up in that phasing out is it can look a lot of different ways. We had a client who had severe anxiety and his career had never lasted longer than two months, so every job he had lasted two months, it was almost like a barrier getting past that two months, it was very challenging for him. We were able to find him some employment that he was comfortable with and we provided a tremendous amount of daily support, not there the whole day with him, but checking in with him - he was working full time - to get him past those two months and we got him past those two months and he was still fine. We started a phasing out with multiple check-ins, a day, then a week, twice a week, a month, slowly but surely going through that. Throughout that we also set up a follow-up and check-in using modern technology; we were using texting, he would text us. He would text his EMW if he needed to vent, had a question or needed help.

Part of how he dealt with his anxiety at home is he journaled a lot, so it wasn't appropriate to journal at the workplace he was in so he just did it on his phone. He would send the EMW a text and at the end of it he had a hashtag. If the hashtag said vent, he was just venting, that's all he needed, he just wanted to get it out there, for someone to listen to him. If it was a question, it was a question, I need you to answer this and if it was help it meant the EMW needs to get over there. He did this for a few months, probably up to six months and then didn't need it anymore, the texts just slowly started to dissipate, he didn't need them and that person has been working full time for 18 months, well beyond the two months.

One of the things that we are always looking at - we have job developers as well and we do job matching and job carving. A big part of what an EMW would do is the job-

carving piece. This is pretty unique to someone who is on-site with an employer. So when an EMW is working with an employer they might see certain needs from an employer that they may not necessarily realize, so an EMW is able to carve out positions that we wouldn't know if we weren't there. So if there's a need that an employer has and a client has a very unique ability to fill that need, we can carve that position out.

We had a client who was working at Giant Tiger who was doing a lot of different tasks and he was really good and precise with setting displays up, so we helped the employer carve that out where that's what he was doing, because that's where his biggest strength was. No one else at Giant Tiger wanted to do that job so we put him in that to do that job specifically, and it was a huge success.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ainsworth, do you have closing remarks?

MS. AINSWORTH: Sure. This last slide, just kind of a wrap-up of things that we've noticed over our 18 to 20 years. We noticed that the full service, with the focus on the unique needs of persons with disabilities does work. It's an equitable service so not necessarily the same thing works for every single person who comes into our employment service. It's unique. For every individual it's different. No two people with disabilities have the same, exact needs so we acknowledge that.

We also know there's always some talk of putting services all under one major shop or centre. We understand that there's a huge risk of dilution of services because what happens when you generalize all services, it's very hard to pay close attention to people's unique needs with respect to employment. We also know after years of doing this work with people with disabilities, the cultural shift has to come from the top-down and the bottom-up. It has to be throughout the entire organization; no different than any of our businesses or employers that are wanting a diverse culture. It can't just be in one area or the other. It has to be throughout the organization.

The focus on outcomes and overcoming barriers through models of service delivery - what Marcus spoke about was just a snapshot, just a slice of part of our model of service delivery. We've spent years developing and designing them. They again are very effective. It's a unique approach that we use to engage employers. We go out; we meet with employers one on one. That's not quite enough. You still need to do a huge campaign, which we do every year. We have a symposium. I've left the material with everyone - Ability Starts Here. I know some of you have attended. We look forward to seeing you next year. That's just part of our ongoing bringing awareness and understanding, and encouraging new employers to show up each and every year. So that's another part, and the other part is just the disability-specific education that Marcus was talking about that we do on a case-by-case basis inside any business environment.

We're on a huge momentum of growth. We'd like to continue this work for many years to come - kind of feel that our job will not be done unless we have a fully inclusive

society, and no one has really told us that has occurred yet. Until it does, we expect to be here.

Thank you very much for taking the time to hear us today and the Collaborative Partnership Network. I should acknowledge Jane Orrell receiving her award possibly as we speak today for this kind of work in working with people with disabilities. Jane has been a leader in our group for many years and I think she'll be joining me as co-chair when she returns and has been instrumental in putting a lot of some of the models of service delivery over the years together. She is receiving her national award today so thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You're welcome, that's very exciting. Just let me take an opportunity to thank you all for being here and thank you for the work you do. I think probably one of the best parts of sitting on this committee is the exposure to all the wonderful organizations that are in our province that are helping our most vulnerable. It's very admirable work and as somebody who came from a teaching background and worked very closely with students, especially who were on the autism spectrum, knowing that after they leave us there are organizations like yours that continue to lead them, it's very overwhelming, it's very nice.

I'd like to take a moment to welcome Ms. Peterson-Rafuse who is joining us; Ms. Peterson-Rafuse is the member for Chester-St. Margaret's. We will begin with some questioning and we'll start with Mr. MacLeod.

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you for your presentation folks, it was great. One of the things that caught my attention was you said there were several areas that aren't being serviced presently by an organization and I'm curious as to where those areas are and what, if any, is the plan for trying to capture the individuals who are in those areas?

MS. AINSWORTH: Well, it's a unique set of circumstances in our province where there isn't a specialized service in each and every area. When it began, in 2001 I guess, by the time all the agencies were up and running, there were services in each of the areas but the government at the time, there may have been some reasons why some eventually closed out and they never reopened.

Now what they do have in some of the areas like Truro, there's a generalized service that does of course invite people with disabilities but their focus and attention isn't necessarily exclusively for people with disabilities. The other area is New Glasgow and they also have a generalized service and invite in people with disabilities.

MR. MACLEOD: I guess from the way you answered that I would suggest that there is definitely a need for the service in those areas. The numbers probably there are the same as they are in the other areas of the province. Has your organization looked at any way of trying to address that? Have you reached out to governments current and past to see

if there's a way to reinstate that, to get it going? Again, if the need is there, there must be a way we can make the programs more specialized than just a general category.

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes, we have reached out in the past and currently there's a transformation happening now, we're considered a Career Nova Scotia centre so we have been talking quite extensively with our current government to see what might happen in the future, the new reality of the Career Nova Scotia centres of which we are all part.

I guess I don't have the exact answer for what might come, I just know that there's a lot of conversation happening right now about specialized service.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Peterson-Rafuse.

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Thank you very much; I apologize for being a few minutes late. I want to thank you for the service you provide, I know it's so integral in our society and the significance in terms of enabling people with disabilities to have the same opportunities as all of us do in the workplace.

I was very fascinated with the program in terms of the maintenance program. I think that's a fantastic part of what you are doing because that's a key element, you know once you find the job and probably a lot of us could use that maintenance service in our work. I think you are right on for that now.

I do realize that one of the challenges always for organizations is with respect to the budget. I'm wondering - I know that you mentioned the \$4.6 million. I have kind of a three-part question. I'll try to go through them quickly. Do you have a breakdown of your budget available for us to see?

MS. AINSWORTH: We do not have it here, but we can make it available. In terms of what each agency receives?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Yes.

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I'm just wondering, with each agency, are they receiving provincial or federal funding, or does it go into your organization and then get dispersed? Can you just give a little example of how that budget functions?

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes, each agency would receive - depending on the numbers of expected clients you might work with over the course of a year - we receive a contract that would specifically spell out exactly how many people you might work with, exactly the activities, and every budget line item that you would expend in any category - wages,

any expense. So that would be with our Careers Nova Scotia Centre, which would have its own set of terms, conditions and activities.

Some of us also receive some federal funding that is very client-specific through the Opportunities Fund. So through the federal Opportunities Fund we're able to extend client programs that would help people get that first attachment to the first job in a work experience - well, not so much work experience anymore; we used to. Now it's under a targeted wage or training subsidy. That under the federal government, again, is still very specific terms and conditions that we operate under for that contract. We share it across the province. There are four agencies that host the Opportunities Fund, and we share it with our other partners so they, too, can tap into those funds for clients.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: One more follow-up. I know that the budgets, the way that they're set out can be quite complicated and the different areas that you can access funding. With everything - and the financial struggles - is there a concern with your organization in terms of finances and how it's being distributed and so forth?

I'm trying to envision the future, which I know is really difficult, but I wanted to get your perception of what that future may look like and where some red flags for your organization and your agencies right now in terms of future funding, whether it's on a federal basis or a provincial basis that we should probably be aware of.

MS. AINSWORTH: One area that we always would struggle with are particular gaps in client funds that are available. We do some of our own fundraising so that we can assist a client without all of the regulations of terms and conditions, whether it be provincial or federal. So we are always in need of that kind of funding. That just means that we have the freedom to make something happen today.

When it's someone in need for - it could be, I'll say, a pair of work boots for a job that they have just secured and they truly, simply do not have the money to be able to cover the cost of that, and/or bus tickets is a huge issue. So they may seem like very small things, but they can actually be quite a barrier if you really don't have any access to funds. That's always an ongoing concern.

Assistive technology is another growing area where we don't really have - Sydney, Cape Breton do have some capacity there, but we don't have it across the province. That's something that's definitely a need for our clients because if you imagine that someone is just starting a job, it isn't always possible for us to go to the employer and say, can you provide this accommodation on a trial basis? So we'd like to be in a position where we could support the client to be able to get the assistive technology or accommodation that they need before they go to the job, so that everything is in place and they have a better opportunity to sustain that job. Those are a few areas of concern - always with the client first.

The other question that you address is of a future nature and that question remains to be seen. There is talk in the transformation that the Careers Nova Scotia Centres across the province, which are 52 in number right now, will be reduced to a number that might be somewhere in the order of 15, so we do have some concerns. We probably have more concerns about the sustainability of the integrity of the services that need to be in place and the expertise to work in our field with people with disabilities. That's probably the concern that we would have, that the sustainability is there, probably not much different than many other organizations.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: Thank you for your presentation, it was really interesting. I have a son who has a learning disability so just getting him educated - he's in Grade 9 - is a challenge, so I know a small bit of probably what you guys experience and stuff. He goes to Bridgeway Academy - I don't know if you're familiar with it or not - so that has been a huge help to us to be able to get the environment he needs to learn. Unfortunately, public school isn't always - no offence - depending on the school, the best place, so I understand all of those needs that you talk about in creating an environment in which they can do a job.

I have several questions, actually - I need to understand it a little better. If somebody needs help finding employment do they go to CPN and then you send them to another group, or how much help happens at your point before they go? I guess I need to understand that part.

MS. AINSWORTH: Actually they can go to any agency in their local area and again, people would just self-identify as having a disability, they would do a short intake form, and they would start.

MS. TREEN: So could they go to you first and then you refer them to somebody else, or would they just go to one of your partners?

MS. AINSWORTH: That could happen as well. It has happened where clients are moving, let's say, from Digby to Halifax, so Debbie Cook in her area would call us and say we have a client that's moving to Halifax, will you be able to help them? We connect provincially because anyone could call any one of our agencies and then we could connect them to the one that is nearest to them. Does that answer your question?

MS. TREEN: Yes, thank you. My other question is, do you feel that the culture, the employer, companies, the culture of hiring people with disabilities, do you feel that's changing and what do you think is causing that change if it is a positive change?

MS. AINSWORTH: Excellent question. I do think it is changing and it's kind of a one-by-one building block of what we've seen occur. I'll use an example of one of our

employers who over the past year and a half has hired 30 people, he won the Lieutenant Governor's Award a couple of years ago, and it's Micco Companies - I guess I can say that.

Right away they started by hiring one person in one of their locations, and that individual had an intellectual disability. They have several businesses and so they had great success. What they would report themselves was they noticed a change within their own culture to a more positive, creative, embracing culture by adding this one person who has an intellectual disability in their environment. So you go from that and enter in another business, they start hiring and the same kind of atmosphere starts to exist in their business and it's good for business, their businesses are doing well, they're making profits, they have low turnover - so, so far, none of our people have left.

I think it builds - it's an education and awareness that comes from doing some of the events we do and the one-on-one education and then an employer gives it a try and they realize their own culture becomes different and more diverse and embracing and then they just hire more people. Then eventually they're not - I guess if there was a fear factor involved in hiring a person with a disability, that you weren't familiar with the disability and you didn't know how that was going to work in your environment, then that fear starts to break down.

In their case they hire people with all different disabilities, people with mental illness, people with physical disabilities, people with cerebral palsy, it doesn't make any difference.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: I just want to go back to where we talked a little bit about the areas without the specific expertise on people with disabilities. I'm just wondering when it comes to placements in those areas, the outcomes that have been observed, are there more negative outcomes? I mean you just described how positive it is because you were able to send in workers that are specific and know their particular field so I'm just wondering what happens in an area where you don't have anybody who is specialized, does that have an impact on the employability of somebody with a disability?

MS. AINSWORTH: It's a difficult question to answer from a statistical point of view because we wouldn't really have a connection directly to those agencies. We may hear, and I really wouldn't want to stand on hearsay so I guess I don't really have an answer for that. I don't know if any of you would like to jump in.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jamieson.

MR. JAMIESON: Well anecdotally we do get at times calls from families from areas that don't have this type of service, looking for support, so they'll ask us in Halifax -

I work for TEAM Work - can you support us? What can you do for us? Unfortunately there's not much we can do. It has happened where that person has relocated to Halifax; they've come to go to school here because there's no support in the community they are in, they've come here to look for work because they don't have that support.

Janice is right, it's hard to put a number on it but we have seen situations where families have moved their child to the city for better opportunities and for that support.

MR. MACLEOD: I'm not trying to put you on the spot, I'm just trying to get a better handle on what is going on in the areas that don't have the service that you are offering here. I guess one of the biggest questions is that if the service isn't being offered is there any statistic to show that there are less individuals with disabilities being employed in those areas? If you don't have the service, it's harder to - and in turn, that would probably have an impact on the economy of the province and the area. I'm just wondering if overall you have a sense are there fewer people in those areas with disabilities who are not working?

MR. JAMIESON: I really don't have that. I would assume that it would be very difficult for someone with a disability to get employed in those areas. I mean for a lot of our clients there has to be some sort of level of support and walking into an agency that doesn't have that specialized understanding of how to work with someone with a disability and how to communicate that to an employer, I think you can only go so far.

MR. MACLEOD: I guess from hearing your answers, my concern would be then that the areas that are underserved by organizations like your own, that means that the people with disabilities in those areas are not getting as much service as probably they would require, so that their quality of life in their own community is not as big so we need to find - the collective "we" - need to find a way to get those areas serviced again with specialized service. I'm just wondering if your group that you're representing here today has ever given any thoughts on how to get people kick-started, restarted, re-involved - whatever the right wording is.

MS. AINSWORTH: In 2008, the Collaborative Partnership Network put together a proposal provincially to cover all of the areas, but since then many things have changed. We have re-offered that same proposal more recently to cover all areas. So it could exist within the service that does exist - it just needs to check the expertise of the individuals who work within the organizations in those areas, and also that the model of service that we follow through the CPN - Collaborative Partnership Network - is part of the conversation.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Thanks for your presentation - that was really interesting. I'm the new NDP Critic for Community Services so I'm learning a lot very quickly and I was very interested in your organization.

I noticed that in the Ivany report, it states that we need to employ more people from various minority groups, including persons with disabilities. You said that the CPN is able to secure 1,000 jobs a year for your clients and you also said the situation has been improving over the last number of years, which is great.

When you mentioned the part about the benefits of specialized services, the no-risk dilution of services to the most marginalized - and you said you were a little concerned about that - what did you mean? Could you explain that a little bit further, please?

MS. AINSWORTH: What I mean by that is when services are generalized - I'll use an example from what has recently occurred in British Columbia. They took a different approach with their career centres and they went for a request for proposals situation, and when the winning primary contractors were awarded, the contracts did not allow money in their costing to work with people who may need a little longer to become attached to the workforce. So what happened in B.C. was that people with disabilities could not receive service unless you were a person - any person - who could come into a service and have two meetings and be ready to go.

So when I say "the risk of dilution of services" that's what I mean. In the rush and the hurry to make targets and outcomes, there is a certain cost to providing that service. Will people who are marginalized and need more time be at risk, with higher needs?

MS. ZANN: So that ties in with your other concern about going down from 52 centres to 15. So is that a reality that we need to be really concerned about? What have you exactly heard about that?

MS. AINSWORTH: It has been widely shared with the Careers Nova Scotia Centres managers across the province through a few sessions with our Employment Nova Scotia partners. They've shared openly what they know so far about their plans and what they're considering, and they will bring it back to the table once they meet with the executive coordinating ministers meeting coming up soon. In July there will be another session with the managers of the Careers Nova Scotia Centres in which they will share what the go-forward plan is. So we would expect that we would know more at that point, but at this point, so far, we're still having plenty of good conversation with our directors at Employment Nova Scotia about the importance of specialized services - our concern about the dilution of services so far and the expertise required.

MS. ZANN: So we should flag it, though, just to keep an eye on that situation and make sure that nothing drastic happens. Okay, great, thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: I'm quite pleased to hear you talk today, your presentation was extremely good. I'm still a little confused about the first entry point of a client or an employee who is looking for a job. I'm just wondering if you could quickly go through it again. You may have already said a lot of that but I'm still a little unclear of where your first entry point is for a potential employee and where it's going.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ainsworth.

MS. AINSWORTH: The first entry point is someone learning of us, so it could be just word of mouth. A lot of times it is word of mouth that people hear about us. Also we do get a lot of referrals from the Department of Community Services so we can be very much a referral base. But if you are walking down the mall and you happen to see, you can just walk inside and come in and do an intake and we do an orientation of our service. So virtually anyone can come in to any of our services, on any day, and self-identify, fill out a quick form and tap in.

Referrals also come from our family doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, so a lot of referral-based.

MR. HORNE: Do you actually spend time or how much time would you spend going out looking for clients? Or most of your time is spent with the person once they become involved with you, getting the appropriate training and so on?

MS. AINSWORTH: Actually that's a really good question. I'm embarrassed to say that we don't do a lot of marketing. We go out and talk to employers a lot but people find us, again through this referral network and we are talking about getting with the 21st Century and getting in social media but we also would have capacity issues if more and more people - I mean a lot of us in this room recognize that youth seem to be on the rise for mental illness, some reports are saying one in five. We're definitely seeing a trend in youth coming forward with high anxiety and stress levels that are sometimes quite debilitating in the employment realm.

MR. HORNE: In relation to what you've just said, what kind of age groups - are you getting people of all ages or is it more youth now? Or what was in the past and what do you think will be in the future?

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes, I think our average age is 45. There's something to be considered when you think about our average age. We have probably 30 per cent are youth and our average age is 45 and we still have 68 and 70-some old individuals coming in and looking for service.

What I want to say about our average age is often people have been outside the workforce for so long, people with disabilities, that now that things seem to be opening up with our employers, a lot more people are coming forward so this may be their first time ever of being employed, at the age of 30, 35, 40, so pretty significant.

We did some statistical analysis just recently and about 70 per cent of our clients have not been attached to the workforce within the last two years and some never. That doesn't mean by any means that they won't be because we have such a high success rate that it does happen. They have the skills, they just never had the opportunity.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: I'm just wondering if you would give me a little more information about your fast-track service. So somebody comes in who qualifies for that fast-track service - have you got specific employers who look at doing that for you or do you have a wide base? So I desperately need a job for somebody or they desperately need a job to keep them functioning properly - how does it work?

MR. JAMIESON: Most people who come through are all desperately looking for work so it's a task for us up front to kind of effectively and efficiently figure out really quickly that this is something that we can fast-track. So we have an employment model that we look at that helps us kind of understand quickly if the person is ready to move into job development very quickly.

So we have different pathways that we would move a client through and a fast-track would be a pathway for us. So that would be someone who is coming through who has good awareness of their disability and the challenges it might bring, but also the abilities that they have. They have a resumé. They're actively job searching and they have a really clear career goal. We would fast-track that person straight to a job developer and start trying to get them connected to employers as quickly as possible.

MR. MACLEOD: It says on your website that if you go to Employment Nova Scotia it takes about four weeks to turn around in that location for funding for an individual. So you fast-track them, then you have to apply for funding and it takes four weeks to turn that around. Is that acceptable to your new employer or your new relationship - is that acceptable to you as an organization? Do you think that four weeks is a reasonable amount of time for a turnaround with the information you supply? I'm just wondering if the wheels are greased well enough or if there's fine tuning that needs to take place basically.

MR. JAMIESON: When we meet with an employer and they have someone they want to hire and there's going to be funding attached, we like to do it as quickly as possible. If someone is interested in hiring one of our clients and four weeks is too long, that's not acceptable. We don't want to miss any opportunities at all.

We would advocate for our client, for the employer with whoever the funder is to fast-track this and to get this moving as quickly as possible. There are different funding sources and some move quicker than others, but we wouldn't want to miss any opportunity because of funding not happening quickly enough. We also offer our employers - we'll go out and help them with that application process.

The funding through Employment Nova Scotia; the employer actually has to do an application. It's not just from the client perspective - it's an employer perspective. It's not always easy. Employers don't have time. They don't want to go online and start looking through different websites and all that stuff so we'll actually go out and help them with that to make that as fast as possible.

MR. MACLEOD: Just to that, do you have any suggestions that you would offer the government to help streamline that process of approval for the reasons that we just talked about?

MR. JAMIESON: Right now, there is no process to identify and fast-track, if we could identify a fast-track on the application right away so that it was red-flagged so we didn't have to go and make the extra effort to advocate - they just knew that this was a fast-track and there's a good reason for it and trust that we've done our due diligence to make sure it is a good application.

Then the other side is just more support for employers, and that's really when things often break down - when the employer just doesn't have the time. So it's a service that we provide, but it's not really our application process. It should come from another area.

MS. AINSWORTH: I would just like to add to that. We host the Opportunities Fund, which has training subsidies. We turn around any application within a week. The reason why, undoubtedly, is we are wholly invested in our person not losing that opportunity, and there are not as many connections to make. It's more a streamlined process.

So I guess the recommendation that I would make is that any funding that is connected to clients - marginalized individuals and opportunity, should be hosted in a community-based organization.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Peterson-Rafuse.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I want to revisit the discussion about the 52 career centres that we have in the province and the possibility of a reduction to 15. I have several questions, I'm going to ask the questions and then I'll go back over them again after you're finished because you may forget a number that I asked, but I think it's important for you to hear them together.

My first question will be the role of the career centres, what those roles are throughout the province in terms of relationship with the Collaborative Partnership and how you interact with those centres and the significance or the relationship and the importance to you to enable you to do your job? The second part would be where are these centres located? Where there are 52, I would make the assumption that there are many in rural Nova Scotia where the job opportunities are very limited especially, of course, for those who have a disability. The third part would be what would be the ramification of that type of large reduction to those with disabilities in the province seeking employment? That is why I said I probably need to go back over them again for you. I guess the first one is the role of the career centres in relationship to your organization?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ainsworth.

MS. AINSWORTH: As far as the Career Nova Scotia Centres we have a managers group that meets both provincially and regionally. As this transformation of the number of centres unfolds, we meet on a regular basis and probably strategize together. As far as the part two question, I don't know if that wholly answers it.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I would probably ask for a little bit more in the sense of I understand you're saying that you meet, but I'm just wondering the relationship with the Career Nova Scotia Centres, how vital that is to what you do and your ability to function and the agencies that are under your organization? Is the Career Nova Scotia Centres a vital link or do they provide you with information, what is that relationship, I guess?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ainsworth.

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes, they are a vital link and there are many levels of professional development that occur on a provincial level. More recently there was the Voluntary Certification of Career Development Practitioners which was a wonderful program to have all of the career practitioners that worked within these Career Nova Scotia Centres become certified, it's ongoing right now. That has been something that has been desired by career practitioners for years, to have a certification level of their expertise. As it stands now there is no additional certification for working with specialized groups, but that might be something to be talked about in the future.

I think that the support collectively together, there are many hostings, there was just the Nova Scotia Career Development Conference that was held last week for a couple of days. So that, again, is always opportunity for all of us and our staff to keep up to date on career trends and labour market trends.

As for how we connect together even on a daily basis as far as our clients are concerned, we will receive a number of referrals from generalized Career Nova Scotia Centres that perhaps don't have the expertise to work with people with disabilities, so they'll often refer over to us. We will often work back and forth together on different

aspects of service that they may offer that we don't and vice versa. It's a constant sharing of knowledge and best practices at that level as well.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: With respect to rural Nova Scotia, do you know the distribution of the career centres? Are they distributed equally throughout the province where we have 52 do you know?

MS. AINSWORTH: From our conversations with Employment Nova Scotia, they have concerns about that distribution because in some areas there seemed to be a high proportion of centres, and I'll say it's in the Valley that this would be true and Halifax, compared to some of the other, more spread-out geographic areas that may well be in need of some service.

Part of their interest in changing and transforming the service is to cover some of those gap areas that don't have any coverage at this moment.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: It seems to me that it's not the matter of reducing them that will resolve any issue or create issues. However, maybe it is on how it is the operation that we see today that the change actually needs to be where the centres are distributed and the importance of being in those rural communities that are in dire need of support for employment opportunities and for those with disabilities.

If those centres were reduced from 52 to 15 - if they were kept and they were redistributed versus just cutting them to 15, what would be the ramifications to those who are seeking employment who have a disability and to your agencies?

MS. AINSWORTH: Well, I guess that remains to be seen. In terms of - it's hard to imagine a structure that will allow the sustainability of the specialized approach under a reduced plan. But having said that, I guess at this point it's just an unknown.

I'm thinking back to what happened in B.C., they did have a structure where there were less agencies, less administration, and a subcontracting and/or partnership approach with a group of other agencies that still could allow some services for people with disabilities but it would have to be done very thoughtfully and carefully.

There does seem to be a focus in every presentation that we have heard from Employment Nova Scotia, and they intend to keep the focus on services for people with disabilities, whether that means in a whole agency approach or another kind of format, they do seem dedicated to keeping that focus.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gough.

MR. STEPHEN GOUGH: Thank you for your presentation, I really enjoyed that. I recognize a number of people who I know are working with disabilities, either from birth

or through injury, through the workplace or a vehicle accident or just an accident basically. I know that keeps your plate full. They say one in five, or 20 per cent, are people with disabilities in Nova Scotia.

I had a question in reference to the age of the folks that your organization deals with and Mr. Horne asked it already and I'm satisfied with that answer. My question is, in all that you do with your organization, how do you define success for your clients?

MR. JAMIESON: Well, we're required to report on employment outcomes and our funders like to make sure that we're getting our targets for employment outcomes. I think for us it's about meaningful employment. If someone is getting a job that they find meaningful - it's not just any job, it's a job that they want and they see value in, that provides more than just a paycheque - I think that's part of a positive outcome for us.

You know we're grateful to be on the journey that we are on with our clients. Sometimes it takes a while to figure things out if you have someone who comes out of high school with a learning disability or autism, who has never worked, who is not too sure what they want to do, you're in for a journey. There are a lot of positive things that happen within that journey. A lot of benchmarks that hit a lot of successes, a lot of challenges, but you're always grateful for being on that. At the end of the day, if someone is becoming meaningfully employed in something they value and really enjoy, that's a positive outcome for us.

MR. GOUGH: I can understand that for sure. With your organization, you mentioned an employee that would text for inspiration to keep going and so I'm thinking it takes a large amount of empathy for people. I'm just curious, where do you guys come from? What is your makeup? You can't just look at it as a job - you'd have to have some really deep feelings about finding - not only employment for these folks who are disabled, but to make sure that they succeed, because I imagine there are many other challenges they face because of their disabilities.

MR. JAMIESON: You really have to want to help people. Regardless of the disability, you have to really want to see people succeed and, like I said before, be part of that journey and be there for the ups and downs that are going to come and help them through that. You have to have the right frame of mind that this person is here to help you or you're there to help them, and that they're looking at you for support. A lot of the time, there are not a lot of supports in place.

We're an employment organization and we help people become employed, but often there are a lot of other pieces that will come in to helping someone get employed that have nothing to do with employment - life supports, housing, transportation is a big challenge. We have to help people through that and to say it always happens between 9:00 to 5:00 isn't true at all. I mean, our Employment Maintenance program - we've had people that work overnight, work from 6:00 to 11:00 and that's when they're on call essentially.

If something happens, something happens - they have to be able to deal with it. I think you just have to want to help people.

MR. GOUGH: I just want to end by saying, I applaud you guys for what you do. It takes special people to do the work that you do. I guess that's the success part - to see people find employment and it better their lives.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we have about 10 minutes left in our questioning and a number of people who are still on the speakers list so I'm just going to ask that our members keep their questions concise so that we can get around as many times as possible in that time frame. Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: Just a quick question on employment. In Nova Scotia, the labour market loss of jobs, according to Statistics Canada we're losing jobs all the time and the labour market is shrinking. Does that have a direct effect when it comes to people with disabilities? Are they affected more or equal as the rest of the labour market when it comes to that?

MS. AINSWORTH: I would say yes, there is an effect and when there is an en masse layoff when a plant closes down, yes. Some of the people may be people who have worked with us and they are definitely affected. However, because many of our people find employment through working with specific employers, they may be less impacted because we build relationships with prospective employers so across the province we probably have relationships that we are - and we're constantly growing 400 to 500 employers that we regularly have visits with, and when anything comes up and is available, they have a pretty good chance that they will get the job.

So yes, there is impact, but maybe not as severe because that job for us will not change. We will always be looking for new employers who are ready to hire.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: You did mention that there are inconsistencies in the system already and that Truro, which I represent, and New Glasgow in particular, have more general practices going on, rather than the specifics as you offer. So two questions - when you mentioned about in B.C. when they took that different approach and that the primary contractors wouldn't allow money in their budget to allow for people with disabilities to be properly addressed - did they privatize it there? Who were the primary contractors who got the jobs? Was it privatized?

MS. AINSWORTH: As far as I know, yes. WorkBC was the name of the primary lead so if you just Google WorkBC you'll see how that all unfolds.

Now as far as I know they're not run by community boards, but I actually don't know for certain so I hesitate to say.

MS. ZANN: If you had a magic wand and you wanted to try to correct the inconsistencies across the province, what would you suggest?

MS. AINSWORTH: I think the number one thing I would suggest is that we have an organization sitting here before you today, the Collaborative Partnership Network, that has 18-plus years' experience in working with people with disabilities. We have a model of service delivery, we have expertise and one of your comments was, who are we? Why do we work with people with disabilities? Sometimes - and we often say this - it's beyond expertise. A lot of the people who work with people with disabilities inside the organizations are people who experienced having a disability so that level of understanding and sensitivity is there.

I guess the next thing I would recommend is that the expertise be built into any system and the training. So far competencies to work within certain organizations are not always tested. So a means by which you test, whether there are diversity competencies or disability competencies to work within whatever organizational structure might come in the future, the only way to become a fully-inclusive employment workforce world is that we have to start there. The people who invite people into their organizations already have to be with that mindset and education and expertise.

That would be a way that I would start: make sure that the model is in place and the expertise is in place and that that expertise is not lost in this transition.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: This is a follow-up from the other questions I was asking. Is there a networking tool for companies or employers that have hired persons with a disability to encourage other people, people who are wondering should I hire somebody or shouldn't I, that they can go to this network and they hear all these positive things and what happens to your business when you do have someone with a disability? Is there some kind of networking tool for that?

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes, there is the Ability Employers. It is community-based and it's an officially incorporated organization, it's a business-led organization so we have representatives on that board from almost every industry - hospitality, university, banks - and they all get together and do that very thing. They talk about okay, our mission is to go out and talk to other employers, how can we encourage more? How can we invite more membership? Bringing Susan Scott-Parker from the U.K. who has revolutionized the U.K. in the way in which employers think about hiring people with disabilities, making the business case, connecting with the Prime Minister in her case - we're going to copy that

here in Nova Scotia with the Ability Employers. Does anybody have a connection to the Premier? (Laughter) Let's start there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: I'm just wondering if you could tell me what the level of involvement of your organization has been with the changes being made to Careers Nova Scotia? Have you had any input or any say or has anybody even asked you what you think should be done?

MS. AINSWORTH: A great question. Yes, we've had a lot of input. I've met personally and we have across the province met individually with different Employment Nova Scotia representatives. The director and the lead in the project have come to a few of our organizations to get a better understanding just by going through a day in the life of, each phase of the service and what it means to the people that we work with, they have, I believe, a very clear understanding of what is unique about our services. So yes, we've been very engaged, we have an upcoming ministers' meeting and another directors' meeting which probably Jane will join us on next week it has been ongoing since the change has begun. All of the recommendations that you've heard here today we've shared and they seem pretty open.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne, we'll finish up with you.

MR. HORNE: I would like to understand a little bit more how large your staff is, all of the Collaborative Partnership Network and maybe how many are volunteer and how many are paid so I can get a better feeling of your status in the community.

MS. AINSWORTH: It would be different in different areas depending on the number of clients you might work with in each of the areas. I have a pretty good idea of what most of the areas are like, but I will just give you an example with Halifax. In the course of a year we would work with 700 to 800 people coming into our service. We have 21 staff, three teams, basically: one of Case Management, so they would meet with people until they are ready for employment. Then they would be transferred over to Job Development of which there are three job developers; and sustainability with our Employment Maintenance Workers we have four sustainability workers and maybe two and a half-ish admin, so that may give you some idea, and myself.

MR. HORNE: For all of your collaborative group how many might that be? I know you don't know them all that well but certainly you might have an overview.

MS. AINSWORTH: That would be about 92 to 100, in that range of staff and volunteers you asked about, we have about 100 board members who volunteer their time so that would be on every single board within the nine agencies and they would come to at least a monthly meeting, but probably a lot more volunteering than that with all the events

going on, each in our own areas. Our volunteers are instrumental to the success of our agencies and all of the activities that we involve ourselves in in education and employment.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'm going to invite you or any of the members of your team to finish up with some closing remarks.

MS. AINSWORTH: I'll make a closing statement. Persons with disabilities have been left out of the labour market, with unemployment rates higher than about 27 per cent than people without disabilities. There is no good reason for this as people with disabilities have the skills the Nova Scotia labour market needs. People with disabilities have the right to expect a full range of employment services that address their needs by professionals with the right expertise, sensitivity and training.

We have witnessed the transformation of thousands of people with disabilities into employment with the right supports. Barriers are breaking down with employers with the presence of supports offered by the Collaborative Partnership Network in education and awareness. Change does take time and attention that can only happen with agencies that are dedicated to working with both the person with the disability and the employer to demonstrate their skills and their place in the workforce. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you so much, thank you for your presentation, thank you for all of the work that you do.

We are going to take a short recess, maybe two minutes to get a coffee or go to the washroom. We have a number of things on committee business so I ask that committee members don't venture too far away. We will adjourn until about 2:43 p.m., thank you.

[2:39 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:45 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Order, please. We do have a number of items, if you want to look at your agendas. We'll first look at correspondence that the committee has received. Our first letter that should be in your packages is a response on Maintenance Enforcement from the Minister of Justice. We are a little bit pressed for time so if you haven't already read that, I would ask that you do so possibly at your own convenience. The emails were sent out in advance, the response.

Our second piece of correspondence is the Halifax Society for Children, Youth, and Families, which was an invitation that was sent out prior to the date of this event, which was April 18th. Now we're beyond that.

Housing Nova Scotia - there was information requested from our January 6th meeting and there was follow-up on this sent back to us on March 19th. Again, that was

sent out to all the committee members, along with an email from Dolores Feltmate, which was information requested from our October 7th meeting.

I'd like to actually bring it to the members' attention that we normally have a practice of posting our correspondence to the website, if it's providing an information request. Maybe I could have a motion to have these responses or this information attached to the minutes of this meeting.

MR. MACLEOD: I so move.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Moved by Mr. MacLeod; seconded by Ms. Zann.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Thank you. We had correspondence that was deferred from our March 3rd meeting, which is in your packages - the Face of Poverty Consultation. We'll look at this first. I am going to suggest though - actually no. There was a direct ask for our committee to write both Mr. Troke and the Minister of Community Services to define the position of Housing Nova Scotia regarding specific details on spending and timelines. My recommendation for this is that we forward this correspondence from the committee directly to Housing Nova Scotia. Ms. Peterson-Rafuse.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: If we do that, can we have noted in our minutes a follow-up to that so you pass those along? We need some kind of mechanism to know what the answers were and when they were provided.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't think that should be any issue at all. So if we could forward this correspondence to Housing Nova Scotia and then ask for follow-up when they provide it.

We also had correspondence received from the Department of Community Services, two issues where we have information. Again, I would ask that we move that this be posted to our website. Is there agreement on that?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Absolutely. (Interruptions)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Wonderful. We had a motion that was deferred from the previous meeting, and I do apologize for not being at our last meeting, but I would like some clarification on this. It's my understanding that you, Ms. Peterson-Rafuse, requested that the Minister of Community Services and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development have a discussion with respect to the possible opportunities of funding for the educational mentor program. Is that accurate?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I'm trying to think back; it seems like it was years ago. I believe this is in reference to Big Brothers Big Sisters when they made their presentation and they said one of the programs they've taken initiative on that they find very successful was the educational mentor program right in the school system where the Big Brothers Big Sisters becomes involved in that.

The discussion at that time and from the presentation was the Big Brothers Big Sisters felt that is of such value that it should rise to the ministerial level to have a discussion because in order to have this type of program be consistent in our school system across the province, of course there would be a funding factor. The motion was for both of those ministers because I know of course of their busy schedule and the amount of information they receive to sort of flag this, that this is a program that an organization has been implementing themselves and it has been very successful and could there be a conversation around that at the ministerial level?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So again, just for clarification, you are asking that the clerk, on behalf of myself as the chairman, send a letter to both of these ministers, putting the presentation, the Big Brothers Big Sisters presentation, in specific the educational mentor program on their radar, have them be made aware of what we learned from that?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I would say as a previous minister, there is so much information flow and the knowledge is the power that you have as either a government or as a minister. I'm not sure if both our ministers are aware of this program, the successes, how it operates.

It's not to ask them to make an immediate decision of funding or anything of that nature but to look at it and have staff look at it and for those ministers to be aware that this program is a program that has a great deal of success and could be modelled after that program in our educational system.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Just for my own clarification, we're asking the minister to have a conversation - is that what you are asking? We're putting forward a request for the ministers to have a conversation about the program? About funding? About expanding the program? All the above or what? So we're asking them to have a conversation with each other?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If I may just speak to that. Again, my understanding of the request is that we, as a committee, are bringing to the attention of our two ministers this program that was presented to us - in the off chance that they are not already aware of this particular program - with the recommendation that they look at the possibility of bringing supports to this program.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Of course both ministers would have to have staff to give them the background information and to give them briefings on it. It is one of those programs that needs the interconnect between two ministers in order to make it happen. So the first component is the awareness and as a committee to ask them and make the ministers aware that this is a program that has been successful with Big Brothers Big Sisters on the South Shore and based on the recommendations that their staff would provide in finding that information to go forward from there.

There's no commitment of the ministers except more of the knowledge and awareness that this could be a potential program in the future for the province because it has been so successful.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLeod, did you have something to add?

MR. MACLEOD: I was just going to say that I think it's a matter of awareness for the ministers to highlight that there may be an opportunity to enhance a program that will help with the educational values of our children. So any time we can do that, I think it's the right thing for us to do and I don't see any issue. If they don't know about it, like we didn't know about it, then how are they supposed to react to it? Knowledge helps.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So perhaps we could have a new motion that clarifies the direct ask. Ms. Peterson-Rafuse.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I should have Alfie do it because he put it together so succinctly. (Laughter) The motion would be to have the information from this committee, to bring it to the attention of both the Ministers of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Community Services about the Big Brothers Big Sisters program from the South Shore on the educational mentoring program. I would say in the motion that we want them to be aware and to ask if they can maybe report back, even their department, on whether they know about it, what opportunities may be there, because there should be a full circle for us. I know that's not a proper motion so somebody else - I see Kim over there, what is that woman saying? (Laughter)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think to ask if collaboration is possible.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we have a motion on the floor. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Thank you. Our next meeting is scheduled for September, since committees don't normally sit in July and August. The first Tuesday in September is actually the 1st, and

since that could interfere with summer events and vacations, and then Labour Day would be the following week, the 8th, I'm suggesting we have our next meeting on September 15th. Is there any discussion or any issue with that date? So, yes, we actually had another member bring up the possibility of having our meetings at 9:00 a.m., as opposed to 1:00 p.m. Mr. MacLeod.

MR. MACLEOD: I would just repeat that for those who travel a significant distance, and our two members on this committee do, the afternoon is a better time because it then flows into a normal - normally caucus is on Wednesday morning so instead of having to be away from home two nights it's one day's travel rather than two days. I would respectfully ask that the committees on Tuesday stay at 1:00 p.m. and the committees on Thursdays be at 9:00 a.m. and that makes it flow for those who travel any distance a lot easier.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. So our next meeting will be set for September 15th at 1:00 p.m. I also would like to move that this be an agenda-setting meeting as our witness list is quite depleted.

Is there anything else the committee members would like to discuss before we adjourn? That concludes our committee business. I thank you all for attending and I will see you in September, if not sooner.

[The committee adjourned at 2:59 p.m.]