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NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, October 6, 2015

Legislative Committees Office

**TEAM Work Cooperative and
The WorkBridge Association -
Overview**

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ms. Patricia Arab (Chairman)
Mr. Brendan Maguire (Vice-Chairman)
Ms. Pam Eyking
Mr. Bill Horne
Ms. Joyce Treen
Mr. Eddie Orrell
Mr. Larry Harrison
Hon. Denise Peterson-Rafuse
Ms. Marian Mancini

[Mr. Larry Harrison was replaced by Mr. John Lohr.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

TEAM Work Cooperative and WorkBridge Association

Ms. Janice Ainsworth,
Executive Director - TEAM Work Cooperative

Ms. Judy Turner,
Executive Director - WorkBridge Association

Ms. Stephanie Berry,
Past client and current employee of TEAM Work Cooperative

Mr. Bill Hildreth,
Client of TEAM Work Cooperative



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2015

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:29 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Patricia Arab

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would like to call the meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services. My name is Patricia Arab, I am the MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park and the chairman of this committee. I would like to welcome everyone here today. Today we are going to be receiving a presentation from TEAM Work Cooperative and the WorkBridge Association. I would like to welcome you all here.

I would like to get started by asking the committee members to introduce themselves and we will start with Mr. Maguire.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We also have Mr. Gordon Hebb, our legal counsel and Ms. Kim Langille from our Committees Office helping us today.

I would also like to remind everyone on the committee and those who are watching to please have their phones turned off or set on vibrate, that is standard practice and under the circumstances we would like to keep any ambient noise down.

I do believe you have presented in front of us before, or you have presented at committee before, but just a reminder. Once we go into the question and answer portion of the committee, if you would direct all of your questions through me, as the Chair, and any responses through the Chair as well and wait until I do recognize you and I will stay on top of that to make sure that nobody gets missed.

I have another note - we're in a new space so for those who haven't been in committee since we moved to this location, the media room across the hall is going to be used for any interviews or scrums if applicable.

Welcome again and I will let you get started by introducing yourselves and beginning your presentation.

[The committee witnesses introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Welcome again and, Ms. Ainsworth, you can start.

MS. JANICE AINSWORTH: So we have been here before and we were talking about our provincial group, the Collaborative Partnership Network. So now we're taking it down to what is two agencies, TEAM Work Cooperative and the WorkBridge Association, so you can get a close-up, front view of what the service is all about from the Halifax region. We are a specialized employment service. Our new motto is we are investing in abilities and I'm really pleased to present here today to all of you.

We are two collocated agencies. The mission of TEAM Work is "To facilitate the full participation of Persons with Disabilities in the Nova Scotia labour force" and together with WorkBridge, to create meaningful employment and career opportunities for persons with diverse abilities in the HRM.

Really what that all means is we're heavily investing in making sure that each person who comes into our office, and that would probably mean in the order of about 700 or 800 people per year who self-identify as having a disability, that we do our utmost to try to engage them in the workforce - to find employment.

We've been here since 1997, which is about 18 years and up. Originally it was a community focus group because the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities was almost twice that compared to people without disabilities. Something different had to happen to make a change, so TEAM Work came to be and many other agencies did across the province that are dedicated to work with people with disabilities.

The WorkBridge in Halifax - again a community group, got together and while TEAM Work was there. We were kind of doing the front end of the service, the employment counselling, and there was an identified need for the other piece that had to happen, specializing in job development. Job development for people with disabilities is very unique, compared to any other forms of what you might think job development is. We do a lot of matching, it's a one-by-one building of relationships with our employers and really kind of marketing the skills of the candidates that we may have who come through our doors.

That organization, the WorkBridge, was formed in 2000. Then we had a vision that somewhere along the way we could collocate and work together more efficiently, so we did do that in 2005; I'll talk a little bit more about that in a minute. It became a one-stop and it's much more accessible for people with disabilities.

The other interesting thing about TEAM Work is we're a co-operative, which is kind of an unusual thing for a non-profit. But what we do is connect with 31 other member agencies to bring together all the services that might be needed to help people find employment - anything that would help advance a person with a disability in their career or even in their life. We are able to reach out and connect almost on a daily basis with a lot of these other agencies. You'll often find in our boardrooms there could be a whole - we call it almost a circle of support, where we could have meetings or case conferencing where we're trying to sort out how to get our way through different systems with a client. There could be 20 people in the room trying to help map out a plan, that's not uncommon.

Why we specialize - we like to think of the services as very unique to every individual with different disabilities. People who come to our service have any number of disabilities that they self-identify with. They could be somebody on the autism spectrum, it could be a hearing disability, a visual disability or mental illness. Lots of individuals who come have experienced different health conditions and that seems to be on the rise. An example is someone who is a cancer survivor who is needing to take a look at their career because maybe their former life, maybe on a very fast-paced career track, isn't going to be right for them now as a cancer survivor so that could be one example. There are many, many different disabilities.

We have a team of experts, we call them, who are disability-competent and have been working in the field for upwards of 18 years. They come to really specialize in working with people with different disabilities, so over and above having a career counselling practitioner certification, they also have a lot of expertise in working with people with different disabilities.

We also offer a huge array of very unique workshops that are specific for people with disabilities. One such is talking about your disability, a huge topic to cover in the workplace. As people are approaching employment, they want to learn, how do I approach the employer to let them know about my disability, when is the right time and how much information is too much? Even our employers will have conversations with them, what is appropriate for me to ask? So that's a really important workshop for us. As well, a number of our clients have been out of the workforce for a long time so we do a lot of pre-employment confidence building, getting people who have been out for a long time to build up their confidence. We spend a lot of time doing different workshops that help with that.

We have a very unique philosophy of inclusion that means that while people are with us during their time at TEAM Work Cooperative and the WorkBridge, it's a dedicated agency and people with disabilities are the focus of all of our work. Our model is that when

you get into the workplace it's not to be there as a token employee, but to be fully included. We do everything we can after employment to help people become completely included in the workplace so that means sending out our employment maintenance workers who help people sustain employment, talk to employers, educate employers about different disabilities and help that along.

The list of services that we do offer; case management, so the case manager - and you'll hear from Stephanie later - but case management follows a person from the beginning of the day they sign in with us until and after they're employed. They are continually checking in and helping to navigate the system. One of the big jobs of the case manager is to make referrals in the community and that can be quite an overwhelming prospect with so many avenues and different funding opportunities and skills development opportunities that are out there that they will help navigate their way through a myriad of systems in the community.

We also do job carving, so it's kind of job development and oftentimes opportunities for jobs are not readily posted. We actually are looking for jobs that are under the hidden job market so going in and doing a business analysis in any employer's environment, you might be able to carve out a job that would be suitable for a person that we might be thinking of. It usually ends up being a win-win situation where it helps their bottom line and helps some of the other co-workers at the same time.

We are a community-based and a non-profit organization and our board of directors are often made up of individuals who do themselves have disabilities, so that we keep our focus on keeping the attention on persons with disabilities and what their needs might be. As well, a lot of our board members actually work in the community in the disability field so they have a lot of expertise and we count on them for guidance along the way.

Our staff are also very often - a high percentage are people with disabilities. They also have a lot of training in disability competency. We have professional development sessions on an every-week basis about different disabilities and all of the education that would go along with learning whatever we can about different disabilities and different programs, that might be something that we need to look at in the future.

I think when we were here last, someone had asked the question about what makes a good counsellor or why people are interested in this field and I think that hands down all of the people who work in our field - it's more of a life's work than a job or a career. We all have a passion about working with people with disabilities and making a difference and seeing what we need to do to make a change and how employers receive people with disabilities in the workplace.

I mentioned the co-location that happened in 2005. It's a really interesting model in that at the time - and I don't know if times are any different now, it's always about fiscal restraint and budget and so on - we kind of took a proactive approach and decided that if

we co-located we'd actually be able to share resources and staff. Between TEAM Work and WorkBridge, we probably share about 10 staff so therefore instead of needing two separate agencies, two different individuals or professionals to do one job, we have one who shares the job. They're very busy people. That has worked really well. In terms of the budget, then what we were able to do is bring in new programs with some of the savings we were about to make in the different staff complement.

We're a disability organization and because we were in an environment that wasn't accessible, we were able to move to a very central location and it's fully accessible. It's on a bus route, which is a really big deal for all of our clients. We continue to develop this one centre of excellence for all needs for persons with disabilities in employment.

The other thing is, by bringing two or three teams together, all of the teams have different levels of expertise in different disabilities. I'll use the example of a few individuals who have a great deal of expertise in working with people who are on the autism spectrum and that makes a tremendous difference when we're all collaborating together to decide what the strategy should be in the workplace to make the most successful experience.

So we can always call on one or the other members of the team. If it's mental illness, we've got some experts in mental illness. We have some experts in hearing and deaf clients. So all of us together can make a good team - pretty much resolve many unusual situations, let's say.

So we have a full continuum of service and the benefits to the client at the time - you can imagine two different agencies and two different locations. What was happening is clients would have to jump on the bus or get in a car and come to TEAM Work, visit with their counsellor for a few sessions and then they'd make a referral and then they'd have to drive over to another location. So it just made it back to that one-stop model for clients a whole lot easier.

I mentioned about the expertise in different disabilities - the referral service is huge in our world of disability where there are so many community agencies. I don't know if there are many people in the community that still are not confused by the number of services that are out there and how you navigate it. That is a big part of what we do.

We also have a counsellor who works exclusively with deaf clients and a counsellor who is blind who works with - you'll hear from Stephanie, she works with any of our clients who come in - but our counsellor who is deaf helps in that navigation with when someone starts a job and they are a person who is deaf, their English is a second language so the communication needs to be sorted out in the very beginning, and hooking up with interpreters at the right time so that during the orientation on the job for the first few weeks, that doesn't become an additional barrier. So making sure all those right supports are in

place. That's what MJ, our counsellor who is deaf - she works on all of that for our clients who are about to become employed.

Now being in this Village at Bayers Road, the professional centre at Bayers Road, it has been a highly visible place for us to be with business. We have comings and goings of all our business partners and we host the Ability Employers group, an employer-led group who goes out and communicates the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to all of their employer cohorts.

The funding for our agency, just for informational purposes - that is the wrong name but that must have been from an old slide. We know it's the Department of Labour and Advanced Education that is the number one funder through the Career Nova Scotia centres - that's where the funding, the LMDA federal package comes through. Service Canada, we have a number of funds for clients who are essential for us to help people get connected for often what is their first connection to employment, to get that opportunity to get their foot in the door, I guess, show what their skills are, and we have wage subsidy programs that allow us to do that.

We receive funding from the Department of Community Services for our deaf councillor. The Department of Labour and Advanced Education, post-secondary services, there's a special short-term skill development program that we can tap into for our clients, and that one is fantastic because it can get people connected to a job almost within a few months. We're just short on one short-term course so it could be about warehousing. We've had a few people through the warehousing course and immediately will get connected to employment after that.

Then we have the James Bartlett Fund which is very much employee-driven. All of the employees who work at TEAM Work and WorkBridge contribute to this fund through payroll. We also go out into the community and make presentations and secure other funds. This fund is used largely for all the areas that we can't find funding for and if somebody really has a need that's directly related to employment that we just can't seem to find the funding for, so that one is very successful.

Now I'm handing it over to Ms. Turner.

MS. JUDY TURNER: Our client profile, we do serve people 16 to 64 but in the last couple of years we've seen an increase in older clients coming to us. Some clients we have at the age of 77 are still seeking some employment, so that has changed. Fifty-five per cent of our clients report living with mental illness; 30 per cent of our clients report living with learning disabilities. We gather all these stats continuously so that we can look at clients we serve and also perhaps look at how we need to change our programs to better serve people who are coming to us. So 20 per cent of our clients identify with cognitive disability, 11 per cent hearing, 10 per cent visual disabilities and 30 per cent with physical disabilities. Like Janice said, we also get a lot of people with disabilities that we have never

heard of and we have to find information on that specific disability so that we can help our clients.

Fifteen per cent of our clients are unemployed for zero to three months when they do come to us; 13 per cent, one to two years with no employment; 30 per cent, two years or more; 23 per cent, which we just find shocking, have never been employed; 70 per cent of our clients fall into the one year to never category and these are not young people. Quite often these are people who have never worked, anywhere from 30 to 50 years old who have never had a job. You would think it would be younger people but it's not always the case. And 33 per cent of our clients are currently on income assistance. We do see, the last time we captured these stats it was 600 to 700, but like Janice said, it's probably closer to 800-plus clients we see every year.

The Labour and Advanced Education transformation that we've heard about, you've heard about it, it's a topic of discussion, blended versus dedicated. For our community we are very much afraid of the risk of dilution of services over time so that the people that need the services the most may not have the same access to those services. So that means there are fewer employment opportunities for persons with disabilities because even us folks doing the work every day, we have to constantly be pushing that envelope that people with disabilities are an untapped labour force, we have people here that can work, so without these services it could be a really critical situation. It also means loss of focus and attention on unique needs in favour of those who do not need any supports.

The risk of being left behind, that's something that we worry about every day, that our clients will be left behind unless they have community agencies pushing to make sure people are getting jobs and keeping jobs, lots of them just for change. For example, we have this symposium every year, we're in our eighth year, I know there are some little cards that are around and it's really on education and employment, to raise awareness and show the work that's being done and also let other people know that when young people are coming out of school or people are looking for work, there are places they can come to get help.

Like Janice said, when she talked a little bit about the Ability Employers and the coordinators at TEAM Work and WorkBridge, employers are now also talking about the message, they have hired people with disabilities, it has been successful and they want to continue doing that. Also, we're afraid of loss of employer support. We work very closely with employers and we build lasting relationships with our employers. Because we are building those relationships and they trust the work we're doing, even if they hire a client and it doesn't work out they do come back to us to hire clients again because they know that we are there to support them.

We like to think the treatment plan Return to Work - where we're a specialized service we do the treatment plan Return to Work a little bit differently. So if you think of somebody going to a general practitioner, for example, I'll use my own example, I have

rheumatoid arthritis and I was diagnosed 23 years ago. I first went to my family doctor, because they don't specialize in rheumatoid arthritis or I didn't even know what it was at that point, but, it was only when I went to the rheumatologist with the tools and the indicators that she was able to treat me competently and it's very much like a specialized agency. We have learned from our other clients, we are experts in the field, we have links to information, so it does make a difference. Since I've been treated I've been able to return to work and I'm proud to say I haven't had a sick day in 10 years so it's a model that does work.

We have another example of the skill level of a client who had fetal alcohol syndrome disorder and they came from a rural community. They went to post-secondary education, but there seemed to be some gaps in what they needed to be successful in. After three months, they were asked to leave school because it wasn't working well and both the client and the parents didn't really understand what went wrong. That is not to place blame on other agencies or say we have all the answers because we don't, but we do know that we have other experiences, we have other clients, we know what supports to put in place, what tools, what resources and indicators - we know how to use the information and the right treatment, and the right steps absolutely lead to success. We also know that each time a client is successful, of course, it makes sense they're more confident, but the more failures and the missteps even if on our part maybe we don't have all of the answers, it does leave the client not feeling very confident.

So now I'm going to ask a few questions to Stephanie. So the first question, Stephanie, is why did you originally seek our services?

MS. STEPHANIE BERRY: I feel like I'm in a job interview. (Laughter) Originally I moved back to Nova Scotia in 2010 and I was living in Dartmouth with my sister, helping with my two-year-old nephew, and I was looking for employment. At the time I was living off leftover student loans and I was also working on a master's thesis by distance. So I needed a job and I found TEAM Work Cooperative by researching on the Internet, and I called them. I remember filling out the intake form briefly and then went in for an appointment. My reason was to find employment. It sounds simple, but it wasn't really.

MS. TURNER: So what were your barriers to becoming employed?

MS. BERRY: There were a few, I think. One being that I was new to Halifax and didn't have a whole lot of connections here. Also, I was a recent graduate from university. I had a lot of different placements that were part of requirements for different things I had studied and a lot of different summer terms and more short-term contract work, but I wasn't able to sustain permanent, full-time, long-term work.

So obviously one of my big barriers was my disability; it limits what I can consider doing as a profession. Also, the other kind of barrier would be that the types of jobs that I found I was able to apply for and were jobs that I knew I could do were not entry-level

jobs, which are the ones that are most readily available - entry-level jobs - in our community. So the jobs that I was applying for were very competitive, which meant that I was competing against people with much more experience and more connections in the city. I think those were some of my barriers.

MS. TURNER: So how did our services make a difference to you?

MS. BERRY: The services at TEAM Work and the WorkBridge helped me to get support. For example, I was able to secure funding through the Opportunities Fund for a six-month contract with Autism Nova Scotia for a pilot project that they were working on at the time. I was able to gain access to some employment counselling through case managers and assistance with job developers who were able to help me with things like proofreading my cover letters and resumé and things like that. I was also able to use the employment maintenance workers to help me with things like filling out job applications and other paperwork that weren't always accessible for me. So those were just a few ways.

MS. TURNER: How does your own experience translate to your clients?

MS. BERRY: I think that my own experiences do help me when I'm working with clients a lot. I studied psychology counselling, so I have training in how to listen to people and how to find out what their barriers are and help them determine goals and things like that, but in terms of my disability, I can relate to a lot of the financial stress that some of them are under.

I know in my lifetime I've been on student loans, I've been a recipient of income assistance at one point in time, and I've also been on employment insurance at another time. So I kind of know how all of those systems work. I think I'm pretty good at navigating them and I know how to find answers when I can't find them or when they're not readily available.

Also, in terms of some of the barriers that people face - emotional kinds of barriers with discouragement and lack of confidence - I know what it's like to feel that way and also what it's like to overcome anxiety. Normally I do try to encourage my clients not to give up and also to know that their hard work will pay off in some way for them, and it can work out for them too.

MS. TURNER: The last question. What do you see as the advantages of specialized services to persons with disabilities?

MS. BERRY: I think specialized services are essential for people with disabilities. I really like the example you used about the doctor and how people can't be expected to know everything. I heard recently, like you said, we have a large percentage of clients on income assistance, and I think I heard that basically 60 per cent of people in Nova Scotia relying on income assistance are people with disabilities.

I think being able to specialize in people's needs is really important. It's important that we understand the accommodations and the assistive technology and different ways that people communicate and if the clients' needs are overlooked, the big risk is that they probably won't be successful. Also I think through our work we're able to help with early intervention and prevention of problems, and I think that's also a key to keeping people connected to the workforce.

MS. TURNER: Thank you; that's part of our team. Bill.

MR. BILL HILDRETH: I have to follow that, wow. (Laughter)

MS. TURNER: The first question is, why did you originally seek those services?

MR. HILDRETH: Well I'm at the other end of the spectrum. I'm a little bit over 40 - actually I'm at 63 years old. I'm a cancer survivor and I'm also a disabled entrepreneur as well, a serial entrepreneur if you will.

I had a successful career, a big house, a great family, dog and cat, house on the Arm, the whole thing. Somewhere in the middle of it I received one of these less than golden handshakes and found myself in a situation where I was a single parent of two. I had a mom aging, over 90 years old, a sister with MS who was debilitated that we were looking after at the same time as well, who subsequently died unfortunately.

I decided to do business and things in the United States because the prospects for what I was trying to do in Nova Scotia were tough, even tougher for somebody who is 60 years old and looking for opportunities. Just one day I happened to be actually coming off a soccer field where I was refereeing soccer, found a lump in my throat and was diagnosed with thyroid cancer - oh good, that message was well-timed considering all the other things that were going on.

Anyway, because of the incredible services that were available locally, the hospital took care of that, got that all straightened away, although it still took a year or two to kind of recover from all the programs. Bear in mind that living on the Arm and driving the nice car and the three children, two children in university, and all the other kinds of things that are going on - that doesn't go away while you're unable to find employment and now you're sick.

In addition to that, because of the aggressive nature of the cure, I developed osteoarthritis, and it kind of got around the hospital that I was probably 100 years old because of the severity of the osteoarthritis. Unfortunately I had two femurs replaced, I had to have both hips replaced; I had a partial pelvic transplant and a couple of other things, along with all the other things that were kind of going on. It basically beat the good out of me, if you will.

One day - I'm probably going on to my next question now - out of desperation, I happened to say, oh my God, now what am I going to do? I remembered these incredible people who some time ago had helped a friend of mine who has muscular dystrophy. I said do you know what? I think I'm going to cash in all my cards, I really need somebody to tell me how I can get out of all of this and maybe I can walk away bankrupt and do all the kinds of things that can happen because I'm virtually unable to do anything. I probably would have jumped off the bridge but I couldn't have gotten over the thing, was the biggest problem.

Anyway, I happened to be over at the Bayers Road mall, I looked across and saw these two great, big, huge wooden doors, and there was TEAM Work and WorkBridge. I thought, okay, I'm kind of at my last resort now, I'm going to go in and just maybe ask somebody if maybe they can put me in touch with somebody who can help me with the things because now I'm disabled. So coming to terms with being disabled after so many years is a very difficult process. Being a proud, semi-successful person in multiple businesses and stuff again, you have to eat your pride a little bit. I knocked at the door, walked in and it was almost like somebody came out with a nice, warm blankie and put it around my shoulders and said, oh my God, come in - what can we do to help? How can we help you?

I had been through all of the multiple agencies and all of the, we'd love to help you, here's the system, try to find your way through it. I've been to many of the employment places, sent out 300 resumés, I've got two degrees, a Master's in Finance, I've got lots of background, but you get lost in all of that because as a 63-year-old disabled person, with all of this background, you really don't fit into the plug, it's a little bit difficult to find something for yourself. As an entrepreneur I was seeking out another opportunity.

After the warm blankie came over me, I had some really wonderful people from WorkBridge and TEAM Work come out and say look, let's sit down and examine where you are. Let's take a moment to evaluate your background - let's do a resumé. Christ, I hadn't had a resumé for years, I was senior vice-president of a major insurance company at one time. A resumé is really - you need a resumé, but anyway, we started with that. We then sat down and we talked about what I kind of had a mind to do and where I was going go and all of those kinds of things. You know, there were a couple of tears and there were a couple of more warm blankies necessary.

The people that I was able to meet, fortunately for me, were like people who were saving my life. These good people, in their wisdom, had trained these people to recognize that situation. It was funny because I think I was saved by a young man named Thomas Beavis, who actually is a client of WorkBridge and TEAM Work. He is a mentally challenged young man and he came up to me one day and said, I think you're a businessman, aren't you? I said well, I guess I kind of am. He said, I think you should help me - I have a business and I'm going to walk dogs and take care of pets and I said, really? He said, yes and I think you should be the guy who is going to help me. All of a sudden in

that particular moment, this little bond that I had with this young fellow turned my thinking around. I said wow, maybe I have something to offer again, maybe it's not so desperate.

So WorkBridge and TEAM Work actually created an atmosphere where people work together, where they embrace the differences and everybody can help everybody and do all those kinds of things, which was so important to me because I really was out.

But anyway, having said all of that I looked at a bunch of different business ventures, and in so doing it brought me back into a position where I was actually seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. I was having some difficulty sort of convincing people to put me in the right places or offer me this job that's, you know, their senior vice-president of marketing or something. Out of the blue there were a couple of grants that came together that allowed me to reorganize a little bit and allowed me to take part in some retraining programs which helped with computers and all of those kinds of things, and some really good people that pointed me in a couple of directions. Subsequently, I have re-established my personal confidence to a level that I thought I hadn't had probably for 30 years.

I saw a large group of people that really needed some help and I said, I think what I'm going to be able to do, now that I'm starting to get back on my feet, is maybe reach out and help a little bit. I had never really done that before because I was always chasing the ace. Do you know what I mean? It was always more important for me to have a bigger house and bigger things and bigger money and all that kind of stuff. Although I had done some work for some people, I didn't really experience that until I met these people.

So I can actually tell you that I made a quantum change in my life at that point in time. Subsequent to that, because I've re-established myself - I've re-established the financial services business, I've written national qualifying exams, provincial exams, et cetera - I've developed a wealth coaching service now that I offer to people in the disabled world. People who are having trouble with their financial matters and things - trying to help them get back into the program.

I've now become the authority in their registered disability savings programs, I think probably for Atlantic Canada - at least I'm going to be. I do a lot of teaching and counselling education now on disability tax credits. I've reached out now to a number of the largest insurance companies in North America, and I have contracts and support now from four of the largest companies in Canada - Desjardins, Manulife and a few of these guys - as well as I have a source promotion program now with the Bank of Montreal and the Royal Bank.

As of recently, I've been endorsed by the Nova Scotia Health Authority, by the Izaak Walton Killam Hospital and by the Nova Scotia Community Health Board to become their spokesperson for the education of people with disabilities for registered disability savings plans and disability tax credits. I've been all over the place lecturing and promoting

that now. So because of these guys, I've actually been able to recreate a new passion. I've been able to help some people that I would have otherwise probably forgotten about.

We've really been able to reach out and really effectively help some people now, which is incredible. That's a huge program. Had I not met these guys - like I said, if I could have gotten my leg over the pipe over on the bridge I would have probably jumped, but meeting the people at TEAM Work, and the love and the acceptance, it allowed me to get through a crisis in my life that really would have devastated us.

We've since recovered everything pretty much now and my wife said to me, which is probably the most poignant thing that I never said to these guys before, but my wife said to me just recently, after I did a seminar in Bedford for Special Olympics - I think you're back; I think I'm getting you back. That was so important for me and my family. My kids are - Dad, wow, you're back; you're doing your thing. Had I not opened the door for the warm blankie, I don't think it would have happened, honestly. So there you go.

MS. TURNER: I think you answered all the questions. (Laughter)

MR. HILDRETH: That wasn't what I was supposed to do.

MS. TURNER: Just briefly to touch on the advantages of specialized services, first, from your perspective.

MR. HILDRETH: From my perspective, there were certain things that I really needed to understand, like actually finding things like the disability tax credit - how does that work? I didn't even know it was around before, but it has been incredibly helpful for me. Other things like specific counselling for someone my age - the people that I met and was referred to, the opportunities for me to be able to get out and talk to some of those people was dynamic. It was really important.

Many of the other wonderful places that I went - I'm telling you, I have to be cautious of what I say - but many of the wonderful organizations that were out there that espouse all of these - oh, we can help you, come on over, here's your resumé, here's a phone book, make a couple of calls. It wasn't the same as the personal service that I was able to receive from TEAM Work and WorkBridge. It wasn't the same, it can't be the same, so as I see people go in now that I deal with as well and have become friends with, each one has such a dissimilar disadvantage in some cases - or advantage in the case of some people, but each one needs a specific type of care and there's a warm blankie that's pink and there's a warm blankie that's green and there's a warm blankie that's blue, and everybody needs one maybe in their colour. I think that's what you guys bring to the table.

MS. TURNER: Did you know adults with disabilities are 50 per cent less likely to be in the labour market still today. Women with disabilities have a higher rate of unemployment than their male counterparts. Dedicated services are successful year after

year, and increase diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Both Janice and I have been in TEAM Work and WorkBridge for 15 years so we have seen how the services can make a difference. We have clients who years ago wouldn't have been in the labour market working as they are today. Labour shortage can be addressed with skilled persons with disabilities; 22 per cent of Nova Scotia's population reports as having a disability, or one in four to five, and that is people who report having disabilities so we know it's higher.

Did you know that employers do not know that help is out there for them? We hear that every day when we contact an employer - even employers we work with say, oh, I didn't know you did that, oh, I didn't realize you did that. That's one of the reasons with the symposium that we try to get the message out every year. They don't know what they need, who to ask or what to ask for. We always say you don't know what you don't know. They know something but they're not quite sure. Through Ability Employers, we do a series every year - we're in our third year. A lot is to do with what employers want to know, what questions they want to ask. We're having to coach employees. There's a number of things so it's very beneficial to employers.

They fear that accommodations may be expensive. We do hear that frequently but that is not the case. They fear safety issues. We also hear that - oh, I don't know, we have a safety thing. We heard these over the years and we outsmart them - we basically get around that. But these are real fears that employers say.

We're glad they say it because then we can address it. They fear or they think that extra time, attention, and mentoring is costly or they're going to have to spend more time with a person with a disability. They will say that I don't have the time, I'm not going to be able to spend the time. Again, we have an employment maintenance worker program and that's when we say we have people who can come in and help you.

Existing employees may see it as issues of favouritism. For example, if an employer hired somebody maybe to work less hours or maybe to have a different schedule or whatever the accommodation is, if the other employees don't know and they don't understand, they can think and believe that somebody is being favoured. So we try to coach employers, we go out and do talks on disabilities awareness so that the other team members understand as well.

Our contact information, of course, TEAM Work Cooperative and WorkBridge, we're in the old Bayers Road Shopping Centre, the professional centre. We're open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. We like when people just stop in and visit us. Janice is going to do the closing statement.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll stop for questions first, if that's okay.

MS. TURNER: She's going to do it at the end.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: All right, we're going to start our questioning with Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Well I must admit that I'm pleased and encouraged with the way you work with disabled people. I have to tell you that just yesterday I met with a young fellow who was very capable (Inaudible) has like 60 members and he keeps looking for help. We talked for an hour and I talked him down actually, he said he felt better when he left, but still I was left with what am I going to do?

I'm just wondering how often and how do you actually get the people coming in? I know Bill had special aid coming in, Stephanie obviously did too. People really don't know, it's not by accident.

MS. AINSWORTH: Actually that's a great question. We actually don't do a whole lot of marketing in traditional ways. Certainly through social media we do that; we communicate through that method. I think it's really interesting that most of it when we look back over the years has been through word of mouth, by someone else's experience - by our neighbours, by our parents, by other organizations that help mostly in that way.

It's always an interesting thing that each and every year, where do 700 new people come from? It makes you ask that question, without any marketing. There seems to be more and more young people coming forward as well with mental illness, particularly in the area of stress, anxiety and depression. We're noticing very much that that is on the rise so I think they find out about us and hope to come in for a safe landing.

MR. HORNE: I think I will recommend him coming to see you folks.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you for your presentation. Of course, I've always had an interest in disabilities for a number of different reasons, but mostly because of my former position. I guess the question is, I have a couple of different questions, last year during the Labour and Advanced Education's transformation period, I guess, there was a bunch of studies that were on and a bunch of different work groups or focus groups to ask about how to transform Labour and Advanced Education funding for people with disabilities and employment agencies and so on and so forth.

I guess a plan at that time came up with three different models - a blended model, a hybrid model. My fear is that they come with a blended model or a different model that people who need the services for disabilities - because of the certifications required for the people who work in the office who have to have the disability certification and so on and so forth, that if a mainstream employment agency gets that contract, because you guys are non-profits and you probably won't have the resources available to do the in-depth bidding on your request for proposals, what's going to happen to people who are employed in that

area and even more so, what's going to happen to people with a disability that need that counselling and the adaptation, and so on and so forth?

I know there are specialty areas. In my area one gentleman just works with deaf patients and that's what he does. If a mainstream program gets that and you don't have that specialized disability service what's going to happen to your employees and more so, what's going to happen to people needing the services?

MS. AINSWORTH: Again, a great question, you almost answered the question with your question. I think that there has been a lot of discussion about this topic of should we blend service or continue to have dedicated services? Some of the thinking has been that if we take the specialists who have that extra level of competency in working with people with disabilities and transplant them into a blended service, that might indeed answer some of the questions and some of the discussions back and forth that say yes, that would make some sense, however, over time there's always the risk that if it's not from the top down/bottom up approach, where the focus is really staying on what the needs of persons with disabilities are around employment, we can kind of suddenly drift off if it isn't on the main focus of whoever the CEO is of this new, blended organization. We've certainly addressed those concerns.

It's the same mirroring that you would find in an employment situation. You know, we have a lot of HR professionals who are very, very keen about hiring people with disabilities but the problem is if their managers aren't on side then it can break down and fracture - it doesn't work. So we can do all the work we can but if every area in the organization isn't on board, things can go tough. So I think that's the concern.

MR. ORRELL: I guess another area I have is, you gave numbers about the number of people with disabilities and 33 per cent of the people are on income assistance with the Community Services Department, which has a cost related to it. The cost of having the specialized service I imagine wouldn't be as great as it is to have 33 per cent of the people on assistance. So if we could get 5 per cent of those people off income assistance by delivering your specialized services to these people, how much money would that save the province over and above what they pay you guys to deliver those services now? Is there a number out there that would look at the cost savings to the province by having people off the system, independently working, and paying into the system after that?

My fear is that we're looking at how we are going to save money, with no idea of what the cost of that saving of money is going to be to society and to the individuals. People who have a job have confidence, they have the ability to get out in the public and help other people. We just heard Bill talk about where he was at, but now he's there and he's helping other people. So instead of going into the system he used your services and now he's giving back to the system. At what cost is this going to be if the services are eliminated?

MS. AINSWORTH: We did do some calculations. The cost per client, if you look across the province - we did this across the province with our other partners - we calculated that for each and every year that dedicated services are here and available, we secured 1,000 to 1,500 jobs annually, and the savings each year can be anywhere from \$20 million to \$30 million. We have just done it case by case, the savings to DCS would be somewhere in the order of \$10,000 to \$15,000 per year, per person.

Then there are all the hidden costs and benefits that you can't quite measure, like all the determinants of health. I mean employment is one of the number one determinants of health because you're connected financially, you're connected socially, and you're engaged in society. It's very difficult to put a price tag on what the health costs might be, but we calculate provincially, somewhere around \$20 million in savings for each of those (Interruptions) With the \$5,000 per person cost.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Peterson-Rafuse.

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Thank you for your presentation and I want to congratulate all of you for Bill's success, and for Bill himself taking on the responsibility of walking through those doors to get your warm blanket. It's an incredible story and I would suggest that that story should be told everywhere you go and every chance that you have and your organization has to say because it's absolutely powerful. One of the things we all have to remember, each and every one of us, we don't know any day of our lives if we may be put in your position and that we may be driving home and unfortunately be in an accident or something and then we need the services and the specialized services from organizations such as WorkBridge and TEAM Work in order to bring us back and bring our families back.

I just want to make sure that that is heard today and that we who are making decisions, that we're advocating that we remember that. I want to just say that you're an inspiration and the team is an inspiration.

Quickly, what I'd like to know is you brought up the points - and whoever would like to answer, just jump in - about the risk of the services being diluted and the loss of focus on the attention of the uniqueness and the real need to have specialized services and the positive results of those services.

If you had that little magic wand and you could ask the government for three top priorities going forward from this day to continue to grow your services, can you give us those three? If you have more, then you can offer more - if you could do that, it would be interesting to hear that step-by-step process that would make a huge difference in your vision of your future for services.

MS. TURNER: I think the key things to save or look at even how we come through, because when we look at the number of people that we're seeing every year, there is

obviously a need sometimes. If there was a dilution of services, I think people would just go away. I don't really know what they would do because we did experience that a few years ago when it was an agency that closed, people just sort of go away. Now that we're out there and people know who we are, I think the ask would be to have services, why it is so critical that people are still being left in harm and there is a lot of untapped resources not being utilized. We're seeing 700 new people every year. As word gets out, that's going to grow - because there are people graduating from school. People aren't getting jobs. There are definite issues having difficulty connecting. That would be an ask.

MS. AINSWORTH: I think a wish would be - and it's being talked about quite a lot about focus on employer engagement. Because as much work as we will do to help clients and prepare them for the workplace, there is just a phenomenal amount of work that we can be doing with our employers and engaging employers. We're at a bit of a tipping point where a lot of things are starting to happen with many of our employers, but it's endless work and that's kind of just things that we do in addition to working on our daily work, but we know it's just an essential piece.

So maybe even a priority would be for, not only the attention to the employer engagement, but also helping with some resources around that, and supporting the disability employers group so that they can be active provincially. We've seen in it the U.K. where Susan Scott-Parker was speaking at the symposium this year. She has just made a revolutionary change all across the U.K. about how employers receive, understand, and utilize the untapped labour pool and it's making a tremendous difference. We want that for Nova Scotia. So that's another priority.

The other one is the review that Judy was talking about where 17 years ago, the situation was pretty dire. People with disabilities were not finding employment for all of the barriers that exist and some of which are attitudinal and a lot of myths that are created by employers not maybe understanding what their skill level is and maybe looking at the disability first. So really taking a look at - if it wasn't working then and now the situation is starting to improve and momentum is being gained, to disseminate something that is working very well before a review would seem a little dangerous.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: So it sounds like the major cry-out at this point as a first step would be to ensure that there is a review. So you would have statistical information in order to develop policies and direction, which I would believe is extraordinarily important to have the stats before a decision may be made to make any changes. I don't want to put words in your mouth but am I correct that that's the call-out you would make to the government, that they do a review before any major decisions are made?

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes, that would be the call-out. Another thing that we're all very aware of is the accessibility legislation, which could be the underpinning of how things improve generally in all facets of life for people with disabilities and employment

being one of the many functional committees that started to talk about how employment needed to be looked at for people with disabilities. So prior to that rolling out with all the standards and guidelines that need to be talked about, it would really be a shame if we disseminate what is here now only to learn through development of the accessibility that these are key features of what things need to be in place to make sure that people with disabilities can have employment (Inaudible) .

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Thank you very much for your answers.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: Every time I listen - I think this is the third time I've listened to you guys and I've learned more and I'm more excited about other people that I can send for help.

Your stories, your two on the end there, Bill and Stephanie - just a suggestion that maybe when you're trying to send people your way or whatever, if you guys could have something on the Internet, like a short video or something, where they tell their stories, so you could say go to this site, listen to these two people on how they got help, I think that would be wonderful for someone who, as you mentioned, didn't want to go through the door, but if someone could have a little taste of it before they went through the door, they might go through the door better, right? And for employers as well, because when they hear all this they are like not so scared of it.

Anyway, just a comment as I was sitting here listening, making my notes. I know you mentioned some of the fears of employers but once you've got the employers, what are still some of the challenges you go through and how do you work through them with employers?

MS. TURNER: Some of the - how we work with them is first build relationships, so just like anybody, you get to trust what the other person is saying when you have a partnership, but we try to debunk the myths and the fears so that as employers get comfortable, they will then say, how am I going to do this, how am I going to do that? Then we show either through research, statistically or our own experience, or sometimes the job developer will say, I'll bring it back to the office and let's try to brainstorm and figure out a solution to the problem. So it's really about the partnership and that the employer is invested and really interested in hiring people with a disability and working through whatever it is.

We do have many great employers and so many of our clients had worked out so well that they're interested, even if they don't. It's just like any of us getting hired - it might work, it might not work. And then because I guess we're always trying to figure out win-win solutions - we want the best match, we want the best employee for a position. We're not trying to place people just because we're nice people. We really do want employees

who are skilled and fit that job description. I think those are some of the things, one by one, one cleared at a time - it seems to work.

Employers now are more interested in contacting us, which is wonderful, like they will call and say I have a certain position, can you help? There's a whole lot of work that we do on the sidelines but it does seem to make a difference and we are getting people employed - I don't know if that answers your question.

MS. TREEN: Do you have enough employers still or do you need a lot more?

MS. TURNER: We always need more because when clients come it's not like all our clients want to work in IT. We have 800 clients and there may be some industries, but each client comes with their own resumé, their own goals and career aspirations so, we always need more. We need sustainable employment and not just contract work.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Lohr.

MR. JOHN LOHR: I deeply enjoyed the personal stories; they added a lot to the presentation. I know that last April there was a four-year labour market agreement signed. One of the goals of the agreement was that employment opportunities available to persons with disabilities would be improved by addressing employer needs. I'm just wondering what your opinion is of that four-year agreement right now and do you feel it's successful and more Nova Scotians are finding employment? That would be either to Ms. Turner or Ms. Ainsworth.

MS. AINSWORTH: The labour market agreement for persons with disabilities, yes, I'm aware of that agreement. I guess what I would say is that it's a small pool of money, \$8 million shared provincially and federally for the needs of persons with disabilities. It's a little bit of money that has to go a long way and there are a lot of agencies that are tapping in and we would be one such agency. Our counsellor, who is deaf, we tell him to (Inaudible)

I guess I would probably just leave it at that. It isn't a great amount of money for the needs and I know there has been a lot of revamping of the program so that everything is targeted toward employment outcome. What happens in a lot of the results of the funding is because there's such a heavy focus on employment outcome the needs along the way don't have any resources or support to back them up.

One of the areas that that is difficult and has just come back now is the purchase of hearing aids for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. I think that's back into play now, but there's a huge gap there. There just are always a lot of needs. You might think well, people can go through their health plan and buy hearing aids, but you probably know they're very expensive and a lot of people are on income assistance and there is no way to cover that. You can't get employed if you don't have functional hearing aids, so it became

this great barrier for a lot of our clients. It may be more noticeable in our agency where we work closely and directly with the deaf community.

MR. LOHR: So what I think I hear you saying is that this labour market agreement is not a significant portion of your funding. Could you just sort of give us a thumbnail sketch of what (Inaudible) funding and how that works for you? What is your funding?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ainsworth.

MS. AINSWORTH: Our funding is \$67,000 and that covers the funding for our deaf counsellor and it also covers both her salary and interpreter services, both for herself and any situation that we might find ourselves in when we need interpreter services. Just to give you an idea, interpreter services for an entire day - let's say because you need to have not just one interpreter for the day, but you probably need two. It's probably about \$500 a day so it can add up rather quickly. If that's what you were asking, a thumbnail sketch.

MR. LOHR: Where does the \$67,000 come from?

MS. AINSWORTH: It comes from the labour market agreement.

MR. LOHR: That's the sum total of your funding?

MS. AINSWORTH: That's the sum total of our funding, yes. For TEAM Work.

MR. LOHR: Can I ask the same question of Ms. Turner?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Turner.

MS. TURNER: WorkBridge is entirely funded by Nova Scotia, so we don't have a piece of that (Inaudible)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Mancini.

MS. MARIAN MANCINI: Thank you. I am going to direct my question to Ms. Ainsworth. I'm relatively new to this area and as a result of that, I wasn't that familiar with the transformation aspect that everyone around the table seems to be pretty familiar with. I really appreciate the presentation, I'm on a steep learning curve, but I've really picked up from all of you - I think I get a sense of how you feel somewhat threatened by a change to standardization.

I just wanted to comment as well that it seems that what you are offering is years of learning, of having developed a model, an expertise. Not only that, but there's a continuity between the employer and the employee and I can imagine that makes the

employer feel very confident. So I just want to say congratulations on that. I think your presentation was excellent.

What I am going to ask you though is that - you stated that 55 per cent of your client base have indicated or identified as having mental health issues; 33 per cent are on social assistance and 10 per cent visually impaired. You've indicated that you partner with the Brain Injury Association, Canadian Mental Health Association and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. We know that those bodies have experienced cuts, as well as people with disabilities have had their bus passes reduced and also social assistance rates have been frozen. How have these factors impacted on your ability to keep the services going to your client bases and what challenges has it added?

MS. AINSWORTH: I think the recent cuts to CNIB as an example and CPA - Canadian Paraplegic Association - are always struggling for funding, as are many of our partners - it seriously impacts our ability to get particular supports along the way. With CNIB for instance, some of the programs that we partnered with them would be for when people have recently discovered they have a visual disability and they need orientation in the workplace or orientation in their homes, for example, to get used to the idea of where things are and getting to stay completely independent and mobile. Those are services that, because of that reduction, we have less offerings for clients who come in to see us - to be able to reach out to our partners. I'm trying to remember the other part of your question.

MS. MANCINI: I think you answered it in the sense that I asked basically how it has affected you and what additional challenges it has . . .

MS. AINSWORTH: The other way it really affects us is then what we discover - we focus our work largely on helping people through their employment challenge but what ends up happening is more and more of the resources are cut in other areas, then we have people who come and sit before us and we want to help them in whatever way. Sometimes it could be in housing and sometimes it can be in transportation so then we're trying to struggle with - how do we get the transportation issue in the case of the bus pass sorted out before we can move to the next step and start talking with employment because until those issues are addressed and basic needs are covered, it's difficult to think about employment. So it does put more pressure on our agencies to come up with all of the solutions.

MS. MANCINI: Can I just ask you, I note that in the report - or at least I saw it in statistics somewhere - that the highest percentage of people on disability in Nova Scotia are women. Is that reflected in your client base that you serve - a larger percentage of women?

MS. AINSWORTH: No, I think it's pretty much a 50/50 split for us. It's very close between men and women.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: I'm kind of wondering about the decreasing resources that you have (Inaudible) How did you guys come together? Was it because of resources (Inaudible) Maybe you could talk a little bit about how more efficient you were or less efficient, even with fewer resources.

MS. AINSWORTH: We were under no obligation by pressure from funders at the time to come together and co-locate. I think it was a will from both agencies, an understanding and complexity of having clients being at such a disadvantage to have them travel all over the city to do basically what could be done inside of one building and in our own minds just trying to - we had a vision of beginning this development of a service excellence centre and that would be one of the first steps, to bring together agencies that offer the full range of services, so they didn't have to travel around.

We were at that time when paper was a big deal - it seems so long ago - but we were transferring files, we were getting in the car and transferring files back and forth, and this was very inefficient. The other part of it that also was very inefficient and not very fair to our clients was they had to come in and tell their story twice, so they were coming to TEAM Work to tell their story and then they would have to, when they made a referral for a job, get on a bus again and go to the WorkBridge and tell their story again, so it's just all the way around was a better set-up.

I mean, we're all fiscally responsible and accountable for all the funds we receive and when you started to look at a smaller agency having the same need, I mean all the infrastructures require the same things - you need a financial controller, you need someone at your reception desk, so from a business point of view it didn't make sense that you would have to have all those individual staff people inside of every organization. If you co-locate, you could make some savings and then could use those savings toward offering more services.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne, did you have a follow-up? We started late so I would like to get a consensus from the committee that we continue until 3:30 p.m., if that's okay with everyone's schedules. We do have a few agenda items so again, I mean we could go around again but I am going to ask that we finish up questioning by 3:15 p.m., if that's okay. Excellent. Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: I'm just going to continue with this other observation question I had from the last one when we finished there. The Mainstream Program, do they depend on outcomes? Outcomes on a person who is physically able are much easier to achieve than someone who has disabilities, as far as costs and time spent goes.

If they go to a blended model or a specific model where the Mainstream funding provides the services, I guess they would concentrate more on ability-based people because their outcomes are easy to achieve and people with disabilities fall through the cracks which would again be different services and assistance for social assistance.

My question I guess is what is the cost of running programs in the province? I think there are nine agencies right now that deliver services to people with disabilities, compared to the savings to the province, their budgets would be \$10 million in saving. I don't know what the budget is for people providing service to the province but what is that compared to the cost saving - you said about \$30 million per year built in the system. I guess that would be the next question.

MS. AINSWORTH: The cost of our program is somewhere under \$5 million. Again, the cost per individual is somewhere - and it varies from agency to agency and geographics - but somewhere between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per person. The savings to the systems will be somewhere in the order of \$20 million to \$30 million.

MR. ORRELL: It just doesn't seem to make sense to me that they would eliminate that service to save a few dollars up front, but in the long term would have that money have to be spent out in other ways. It just doesn't make sense to me and I know last year there was a big kerfuffle about the whole system and the labour market agreement for persons with disabilities. Where does that sit right now - the transformation, where does it look like it's going to go? How far along are we in the entire RFP process or the process where we're going to find out if that's going to stay or that's going to go?

MS. AINSWORTH: I just want to go back a second to an earlier comment that you made about the risk of - I think I mentioned earlier, a lot of the funding that we all enjoy to provide the services we do are based on outcomes. There's nothing wrong with that. I mean, we're here to help people become employed, whether you're an organization that works with people with disabilities or a general agency, but you're quite right about the risk. When you generalize all services, it is true - some individuals might take longer. They may need more support so the pace might be quite a bit different and time commitment by our counsellors would be quite a bit different working in our area compared to general, so that is a risk. It's a risk to keep talking about.

Where the status of, from what we know today, the next step is to take the three - or whatever model that is, your favorite model - where the employment services for all the Career Nova Scotia centres around the province are to be put forward by the Executive Council of Ministers at the next earliest available date in the next few weeks. That was the latest update. After that, the information will be shared with all of the managers across the province - what that new model will look like - as well as the priorities the province has, which there are some really great new priorities that the province is undertaking, one of which is to offer more career counselling in our school system, something that's definitely - no one would argue about the need, it's a wonderful priority.

Just on the outreach, how do we reach more people with needs and career guidance and counselling than we currently do? That's another priority - all commendable. So somewhere in the mix of that and dedicated services versus blended, I suspect we'll find out in the next month or so.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Peterson-Rafuse and Ms. Mancini. You can each ask one. (Laughter)

MS. MANCINI: Just briefly, the Disabled Persons Commission shows that a vast majority of individuals in Nova Scotia living with disabilities are over the age of 45. How receptive have employers been to hiring individuals who are in this age range and what barriers do they face when working with older clients?

MS. TURNER: Our average age of our client is 46 and a few years ago the age was 36, so we've definitely been seeing older workers. I think employers are receptive, but just like any individual with a disability you have to do some work. There are some older worker programs. We don't have any of those, but we do look at - if somebody who is over 45, we help them with their resumé. We look at a variety of resumé - not just chronologically, but we look at different ways that that person can market themselves. I guess with employers, the same thing - we just look at the individual. Just really try to help people. We're always current on what's out there, what employers are looking for, what's the latest in - what resumé works. We're always looking for knowledge to help our clients.

We all know it's more difficult as you get older. You now have a disability and there is also ageism, so these are the things we have to deal with, I think.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Peterson-Rafuse.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Can you tell me, has there been any communication with your organizations in terms of when these decisions will be made? Do you have like a plan that has been communicated to you that would say okay, such and such a date, this is when the decisions are coming down or also, have you been asked to participate in sitting at a table, making those types of decisions?

MS. AINSWORTH: Yes, we have sat at the table many times, both with Labour and Advanced Education, representatives of the minister, deputy ministers and several presentations and have had recent communication about the timelines. So they do inform as much as they are aware, of what the upcoming schedule will be, it's pretty open, and what the process is, but not necessarily at this point what the decision is because I don't know that it's exactly known at this moment, and maybe the decision isn't final so they're not sharing that information. But they have been definitely open in discussing what the timelines are, if there are any changes about the timeline, if there has been a delay and what the first anticipated timeline will be.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I'm wondering if you could comment on your tag line on your front slide which was "Invested in Abilities". I notice in your mission statement you mentioned abilities too. I have a friend with a disability; I always felt he was a person with a specific

disability but an enormous number of abilities. I'm just wondering if that's where you're going or you see the language going or the focus going, the focus on abilities versus disabilities. Can you comment on that?

MS. TURNER: The language over the years, you know disability and it was perceived as negative. We do look at all the clients we work with and promote them and market them in accordance with what they can do, so a can-do attitude.

The "Invested in Abilities", we created a model for our own services and we talked a lot about the investment from staff and counsellors but also from the clients so the word "investment" became about partnership, so that when we meet with our clients it's like, I'm invested, are you invested, as well as employers. So the word took on - there's a powerful theme that we really are invested in helping people get to work and I guess just like modernizing the language a little bit - we're very, very cognizant of that. So it's great that you caught that and noticed it, because we are trying to get away from - sometimes we've heard oh, disability, what does that mean? (Inaudible)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: No further questions, and I thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to actually allow Ms. Treen to ask one more question before we ask you to give your closing.

MS. TREEN: I love the work you do, I think it's wonderful. I think all the knowledge you guys have and then your best practices, all the experience you have, everything you do and all the help you do needs to be shared amongst the province. I know you're scared, obviously - that was discussed in this room or whatever - but I know in talking to my doctor, I had a conversation the other day with my doctor about the future and about doctors and how they're going to work. She said you need to put a whole bunch of services under one roof so when they come to my office - I'm not the help they need, it's down the hall, and I can send them down the hall to get the help.

Your story tells the story that you found that door by accident - well, maybe it was fate.

MR. HILDRETH: Karma.

MS. TREEN: Karma - but you found that door and you found your way, but maybe you might have found it earlier if you had gone into one of those other places and they said, you know, I know where to send you for your warm blanket. You could send them down the road to the warm blanket. It has to be done right. I totally agree, it has to be protected. People with disabilities have to always be up on it, it has to be there.

I mean, I have a son who has a learning disability. I'm around a lot of people and kids who struggle with that - with finding their way. So it's very important, it has to be done very right by government. I totally agree with that, but you do have support and understand why that umbrella is better because it takes a lot for somebody with a disability to go out and reach out to get help. If they go somewhere and someone says no, we can't help, you get discouraged and you go back into your shell, but if there was somebody there under that umbrella that said, you're just in the wrong room, those blankets are down the hall and they can help you, I think it could be a good thing for the whole province that we could find help for all our disability people that are all over the place. It has to be done right. You're very right about that and it always has to be at the forefront and it always has to be there.

Change is scary. I think of these 31 things - I remember I was in a different meeting and they talked about them and I didn't know these all existed. I would have never known if I hadn't been in government to learn about them and I think somehow we have to get it out there and get to the people it needs to get to, to know that you guys are there to help and somehow we have to make that connection and sometimes that umbrella is the way to do it, if it's done right.

So I guess it's not a question. I guess it's a statement, sorry, but I feel positive about it. I think what you guys do is wonderful and your best practice is a lot of people could learn from the knowledge you guys have to offer.

MR. HILDRETH: The answer to your question is yes. (Laughter)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ainsworth, we'll let you do some closing remarks.

MS. AINSWORTH: Thank you for being with us today and listening very intently and asking great questions. In closing I'd like to say that persons with disabilities are 22 per cent of the population of Nova Scotia - the highest rate in Canada. In Nova Scotia we also have the highest aging population, and with the impending labour shortage that everyone has been hearing about, there is a real opportunity for us to inform, coach and support employers about the benefits of hiring and retaining people with disabilities.

An agency such as TEAM Work Co-operative and the WorkBridge Association are dedicated to matching the labour needs with skilled candidates with disabilities. This is such a pressing issue facing our economy and together, community agencies play a vital role to change the minds of our employers to seek candidates from this untapped labour pool.

Inclusion is everyone's business and a vision for a better future for all Nova Scotians includes people with disabilities of all areas of work in community. To witness the benefits of inclusion, we need to look no further than Bill and Stephanie - two examples

of thousands of people who without the supports, resources and commitment of specialized agencies would not be as successful as you see here today. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We really appreciate you being here. We're going to take a short recess - please, three minutes - so that we can get back on topic and finish up as close to 3:30 as possible.

[3:09 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:12 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'd like to have all the committee members back to their seats. Remember, we are having difficulties with the audio today so any conversations that can be moved to the anteroom, that would be great.

I'd like to call the meeting back to order. The first item - we have just a couple of things on the agenda. The first item is correspondence that was mailed out to each of the committee members, from Kendall Worth in response to our decision at our last meeting to not have him as an individual appear before the committee, mainly an FYI.

The next, as all of you are aware, is that the Committee on Assembly Matters met and we would like to look at agenda setting again and prioritize the witnesses for each of the caucuses so that Ms. Langille can start scheduling them. I believe Ms. Langille has passed out the list of witnesses. So as lined out in the Committee on Assembly Matters, we're going to be prioritizing three witnesses for the Liberal caucus, two for the Progressive Conservative caucus and one for the NDP caucus. Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: The two for the PC caucus would be the Cape Breton-Victoria Child Advocacy Society - number one - and the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers is number two.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Mancini.

MS. MANCINI: I'm not sure if I'm speaking correctly or not but you can shut me down at any point. I just note, we have child welfare services on our list and I wanted, just to clarify what I think the intent is that might not describe it accurately, but it's really to do with the Children and Family Services Act and proposed amendments. So I just wanted to clarify that that is . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is that the witness that you would like to prioritize?

MS. MANCINI: Yes, it is - I think. Yes, okay.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And from the Liberal caucus? Ms. Eyking.

MS. PAM EYKING: Habitat for Humanity and the DCS Sexual Violence Strategy.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And there's a third?

MS. EYKING: Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we will have Ms. Langille schedule those six witnesses over the course of the next committee meetings. We do have the issue of having committee when the House is in session. This won't be an issue for our November meeting, but it could potentially be an issue for our December meeting. If there are any feelings one way or another and you would like to comment. In the last two sessions we haven't held this committee when the House is in session. I would leave it open for discussion if that's something that we'd like to continue and have Ms. Langille book for January. Have a witness for November's meeting, skip December and hopefully if the House is not in session, have it scheduled for January.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I agree with you, Madam Chairman. I know of the importance of our committee work here, but we probably all do agree, having experience in the House, just how difficult it is to add the extra commitments of committee work. We never can predict with the House sitting how it's going or what's going on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there any other discussion? Is that in agreement? Ms. Langille has pointed out that the January committee meeting is right after the new year, which is January 5th, is that okay? Again, we're not quite sure if the House will be in session at that point or not so it might be a tentative date, but we would like to keep it at January 5th and proceed, or would it be safer to move it to another Tuesday in January when this room is available?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Would it be available the next Tuesday because that makes it kind of safer? Just a suggestion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Right now we will tentatively look to book a witness for January 12th which is the second Tuesday, unless there are some objections. We are open to conversation on any of this. Okay.

Ms. Langille would like some clarification to make her life a little bit easier. For the rotation, if she is unable to schedule witnesses in the rotation agreed upon at Assembly Matters, does she have the ability to have some leeway, as long as the group of six witnesses are scheduled within the next six meetings? Do we have consensus on that? Wonderful. Thank you so much and with that, is there a motion to adjourn? (Interruptions)

That was the first item that we talked about. We spoke about Mr. Worth at the last meeting and it was agreed that we do not want to set the precedent of having an individual to appear before the committee. The request was, if you actually read the correspondence

that was sent, it was sort of an FYI as to the next steps that this individual took after not being able to appear before this particular committee.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Is there any possibility that we can provide Mr. Worth with a recommendation if we're not taking individuals. For example, can Dalhousie Legal Aid come in on his behalf as an organization, because we're saying that it needs to be an organization, and talk about the special needs issues that he brought forward? Because that's what we're saying to him as a Nova Scotian, is that the committee does not take individuals who are coming here. I know that the special needs diet is an issue among many more people than just Mr. Worth. As a committee, can we offer him a suggestion of how this very important topic to him can get on the agenda perhaps through Dal Legal Aid or another non-profit organization that have concerns or dealings with clients who need to have special needs diets.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I would recommend for Mr. Worth is maybe the committee could reach out to him and give him those options, but also make him aware that his MLA, whoever his MLA is, is also an advocate on his behalf. That really ultimately is how the constituency works out. So if he has had personal issues with the department or program, maybe a letter to his MLA - maybe a letter to him instructing him what to do next.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We as a committee could facilitate that introduction and that support that we'd be willing to facilitate a meeting with his MLA. Honestly I'm not sure where it is on the list.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: It would be just a shame to . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Again, I'm speaking just as a committee member, not as Chair right now - part of the issue when it comes to individual cases, as most of us know, there are so many complex that we just can't. Again, I think in the spirit of what you're saying, if it's a group that can speak to an issue like that in a generality, then absolutely all caucuses should be bringing those groups forward just to give us a better clarification on situations like this.

MR. ORRELL: That's what I was going to say. If there was a group out there that would advocate on his behalf, that would be acceptable. I guess that was your question.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Yes, maybe I'm not explaining it well.

MR. ORRELL: So now with the new rules, there is the chance of having that person come forward to bring that forward and have that happen.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We can definitely put that on the next agenda-setting and have the chance to sort of look at it. Just as a committee member, I would hesitate having something specific to an individual case, but again, if we can have something that speaks to the generalities of situations like Mr. Worth's, then if there is a group or somebody who can help educate us better, then absolutely.

MS. MANCINI: So just to be clear, will there be correspondence sent to Mr. Worth from this committee?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Again, I think that the appropriate correspondence at this point would be to offer facilitation between him and his MLA, which I would be willing to send to him and I would be willing to take that on as well. Then we will put the opportunity for a group to come and discuss the broad issue brought up by Mr. Worth on our agenda. With that, I will adjourn the meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 3:23 p.m.]