

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, April 4, 2017**

**Legislative Committees Office**

**Feed Nova Scotia**

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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  
Ms. Marian Mancini  
Ms. Lisa Roberts

[Ms. Pam Eyking was replaced by Mr. Ben Jessome.]

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Ms. Nicole Arsenault  
Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESS**

Feed Nova Scotia

Mr. Nick Jennery,  
Executive Director



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2017**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Ms. Patricia Arab

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. I'd like to call the committee to order. We are waiting on our witness, but we have a bit of very brief committee business that maybe we can start off with while we're on hold.

Surprisingly we had no correspondence since our last meeting, so we are looking at our next meeting date. The committee agreed to meet with the Sexual Assault Services Network of Nova Scotia next. They will be our next witness and depending on what is happening at the Legislature - if we are sitting or not - that date will either be May 2<sup>nd</sup> or June 6<sup>th</sup>.

Also, I thought we would have a discussion. Typically the committee does not meet during the House session and I'm just wondering if that is still the practice of the committee? I guess we will not be meeting when the House sits.

Our next agenda-setting meeting will be in September. That will give caucuses the opportunity to put forward a list of witnesses that they would like to have for the remainder of this year.

That's really all I have. I suggest that we recess now until our witnesses arrive, so stay close. Thank you.

[10:02 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:06 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee back to order. I would like to welcome Mr. Nick Jennery, who is the executive director of Feed Nova Scotia. I also welcome everyone in the gallery today.

This is the Standing Committee on Community Services. My name is Patricia Arab, and I'm the MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park. I also have the honour of chairing this committee. Today, we are going to be receiving a presentation from Feed Nova Scotia.

I would like to remind those who are in attendance, including our committee members and our audience, to please have their cellphones switched to vibrate. Also, unless you are a credentialed member of the media, you are not able to take video or photographs of any committee proceedings. I would also like to remind our members particularly to wait until I as chairman recognize you before speaking for the purposes of Hansard.

With that, we will ask Mr. Nick Jennery to introduce himself and begin his presentation.

MR. NICK JENNERY: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and members of the committee, for this opportunity to share with you my perspective and the state of hunger in Nova Scotia. My name is Nick Jennery. I'm the executive director of Feed Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's a pleasure to have you here. Maybe we'll take a brief moment and have our committee members introduce themselves as well.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: With that, I will have you start your presentation, Mr. Jennery.

MR. JENNERY: Any commentary should really start and finish with a reminder of who we are trying to help. There are many stories of clients and those who are hungry, and unfortunately there are a few myths. Those myths include a sense of entitlement, laziness, free groceries, and all people really need is a job. This is not our experience.

In my submission, I started with a few pictures and a one-line introduction to some of the clients that we typically support. We also have a YouTube channel to allow those clients who are helped in a time of need and anxiety an opportunity to tell their story in their own words and to say thank you. That 'thank you' becomes a lifelong expression of giving back and helping others.

To that point, I would offer any member of the committee, their colleagues, and their families an opportunity to come ride the Feed Nova Scotia truck. Any day of the week,

we'll give you a blue shirt, and you'll travel with one of our drivers for a couple of hours. You'll be able to see and experience the gratitude of clients when they receive food through the generosity of our communities. I can give you the stories. I can give you nice words. But I would encourage any member of your team to take up that opportunity and get your own stories and experience first-hand.

The four stories that I quickly identified in my brief are fairly typical of Nova Scotians in need. For instance, there's Glenn, who worked for the Sydney airport for 34 years. Worked all his life, always had a job and then he had an accident. That accident really started a circle where he became depressed and eventually he couldn't put food on the table and he reached out for help.

Tracy had a promising career as a teacher. She had to make that tough decision to leave that profession so she could look after her special needs son.

Kenneth got a scholarship to Saint Mary's only to find that he couldn't complete his education while doing two part-time jobs. His goal is to enter the community services sector to help others realize their potential.

Keith is the elderly gentleman, is part of a growing segment that I would draw to the committee's attention, who are needing help from food banks and those are single adults. Keith lost his father, suffered from depression and then found the open arms of his local food bank and now volunteers in the soup kitchen seven days a week. If you listen to his story like the others on our YouTube channel, he will tell you how excited he is to try and do this for the next 25 years. My guess is that he is somewhere in his early 70s.

Laura is a single mom and like so many who are helped by this network that we supply food to, she only needed temporary help until she found a job. Now, with that job, she regularly volunteers in the Upper Room Food Bank.

I would implore members of the committee to listen to those stories, look at their eyes, hear their voices. These are people who have a great deal of gratitude for the help they are getting. They are making a big effort. They have courage and there is a commitment to give back.

While all of this sounds like a Good Samaritan gesture - we're delivering food to those agencies that support people that I've just described - in actual fact it's a real struggle. Every day we reach out to the community for food and funds because every day we have to get about 7,000 kilograms of good quality food onto trucks that go to every part of our province. That's about 16,000 pounds every day. We start from scratch and we work hard at it to get that.

Now those 16,000 pounds go to 146 food banks, shelters, and meal programs across the province. Half of that delivery is fresh fruit and perishables. I might add at this point

that those fresh fruits and perishables have increased during this last year, with recognition, I think, to the farm tax credit that came in. I know that the Opposition Parties and the government have looked at this over the years but I'm here to tell you that it works. We have received a 108 per cent increase in the first eight months of the farm tax credit in donated perishable products.

The challenge of finding and delivering food is one thing, but the challenge of supporting an increasing number of Nova Scotians is quite another. If I had to say it in a sentence, we really are at a tipping point. Our network of food banks and our central distribution model, as efficient as it is - and when I say efficient, a \$2 donation is enough to allow us to deliver three meals' worth of food to somebody who is hungry anywhere in the province. So \$2, for three meals.

You think, how can you do that? We do that because the vast majority of the food is donated and our volunteers outnumber staff 11 to one. That allows us to do that magic called \$2 and three meals. But despite all that, as a network, we cannot absorb these double-digit increases of vulnerable people who require help from a food bank.

The stats are one in 21 - 44,000 Nova Scotians are registered with a food bank for support. Now those are only the people who have found the courage to put their hand up, to walk through a door - often a strange door - and say, I can no longer feed myself, I can't feed my family, so the number is probably a lot higher. But I can tell you that 44,000 is the number that are registered with food banks today.

Last year, Nova Scotia was the province that saw the highest increase during the month of March out of all of the provinces, 21-plus per cent. Here in HRM we saw that increase by 49-plus per cent - an unbelievable number that, quite frankly, is a scary number because we don't know how we can support that.

The good news - if I can call it good news - is that when you look at those 44,000 Nova Scotians, over 70 per cent only went to the food bank six times or less. So that's not every week, it's not every month - it's people who are saying, I need help, I need help right now, but I really want to get to a better place - I really want to be independent and self-sustaining, but right now I need help. If you go back to those stories that I identified right at the very beginning, those are the stories of what happened. People went to the food bank, got help, got support, got to a better place and now they're at a point of giving back.

So coming back to an original point - we've got 44,000 Nova Scotians, and that number is going up. I'm here to tell you we cannot feed our way out of this crisis. It's ironic in a way because if you look at the amount of food that is thrown out, and if somehow we could magically redirect that in a timely way to those who are hungry, we would solve our short-term problem. It's complicated and it needs a lot of commitment and political will to get that done, but we can't feed - I can't make this model that much more efficient in order to realize more food distributed to support more clients.

So here's what we do know. If we can't feed our way out of this crisis, perhaps we can address some of the root causes or at least investigate them in a collaborative way. Fifty-six per cent of the people who are supported by food banks have identified income assistance as their primary source of income - that's 11 per cent higher than the national average. Why is that? I don't know.

I do know that those are the stats, and while the public have been truly amazing in their support - I have six-year-olds who come in on a regular basis giving us their allowance to help feed the hungry kids in their class. I have 13-year-olds who have their birthday parties in our warehouse where their friends don't bring gifts, they bring food and they sort food. These kids get it and they're doing something about it.

I have families and businesses that are there for us every day, but unfortunately there is a tolerance or an acceptance that we will never solve this issue called hunger. I'm here to tell you that I don't believe that. There is enough food out there that if we had the will, the commitment and the creativity to redirect it in a timely way, we could turn this around.

At the heart of those who are hungry, if you talk to them they will tell you that income is often the source of the problem. I am not an economist, I am not an expert in social policy development, but I do know that people in need do not have enough money to pay for the basics such as food.

So where do we go to from here. If I had some advice, I would say that we need to take a closer look at why we have this increasing situation and while it's complicated, I'm a big fan of pilots. I'm a big fan of a pilot to see what the net impact would be of change. I've talked to Legal Aid. I've talked to those on the front line within the Department of Community Services. We've talked to clients and we've talked to the agencies. It is complicated, for sure, but it is solvable.

What we need is a change in attitude that we will solve this, that we won't tolerate it anymore. It needs some courage in terms of supporting those in need in ways different than what we've done in the past. My sense is there are enough people - certainly within the Department of Community Services and others - who are willing to try to do something different so that we can get people to a better place.

With that, Madam Chairman, I would like to conclude and thank you for the opportunity. I am an optimist. I willingly accept challenges that look impossible. I'm surrounded by terrific people who are giving their food and funds and time to help make this work.

This is a community value and of that, I am absolutely convinced - of businesses, small children, schools, every aspect of our community. What we need is some political

leadership. We need some courage, and we need some commitment that says we're going to fix this.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Jennery. I'm an optimist too.

MR. JENNERY: That's terrific.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll start our questions with our PC caucus. Mr. Orrell.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Jennery. It's a shame that we have to be here, or a sin that we have to be here, talking about this because it's something that we all should have high in our priorities, to make sure that no Nova Scotian goes hungry not matter what the situation people are in.

I know Tracy and Mark, the picture on the front. They're friends of mine. I had Mark as a patient when I was a physiotherapist, and I know Tracy was working at the time and did have to do that. I know how good the food bank is because Mark has some needs for a special diet, and he has been able to access the food bank. The people in the food bank would come in with something that they may not know what it is, but because of Mark's diet and history, they knew what it was, they'll have that for him, so that he has good nutritious meals as well.

I guess my question is, what is the biggest issue in your mind that contributes to people using food banks, and having to return to food banks over and over and over?

MR. JENNERY: The short answer is, I would say, that they found themselves in a situation where they just don't have enough income for the basics. Whether that's a decision to personally care for a special needs daughter or son or something like that, it all adds up to the same thing. That is the biggest issue.

When people don't have enough food - if they have to choose between rent and food, they choose rent. In my experience, people who don't have food get themselves into a very high state of anxiety where it's impossible to have a conversation. People who are hungry become marginalized, become isolated, and it can circle down from there. Income is probably the first thing. If people find themselves in one of those challenging situations, we need a support system that allows them to have the basics: food and rent, and those types of things. I don't think they should be forced to choose.

I often think of myself in the hope business. What we try and do is give people hope by giving them food. If you give them food, they have a conversation, and we can figure out ways to get them to a better place. I'm not sure if that answers your question, but in all of those cases that we've talked about - including the ones you've mentioned - what happened was, collectively, we gave folks hope. We allowed them to get the basics, and now they're in a better place.



MR. ORRELL: I think you just said March showed one of the largest increases in food bank usage ever. It would be interesting to hear your thoughts on that.

But the biggest question I want to know about is, you talked about food that's thrown out, if we could somehow repurpose that. Can you explain to me what exactly you mean by food that's thrown out? I hope it's stuff that the grocery stores or Tim Hortons have at the end of the day that goes into the dumpster because they're not allowed to give it to whoever because of whatever it might cause. If you could explain that to me.

MR. JENNERY: Sure. I can start with a CBC investigation some months back which concluded - and it has been a credible study and others have said, yes, that's about right - there's about \$31 billion worth of food being thrown out per year in Canada.

If you take our population of 950,000, divide it by 35 million and do the math - the retailers for instance are about 10 per cent of that problem, consumers are about 49 per cent of that problem, and restaurants, hotels, and institutions are about another 10 per cent of that problem. If we just take the retail sector as one example, and we could claw back 10 per cent of that food and redirect it in a timely way so it's still high quality, I could almost double my food support to this network of agencies that I support. That's the size of the prize.

Now having said all that, the large retailers are extraordinarily generous, both in their fundraising and in their food donations. We are going through an attitude change right now where we're taking another look and saying that if it's still high quality but can't be sold because of whatever retail policy, can we redirect that through what essentially is a unique network that Feed Nova Scotia has, to all of those agencies in a timely way?

In fact we're on week two of a new pilot right now with a retailer that is going to make an announcement later on this week where we are literally picking up on a daily basis all foods that are not sold that are still acceptable for consumption and directing that to the shelters in HRM on the same day. That's an exciting pilot for me. It's evidence of a shift in attitude but we have to do more and we need more people to do that. That's really what's going on.

We need to change our attitude around food waste. It should start from a zero-waste policy. Let's have a policy of zero waste to landfill and work it out from there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: In 2015, the Food Action Research Centre at Mount Saint Vincent University calculated that a single man on income assistance would face a monthly deficit of \$793 when trying to pay all his bills and also eat a nutritious diet. That deficit varies if it a single man with a disability; the gap would be \$510 for a lone parent family - I don't think that figure is right. The gap varies per household makeup.

How much of that gap, how much of that deficit is Feed Nova Scotia able to address by offering support through the food bank system?

MR. JENNERY: Thank you for the question. It's complicated but here's what I know factually; that 16,000 pounds of food that we distribute each and every day adds up to a little less than three days' worth of food per client per month. So when I say we're collectively feeding hungry Nova Scotians, it's actually incorrect - only three days per month per client. It really is a helping hand, but it's not solving the problem. It's not even addressing hunger because I just don't have that much food in the system to be able to do that.

As I listen to those in the Department of Community Services, as I listened to clients and agencies, it is very complicated how much money gets to a person in need and therefore, how much money do they have left to buy groceries. What I do hear consistently is that it's not enough to do the basics, to put a meal on the table each and every day.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: I'm part of the NDP caucus and we have proposed a \$15 minimum wage. What impact do you think that would have for Feed Nova Scotia's clients?

MR. JENNERY: If those who are hungry have more income than they do right now, it's only a good thing. It's nothing but a good thing. Again, I'm not an economist or a person who is an expert in social policy so I would support a pilot to try it to see what would happen, see what the net impact is. I don't know what the impact would be on businesses, small businesses. Some may have a different point of view. But if you are telling me that it gives those who are hungry more income to buy food, then I'd have to say that's a good thing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: Thank you for your presentation. I guess I want to ask about donations and where they come from. My riding that I belong to - part of it I've never, ever had them access a food bank, and then Eastern Passage has their own. So the community kind of takes care of it and our businesses within take care of it. Then I have South Woodside, which I don't have a lot of experience with, which they would be able to access, but they have a lot of trouble getting to a location where they could access it.

So I guess my first question is, where do all your donations come from?

MR. JENNERY: Food donations or cash donations?

MS. TREEN: Both.

MR. JENNERY: With food donations, the majority comes from the larger retailers. So we're talking hundreds of thousands of kilograms, and all of the stores that are involved in that. The farmers are about - it's in our annual report - but the farmers are around 9 per cent, something like that. The retailers are probably closer to about 40 per cent. There are a lot of public food drives. We're extraordinarily grateful for community initiatives. There are over 550 per year that end up with donations to Feed Nova Scotia. That's another big chunk of it.

We also rescue - I'll use that word - a significant amount of food. I have two trucks that just go around HRM - Dartmouth and Halifax - every day and they pick up food from Starbucks, Tim Hortons, local bakeries, those types of things, hospitals, institutions. That's about 160,000 kilograms a year right there. So it comes from a variety of sources, I guess is what I'm saying.

From the cash donations, virtually 100 per cent comes from the community. We do get - or for this last year we got about \$12,000 from the government, but on a \$3.5 million operating budget, it's small. We probably get more actually from the government employees because they are tremendous in their initiatives to help us with our mission.

The public and Nova Scotia businesses are by far the biggest source of cash donations. Having said all that, we operate on very thin ice. If there was, God forbid, a natural disaster that would somehow divert attention to support that national disaster or the impact of it, we could find such as what we saw with the tsunami a few years ago, we could see a big impact on cash donations. That could get us into trouble pretty quickly.

We carry about three weeks of food inventory on average that allows us to keep the system going. Last July for the first time in recent memory, we actually hit the panic button and said, we have days of food and not weeks of food, and the very real possibility that we would have empty trucks parked on the roadside was staring us in the face. The public responded dramatically - police cruisers, emergency services, kids with wagons, right across the province. So it's a touch and go business.

MS. TREEN: Ours run similar. A lot comes from the community and from donations, and the same thing as what you said - when you get into a little bit of trouble you do the call out and people step up. Nova Scotians have big hearts and they fill the shelves.

For the section of my riding, South Woodside, which I talked about, which has quite a bit of poverty there and who have trouble accessing Feed Nova Scotia because of the distance, I've started my own little food bank in my office. I have somebody in my office that does couponing, and let me tell you, couponing you can get a lot of stuff for very little money. So I keep that in my office now so if I get a call, I just make a delivery and bring them some food so they can access it.

So you might want to think about finding some people who are really good couponers. It's amazing the amount of food that you can get - a lot of non-perishables that you can keep and some other things too that I've been able to keep on hand.

It is a challenge for South Woodside. I don't know if you guys realize that or not - for them accessing food. The distance is quite far and some of them when they're down to the end and they don't even have bus fare, sometimes I'm driving them myself. There's a family resource group that will come, and she will drive them as well.

But they do have a lot of challenges there. You do great work, but just to make you aware that there's a little corner that's getting missed there. I think they could use a little more help, and I would be willing to help you on that too.

MR. JENNERY: First off, let me thank you for what you do. I think any people who take initiative to help those who are hungry and get food to the right place certainly deserve a thank you, and I would like to do that right now.

Feed Nova Scotia operates on a fair share principle. We don't dictate where the food bank should be or how the food banks operate. All of them have their own board of directors, and they make their own rules. What we do ask is that they all sign a code of ethics, if you will, which is that you feed people who are hungry in a dignified, respectful manner and that you work to address the sources of hunger in your community. The code of conduct is in our annual report.

I take your point about couponing. I come from the retail grocery industry, so I know the impact of that. We will certainly have a look at that.

What I would say and draw to your attention is what happened in Canso this last year. The Canso food bank found themselves without a site to operate in because of landlord issues, et cetera. What we suggested and supported was that the community come together, which they did. Those who run the food bank along with front-line workers along with several members of council - the community was represented.

What we said, and what we do, is we support whatever solution the community decides to adopt. If you have particular transportation issues, if you want to go with gift cards versus food, or whatever helps the people in your community most effectively, we will support that. Our fair share principle says that if you're - I'm going to make up a number here - 1 per cent of the hunger problem in Nova Scotia, we will give you 1 per cent of everything that we have. That way, we direct our support to where it's most needed. I support a community-led solution, whatever that solution is.

I'm willing to have that conversation. If you want to call a meeting, I will be there.

MS. TREEN: Perfect, thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Harrison.

MR. LARRY HARRISON: I want to thank you, Mr. Jennery. You have great passion for your work.

MR. JENNERY: I do.

MR. HARRISON: Yes, you do, and it shows, and it's admirable.

I have two questions. You are a pilot guy. In your best of worlds, what would one of the pilot projects be if you could pull it off?

MR. JENNERY: I would first bring people around the table who are smarter than I am. If we take a defined community, and that could be geography - whatever way you want to carve that up, but make it small enough that we can effect change. I would bring people who are probably academics, people from Community Services, front-line workers, people in the community - people who know and are intimately involved in dealing with those who are hungry, who have experience in that.

Let's agree on some metrics. How are we going to measure this? What's the impact on kids' ability to learn if we give them food before they go to school? What's the impact on self-esteem if you give people who are able to enter the workforce some increased self-esteem because we're giving you food, and maybe we will even teach you how to run a business - so get the metrics right.

Then from Feed Nova Scotia's standpoint, whatever resources that I can spare, I would apply to that because I'm interested in longer-term solutions. I can't handle the short-term crisis.

So that's what I would do. I would get people who are social policy experts - front-line workers, education, health, NGOs - but make it small, make it tight, operate like a commando force, to get it done first and learn by what the results tell you, as opposed to study it to death.

MR. HARRISON: You partly answered my second question. We, as politicians, are in the business of trying to make good decisions so that the lives of Nova Scotians can be better. What do you see us doing now to support what you do, out in the community?

MR. JENNERY: Well if I was to start at the top of my selfish list, I would say I need a facility that is larger than what I have, in order to handle more food to get it to people who are hungry. I don't need much and it doesn't have to be new but I want to get more perishable product to people who are hungry because I know that they will become healthy. That's an internal need.

I think on an external need, I would like a group of people to take a look at income assistance and all the numbers that Ms. Roberts identified, tease it all back and put yourself in the shoes of the client and say, how can we make this better for you? Maybe that would result in allowing people to earn a little bit of income while they are on income assistance, so they could get to a better place.

Now do we know that they would? I think a pilot would probably illustrate that. If it can be statistically relevant, then maybe what we've got is a solution that we can scale up and get some critical mass to.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: Feed Nova Scotia had its funding cut by the government in 2015-16. What impact was the loss of that funding for the organization?

MR. JENNERY: Our funding is fluid because we are pretty much entirely dependent on the community and the public to allow us to achieve our mission. We respectfully are very grateful for the loyalty that the public gives us. So when there is a shortfall, the public comes to our aid.

There's no better example, and it makes me cry every time we try and talk about it - last July when we said we have days, and we've got 44,000 people out there, there was a lineup outside our building. There were kids with wagons who went through their neighbourhood to collect food and funds because they knew we needed it.

If we fall short, whether it's through government funding - essentially we don't have government funding - if we fall short, there are people who do rally. To your point, Nova Scotians give like we're a wealthy province, even though we're not.

Having said that, it's not right that I go to the well on a regular basis, saying we need more money, we need more food. We do, but we're going to reach a point where people have only a finite amount to give and I think what that says is that we need to have everybody on board in helping us financially and food-wise, while working on those solutions so that we can manage our way out of this crisis.

MS. ROBERTS: Since 2013 we do have 7,500 more people in Nova Scotia using food banks. While dealing with that short-term crisis, have you been able to do any work as an organization towards poverty reduction?

MR. JENNERY: I would have to say that is probably our biggest opportunity. Our mission says to feed Nova Scotians in need and to reduce that need. The reality is that probably about 90 per cent of our resources go towards feeding hungry people. This year we are deliberately allocating resources to reducing that need. That's the second part of our mission, to find those solutions.

That is why this last week we had people from Legal Aid, from the community, the Department of Community Services, clients and customers all come into our premises and say, tell us your story: how could we make things better, how can we simplify the communications, how can we make people understand, how can we change attitudes - those types of things. We are going to work a lot more on that because we just can't feed our way out of this crisis, as I've said several times. I'm not sure if that answers your question.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: I think we're discussing a very important issue in Nova Scotia. Food banks are very prevalent. You have talked about the number of increases in the use of the food banks. I'm just wondering if you can discuss the issue of the farmers and the tax credit and how much that has helped. I know it has improved, but how are you getting to get that type of tax credit from the farmers?

MR. JENNERY: In talking to the farm community - we're pretty close to the farmers, the folks in the Valley, as well as the retailers who handle their perishable product. Those on the front line will tell you that often farmers find themselves with surplus product. Maybe the market has changed, maybe the carrots are too long to fit inside a retail specified bag, and there are hundreds of thousands of kilograms that fall into that category. Maybe there's a surplus of corn. You're dealing with an agricultural product. What the farmer faces is, what does he or she do?

Often what they have done is just left it in the ground - they've plowed it under - because it's not worth the labour to harvest it only to find that there isn't a market for it. We knew that, we saw that and we also saw the impact of a farm tax credit in three other provinces - Quebec, B.C. - I forget what the third province was.

So when we approached the government saying, please consider a farm tax credit because it might be enough of an incentive to create additional donations, the truth was we didn't really know, but I would give the government credit to say we'll try it, we'll do it simple and we'll get it done.

So last July when it happened - we all had to work a little better on getting that communication out, but by saying to the farmers that you can donate bins, even trailer loads of food and we'll get it to those in need, it became logistically a fairly simple solution to implement. I think the success of it is related to that we made it simple - the number of products was restricted.

Having said all that, now that we see how it works, that we can issue those tax receipts, that the farmers understand that they can really donate product and it does help feed hungry people, I would advocate for broadening that farm tax credit to include more products - more perishable products.

In other provinces they include meat, they include dairy, they include poultry. I would like to see that - I would at least like to have the discussion about broadening that because that small incentive creates hundreds of thousands of kilograms of additional product that I have the infrastructure to redistribute. That's how it works. That's what my position is.

MR. HORNE: Just as a follow-up, a couple of things - are you promoting the farm tax credit?

MR. JENNERY: Absolutely. We got volunteers on the phone. We went through our - it's not a Rolodex, I'm showing my age there - but the digital equivalent of it, and we just made phone calls. We made phone calls and said, do you know what it is? We developed a one-pager saying, here's how it works, this is how you calculate the value, let's do that. We speak to the hort council and work very closely with the trade associations and the promotional agencies who have done an outstanding job of getting that message out to the farm community. So collectively, there was a big communication effort to do that.

MR. HORNE: If we increase the tax credit - I think in Nova Scotia it's 25 per cent . . .

MR. JENNERY: Correct.

MR. HORNE: Would that be more helpful? Would you feel that would increase the number of farmers that would be giving?

MR. JENNERY: I think that's a question better asked of the farmers and their representative groups. My personal feeling is, I would like to see that same farm tax credit applied to more products. People who are hungry, one of the things they cannot afford is protein.

Last year when I asked for my staff to voluntarily see how many meals you can get out of the food that is being donated to the network, it was a very tearful pilot. What it said is that, all too often, we are distributing snacks. If you are a single father with two teenage sons, what you are most concerned about is putting a main meal on the table. If we can focus more on main meal components, that would have a huge impact on those who are hungry.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Harrison.

MR. HARRISON: In this same vein, there are a number of farms now that are going out of business. The land here in Nova Scotia is certainly good land. Do you have any idea how many communities are actually sponsoring community gardens, for instance, growing food for this purpose?



MR. JENNERY: Short answer: I don't have an actual number for you. The number of community gardens - and we're a strong advocate for those - has increased quite significantly year over year and will continue to do so. Frankly, it just works.

There are lots of examples I can point you to. In fact, even this last year, we issued some tower gardens, which are indoor, vertical gardens, so that people could grow their own food if they didn't have the land to do so.

Here's what I learned from community gardens. Apart from being able to produce food at a very reasonable cost, what it does is increase self-esteem. When you get kids growing food, they understand and appreciate the value of food. When you get those who are hungry contributing and engaging in growing food, their self-worth and their self-esteem increase. That has a whole lot of downstream benefits.

I'm a big believer in community gardens. I think there's ways of scaling it up if we got some like-minded individuals together. If we know community gardens work, then let's have a big, mother community garden, and let's see where that can take us. You have to do the calculations of population density and logistics.

I just visited a Mississauga food bank a couple of weeks ago, and they are growing fish in their food bank, as well as indoor products. You think, how does that work? Well, curiosity is the best trait you can have in this business. Passion and curiosity will find solutions to hunger in Nova Scotia. If you have an idea for a community garden or making it bigger, I'm all with you on that one. The self-esteem point is a very big issue.

MR. HARRISON: I'm going to see what I can do to help you on that one.

MR. JENNERY: All right, okay.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Jennery, in Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, probably some of the most consistent groups that I come across that contribute to causes similar to yours are groups like the volunteer fire department with their Santa Claus drive-by, the churches throughout the community, organizations like Saint Vincent de Paul and Meals on Wheels. What's your experience, your relationship, in dealing with those types of community groups? If you could comment specifically on that area, that would be helpful too.

MR. JENNERY: I take any and every opportunity to speak to those groups as often as I can. It starts with a fairly simple message: thank you for what you do. When they do a food drive or a fundraising event, I start with, \$2 is equivalent to three meals. If you are hungry, and somebody gives you three meals, you are changing somebody's life, maybe in a permanent way. So do not underestimate your food drive or your fundraising effort. No

matter how small is, it has a big impact because we have this unique infrastructure in Nova Scotia to be able to help hungry people. I talk to churches a lot, fire departments, schools, government employees. If you've got a group of people - I want to tell you a story.

One of the things that I also say is that it's even as simple as a bag of flour. Here's the story of a bag of flour, if I can take 30 seconds to tell that. We had a conversation with a social worker at the Supportive Housing for Young Mothers, part of the YWCA - an excellent organization. They're helping young moms with kids between three weeks and three years old. We provide food for them on a daily basis. I got a donation of 8,000 bags of flour - I always say yes in this business and then try to figure out what to do with it afterwards.

So we were telling the story, and they said, you know what? These young moms don't really know how to cook. Why don't we put on a cooking class for them? We reached out to NSCC and got an instructor. They held a cooking class for the young moms. We provided the flour - easy thing to do. They made muffins for the first time ever. They were so pleased with the product, they said, wow, doesn't this taste good? Wouldn't it be amazing if we could sell that and make some money at it? With a little bit of help, they formed their own organization, and they started selling muffins and baked goods at the Seaport Market.

It's a nice little story that all started with a bag of flour, but here's the point. The self-esteem that happened with those young moms, not only when you help them with food but also when you allow them to do something with it - I don't know how they feel about themselves, but I do know they feel a whole lot better than they did before.

A toonie, a bag of flour - to the people in your area, that makes all the difference, and I'm happy to tell those stories.

MR. JESSOME: I'll shift gears just a little bit here. Some of the consistent folks who come through my office are in a bit of what I'll call a gap scenario. There has been a death in the family, a divorce has taken place, or a separation is under way - maybe a lost job or something like that. Something is creating a temporary deficit for their family situation. I'm wondering, for people in those circumstances, what is their access to your organization's food supply or the food supply at the food banks? Do you have any sort of indication how prevalent or what types of numbers would represent families in those kind of gap circumstances that come to your food banks?

MR. JENNERY: Starting at the beginning of that story, if you have one of those life-altering moments that you described, in our experience, it's often hard to ask for help. You've worked all your life. You've fended for your family - I've never been in this situation before. I'm just going to tough it out. People try and tough it out, and then they get to the point where not only are they going hungry, but their kids are going hungry.

Then, hopefully, if they have a network around them, or somehow they find the internal courage - that's why I very much respect people who are hungry for the actions that they take. They will walk in through those doors, and if you walk in through the doors - I remember the doors of Bridgewater food bank, you will get hugged like you've never been hugged before.

Kelly at the North Dartmouth food bank - that's the first thing she does when you walk in through the door. She doesn't ask you any questions. She hugs you and will not let go, almost to the point of being awkward. But she's telling you something. Then what she's going to do is give you some food.

There's no judgment involved. Nobody's asking you for financial information or proof of receipts and things like that. We're going to give you some food so we can start a conversation. If we can start a conversation, then we're going to say, what is it that's troubling you? Is it mental illness? Is it that you don't know how to deal with this separation? Do you need help writing a resumé? Do you need marriage counselling? Do you know that Legal Aid is available right now? A lot of people don't know the rules about all that.

This is what a food bank does. I think they do it extraordinarily well. You can pick a story which sort of counters what I've just said. The vast majority do it extraordinarily well. They are committed to getting it done, and a lot of them are all run by volunteers. That actually is an Achilles heel of the system because the volunteers are getting older, and what happens then? That could get back to this need for a community discussion about how we are going to do this in a sustainable way, getting people to a better place and keeping them there.

The number of people who are like that, it's a high number. If you look at the pictures in the brief that I gave you, they could be your neighbour. They could be at the hockey rink. They could be at the bus stop. You wouldn't even know it because often they are people who are proud. They have high anxiety, but they're trying to hide it. I can show you a lot of videos of people who tell their story, and that's a level of courage that is upward from what I just described.

I know people who are general managers of radio stations in Halifax, directors of major grocery chains. I know people who are regional managers of IT companies. I have somebody on my board who is the youngest winner of the Sobeys award of business excellence. He has three companies. He was there. All of them were there. So it can happen. I'm very thankful for the people in the network that catch folks like them and try to get them to a better place, but we need to help them.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: We talked earlier, Mr. Jennery, about unhealthy people having high anxiety, more medical illness, all kinds of other secondary problems and concerns. What would the cost of that unhealthiness be on the government compared to the amount of money we as a government - and I'll include myself in that - give to the food banks or Feed Nova Scotia to try to assist you guys do the work you do? If the cost is millions, then a little bit more to you guys to try and prevent that would be a good investment. I'm just wondering if you had any idea how many people would be ill because of that and what the cost of that might be compared to what donations are given.

MR. JENNERY: You're asking for a number that I can't give you. I do have and have had people from the Nova Scotia Health Authority on my board of directors. I've talked to Janet Knox, and I've talked to others in that group. My sense is that it is disproportionate - people who are hungry who are not eating well are often not healthy. I can't quantify that, nor can I really say anything beyond that.

But what I do know is that those people who are hungry are saying, we want to give our kids healthy food. Healthy food - there's no such thing as unhealthy food. Personally, what we try to do is ship out a balanced diet. We do a deliberate calculation of so many kilograms of protein and so many kilograms of fresh produce and grains so that people have, as much as we can give it to them, a balanced diet.

I think that if you ask those in the health community, those who are in the front-line agencies - Canso is a classic example I came to - they're not eating right. People who are unhealthy often aren't eating well, but I really can't comment beyond that.

MR. ORRELL: You talked earlier about a zero waste policy. Have you considered what that would look like? Can we have that conversation to see if we can come up with something like that to try to benefit your organization and the people who use your food banks?

MR. JENNERY: I think you can. I've had it individually with people who are frankly giving us a lot of food right now. If you talk to businesses, they'll tell you that it's an expensive proposition to navigate food to landfill because there is a lot of handling going on, there's transportation. If it's being composted, or if it's going into pet food or industrial uses, all of those are more expensive than donating to the system. Ask Walmart, ask Sobeys, ask Superstore - they'll all tell you the same thing.

I think that if you got people representing the hotel, restaurant and institution businesses, as well as the retail community - they are all good people predisposed to helping us so I don't want to appear like they're not helping us - and ask them, what sort of policies, what sort of infrastructures, supply chain integration, do we need to do in order to redirect food, rescue food that is not sold through your businesses? How do we make that happen? I think you can poll around the table, I think they will be there and I think we would have a fascinating conversation.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: This committee has been hearing testimony that touches in some way on the transformation of income assistance in Nova Scotia for a number of years. It is, to some extent, under way, we understand, but it has not resulted in an increase, or at least a significant increase to income assistance rates. What do you hear from clients related to their experience on income assistance?

MR. JENNERY: Recognizing that I'm working through a fairly small sample but I'm working directly with clients, hearing their stories, as well as the agencies, I hear two messages. One is that the system is complicated and few people understand it - fewer people even understand that they can appeal it - so understanding how the system works.

If you have somebody in a high state of anxiety who is hungry and is now faced with going on income assistance, I think that despite the best efforts of some very well-intentioned front-line people, particularly in Community Services - I think they do an awesome job but the net result is that there's a lot of clients, people out there who don't understand how it works. That's partly because they're in a high state of anxiety and they've got their own issues.

The other thing I hear is that in the clients' mind, from their perspective, they feel there are penalties if they try to get themselves to a better place. By that I mean if they get some small part-time work or if they get additional income, that quickly it gets clawed back. I'm not an expert in the numbers but the number of \$150 sticks in my head there.

What I would ask - you know we were talking about pilots - is there maybe an opportunity to allow those who are hungry, those in poverty, to keep a greater share of their income from where it comes, to allow them to get to a better place? I see a lot of courageous, big effort going on with people who are hungry. It makes me want to give them a chance. Certainly you can't have an open chequebook but maybe you can do a pilot, maybe you can try something and see whether that is a solution. Maybe that's part of the transformation, I don't know.

MS. ROBERTS: There has been a tremendous increase in the demands on the system that you run, which you acknowledge doesn't even meet the demands of the people who sign up as clients, and then there are many more who don't sign up as clients but are also hungry in this province. What is your understanding of what is driving the increase in demand, the increase in hunger?

MR. JENNERY: I don't have a really good answer for you. The situations are as varied as the stories I mentioned at the front end. Somehow something happened to somebody's life which either caused them to make a very tough decision or that they lost income that led to their situation. I couldn't even generalize.

What I would like to do is perhaps maybe there's an opportunity to get people who study this for a living to look at a particular community and do a deeper dive and say, what's really happening here? Yes, there's lots of individual examples but is there an underlying trend that we need to address collectively? That's where I would point my head.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for coming here today. We keep hearing words like "complicated," "anxiety," "stressful," and we keep going back to pilots and things like that. One of the things that really stuck with me is you talked about the issues that people are facing when they come into the food bank.

We have two food banks out in Spryfield, St. Paul's being one of them in the Greystone area. They've taken some initiative. We've helped them get some grants and some funding. The community garden at St. Paul's has done a fantastic job and they've partnered with the urban farm. Greystone recently - I don't know if you know, but they have a hydroponic system set up there. Renee has been growing her own food and stuff like that. So they're taking initiatives.

One of the things I wanted to go back to is the whole causes and issues around poverty and lack of food. Have you ever heard of HOPES?

MR. JENNERY: Yes.

MR. MAGUIRE: When I think of the food bank, I think of the trust that - I mean, it's a very intimate relationship between yourself and the clients that come in. I find that a lot of people end up volunteering there. We see a lot of people in the Spryfield area end up volunteering at the food bank. Have you thought about partnering with - like HOPES has done - with the different students and residents and things like that, to actually have them come in to give free advice, maybe bring a nutritionist in on a Tuesday when people come in, mental health care, child care, things like that? I know HOPES has been very successful, but is that something that you guys have looked into? I know that's probably a lot to take on.

MR. JENNERY: As an operating strategy, partnering with people like HOPES or another organization - anything like that just makes great sense to do that. You started off by talking about St. Paul's and what they've done. A little bit of investment in an organization and people like that has paid dividends not only in social benefit, but getting people to a better place. There's no better example than what they do with their community gardens.

We partner with as many people as we can. A lot of the people that we partner with are around food and fun because that's what we need first and foremost to keep the system going to allow us to be viable tomorrow, but I would be very open to that. If there is a

group like HOPES or an equivalent in any of your communities that are predisposed to doing this, as much as we have the volunteers and resources to help support that, I would like to do it, because there is great learning in doing that.

You ask people who are hungry, what do you do to kind of keep your head straight? Like, you've got a lot of reasons to be desperate and depressed and angry and frustrated and all those things because you're hungry and all of that. When I ask them, how do you keep your head straight, almost 100 per cent of the answers are, we help others. When you help others, you feel better about yourself.

When somebody comes into Feed Nova Scotia and they give me a bag of flour, a toonie, whatever it is, they are feeling the very best about themselves when they are making the donation. Those kids get it. They feel the very best. We make a big fuss of those kids when they come in.

There is magic in allowing people to volunteer and to help others. From a business standpoint, from a philanthropic standpoint, from a social standpoint, I would absolutely support further partnerships as much as we've got the resources to do that.

MR. MAGUIRE: The reason I bring that up is you talk about pilot projects, but I think Feed Nova Scotia would be ideal - the whole organization would be ideal to start a pilot project. You're saying you have 44,000 registered Nova Scotians; it's probably more than that that are coming in. To partner with the universities - so partner with the Dal School of Nursing, School of Social Work, and have some of those residents and those students come in - that's something I could help with if you'd like. We could help try to facilitate some of that stuff - help them come in on the ground level.

A good example is, Tuesday afternoons we have Soups On! at St. Paul's Church. There's an opportunity there for two hours. We have hundreds of people coming in and out to actually sit down and maybe - whether it's barriers to employment, dental hygiene, child care, things like that - to have people come in and slowly approach others and say the services are here, and just create a hub model out of Feed Nova Scotia because as you know, poverty and access to food is much more complicated than one solution or one answer, right?

MR. JENNERY: It's a terrific idea, and I would take you up on that one. Just to be clear, we do have a lot of students coming in from Dal. We had the nurses actually just in the last few months help us understand how we categorize the food that gets donated and, when we're putting together a shipment to a member agency, how much protein, how much of this, that and the other, and how we do it. The Dal nursing students have helped us with that.

We also have people from Dal engineering who have come in to take a look at our logistics. If we've got five trucks and two million kilograms of food to get out on the road, how do we get best cube utilization? It's a complicated business.

We've reached out to students that way. The volunteer experience is part of our brand, but I absolutely take your point about flipping that around and finding the time to meet offsite with students who are doing that type of thing, absolutely. I'm all about spreading the message and creating the experience.

MR. MAGUIRE: One of the positive things that St. Paul's has done and Renee is starting to do at Greystone, is education around fresh fruit and vegetables - what to do with the turnip, what to do with the zucchini and stuff like that. That could be part of it too, like bringing nutritionists in volunteering their time and having a conversation. As you know, I think most people would be surprised that people don't know what to do with corn on the cob or things like that. So it's not just getting the food in their hands. It's also educating them on how to cook it and what to do with it.

We gave out tomato plants last year. We gave out 300 plants, I think, in the Greystone area. I would say that a large percentage of them asked, what do I do with this? So we went back and gave them different recipes and things like that. If you've never been introduced to fresh food or if you are used to living a certain way, then it's not just having access. It's also an education thing.

MR. JENNERY: I have two quick points. As with any of the stories that we've heard today of what you're doing in your communities, I would implore you to tell those stories because they inspire. They look at you, and they look at your colleagues and say, well if you're doing that, why don't I do that? There is power in telling that story.

The other thing I would say is that food banks are often seen as just handing out food. In fact they don't. They provide all sorts of advice. They put on nutrition classes, cooking classes, anger management classes, marital classes, all sorts of things. They'll do your tax receipts for you. They are as varied in the services as they are in the number of them.

Our commitment, as Feed Nova Scotia, is to enable them to be better at what they do. If they need a refrigerator or a freezer in order to increase their capacity so that more perishable product can go to their clients, we'll go out and try and find them a refrigerator. Just in the last month, we put it out there for every one of those 146 agencies, because our fundraising was particularly good this year. We said, there's a \$2,000 capacity grant for whatever you want that enables you to be better at what you do. We got couches for Out of the Cold. The vast majority were around freezers and refrigerators to increase the capacity so we could get more perishable products handled through the system, whatever increases their capacity. So yes, Tuesday afternoons.



MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: First, I want to give some accolades to Feed Nova Scotia and, in particular, Beacon House. Our Lions group and our community work together at Christmastime to supply food to Beacon House. I think they do a wonderful job.

The system you have there is great for volunteers. They love to have volunteers come in. The days I've been, there most times at Christmas, there were anywhere from 50 to 100 volunteers, representing all kinds of individuals of course and also corporations that are allowing their employees to come to Beacon House.

We collect from most of the schools in the community at Christmastime - we actually help people all year round, but particularly at Christmas. We do find there's a lot of food that we receive through our collections that is out of date. Cans are cracked or leaking a bit. That can add up to a significant amount of food. Maybe a half-ton truckload-full every year goes to our recyclables. We don't pass that out to the community.

I'm just wondering how you do the security of food at Feed Nova Scotia and make sure that they are being checked to see if the food is appropriate to be given out or not.

MR. JENNERY: On dented or damaged product, there are well-defined standards about what is acceptable and what isn't - whether the dent is across the crease or if it's something that really doesn't affect the quality of the product. Those are well-defined, and all the food safety specialists have signed off on that, whether you're a retailer or a food bank.

The vast majority of our volunteers are involved in what we call reclamation. That damaged product comes into Feed Nova Scotia, and we look at it individually, product by product, using our volunteers. If it was a for-profit business, if you were paying an hourly rate for that, you would be out of business tomorrow. But because the volunteers help us do that, we rescue about 70 per cent on average - sometimes up, sometimes down - of that "damaged" product. It's checked for code dates and all the other different standards on that. We also have a food safety specialist onsite who does check all of that. That's what we do at Feed Nova Scotia.

Also, the member agencies are required to undergo food safety training to know what those standards are. That's also part of the code of conduct that you sign with Feed Nova Scotia if we are to deliver food to you.

You mentioned Christmas. Beyond the day-to-day stuff, Christmas has now gone, in round numbers, from 6,000 households to 7,000 households requiring support this last year. That was a very big jump. You talk about partnerships and collaboration - it's a fairly easy thing from a working standpoint to work with the Salvation Army, Parker's food bank, and member agencies to ask, how do we get this puppy done? That's what happens. We're

staffed by a lot of volunteers who also call each one of those 7,000 households to ask, what do you need? Here's where it's coming. Then we have Purolator and companies like that that volunteer on the weekends to deliver that food.

There is no finer example of community collaboration and partnership than what happens at Christmastime. It is a grunt, an absolute grunt. But at 7,000 households, the vast majority being in HRM, we are hard-pressed. If you're telling me it's going to be 8,000 this year, and I'm an optimist, I'm not sure how I'm going to do that.

We are expanding that though, just for your information, to major religious celebrations like Ramadan. This year, we are working with those agencies where, in their estimation, they feel it's the right thing to do to help Muslims who are hungry, to help them celebrate Ramadan in the same sort of way that we help people celebrate Christmas. We're going to try that. There's a big community effort under way to collectively make that happen and see what that's like.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: I have here that in 2015, one-third of food bank users were children, 13,100. Are there specific challenges related to serving well the high number of children accessing food banks?

MR. JENNERY: If there's one fact that depresses me, that causes us great concern, it's the fact that there's that many kids - I think it's actually now closer to 16,000 kids - who are going to school hungry. Mr. Maguire, you mentioned your area. There's a well-known example of the local food bank there actually getting food in on a Friday to the local high schools so that those kids can eat on the weekend. It's depressing and outrageous and intolerable that we actually have this here in Nova Scotia, but I venture to say that it's probably not the only reason why. So why do we have that many kids? I don't know. They're associated with families who have difficulty making ends meet.

One of the organizations that we support is Family SOS. They will tell you that when they deal with families and the kids at the end of the school day and give them food, the conversation changes dramatically. They will tell you that, which is why we are predisposed to helping give them food. Why those kids are in that situation, I can't honestly give you any great insight, other than that to me it's unacceptable, and we all ought to treat it as unacceptable and do something about it.

MS. ROBERTS: As an agency, what does that look like?

MR. JENNERY: Everybody needs a balanced, a healthy diet. It could be argued that kids need it as much as anybody. Kids can't live on snacks. There are other things that we hear from the children who come into Feed Nova Scotia.

I had a five-year-old come in with a very modest amount of money who asked me to feed the kids in his class. When I asked him what made him do this, he talked about how at breaks, he has snacks, but some of his fellow kids don't have any snacks, so they sit in a corner. He didn't feel that was right. In fact, he held me to account. He wanted to know how I was going to spend his \$20 to feed the kids in his class. So I took him for a tour around Feed Nova Scotia. I introduced him to the volunteers and the staff and showed him what we do and asked him to come back. Let's do this together.

This is what kids do. Kids see the impact of this. Again, there is an isolation. There is a marginalization that goes on. I don't know why those families have trouble.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That concludes our questions for today. I would like to give you a few moments for any closing statements that you might have.

MR. JENNERY: I think you should give yourselves a pat on the back for looking deeper into this issue. It's really easy to ignore it because many of us have lives where we don't necessarily come in contact every day with people who are hungry, but you've decided to ask some very thoughtful questions. You've got some great ideas, and I would take you up on any of the challenges that you've put to me as much as I can because through that, there will be learning. If we share that learning and share the stories, we can make Nova Scotia a better place for those who are hungry.

I started off by saying I'm an optimist. I still am. We have such phenomenal community support and the most amazing volunteers. I personally am blessed with a staff team who are committed to get this done. If we can align around an intolerance for hunger, a commitment to move the needle just a little bit and to share that success, I think I would have a happier story to tell you this time next year.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's fantastic.

In closing, I think that we could have a good partnership when it comes to helping our Muslim community out. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. In my area, we've already started with Ramadan boxes. I think you and I could have a good conversation about that. I'll give you my card at the end.

Thank you very much. Thanks to the committee members. With that, I will adjourn our committee.

[11:29 a.m. The committee adjourned.]