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Committee Room

Housing and Homelessness in Cape Breton Regional Municipality

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WITNESSES

Cape Breton Community Housing Association

Mr. Fred Deveaux, Executive Director



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MAY 1, 2018

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Chuck Porter

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. Thank you very much, we're just a minute over, my apologies, that's the chairman's fault.

Good morning everyone. If I could - everybody knows, I don't need to say this too often, but cellphones on vibrate or silent, washrooms are out there and, in an emergency, we all gather at the Grand Parade.

Mr. Deveaux, we'll come to you shortly.

We'll start with introductions, please.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: A few things today on the agenda. We will start with our presentation from Mr. Deveaux in just a moment. We'll go until about 11:30 a.m. We have a bit of business on the agenda to take care of with regard to some correspondence that we have, and we need to make some decisions about the coming months. We may be able to go a little bit longer; we'll see how things go along. It's only 10:03 a.m., we'll get started.

Mr. Deveaux, welcome. The floor is yours, sir, for some introductions or opening comments, and then we'll have some questions from members and make our way through the meeting.

Mr. Deveaux.

MR. FRED DEVEAUX: Thank you for having me, this is my first time appearing before a committee. I'm pleased to be here.

As mentioned, I am executive director of Cape Breton Community Housing. We are an organization that provides supports and residential options for individuals living with mental illness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. We were established in 1977, so we've been around a long time. We just celebrated our 40th Anniversary last year.

We operate three group homes and eight small options homes, as well as an independent living support program, outreach program, and some other programs in the area.

In 2005 we were asked to assume operation of what was then called the Open Door Homeless Shelter. We were asked by Minister David Morse from the Department of Community Services because the shelter was in danger of closing at that time. We put forth a proposal and have been operating the Community Homeless Shelter since then. It's a homeless shelter for men. We see on average about 150 men stay there, per year, and we also have a female referral program through there and occasionally youth stay there as well.

When I came to Cape Breton Community Association about almost four years ago now, I noticed a few things at the homeless shelter and in CBRM in general. First, I noticed that we didn't really understand the scope of homelessness in the municipality. We knew that the shelter was almost always full at that time. We knew that there were approximately 350 to 400 people using shelters in CBRM per year, and that would include Transition House which is a shelter for women who are escaping domestic violence and a transitional housing facility called Almost Home that has six beds.

The other thing I noticed was at the Community Homeless Shelter, we were seeing the same people all the time. It was a revolving door at the shelter and people would come in, stay at the shelter for some time, break that cycle of homelessness, and end up back there fairly quickly, usually within a month or two. So those were a couple of things I noticed there.

The other thing I noticed is that we were having a great deal of difficulty finding stable, affordable housing for people trying to escape homelessness, and the data we were getting from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation suggested that there were lots of vacancies available in CBRM. The issue didn't really make sense to us.

With all of those things, we decided to form a community group called the Affordable Housing and Homelessness Partnership in Cape Breton and to design a number of research projects to try and figure out the scope of our issues around homelessness in CBRM. We formed the group in 2015 and started conducting research in 2016 and I'd like

to present some of that research to you today because it was quite telling what we found out and it opened our eyes to the scope of the homelessness issue in CBRM.

The working group is a partnership of Public Health, Cape Breton Community Housing Association which I represent, the regional police, Cape Breton University, and the local community advisory board on homelessness. The community advisory board is responsible for administering the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy money in Canada. The funding was provided through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the CAB, or community advisory board, and it was to really figure out the scope and the extent of homelessness in CBRM and to figure out our housing situation as well.

I mentioned at the homeless shelter we were seeing a revolving door of people coming and going, not really permanently breaking that cycle of homelessness and we had a great deal of difficulty finding safe, affordable housing for people. At that time, Housing First was being offered nationally and internationally as a program to help end that cycle of homelessness. Housing First is an internationally-accepted, empirically-tested program designed to permanently end homelessness and it starts with housing. If someone is presenting as homeless, immediately you help them find safe, affordable housing and then you wrap supports around them to help them maintain that housing.

We were concerned about starting the Housing First program because we knew that we were having difficulty finding that housing which is a starting point for Housing First, so we thought we would drill down on that a little bit and figure out what was happening. We asked a couple of research questions: did CBRM have the affordable rental housing infrastructure to implement the Housing First program, and how many individuals are homeless in CBRM? So those were our two main research questions.

We conducted two research studies to gauge the number of homeless individuals in April 2016. One was what's called a Point in Time Count and I'll speak about that on the next slide. That one was being done nationally and really, that one is a boots-on-the-ground, volunteer effort where you go out over a defined period, usually 12 hours, interview people in the streets with surveys, and figure out how many homeless individuals are in an area in that 12-hour period.

Everyone was doing that across the country, I believe there were 60-some communities doing that in Canada, and of course we wanted to do that as well. We were concerned that it wouldn't capture our full situation and the full scope of homelessness in CBRM, because we felt that a lot of our homelessness was hidden, we don't see a lot of people sleeping outside on the streets or in places that homeless individuals are normally sleeping, so we felt it would capture some of the issue, it wouldn't capture all of it.

We designed a second research study called a Service-Based Count. The Service-Based Count was largely conducted with Public Health of the Nova Scotia Health Authority, and it enlisted the help of 40 service providers in CBRM, that included government departments, Community Services was involved, emergency rooms at the

hospitals, income assistance, Justice, community groups, non-profit groups, food banks. It was a wide range, it was a big study. We wanted service providers to look at their case files over a one-month period and anonymously identify any homeless individuals they encountered.

With that count in April 2016, we found 304 homeless individuals in that one-month period in CBRM. That's a bigger number than we thought we were dealing with in our municipality, and we were surprised by those results. Most of the folks we found were single - 88 per cent - 90 per cent were younger than 60, 48 per cent were female and 52 per cent were male. That's a trend that's different from the national trend. The majority of homeless individuals nationally are male, and we found a high number of women who were experiencing homelessness - 38 per cent of those counted were under the age of 30.

We found a couple of things we were surprised by. We were surprised by the number of women who were homeless in CBRM, we were surprised by the overall numbers, and we were surprised by the number of youth who were experiencing homelessness as well, higher than we thought. We felt those numbers, that 304 was an underestimation of the actual number of homeless individuals, for a few reasons. The first was that when we did the survey at the methadone clinics, anecdotally, the people who worked there were telling us, you are going to find huge numbers here at the methadone clinics. Afterward, we learned that you have to give an address at a methadone clinic to be able to get your medication, so we felt that was a big underestimation of the actual number.

The other thing we felt was underestimated was the number of homeless youth because they're very hard to contact, they're very hard to reach, and they are not always engaging in services, so we felt that that 304 was actually lower, after everything was considered. Sixty-nine per cent of the respondents reported low income and poor housing options as the main reason for their homelessness, and that was quite high, too.

We just finished replicating that study yesterday with more service providers this time. I think it's still 40 but there were 17 who were actually part of one organization like the Health Authority and Justice. We don't have the results yet, of course. We don't expect a decrease, we expect an increase. We're not positive about that, but we'll be releasing those results as soon as we have them.

With the PiT count, we did a one-day count in April 2016, over a 12-hour period and found 137 homeless individuals. To put that into comparative perspective, Halifax also did a PiT count in April 2016 and found 198 individuals who are homeless.

[10:15 a.m.]

So the numbers were quite comparable. A PiT count is not a really accurate gauge of homelessness in a community, but it's telling that the two numbers between HRM and CBRM are quite comparable.

We found the same thing with single adults - 88 per cent were single. Fifty-two per cent were female in that study, so it was more - the numbers were flipped a little bit. Nineteen per cent were youth under the age of 24 - so a high number of youth homeless as well.

What really surprised us is that we found 24 people sleeping outside or in a place not fit for human habitation; Halifax found 20, I believe. We were surprised because we don't see people doing that, but we found people sleeping in abandoned houses, in cars, abandoned buildings and things of that nature. So that was surprising.

We just replicated that study again on April 19th and unofficially - I can't release official numbers yet because we haven't screened all of the surveys - we found approximately 120 homeless individuals in that 12-hour period. It's a slight reduction, which is a good thing. That's what we want to see.

One of the things that was different is the folks staying at Almost Home are now counted as permanent housing, so that reduced our numbers by a fair bit. We did find fewer people sleeping outside; I think the number was 15 or 16 this time around. That's good news for us. That means some of our interventions over the last couple of years are hopefully working, if we can use this as a good gauge.

I would like to speak a little bit about our situation and services that we have in CBRM currently for people experiencing homelessness. Cape Breton Community Housing was successful in receiving funding to start a Housing First program in early 2016. We've been going for over two years now and we have 65 individuals enrolled in that program.

Last year alone, the outreach worker attached to that program ended homelessness for 130 individuals, so the team is doing very good work in starting to help some of the individuals we're seeing.

We have major gaps in our services though. There are no emergency shelter services currently for women and youth in CBRM, and I'd like to speak a little bit about this. In HRM, there is a robust shelter system; there are shelter beds available for women and youth and families. In CBRM, we have Transition House, which supports women who are escaping domestic violence. Occasionally they can assist women who are experiencing homelessness, but they mostly operate at capacity and they send their referrals to us actually. There is nowhere for youth to stay. Male youth over the age of 16 can stay at the Community Homeless Shelter, and we try to limit those stays as much as possible because it's not an appropriate environment, but there are huge gaps there for emergency shelter services specifically.

In the past five years, we had 703 homeless male clients seeking emergency accommodations. The Community Homeless Shelter had 369 female referrals. If you're a woman experiencing homelessness in CBRM, the Department of Community Services will pay for a maximum of two nights in a hotel to get you off the street for that amount of time.

So, of those 369 referrals, 315 were referred to a local hotel for two nights. After that you're cut off. You have to meet conditions through the Department of Community Services, and people who are experiencing homelessness are not often in a situation where they can meet those conditions. It's very difficult for them to meet with caseworkers and keep appointments, and keep schedules. What happens is, when a woman experiencing homelessness ends up staying in a hotel for a night, we lose track of them. We aren't able to intervene and provide support services, and they go back to whatever situation they were trying to escape in the first place. So, they put themselves in risky situations at times, sometimes they return to abusive situations, or they couch-surf and do those kinds of things - not an ideal situation.

We were only able to place two women in the last five years and that was five years ago at Almost Home because they're always full too. They're always at capacity, they simply don't have the bed space available, nor is it their mandate to provide emergency shelter services. Thirty-eight women were unable to be placed anywhere and remained homeless on the night of the referral, including 17 women in the past year alone. I have a list of names in my office, given to me by the Department of Community Services, of women who are not eligible for hotel stays in the event of homelessness because they haven't met the conditions set forth by the department. So, of those 38, almost all of those were because they were no longer eligible to receive supports. It's a very alarming situation, it doesn't exist in HRM, there are adequate shelter services available for women, and it's something that needs to be addressed.

In the last five years, we also had 132 male youth admissions at the community homeless shelter. Female youth, I'm not sure where they're going, we have done some female referrals, but there aren't services available. Some of them may go to Transition House if there's room, but it's a huge gap in service.

So, that's the homelessness situation in CBRM. I'm going to switch now to the housing stock situation. As I mentioned, Canada Mortgage and Housing was telling us that we ought to have enough vacancies available to accommodate people exiting homelessness for the Housing First program, that wasn't our experience. So, we partnered with Cape Breton University and specifically, with Dr. Catherine Leviten-Reid at Cape Breton University, to look at our housing stock situation to try to figure out what exactly we were facing.

So, they merged an inventory of rental housing with the provincial database, to come up with a list of landlords in CBRM, and administered a survey to them, to look at as many units as possible. We had a 63 per cent response rate, which anybody with a research background will tell you is very good, and that was over 5,000 units.

The study mirrored the Service-Based homelessness counts in that there are very few housing options available for single, non-senior adults in Cape Breton, but in Nova Scotia in general. As you all know, there aren't any social housing options or public housing options available for single, non-senior adults in this province. I'm not sure how

that came to be, I think it's a situation that needs some serious scrutiny. You know, at the Westin today, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation is having a roundtable discussing housing as a human right, which is part of the National Housing Strategy. Eventually, the federal government will adopt housing as a human right approach, and the province is lagging in that regard in not making safe, affordable public housing available to single, non-senior adults. They're excluding an entire demographic, and it does need some attention, it needs to be addressed.

So, people under the age of 59 - which is the cut-off for public housing - and without children are left out of decent affordable housing opportunities in the CBRM. That has consequences for health and a sense of belonging, and it's a serious impediment to permanently ending homelessness. You know, part of the Housing First program, it presupposes that you can find safe, affordable housing, so it makes our job that much more difficult.

At the basic level the data shows a policy gap where housing provision has not caught up with socio-economic trends. We found a number of things. One we found is that many units in CBRM are targeted towards specific renters. According to the Tenancies Board, this is not allowable but it does happen. What we found is most of the units are targeted towards seniors, a good chunk is targeted towards families, but the no-target renter, that 23 per cent, that's the total number of units that are potentially available for individuals who are single, non-senior adults trying to escape homelessness.

If you look at public housing there are no units available for single, non-senior adults. Non-profit, there's no target for some of the people in that category. Most people who are experiencing homelessness have to figure out housing from looking at market rentals, so they have to find their housing in the market rentals but they're competing with everybody else in that regard for housing as well.

In addition to the target renters, we also found that the average housing costs were far higher than we thought and higher than what Canada Mortgage and Housing was telling us. Canada Mortgage and Housing is giving us data on what they call the primary rental market, which is buildings that have four units or more in CBRM. The primary rental market only accounts for 50 per cent of all rental housing in CBRM and the secondary markets, which are smaller buildings or homes that rent the upstairs and a basement apartment, accounts for 50 per cent of the rental market as well. Those are the apartments that most people exiting homelessness are targeting.

With the costs, we found that the median costs are in and around \$650 per month. The shelter allowance can go up to \$535 if you meet certain conditions, so we're seeing a gap there between what the average costs are and what you are eligible for from income assistance through Community Services.

We were very surprised by this slide. I mentioned that CMHC was indicating a high number of vacancies for apartments in CBRM. What we found was that yes, there were a

fair number of vacancies and that 14 per cent of one-bedroom apartments had experienced a vacancy in the year prior to the study. The issue became that only 2 per cent of those were affordable, which means they were under the \$535 a month. We have vacancies, we have apartments available, but we don't have the means to bridge the gap between what you get on income assistance and what landlords are charging for rent. At any given time, we're left with trying to place people in housing that has a 2 per cent or less vacancy rate and it's very challenging.

We think there's a housing policy gap. We think the practices of housing providers haven't caught up to socio-economic trends. The trends in CBRM are high unemployment, low median household incomes for single households, high youth unemployment, and an increase in single-person households due to delayed cohabitation and greater separation and divorce. That has increased when you are speaking about people who are exiting homelessness. As I mentioned, most are single, non-senior adults. Many have issues related to mental illness, addiction, poverty - all those things. Certainly, there is a gap for those people experiencing homelessness.

[10:30 a.m.]

We have a few recommended policy and funding interventions. We have a desperate need for expanded shelter services for women and youth in CBRM; we just don't have the bed capacity to deal with the number of homeless individuals that we see. We're doing our best through the Housing First program, but without an emergency crisis place to land when you're experiencing homelessness, and a point of entry into the homeless serving system it makes the work of the Housing First team very difficult. So, we do need those shelter services available.

We need health services such as the MOSH team that exists here in HRM. MOSH is the Mobile Outreach Street Health unit. It's funded through the Department of Health and Wellness, and the Department of Community Services. It brings health services to people who are in the street, at the shelters, and who are unwilling or unable to go to emergency rooms or doctors, who can't find a doctor. We're seeing an increased need for those types of health services in CBRM as well.

We recommend raising the shelter allowance for single households or implementing a portable rent subsidy program for all low-income renters, or implement a basic income.

With the rent supplements, there are rent supplements available in the province - mostly in HRM - for people exiting homelessness. There is a Housing Support Worker program that's funded through Housing Nova Scotia; it has just been extended to CBRM. Attached to each of those seven full-time workers is a pot of money for rent supplements to be used to bridge that gap between the \$535 you can get on income assistance and the average market rents that landlords are charging.

Those rent supplements are also available for clients of Housing First in HRM. They're yet to be made available to our clients in CBRM, except that we do have 10 rent supplements available for youth, and that's a new program that just started in February, funded through Housing Nova Scotia that we are about to make very good use of.

We don't have any rent supplements currently for single, non-senior adults who are enrolled in either the Housing Support Worker or Housing First program in CBRM, though those programs exist in HRM.

We recommend allowing single, non-senior households in public housing - or at least starting some discussions about how to best provide housing for everyone and not just specific demographics. It's exclusionary and it's discriminatory, and it should be addressed.

We're recommending continued funding for Housing Support Workers in the CBRM. Housing Nova Scotia just provided funding for a youth Housing Support Worker and a trustee worker in CBRM, and that program started in February of this year. We just received funding to start a program, today actually, for a Housing Support Worker funded through Housing Nova Scotia for adults experiencing homelessness in CBRM. That's great progress. It's needed; we have a wait-list. We have people who are looking to get services and break that cycle of homelessness. So, the extension of that Housing Support Worker program has been very welcomed.

We'd like to somehow ensure that new investments in affordable housing do not exclude single, non-senior households. There are negotiations happening now with the federal government around the National Housing Strategy to look at social housing generally and housing in this province. We recommend that it be extended to everyone who needs housing.

We need to collect better data on rental housing through Housing Nova Scotia, through Canada Mortgage and Housing, so we have a clearer picture of our situation. We would like to see a commitment from the government to ending homelessness in the province. There have been some overtures; there is funding available, but we haven't seen a firm commitment from the provincial government to this end. We've seen it from the federal government, but we'd like to see it from all levels, actually.

Thank you very much, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Deveaux, for your presentation.

Mr. Orrell.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you, Mr. Deveaux, for your presentation. Being a Cape Bretoner, it's a real eye-opener, right? As you said, you don't see people sleeping in

the streets or in storefronts or on corners, and so it's a real shocker to think that there are that many people who are homeless on our beautiful island, but obviously, they are.

My biggest question - with the number of females who are there - and the number of males, actually, because it's almost 50/50 - what specific services could you use or do we need to really, really, really and truly address homelessness on Cape Breton Island?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Deveaux, I should have explained that I will recognize each person for the purposes of Hansard and recording, and I should also explain that we will start off as we normally do in the committee with a question and a supplementary. We will make our way around, and we will attempt to get as many questions in as we can, and we will change as needed.

MR. DEVEAUX: Okay. Our immediate needs are fairly simple and they are on the list of recommended policy and funding interventions.

We need expanded emergency shelter services for women and youth in CBRM. When you are in the middle of a homelessness crisis, you need a place to land in order to start breaking that cycle and escape your current situation, in getting the supports and services you need in order to turn your life around.

An emergency shelter is an essential component to a homeless-serving system because it does give people an immediate end to their current crisis, which is homelessness. It gives them a place to sleep that night, a hot meal, a hot shower, and a chance to start working to change things. That is one of the most immediate needs that we see.

The other is rent supplements. We need to be able to help people bridge that gap between what they can get on income assistance and what landlords are charging to get people into safe, affordable housing.

I mentioned that we helped house 130 individuals last year. We have a small pot of money, available from the federal government, that is very small and time-limited for rent supplements and we guard it very closely because we have to make it stretch, but what we end up doing is putting people into housing that is substandard, poor quality. You know, it's cheap because that's what people can afford, but it's certainly not conducive to permanently ending your cycle of homelessness. So, those rent supplements are crucial. They exist here in HRM, and they are badly needed to help end homelessness in CBRM.

Those are the two main things. Some of the other things we could use is a transitional housing facility for youth escaping homelessness, with dedicated live-in supports. They have some great facilities here through the Phoenix program in HRM, but we are often faced with a situation in CBRM - because we have nowhere for youth to go - with putting youth on a bus to Halifax to access Phoenix youth programs because we don't have the programming at home. We have an out-migration problem already, so it doesn't sit well with anybody that in order to access services we are sending youth to Halifax.

A transitional facility that specifically addresses youth homelessness would be needed, as well.

MR. ORRELL: I guess being the second-largest municipality in the province, how does the funding - you are talking about what Halifax has that we don't have, and I imagine that is a funding issue more than anything - how does the funding compare to Halifax as far as what CBRM receives for homelessness and what Halifax receives for homelessness - any indication of how they are not related, I guess, or what the difference is, being that they are the second largest municipality with probably the second largest homelessness, I would think?

MR. DEVEAUX: I haven't seen official numbers on provincial homelessness funding. I've done a rough estimate, and it is rough, and it is in around \$7 million annually. I know specifically what the homelessness funding is in CBRM. Up until the end of last year, our Community Homeless Shelter received \$118,000 to operate. Recently, we had an increase of \$42,500 for the operation of the Community Homeless Shelter. I mentioned that Housing Nova Scotia has increased funding for the Housing Support Worker program. The youth component of that is \$100,000, and the adult component of that is \$57,000 annually for two years. So, we're in around \$300,000 out of a \$7 million provincial budget - very low, especially given the numbers of homeless individuals that we're seeing.

That's my rough estimate. I haven't gotten official numbers from the department on homelessness spending in this province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Martin.

MS. TAMMY MARTIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I am actually speechless. To sit here and hear this as a Cape Bretoner is extremely upsetting, for one, and unbelievable, for two. As a woman, if I were homeless, there is nowhere for me to go in CBRM, with my child - there's nowhere for my child to go. I'm hearing that \$7 million is allocated for Halifax or HRM for their homelessness program, and CBRM, as Mr. Orrell said, the second-largest municipality in the province, is allotted about \$300,000. Probably per capita, we have a higher rate of homelessness, because we are a heck of a lot smaller, but the numbers are almost equal.

I'm disgusted to hear this, that it's just one more part of how CBRM receives nothing and HRM receives everything. Honest to God, I think I'm speechless - obviously not. So, the people who come into my office every day who are 54 - male or a female - and they tell me that, and I call housing and I say, where can we put them? I'm sorry, there's nowhere that we can put them, they need to couch surf. Is this the same across the province?

MR. DEVEAUX: Well, I can say that there are no public housing options available for single, non-senior adults across this province. This is a provincial problem. It's a huge gap in service, it's not just in Cape Breton. Public housing in this province is available for families and seniors, and it has been that way since the 1970s. As I mentioned, it doesn't

reflect current demographics or current need. It is excluding an entire demographic of individuals, and it needs to be looked at. It's something that, as a province, we have to figure out, so we can provide housing for everyone. In that sense, CBRM is not unique.

I believe that another point you mentioned is the per-capita homelessness, I believe it is higher, per capita, in CBRM. We have very high unemployment, we have high rates of poverty, we have high child poverty rates, and we have high rates of addiction to opioid drugs, and very few housing options. All these things add up to a pretty bleak picture in terms of the people who are experiencing homelessness in CBRM.

MS. MARTIN: Thank you for that answer. It's true, as Mr. Orrell said, we can drive down our streets in CBRM and we don't see people sleeping in the streets, but as politicians, we do know that that exists. To me, this is another systemic reason of where we are in CBRM. Health care is in crisis, homelessness is greater in CBRM than in HRM, with a lot less funding. Education, there are so many things - high unemployment, high opioid addiction, with absolutely no services available for these situations, like opioids, mental health - we have to come to Halifax for that.

I think I heard you say that with the Phoenix Youth program. If there was a young person who was homeless, the best we can do, of course, is to send them to HRM because we can offer them nothing in CBRM.

[10:45 p.m.]

MR. DEVEAUX: I know that's not the best we can do - that's what we have to do. We do have a Housing Support Worker for youth now; they just started in February. There are 13 youth already enrolled in that program. We have a pilot project that we received funding for a year ago, a Housing First for Youth program. It's a robust program and it's federally funded through a pot called the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness. The funding ends at the end of this year. We were able to help 16 youth remain at home, engage in skill development work with Pathways to Employment, engage in job shadowing and employment opportunities, and also had some rent supplement dollars attached to that to help people find good, safe, independent housing.

Add on top of that emergency shelter services, then we have best-case scenarios. We're keeping youth at home. We're engaging them with proper services and supports. We're not sending them to Phoenix and we're not breaking their social ties. We're not uprooting them out of whatever education or employment opportunities they're currently enrolled in. They can stay at home. They can get the supports and services they need and they can break that cycle of homelessness. There are all kinds of research out there that indicates if you can break that cycle of homelessness early, especially with youth, you end it for a lifetime.

Those services are essential. They need to be bolstered. They need additional provincial funding in order to make them more robust. But the best scenario is that we have

the resources we need to be able to serve anybody who is experiencing homelessness in CBRM.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I guess first off, I'd like to thank you for being here. I think Cape Breton is lucky to have an organization such as yours to bring not only the advocacy that you bring but the numbers in the demographics of what you're dealing with, so I do commend you on that.

I think all of us on both sides - we're a little disadvantaged over here, we don't have a Cape Bretoner with us in the crew here. I know for myself, certainly access to housing in my area is a concern that I have also, and I think I'm not going to say there are differences where we're the same. I wish that we had a group that was pulling the numbers. I know Bernadette MacDonald does a lot of work down our way - I'd certainly give a shout out to her, we work closely with her.

It was interesting, you mentioned that the second most important thing that you'd like to see dealt with is the rent supplement. I know that we did immediately reduce - we brought the numbers down 25 per cent which was progress. We're targeting another 30 per cent over the next three years, 10 per cent a year. At the end of your summary, you mentioned a lot of good places where money is being spent and I think you said good progress. I think that's what we all want to see.

You did mention an awful lot of partnerships that you had - a tremendous amount in working with sexual violence, which is really commendable. I'm assuming you partner quite well with Housing Nova Scotia also. In saying that, we look to the private sector a lot. We look to the non-profits. We look to the community which is truly the strongest place to spend that money. What can we do better to work closer with those groups?

MR. DEVEAUX: In CBRM, we currently engage with those groups. We engaged with landlords certainly for the research that we did through Cape Breton University and with that, we asked landlords specifically during that research if they would be willing to partner with us to help find housing options for people exiting homelessness in the Housing First program - make good connections there - and we started building a good community network of private market renters, or rental property owners, to have places available.

The issue becomes affording those places. It's one thing to start those partnerships, it's another thing to be able to actually afford what landlords are charging. I mentioned we have a limited budget for rent supplements through the federal program. It's limited by amount - I think it's around \$24,000, and that funding ends as of March 31st next year. It does allow us to bridge that gap.

We're finding places for people to stay through those private partnerships with minimal rent supplement money, and being very creative. Being from Cape Breton, we

have to be very creative with the resources. So, we will partner with anybody who's willing, who is able to help us bridge those gaps.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I was also curious about the research that you did - the Service-Based and Point in Time. I think you said there were 60 of these done nationally. Were there any other of those surveys done in Nova Scotia?

MR. DEVEAUX: The Service-Based Count is a unique tool, and it has been done in different formats. P.E.I. did it and a few smaller rural places have used a similar type of tool to gauge homelessness because they face similar issues. They don't see people sleeping outside, and they want to ensure that they have a good capture of who is couch surfing and who is in shelters, and things of that nature. It's not a widely accepted national tool, but it gets some use. It's a good supplementary tool to the PiT Count.

One of the other things that we did this year for the first time, is we engaged in a national program through the 20,000 Homes Campaign. It's through an organization called the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. What it did was offer an additional tool on the day of the PiT Count so that you could actually register people by name and provide follow-up supports with them. It's called a By-Name List and Registry Week. So that's another tool that we're using. That was done in 40 communities nationally this year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Adams.

MS. BARBARA ADAMS: My question is about the costs of all of the various programs. We have a really nice snapshot here of what's going on in Cape Breton. The one piece that I'm wondering about most is how much the cost of each of the programs is, and if you took each of the recommendations and implemented all of them, what would the additional cost be? I realize it's not a simple question, but I'm wondering what the percentage of the budget is currently, and then if you implemented everything that you wanted here, how much would that change the overall budget?

MR. DEVEAUX: Well, if we look at total provincial spending at \$7 million, and we look at a fair provincial share based on our population demographics and the number of homeless individuals we see, we're talking in the millions of dollars in CBRM to properly address homelessness.

With that, we have done some work as to what the costs could be for some of the things I've mentioned there. We submitted a proposal very recently to expand emergency shelter services for women in CBRM. It went to the manager of Service Provider Relationships, Adam Fraser through DSP. He is my contact, because we wear multiple hats at Community Housing. It made its way to ESIA to Brandon Grant and to Housing Nova Scotia. It was a very modest proposal.

We have a community group that is interested in acquiring a building to expand shelter services in CBRM. The proposal we submitted was around \$350,000 in additional

funding. Still a pittance. It wouldn't give us 24-hour shelter services, but it would at least allow us to expand the number of beds for women.

If it comes to fruition it would also allow for some short-term temporary rooms available for youth experiencing homelessness, crisis homelessness in CBRM. It would solve a number of our issues. The MOSH-style, we haven't fully costed that out. I know it's in partnership with Capital Health here and that they contribute resources to it, but it would be more or less a nurse practitioner and a resource worker being mobile to visit shelters in CBRM to deliver basic health services.

Rent subsidies, we have 10 for youth currently. We were starting with zero at the start of this year. Anything is progress. You know we housed 130 people last year so we could certainly use rent supplements up into the hundreds to help people bridge that gap between income assistance and market rents.

The funding for the youth Housing Support Worker program is in place for one year, it is \$100,000 and it's a pilot project. We would like to see that continue. We just started the Housing Support Worker for adults. We have \$57,000 available. The program actually costs a little more than that because the funding from Housing Nova Scotia doesn't include funding for things like mileage and office and those kinds of things. That could be expanded as well and that's a low-cost program. These are all very low-cost programs, far cheaper than some of the programs that exist elsewhere in the province. Modest increases, but I will say that we could do a lot with a little.

MS. ADAMS: If there is a document having an outline of the actual funding for each of the programs, it would be great to have a copy of that.

The other comment you made before was that DCS has certain conditions that prevent people from accessing certain resources. I know that one of the ones I hear about is if you want to start a claim for income assistance or whatever, you have to start with a phone call. You can't walk into an office and just sit down and start the ball rolling there. For those who don't have cellphones or if you are homeless, there's maybe not access to a phone.

I wonder, could you comment on what conditions you repeatedly see preventing people from accessing the programs and the housing interventions that you are looking at that we could possibly advocate for changing, moving forward?

MR. DEVEAUX: Well I'll start by saying we partner with the Department of Community Services all the time and we're all on the same page in wanting to best serve our clients and we share those clients. At the community homeless shelter, if a man comes in and he is homeless we immediately start working with him to work with the department to make sure they have adequate income assistance, shelter allowance, any other money they may be eligible for. They can use our phone, they have a place to sleep, they can return to the shelter and they stay anywhere from two weeks to six weeks to get their lives back

on track. That works fairly well, they access what they can, which is not always adequate but it's a start.

For women, it's very difficult in CBRM, because if they get a hotel referral we don't have the opportunity to work with them. Working with them for one or two nights is not sufficient to help them meet with the department representative, establish a case file, secure income assistance, secure services and supports they need to maintain housing because in two nights they are homeless again - that doesn't lend itself well to trying to change your situation.

Some of the limits that are put, the department has a requirement that anyone who accesses those hotel night stays shows up at the department the next day and meets with a caseworker. It's a rare occurrence that that happens because of all the other issues that are happening. When I talk about the limits placed by the department, those are the major ones for women.

[11:00 a.m.]

There are other limits for youth. It's difficult for youth between the ages of 16 and 18 to access income assistance. The youth we see oftentimes can't return home because of situations there. Sometimes there's money available through Child Protection Services, sometimes not. It depends on what the youth is willing to divulge, but we see male youth staying at the shelter, choosing to stay there and not returning home, which is a good indicator to us that there are issues - regardless of what they tell us, there are issues that prevent them from doing so. It has been a challenge to try to access income support services for that group as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Leblanc.

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Deveaux, thank you so much for your concise and informative presentation. I just want to pick up on a couple of things you said before I ask my question. One of them is, I want to commend your use of the term "wrap them in supports," because I think that's a key part of this whole thing - the Housing First program where people are assisted in finding housing and then they are wrapped in supports. People in these vulnerable situations, that's exactly what they need. I really appreciated your use of the word "wrap." My office is next to an organization that does some of that work, and it's really important and necessary.

I also wanted to pick up on the truth that people in this age category that you're talking about - the single, non-seniors - can't find public housing. I wanted to flag that even the demographics that public housing is prioritizing - i.e. seniors and people with families - there's also a giant waiting list. At least in HRM there's a huge waiting list, and so to me that points to a serious problem with lack of investment in public housing. So now we're seeing the result of it, particularly in Cape Breton, and it's not a good situation.

Based on all the work that you're doing with people in all your various locations and organizations, can you talk a little bit about the reasons why people are presenting as homeless? What do you think is contributing to that? We saw in your presentation that 69 per cent cite low incomes. Can you sort of maybe dig into that a little more for us and talk about it?

MR. DEVEAUX: I would like to pick up on a point before I answer that. There have been numerous studies that link the federal withdrawal from housing to the increase in homelessness in this country. It's well reported. It's well documented. It has not been reported provincially. We haven't done any research around the lack of public housing options and its link to homelessness in this province. I'm sure that if we drill down on that a little bit we would find a correlation, if not a causal relationship.

As to the reasons people experience homelessness, homelessness is a very complex problem. The things that lead people to end up in a situation where they no longer have a place to sleep, it's hard to point your finger at one thing. Poverty is an obvious one, and people simply - you mentioned the 69 per cent of people reporting low incomes - people don't get enough to make ends meet. They don't get enough to be able to afford what landlords are charging for rent. They don't have other housing options, and it's simply a lack of income that leads people to situations like that.

The people we see at the shelter, they have all kinds of reasons why they became homeless, but we have seen people who had to make a choice between eating and heating their home in the winter and show up at the homeless shelter because they made a certain choice. Those are not frequent but they happen. Addiction is a major issue and people coming out of incarceration especially if they went into incarceration facing addiction issues - they usually come out and they're in often a worse-off situation than they were going in.

We have established a partnership with the Cape Breton Correctional Facility. They've hired a social worker there and we work very closely trying to prevent people who are exiting the correctional facility from entering into homelessness, and so we're able to get ahead of some of the issues that people face.

Mental health issues - it's very difficult and it's widely known it's hard to access mental health services in Cape Breton. The average wait for crisis services or a psychiatrist is 425 days. Many of the people in the Housing First program have mental health issues and one of our greatest challenges is accessing the proper supports that they need to stabilize their mental health so that they can stabilize their housing and it's not just our program. That's a system-wide issue in CBRM; everybody is facing that.

So, the issues are complex and, you know, when someone comes in to the Housing First program, the workers have to help them figure out their income, what rent they can afford, food, apartment set-up, and where they're going to live and those are just basic things. Then, we have to start wrapping the services around that include addiction services,

whether or not they're involved in methadone programs, mental health services, and everything else that goes along with it. It's very complex.

MS. LEBLANC: Thanks for that answer. I just wanted to ask - and this may seem like a very obvious question but in fact I'd love to hear your answer to it. My colleague asked what the cost of these programs would be and I'd like to hear what you think the cost of not addressing these issues would be in Cape Breton and in the province.

MR. DEVEAUX: A number of years ago, the Mental Health Commission of Canada did a Housing First pilot project in five major Canadian cities, and they did a number of things. They looked at housing first as an intervention in terms of system savings - the study was called *At Home/Chez Soi*. They found that for every one dollar put into Housing First and housing support services they saved three dollars in health care, justice, everything else, hospital stays.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness has done some research. I can't remember the exact figures, I would have to look it up, but they do have research on it and it's substantial. For not intervening in people's homeless situations, it costs the system far more than the intervention costs, for sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Deveaux, thank you for being here this morning and affording us committee members the opportunity to ask some questions. I'm a big believer in sustainable community development that's led by partnerships such as the one that you're referring to this morning. I think it's important for governments not to - I'll use the phrase, lead too much. It's important to know what the lay of the land is in a community in order to best suit the needs of that community.

I think you've done a tremendous amount of work to provide the committee with a good understanding of what CBRM is dealing with, as intimately as possible. As a member from off the island, it's helpful for me. I represent one community but as provincial members, I think we all wear a couple of different hats and we have to look at things from a provincial perspective. So it's important in this context for non-Cape Breton members to have a better understanding of what's going on to my north.

I wear the hat of the Premier's ministerial assistant, the minister responsible for the youth portfolio, and you made a couple of comments and I will just highlight them to add some context.

Youth are difficult to reach and not often accessing services. Mr. Deveaux, I'd like you to perhaps expand on any information you have gathered on why that is, in terms of accessing those services, and we will go from there.

MR. DEVEAUX: That's a generally accepted principle nationally, that youth are more difficult to access in terms of figuring out the number of youth who are homeless, because they are not often presenting at, say, doctors' offices. At home, there are not a lot of youth programs to present that.

Part of the pilot that I mentioned, the Housing First for Youth program, includes the development of a youth homelessness strategy for CBRM, and the person hired to develop that strategy is working in partnership with a national organization called A Way Home, that does research for youth homelessness and provides programming.

She is also engaging with all of the youth service providers in CBRM to try to figure out what the exact situation is around youth homelessness, because we don't think that the PiT Count and the Service-Based Count will give us an accurate picture, so we are doing some development strategies with that.

What we are finding is that the youth who are accessing a lot of those programs are not always the same youth who are showing up as homeless, either at our shelter or presenting to our Housing Support Worker program, or even presenting to some of the service providers in the Service-Based Count, such as the hospitals, so we are missing a large number of those youth.

A lot of times it is because they don't know where to go or where to turn. They are young, they are just leaving home for whatever reasons, and they have other issues they are trying to contend with that prevents them from accessing the services. It is really the access points that is one of the biggest issues.

MR. JESSOME: Thank you for that answer, Mr. Deveaux. Do you have any idea or any expectations on when that youth homelessness elimination strategy will be completed? I would invite an opportunity to meet with that group in Cape Breton. I have to make a trip up in a couple of weeks' time, so maybe there is an opportunity for us to take a little bit of a deeper dive into that work. No obligation, but I'd be interested to meet with that group, if you so choose.

MR. DEVEAUX: Sure. A meeting would be welcomed and easy to arrange. We have a number of staff now working in the youth homelessness area.

The strategy will be developed by the end of this year. It has started and consultations have already started with youth, and with service providers, as well as with A Way Home, who are providing guidance for that strategy. It really is an attempt to develop a community plan with resource contributions from many different areas, including all levels of government, to make sure that we have adequate resources for youth experiencing homelessness.

We are also developing an affordable housing and homelessness strategy, generally, through the Affordable Housing and Homelessness Working Groups, and expect

that to be released late summer, early Fall and that will look at specifics around what is needed in terms of making sure we have a system that can serve anybody who enters into it who is experiencing homelessness, and making recommendations around what housing is needed to address some of the issues we see.

[11:15 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We'll go to one question as we've been around twice at two. We will run past 11:30 a.m. I've reviewed the correspondence and I think we'll probably run to about 11:40 a.m. I'll allow Mr. Deveaux some closing comments and we'll move to our correspondence. I think we'll have adequate time, from what I've looked at. So, we'll move to one question, we still have others who have not had a chance to ask.

Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess the big concern I have is that a lot of the housing stock that's available in Cape Breton would be in the Sydney area. Myself and Ms. Martin, from New Waterford, live outside that area and have a difficult time when people come to our office, to get them to you guys, for one thing, and to get them into safe, affordable housing and/or shelters and so on and so forth.

What can we do, as Cape Bretoners, politicians, but as a government and I'm talking all - not Liberals, Tories, NDP, but the whole works - what can we do as a government to help you and the homeless people in Cape Breton specifically and all over the province, to connect with the proper resources, the proper finances, the proper people to make sure that the people who need the services get them - what can we do about that, how can we fix that?

MR. DEVEAUX: Well a blank cheque would be nice. (Laughter) Transportation is a big issue, too, and geographically we're pretty spread out in CBRM. The services that exist, exist in Sydney, including shelter services. When we do our research studies we do go to Northside and New Waterford, Glace Bay, and partner up with some of the service providers in those areas as well - Northside it would have been the Cape Breton Residential Society; in New Waterford the Kin Centre; Northside would have been Community Cares and the food banks over there; Glace Bay, the local food bank and Town House helped us with figuring out the situation in those smaller communities.

Ideally it would be great to have some sort of transportation system, so if someone is in Glace Bay or New Waterford and homeless on a given night, they have a way to actually get to a shelter and not be on the street for the night, so transportation is an issue. Generally speaking, we don't have enough resources to meet the current demands of the numbers of homeless people we're seeing.

Housing First is doing a wonderful job. They can only do so much. Without having adequate shelter services and rent supplements, the job becomes very difficult. We really

need an increase in resources in order to at least help people have a level playing field in CBRM, as they do in HRM, to end their homeless situation and start getting out from under this.

The Homeless Hub and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness talks about something called “functional zero.” So, we’ve stopped talking about ending homelessness per se because in order to truly end homelessness we have to end the conditions that cause it, which means we have to end poverty, we have to have lots of housing, and we have to have robust supports for people experiencing mental health and addiction issues. So, ending homelessness without ending the preconditions that cause it is a bit of a pipedream right now.

But when they talk about functional zero they talk about a system that’s able to adequately serve anybody entering into it who is homeless. You are always able to match the appropriate resources and supports for anybody who ends up in a homeless situation, whether it be newly homeless or has been there before, and to help them break that situation and get into an independent housing situation.

We’re not there in CBRM; our system has major gaps in it. Shelter services, rent supplements and even support workers, and we’re making progress, but we’ve got a way to go.

MS. MARTIN: Thank you, Mr. Deveaux, for all of this. So, what I am hearing is that CBRM is the second-largest municipality in the province, and while we are all here to represent the province, CBRM is yet again being treated like the poor cousin. We have less than adequate services, less than adequate funding. It begs the question, why are homelessness and the lives of Cape Bretoners less important than those in HRM?

I have a lot of answers to that, but having said that, Mr. Chairman, I’d like to put a motion on the floor. I’d like to make a motion that this committee sign on today to pen a letter to the Minister of Community Services, requesting her urgent attention to homelessness in Cape Breton, and addressing the lack of funding in comparison to HRM.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I appreciate the motion. Bringing awareness to what’s going on is important for all of us. I think more importantly in respect to - I’m a firm believer that - it’s not that I like to sleep overnight on anything, but certainly consider something. I would say that at this point in time that motion isn’t something that I could support, but I would certainly like to consider it, if you would like to bring it back to another committee for discussion, but I’m a firm believer that you don’t just drop something in the middle. I’d also like to hear more from Mr. Deveaux, please.

MS. MARTIN: While I appreciate Mr. Wilson’s comments, we don’t have time to wait. People are dying in Cape Breton, and homelessness is a huge issue in Cape Breton.

We don't have time to wait. We need to address this today, just like it's being addressed in HRM. So, sadly, it's not something we can wait on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Further discussion? Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: My interpretation is we want to send a letter to the minister to further investigate the funding gaps that are in between Cape Breton and Halifax Regional Municipality. It's not something that's hard to get behind - just to write a letter to ask them to check into it, and see where the gaps exist, and if there is anything we can come up with. It's not a big ask. It's just an ask that the department look into it and see if there is any more they could offer to help with the situation in Cape Breton.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Leblanc.

MS. LEBLANC: Yes, it's a letter - that's all it is. I think we could all get behind it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson, I want to close it, because I would like to get back to Mr. Deveaux while we still have some time.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I would like to get back to him also. Yes, it's not a problem. We can support that.

MS. ADAMS: Just out of respect for the rest of the province, is it possible to amend your recommendation and say that we would like to look at the funding situation for the entire province?

MS. MARTIN: We're here talking about CBRM. We're talking about the disparity between funding in CBRM and HRM. If Shelburne or Annapolis or Pictou County or Waverley want to come forward and present the same, then absolutely, I would support that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There is a motion on the floor made by Ms. Martin. I don't know the exact wording, but if she would like to refer to it once more, then we shall vote on it. So, just for clarity on your motion, please move that for me one more time.

MS. MARTIN: I move that this committee pen a letter to the Minister of Community Services to request her urgent action and attention in investigating the disparity in funding between HRM and CBRM, and commit to reviewing same.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've all heard the motion. We've had lengthy discussion. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Thank you. We shall now move to Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: You have certainly shown us a lot of indication where there is a lack of funds to develop a better program. I understand there is \$3.9 million for the Cape Breton homeless association and 20 housing co-operatives in Cape Breton. Maybe you can talk about the number of community supports for the homeless and the number of beds that are available. We do have to try to solve the problem. I guess it's more we need, but at least you could give us some idea how the beds are looked after throughout every day or every night and give us a little more information on the type of community supports you do have from the community non-profit groups, government's Health and Wellness, and so on.

MR. DEVEAUX: Thank you for that question. As I mentioned, Cape Breton Community Housing also provides residential supports for individuals living with mental illness. This is through the Disability Support Program and that's where that \$3.9 million number comes from that you have. That's a separate program from the homelessness program, but that funds three group homes and eight small options homes for people who require anywhere from four- to 24-hour-a-day care through the Disability Support Program.

We happen to wear two hats at Cape Breton Community Housing. We do have the Disability Support Program side of things, which is funded through DCS, and then the homelessness side of things, which is separate from that funding.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Adams.

MS. ADAMS: Thank you, Mr. Deveaux. I had a situation - the person wasn't from my constituency but placed a call through to my office. She was moving from location to location because she didn't have a set place for her to live, and so therefore she couldn't apply for income assistance because she had to have a home address and so she was told she had to go to a shelter in order to apply for income assistance.

What do you tell women in Cape Breton, if there is no shelter for them to go to? How do they access income assistance if they have no place to live?

MR. DEVEAUX: It depends on if we can actually make contact with them. If they go to a hotel, usually we can't. We do have partnerships with Almost Home and Transition House, and if we can actually make contact with a person who is experiencing a crisis or issue, we will do our best to help them remedy that as quickly as we can.

It becomes very difficult if they don't have a place to sleep on the day they show up. That's the big issue - they want somewhere to stay that night and that's their immediate concern, and if we can't address that, we often lose contact with them.

We will dedicate staffing resources if the individual is willing to work with them - whether that's going to income assistance or negotiating with a landlord or doing whatever it is we can to help them change that situation, but there's only so much that we can do and

the person has to be willing as well. Oftentimes they hear, we don't have a place to put you up tonight, and we lose track of them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Leblanc.

MS. LEBLANC: Thank you. Something that I hear quite a lot from different people is that tying income assistance rates for shelters to the market is difficult because when - people have been calling for increases, but when increases happen, then rents go up, which is, at a certain point, okay because it's just like, you get the money and it goes to the landlord, but I'm just wondering, what do you think about the concept of rent control for that situation to kind of limit that phenomenon?

MR. DEVEAUX: I haven't seen much empirical evidence that suggests that if people have more money the rents go up automatically. I know it's anecdotally out there, but I'm not sure if there's research on that or not.

If that was the case, then there would have to be mechanisms in place to limit the rent increases, and some exist already in that landlords can only raise rents by so much at any given time based on a set schedule.

I don't know enough about rent controls to comment on whether or not they would be able to mitigate that situation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. DiCostanzo.

[11:30 a.m.]

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I'm really appreciative of all I learned from you today. It's wonderful. I have just a question in my mind about women's shelters because I'm actually with the Status of Women as a representative and I know that all, Bryony House, Alice House, everything that's available here, they're not government-run. They are a community that got together, and non-profit, and built it up. I'm just wondering how come this hasn't happened in Cape Breton and have you had any demands for those and it's a community that starts those and then government has helped them along the way.

So, what has happened in the past and why don't we have people who are taking charge and doing these things and government supports them - what do you have as answers for that, if you don't mind?

MR. DEVEAUX: It's true that many of the shelters in Nova Scotia have started up from community groups to address a need. The same is true of the Community Homeless Shelter in CBRM that's operated by Cape Breton Community Housing Association. It started as a need seen in the community by a group of interested and concerned individuals and eventually was able to get to a point where it acquired government funding, as have the other shelters that you have mentioned. With that, a community shelter, a homeless

shelter in CBRM can't operate without those partnerships and without that community support. I mentioned up until the end of last year our funding was \$118,000 a year; our expenses were in around \$210,000, per year.

So, we rely on the community to make donations, we fundraise, we have an annual auction, we work with all kinds of community partners including United Way to try to access those additional monies required to operate, and we also have been back and forth to the department on several occasions with deficits that we can't address and requesting assistance. It was nice to see the increase in funding from the department this year of \$42,500, but we're still \$40,000 to \$50,000 short this year in our operation of the homeless shelter, which means we still rely on community to make the homeless shelter operate.

With the other issues around women's homelessness and youth homelessness, we only started really looking in a systematic way at this two years ago and it was only after we conducted the service base counts and the PiT counts and the housing stock research that we had a clear indication that we had a serious issue and that the shelter capacity in CBRM was not equipped to deal with it. In that time, we have had lots of good media coverage around some of those numbers and we've had community groups step up and say what can we do to help, but we have no money, but they are offering to, you know, join together. We have good partnerships; the issue is that we're under-resourced.

So, the proposal we put forward to the government to expand shelter services is the result of being approached by a group of concerned citizens who want to contribute both in terms of providing supports, but also financially, to expanding shelter services. So, the timing is good. We have interested parties and we've done our homework. We've done our research, so we're ready for the next steps.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Chairman, I think I know who your auctioneer is for your auction every year - he might even be sitting in here today.

I guess just on a positive note, Fred, to finish off, you guys have done amazing work with a little bit of money. I know you could do a lot more if you had a little bit more money - a lot more money would be great, but a little bit more money would help. But I guess my big question is how many individuals realistically have you helped, and how many have you helped end their homelessness between your group and the community housing and so on and so forth - how many in Cape Breton have had that homelessness ended and how many, for lack of a better term, fall off the wagon, end up back there, and is there more we can do to keep them out of homelessness after we've solved the problem?

MR. DEVEAUX: I need to answer that question looking at pre- and post-housing first, because Housing First just made a huge change in our community in permanently ending homelessness. So, before Housing First - I mentioned folks were coming in and out of the shelter all the time, and they weren't breaking that cycle of homelessness, so to talk

about the number of individuals who ended homelessness in that time is difficult, because a return to homelessness is not exactly a positive thing.

Since Housing First, last year we ended homelessness for 130 individuals. The year before that was just under 100, and we've been in operation for about two years. We have 65 individuals enrolled in the Housing First program now. Those are people who were chronically or episodically homeless, and who were unable to break that cycle of homelessness without supports. So, 65 is a big number, and very comparable to what HRM is doing with their Housing First program as well.

We have the Housing Support Worker in place now for both youth and adults, so with the youth component that's provincially funded, we have 13 people enrolled in that in a very short time - a few months. The adult Housing Support Worker starts today. We have a wait-list of 25 individuals that we found on the PiT Count day through the By-Name List and Registry Week lists, who will be on that docket immediately.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Martin.

MS. MARTIN: Just a quick question. Mr. Deveaux, you mentioned, I believe, in your previous answer that you've put forth a proposal to the government for how to improve this. Have you heard back?

MR. DEVEAUX: Not officially. I know that it is being discussed. I haven't received any official word on how or where it's being discussed. I do believe that the government and the Department of Community Services recognize our issues. I do believe that there is a will on the part of the department to address some of these concerns. So, I have faith that we will be sitting down for negotiations with the department soon, because the longer we wait, the longer people are homeless, but I do feel that we're making progress with this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson, we have time for a very quick question.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I kept referring to that up there on the wall - looking at it after - your presentation was awesome. I've gone through it, and I'm not going to list everything, but I feel almost every one that I've seen here we are working on, or have worked with you on them. I don't see any real gaps there, which I'm kind of interested in. I know we can do more, and the complications - you talk about poverty. There is education also in there. There is the work that we're doing with Employment Support Services. There is the work that we're doing with Inspiring Communities and all those other things that tie in to homelessness.

I guess maybe the quick question will be around the National Strategy for Housing - the reduction, the plan of 50 per cent reduction within the next decade, and the bilateral negotiations that are going on. Are you providing Housing Nova Scotia with information that would help us and be more informed with these negotiations?

MR. DEVEAUX: I agree that there is great work happening, and that the government is doing good work, and we are making progress. To be fair, it's only in the last couple of years that we really understood the full scope of the homelessness issue - to be fair to everybody, but we have the issue - and there's good work happening.

I would not agree with the comment that there aren't gaps. There are huge gaps. If you're a woman and you are homeless tonight in Sydney, likely you don't have a place to stay. If you're a youth and you are homeless in Sydney tonight, likely you don't have a place to stay. So, those are major gaps, I would argue.

Housing Nova Scotia, I presented to them first in April of last year, and the initial research we had done around the PiT Count and the Service-Based Count and the housing stock. They received the technical reports from each of those studies, and we've been communicating quite a bit since then.

I was invited to a session in November with all of the other homelessness service providers in the province, which I think is likely the first time that has happened, that Cape Breton was represented at a meeting such as that, and so that was welcomed. All the indicators are that they are well aware of the problem. They have allocated some funding for the Housing Support Workers and the 10 rent supplements for youth, and are working towards trying to rectify some of these situations.

We are making progress. It's slow, but it's happening, but more needs to happen.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Deveaux. If you'd like to take the next four or five minutes to offer some closing comments, that would be just fine.

MR. DEVEAUX: Well, I want to thank the committee for having me. It's always nice to escape the Island for a short time. It's nice to be able to bring forth an issue that exists not only at home, but as a provincial issue.

It's somewhat discouraging to see the funding disparities, I'll be honest, especially where they are so huge. We're receiving now less than 3 per cent of the total provincial funding for homelessness, and we have a fair share of the homelessness issue. That discrepancy is a concern. It's a concern on the ground when you see individuals who are homeless and don't have a place to stay, and there aren't options available for them.

Really, we're all in it for the same reasons, and that's to help Nova Scotians. I know we're all committed to the same things in that regard, that is making sure that everyone has equal and good opportunity to change their situation.

I would urge this committee to keep in mind the presentation that I did this morning when making funding allocations and doing departmental reviews of funding allocations, and also to be a little more proactive in seeking information about situations in areas of the province outside of Halifax. We were able to conduct some pretty high-level research in

Cape Breton and figure out the situation there. It would be good to have government be a more active partner and a proactive partner in that, and help us figure out our situation, in addition to helping us solve issues moving forward.

I'll end with that, and thank everyone for having me, and wait to hear.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much and we appreciate having you, especially your first time joining us. We had an opportunity for 21 questions today, and thank you for your detailed answers, they were very detailed. We appreciate that very much.

We've got a little bit of business left to do, so you can either sit, if you like, or you can make your way to the back. I think the media could potentially be looking. Mr. Laroche is back there - he may want you, he may not.

Thank you again, Mr. Deveaux, we really appreciate it.

Committee members, we will move on with some business. Not a whole lot here, but I wanted to make sure we had a few minutes. I did review it, there is some correspondence, as you will see on your agenda. I did not call a recess, in case any of you are interested in knowing that, so I will call order, and we will come back to business.

As you will see on your agenda there is some correspondence. We'll start from the request for information dated December 5th, we have that in the Sexual Assault Network. Was there any discussion? That was just information that was provided, but I wanted to ask if anyone had anything further, if what was requested and asked for was detailed there. If none, that's fine, we'll keep it for our file. Good, okay.

The second piece was the requested information from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women from our February 6th meeting. Again, some information provided, as you can see, there's a follow-up to three specific requests for additional information. They are listed on Pages 1 and 2, for our information, but if there is any discussion on that - does that look as though it has answered our questions on what we were looking for? Ms. Adams, was that your request?

MS. ADAMS: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're okay with that. On our next piece, we have the response from Kendall Worth on behalf of the Benefits Reform Action Group - a response from the Department of Community Services, December 1st. I don't know if any of you have had a chance to read this, but you may take a minute. Ms. Leblanc.

[11:45 a.m.]

MS. LEBLANC: Yes, I had a chance to read it and in it, the Benefits Reform Action Group does request to be witnesses here. I just wanted to say that I support that request. I

think this is a group that is made up of First Voices and also Legal Aid lawyers, and a bunch of different people working with and who experience issues related to income assistance, and other Department of Community Services programs. I think hearing from them first-hand, here in front of us, an opportunity to listen to them and also ask them direct questions, would be really helpful and beneficial. So, I want to fully support that request.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I have no doubt that they are a very worthy group. I read the package also, and I think probably a lot of the information that was asked could be responded to by the department directly to deal with that. From my perspective, I think that would be a very easy way to deal with those points.

MS. LEBLANC: Actually, in the letter itself it refers to the fact that they've sent letters and we've sent a letter to the Minister of Community Services, and they are unsatisfied with the responses, so I feel like maybe we should give them a crack at hearing from them first-hand.

MS. ADAMS: I would just like to second the recommendation from Ms. Leblanc. The Ombudsman Report had about 1,800 complaints in the previous year, and over 400 of them were for the Department of Community Services. I don't know exactly what they were for - certainly that's a step to take - but the number one complaint that I get is about this issue.

So, whether it's this group, or this group in partnership with other groups, I think this is something we need to hear from. Unless there is another group that could speak more succinctly on these issues, I would support having them come to speak in front of our group.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I know this committee doesn't have a subcommittee on agenda setting, but we will be having an agenda-setting meeting. I'm not sure - Madam Clerk, your thoughts? We have a June 5th meeting. We have a September meeting, which I want to talk about in a second as well. In our June meeting we need to maybe talk about what the agenda looks like for Fall. There is one scheduled for September, and I'll go to that now because it's September 4th, which is the Labour Day weekend. Usually that next day would be a constituency day for most of us. So, I was thinking perhaps we would move that out one week, if that was possible. I'll refer to you, Madam Clerk for the 11th, does that work? Is there any reason anyone knows of why we couldn't meet September 11th - and would that be favourable - as opposed to September 5th?

Just because it was brought up quickly - why don't we bring it back for final discussion in June. Take it back to your caucuses. I don't know what each representative or caucus is doing, but why don't we put it on for our agenda just for final discussion around the September date at our June meeting so there is ample time. I would suggest that we also move the request as well. Let's put that on and see what other agenda - so we

probably should bring, as per normal, two or three agenda items to move forward into the Fall of 2018 and beyond, so that our clerk has time to book them as well. Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Back to that point, in the interim between now and then if we could ask for further clarification from the department on the areas that they feel they're deficient in the answers. I feel the department should be able to reply to that. I'm surprised that we don't have anything there that feels that it has met that, but I would suggest in the interim that we ask the department to reply to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just for clarity, on Mr. Worth's letter?

MR. GORDON WILSON: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As I suggested, if that's suitable, I'd still like us to take that back, come in June with an agenda from our caucuses. We're not going to see anyone until October - new - that's not already on the agenda. We have time. Let's do that. There may be some questions that caucuses will ask about that but let's come back in June to ensure that we have a list that we can discuss and we will allow some time for.

Who is our June witness, Darlene? The Department of Community Services, foster care.

MRS. DARLENE HENRY (Legislative Committee Clerk): The College of Social Workers.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will allow ourselves enough time in that meeting, an extra 15 minutes or so perhaps in that meeting, just to go through and set our agenda and put forward what we would like to do at that time and add that to our agenda of the day.

Can we send them in advance? I know I've been around a long time but some committees used to send and have notice of what the other caucuses were putting forward. I don't think it really matters - we always did, yes. I would suggest that we do the same, go back, send to the clerk your wishes, so it will be a very quick discussion in June as to moving forward for the Fall agenda-setting and so on, so let's do that in June.

We'll add Mr. Worth's and Ms. Leblanc's request. Ms. Martin, did you have something further to add?

MS. MARTIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just as employees of the province, I think that anybody who wants to speak to us that we should afford them the opportunity, regardless of the circumstances.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hence the reason I'm going to move it out. I'm not prepared to say anything today. I want to move that out so we can take it back and see what is what on all these files. I know there has been a fair bit of correspondence back and forth, so let's

just see where things are on this thing and certainly we can discuss it further. If it's the wish of the NDP caucus and Ms. Leblanc to put that on the June agenda for the future, that's just fine, so we'll discuss it further then.

Is there any further business before we move on? Hearing none, we stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:51 a.m.]