

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, May 7, 2019**

**Committee Room**

**Career Rising Program**

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**COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Keith Irving, Chair  
Rafah DiCostanzo, Vice-Chair  
Ben Jessome  
Bill Horne  
Hon. Gordon Wilson  
Keith Bain  
Larry Harrison  
Lenore Zann  
Susan Leblanc

[Suzanne Lohnes-Croft replaced Hon. Gordon Wilson]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

**WITNESSES**

Department of Community Services

Brandon Grant - Executive Director, ESIA  
Joy Knight - Director, ESIA



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2019**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**10:00 A.M.**

CHAIR  
Keith Irving

VICE-CHAIR  
Rafah DiCostanzo

THE CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services, and my name is Keith Irving. I'm the MLA for Kings South and the Chair of this committee. We're gathered here today on this beautiful May morning to receive a presentation from the Department of Community Services with respect to the Career Rising program.

I'd like to begin by asking my colleagues around the table to introduce themselves to our guests.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Welcome, everyone. As most know, but for our new guests, the washrooms and coffee are just in the antechamber to the left as you exit the room. In case of an emergency, we will exit through the Granville Street entrance and proceed around to Grand Parade Square by St. Paul's Church.

A reminder to put your electronic leashes on vibrate or off, and a reminder that pictures during the committee meeting are only for accredited press members, so please refrain from pictures. As interesting as this all gets, we'll leave it to the media to report on it. Also, a reminder to my colleagues and our guests here to wait to be acknowledged by the Chair before speaking.

Now I'd like to turn it over to our guests. Welcome, Mr. Grant and Ms. Knight. You can introduce yourselves and your role within the department, and then proceed to your presentation. I think we can give you 10 or 15 minutes to outline the Career Rising program.

Mr. Grant.

BRANDON GRANT: Mr. Chair, committee members, thank you for the opportunity to present on the Career Rising program to you and answer any questions you may have about it.

My name is Brandon Grant. I'm the Executive Director of Employment Support and Income Assistance with the Department of Community Services. With me is my colleague Joy Knight, who is the Director of Employment Support Services, also with the ESIA program.

Mr. Chair, members, for some young people in Nova Scotia, poverty is an intergenerational reality that they have to face. However, they are strong, resilient, motivated young people who simply need access to tailored supports and services to thrive and be independent.

Each young person is unique and the program we offer needs to be flexible and responsive to meet their needs. It needs to help young people build confidence and connections within community, gain work experience, find mentors, identify their career goals, and plan for post-secondary. This is why the Department of Community Services continues to invest in supports for youth attached to our department across a continuum of programming. Career Rising is just one of the programs delivered by Employment Support Services, part of the Employment Support and Income Assistance division. I'm pleased to share detailed information on this program with the committee today.

The Career Rising program is part of a collection of programming that's offered through the Employment Support and Income Assistance division, or ESIA. One of the branches of ESIA is Employment Support Services. One of the changes that we've made through transformation is a focus on preventive programming. We have a program called the Youth Development Initiative, which is an initiative that helps support community organizations or provides wage subsidies to help young people to get their first job or to build employability skills.

We have new programming that we're developing for youth who reside in residential facilities. We have the Immigrant Youth Career Exploration program. We have a new program called the Inspiring Success program, which is government departments hiring our ESIA dependents as well as our ESIA post-secondary students to get a job placement within government departments across the province.

We also expanded our post-secondary education programming in 2016 to develop a new stream called Educate to Work for Dependents program, which supports our ESIA dependents to go to community college and provide them with financial supports to do so.

We also have ESIA client programming and the new EDGE program, which is a program offered in Kentville and in Halifax, which is focused on our 19- to 26-year-old young people who are on our ESIA caseload. We have wage subsidies and project-based funding. We also support the Work Activity Centres and other post-secondary programs, including the Educate to Work program that provides financial support for our ESIA clients to go to community college; as well as the Career Seek program, which provides financial support for our clients to go to university.

Career Rising is part of a continuum of supports that we're building, so that our programming in some cases can support our ESIA dependents as young as 12. We have programming that's focused on supporting our clients who are considered young people as well.

We know we need to have more of an emphasis on young people because there are a number of unique challenges that young people face that we have to account for as we transform our program.

The Career Rising program that I'm here to speak to members about today, the goal is that it supports high school students to gain work experience, to develop their career goals, and to go on to post-secondary education. It's a partnership with the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council and it includes a variety of different component pieces to the program, including a two-week skills development camp in which young people get exposure to the agricultural sector and receive training relevant to a successful placement.

Following that, young people get their first job in many cases and a paid work experience with a local farmer or business that works within the agricultural sector. We also have ongoing workforce and career development supports post the work experience, and a new feature of the program includes a post-secondary grant of \$1,200 each year for those participants that complete the program, as well as a contribution of \$500 from the Community Credit Union of Cumberland Colchester. People get skills and training; they get their first job and first paycheque and exposure to the industry; and if they complete the program, they have some money set aside for their post-secondary education.

The bulk of our referrals and who this program is for are our ESIA clients, with a targeted age of 15- to 19-year-olds who are in high school. This program is also offered for our youth in care, as well as our CYFS - Child, Youth and Family Supports-funded youth outreach programs. That's where the bulk of the referrals are coming from to participate in Career Rising.

We currently have program sites in Kentville, Bridgewater, Truro, and North Sydney. In 2017, our first two sites were Kentville and Truro. Here's some information in terms of the amount of employers, the youth that were placed initially in the program, the amount of youth that have completed, with the average grade as well. The following year we expanded to North Sydney and Bridgewater; with that, we had to recruit new employers as well as youth to participate.

We completed a survey because, again, this is a fairly new program that started in 2017. We're learning along the way - engaging with our young people - to understand more about the program: 80 per cent stated that the training week helped them prepare for their job placement; 83 per cent felt more comfortable starting work after orientation week. It's clear from this that we've learned a number of things from the survey with our young people in order to make changes to the program as we move forward.

Of the 42 youth who have completed the programs, 64 per cent have graduated or are graduating in 2019, so that goes back to the average age of the young people within the program.

Of the 27 who graduated or are graduating in 2019, 33 per cent are attending or have enrolled in post-secondary. It's still a little bit early, given that we're in the first couple of years and the average grade is either 11 or 10, but we're excited that we have seen our first couple of Career Rising participants get into post-secondary education as well, to access their post-secondary grant.

One of the things that our team is also excited about is we have been recently recognized through OECD's Observatory of Public Sector Innovation as an example of an innovative practice. From here, in 2019, we are supporting our post-secondary students and linking our post-secondary students up with programming that has been developed over the last number of years.

The great thing about the Career Rising program is there are other opportunities in which young people can participate in other programs being offered through the Department of Community Services.

I spoke briefly about the Inspiring Success program that links our post-secondary students to job placements within government, but also the Educate to Work for Dependents program which provides financial support for our dependents of the ESIA program to go to community college.

We're expanding so that our referrals can come from New Glasgow, Amherst, Cumberland County, Glace Bay, and Sydney. We are also offering a weekend leadership retreat for returning participants and looking at expanding the view of the program to other sectors as well. We started with the agricultural sector, but we're looking for partnerships in place in which we can expand the amount of businesses that can participate.

We're just getting started and, again, this is a new program. There has been excellent collaboration amongst local communities and businesses that have participated. What's exciting is we have some businesses that have even forgone a wage subsidy because they believe strongly in the fact that they can support young people and they see it as being part of a good business community to support young people in their communities.

This is one of the programs that is part of the ESIA transformation and, again, we are still continuing to learn from this and will continue to make program adjustments as we move forward.

Thank you very much and I'd be happy to take any questions from the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Grant. As per normal, I'll be keeping a speakers list of questioners. Certainly, in the first round, we'll do one question and one supplementary, and if the list gets long and our time gets tight, with the permission of the committee, I'll move to just one question.

Maybe we'll get started with Ms. Zann.

LENORE ZANN: Thank you very much for the presentation. Agriculture was the first industry and now you're moving into fisheries, natural resources, and also there are some placements in credit unions - is that correct?

BRANDON GRANT: That's correct.

LENORE ZANN: Who chose agriculture, fisheries, and natural resources - why were those industries chosen?

BRANDON GRANT: Originally, one of the things that we wanted to look at was how we can support our young people entering into the labour market and get exposure to an industry that is diverse and has a variety of different roles and job functions. Through conversations that we've had with the Co-op Council, but also with other departments, we felt that a partnership around the agricultural sector would be a good place to start.

What's great about the programming and the businesses that have participated is there is a wide variety of functions that people are doing as they participate in the program. Young people are able to work with animals and with small equipment, and they're able to be outdoors and participate in storefronts within the retail sector.

[10:15 a.m.]

There's such a diversity within the agricultural sector, it felt like a right fit for young people who would be seeking jobs that were interesting and engaging. We feel that there are other sectors that fit within that. The good part, too, is that we wanted to have a rural focus as well, because often we'll see things start within the city, and we wanted to make

sure that we had an expanded view of our programming so that young people were able to participate more fully.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thanks. I was caught off guard. (Interruption)

THE CHAIR: That's okay. It's whoever puts their hand up first at this committee.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you for the presentation. I have lots of questions, but I'm going to start with this one. You mentioned that there is a total of 49 youth who have completed the program so far. How many dependent children between the ages of 15 and 19 are there in families receiving income assistance? How does the department determine eligibility for this particular program?

BRANDON GRANT: As of 2018 data, we have 3,057 beneficiaries between the ages of 15 and 19. In terms of the fit within the department, we have created this program for ESIA dependents, as well as our youth who are in care of the minister. One of the things our ESIA caseworkers are mindful of is that we're recruiting young people and making sure that it's a right fit, that we're providing information in advance of the program for parents, as well as for the young people.

We have a variety of information sessions for folks who can participate, because we want to make sure that young people know what they're getting into and what the program is about. Beyond that, there isn't a strict set of criteria around it, if you're an ESIA dependent or a kid in care or being served by one of those CYFS organizations that serve youth at risk.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Currently, the program is only available to those folks who are connected to one of the communities, correct? In terms of that eligibility and that number - 3,057 - can you break down how many of those kids are in those areas? Basically, I'm just trying to get the city kids out of the picture. How many kids who would fulfill the requirements of the geographical area would be in that pool of youth?

BRANDON GRANT: I don't have that level of granular detail. What I would say is that this is just one of the programs that are available for communities. Wherever possible, we try to have a provincial program in place. We talked in the presentation about Employment Support Services, so a lot of those programs are also available for youth in community. I don't have the specific breakdown of how many dependents would fit within the Kentville versus Truro area right now.



THE CHAIR: We'll now move to Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: I'm glad you're here today. I'm glad to hear how well this program is doing. I'd just like to get your impression on how far you think you can build the numbers of students going through the ESIA and this Career Rising program for the future. Do you see it continuing on, or do you have to have some sort of study to decide whether it should or not?

BRANDON GRANT: What I would say is that this is a fairly new program, and as the committee members heard, we've expanded after the first year into two new communities, and we further expanded to other areas in which we can receive referral.

I would say that our focus right now is understanding the survey results and where we can make improvements, and also looking at ways in which we can build further partnerships in other sectors as well - recruiting businesses and understanding what the needs of our young people are before we look to expand further.

We've expanded every single year. We're in the middle of the process now for the upcoming year, in which we're recruiting participants, and what's exciting is we're having some good initial success with participants signing up for the program, but we'll have more learning as we've had in each year afterwards about what our next steps might be.

BILL HORNE: A quick supplementary - I just wanted to get your ideas on, have you interviewed each one of the students over the terms of their employment to see how they feel about the program and how it has helped them?

BRANDON GRANT: We've conducted a survey, and as folks can see within the presentation, the survey results point to areas in which people feel supported, feel that they understand the program and what those are. We've also received an evaluation from the Co-op Council, as well, to have a greater understanding of what the successes are of the program, but also what some of the challenges are. It's good information that we've received so far from program participants that we've encouraged to participate in the evaluation and surveys that we go through.

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICONSTANZO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have too many questions, but my first one is: How many employers have participated and how are you advertising or promoting yourselves? I know you're just outside of the city right now, you're only in the rural areas. When are you hoping to promote yourselves also in the city, and other employers?

BRANDON GRANT: In 2017, we had 12 employers for the Kentville and Truro areas. In 2018, when we had Kentville, Truro, North Sydney, and Bridgewater, we had 40 employers with eight returning employers as well. There are a number of things, a number of avenues in which there has been promotion to recruit employers and I might ask, with the Chair's permission, for Joy to supplement my answer.

There are relationships that the Co-op Council has. There are employers that the department has worked with in the past and, strategically, we know the certain sectors within the community that would want to apply and reaching out to them as well. With your permission, I ask Joy to supplement.

JOY KNIGHT: With the wonderful relationship that we have with the Co-operative Council, we are able to leverage their vast membership, but because we've seen such success over the last two years, we have employers starting to approach us now to start to get engaged, which has been really, really positive and we find because we're focused on rural communities and sectors that have a labour market need in their community that is unmet in some communities, we are finding employers coming to our door now to help to meet that summer labour market need, which is great - it's a benefit to both the employer and to the program and our youth. We're very happy to say that of the 40 employers that participated last year, we have 39 returning this year - and the only exception is because their season starts too early for our program.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: There is no actual incentive because the incentive is that they are looking for employees in most of those sectors. I know you're giving incentives to the employee or to the kids who are joining the program, but are you giving anything to the employer as an incentive program?

BRANDON GRANT: Employers are eligible for our wage subsidy program but, again, I think what's been clear from the interactions that we've had with employers is that employers and businesses and farmers within the community see this as part of being a good business within community and they've shared that feedback with us, so they are eligible for the wage subsidy program that's offered through our division in order to hire the young people.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bain.

KEITH BAIN: Thank you very much for your presentation. I want to start off by asking a couple of questions that are related to resources and I know that resources is one of your aims at this point, but a lot of resource jobs are disappearing. Has any consideration been given to the forestry sector, especially with the possibility that Northern Pulp could close next year - what's being done to promote the forestry industry, I guess, in that respect?

BRANDON GRANT: I think we're looking at a variety of opportunities. I think what's exciting about this program, seeing how employers are stepping up and stepping forward - I think there are a variety of different employers and different sectors in which we can explore. I think as we move through the process of getting through the next year and working with the cohort that we have moving forward, we'll have to have a discussion on where it makes the most sense to expand beyond the sectors that we have now.

KEITH BAIN: If the person who's going to be participating in it expresses an interest in forestry, or let's say geology, and jobs are scarce in those fields, what consideration is given to the individuals because that's their choice? How do you make it all fit together?

BRANDON GRANT: I think we would try to do whatever we could in order to account for the needs of our young people. The barrier is finding an appropriate employer and place, and making sure that we haven't expanded so far out that we're not able to support that.

I would say that there are a couple of things that we want to achieve through this program. One is we want our young people who are supported through the department to get the same opportunities as all young people in Nova Scotia get. I think as we've developed the leadership, job experience, and post-secondary components of the program - we're starting to bridge that gap between our clients and the challenges that they face.

I think we shared during the presentation that we understand our programming needs to be flexible to individual needs, and I think that's the principle that we'll carry forward as we look at other areas and other industries that we can expand further.

THE CHAIR: Not to surprise Ms. Leblanc, but you're up again.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Amazing, this is so great. I'm wondering if you can provide a demographic breakdown of the individuals who have completed the program so far. How many are male or female, how many self-identify as African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq, individuals with a disability, or any other notable demographic categories?

BRANDON GRANT: We have some information available, and some others that we don't have available at this time. We know that there are 11 youth in care who have participated. We know that the remaining would be either ESIA dependents or referred clients. We know that we've had a couple of participants in the program who were refugees. I think that's what we can share at this point. We'd be happy to break down any other information at a later time.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That would be great, and the question I asked earlier, if we could get that number of people - anyway, if we can get that information later that would be awesome.

I'm wondering if you could walk us through a day in the life of this program. I'm assuming that maybe you or Ms. Knight attended a day. Could you talk about the kind - if you just think of one person in the program, the specific job that they were doing, and if the work or the fact that the person has gone into university, or is applying to university, is that directly connected with that work or with the industry in general?

BRANDON GRANT: We're pulling up the agenda, the training, to give the member an appreciation of the training. A day in the life of the program - the first component piece would be the training program in place in which our young people would get exposure to the industry through presentations, but also a variety of different training in order to make sure that they're ready to enter into this field and to be available for the work.

Part of that is training that's offered for first aid. We also have employment readiness available in training so that young people can understand everything from how to appropriately dress, to what the proper procedures are within a normal workplace. There are component pieces like financial literacy. There's also a program that has been offered through a not-for-profit around youth engagement to build trust within the group, so they can participate as part of the cohort.

[10:30 a.m.]

A day in the life during the workplace really depends on where that young person is placed. We've had a number of folks who have been placed within a retail storefront; we've had other young people who work with animals. One young person, part of their role was to participate in horse rides for young people at the farm, so they would work with a horse and the clients that would participate. It depends on the work placement and that's the good part about the program; it varies, depending on the young person and where they are placed within the agricultural sector, because there's so much variety in things that people can do and participate in.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: Thank you for being here, it seems like a pretty exciting program. I know it's a little early but have there been any trends as to what they might be interested in when they finish? For instance, agriculture, is there a trend that a certain amount are willing to pursue that for a profession or job placement?

BRANDON GRANT: During the survey results what was heartening was that 60 per cent of the participants said they were interested now in participating in the agricultural sector. We're taking that as a good sign, that young people are seeing that this is an exciting field to enter into.

This is our first step along the way. We feel that once young people see and are exposed to the variety that is in place for the program, and for the sector itself, and all the different businesses and farms and things you can do, we're confident that that number can grow. With your permission, I'd ask if Joy could supplement my answer.

JOY KNIGHT: I actually just wanted to share one of the connections that have already happened through the program. While 60 per cent are interested in the agricultural sector - which is wonderful, it is very diverse - we want them to understand that agriculture can mean a high-level university degree; working in labs and testing; safety and all that comes with that, so we have work placements look at that; or it could be working on the farm with animals. It's very diverse.

We actually have a young man right now who is at the Dalhousie Agricultural College in Truro; he was inspired by the program, so he's now there and received his \$1,200 grant. He's also being sponsored this summer by the Department of Agriculture through our Inspiring Success program, working in his field of study. So, we are making some nice connections.

LARRY HARRISON: Once the program is actually completed, is the participant able to maintain the communication with the employer that they had, for maybe future job opportunities?

BRANDON GRANT: Absolutely, and I think one of the exciting things is that we see there are some folks who come back for that second year. Because this is targeting high school aged youth as young as 15, there is an opportunity for young people who, if they enjoyed the program, are able to participate again in a second year.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Zann.

LENORE ZANN: In the presentation you noted that 33 per cent of the 27 youth are attending or are enrolled in post-secondary education. My math is a little bit rough on percentages, but would that be about eight students?

We know the tuition fees at Nova Scotia universities and colleges are above the national average. I'm the post-secondary education critic, so we know students graduate with about \$37,000 worth of student debt. How was the decision made to set the maximum for the post-secondary grant portion of the program at \$1,200?

BRANDON GRANT: One of the partnerships that we've established in place is the \$1,200 with the Poverty Reduction Blueprint. One of the government initiatives that's funded through the blueprint is that cost-sharing or the wage-matching component that we were able to offer through the department.

In addition to that, as we talked about in the presentation, there are other opportunities in place in which our young people are able to start to break down those financial barriers to attending post-secondary.

As I mentioned before, there's the Educate to Work for Dependents program that pays 50 per cent of tuition fees in order to go to NSCC, as well as full books and fees and dental fees in order to go to NSCC as well.

We've also built in some supports through our post-secondary job placement opportunities to help our young people to get the income security that they need while they attend post-secondary.

It doesn't reduce all the barriers, certainly, but what we're trying to do is build a series of different programs across the continuum so that young people who are with DCS can see that post-secondary is an opportunity in which the department will support them.

How the \$1,200 was decided, I will ask Joy to help me answer that question.

JOY KNIGHT: The \$1,200 was arrived at as we looked at fiscally what we had through the Poverty Reduction Blueprint funding and we looked at about 25 per cent of wages that would have been earned through the summer. Roughly, that would equate to about \$1,200 per participant, and our hope is that each participant will return.

If they start at 15, they have about three years with the program and then each year they will be eligible for that \$1,200 in addition to that \$500 from the Colchester Cumberland Community Credit Union. All that together gives them just over \$4,000, if they were to participate each year, towards costs that are not dictated. We don't say that it has to be used for tuition or fees. We actually leave that money unencumbered, and they work with the Co-op Council to determine how that best supports their post-secondary.

LENORE ZANN: What are you noticing is the biggest deterrent for these youth to decide to go into post-secondary education? Is there somebody who works with them to try to help them decide whether that is the way they want to go, and what are you noticing - is there anything across the board that makes it more difficult for kids who are in, perhaps, a poverty cycle in their families to advance, to go to post-secondary education?

BRANDON GRANT: It's an interesting question. One of the things that we know is that there are a number of barriers that our young people face, and as we've learned as we've developed the programming, we're learning each and every day about what those barriers are.

We know that throughout the development of the EDGE program, for instance, not having a mentor in their life was one of the key barriers that our young people identified as a major barrier, and just understanding how to navigate systems, how to make connections with employers, really understanding how all of these different systems work, having systems and supports that are flexible - and going back to the previous member's point around making sure that programming is flexible and understanding the challenges that young people face. People have identified anxiety and they have identified a number of things they experience within the school system.

There is no one thing, but what we're trying to do, again, with starting as young as age 12, is really making sure that our young people get exposure to a variety of different things to help build up self-esteem while you build up the resumé as well. I think that's been an approach that is opening up opportunities in people's minds of what's possible. We're building up those financial supports.

One of the initiatives the department recently participated in was a partnership with the federal government, with the Canada Revenue Agency and ESDC around the promotion of the Canada Learning Bond. Again, the Canada Learning Bond is \$2,000 of post-secondary funding that is available for low-income Nova Scotians. Our department embarked upon promoting the bond by setting up super clinics in communities to promote people signing up. It's an income-based program with no strings attached; sign up, and you can get \$2,000 for post-secondary. One of the things that the Canada Learning Bond talks a lot about is just having a little bit of financial support; it's a big psychological boost in knowing that that savings is being built.

We saw great success. We had four super clinics; specifically, 700-plus people came out for the Learning Bond as well. As you begin to see where the department is trying to build up these financial supports and break down those barriers for our clients, that's what our focus has been: building up the skill set in education, addressing the financial issues as well, and promoting programming that's flexible for young people.

THE CHAIR: We will move to Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Thanks for your time this morning, folks. I'm just wondering, are there restrictions around the types of post-secondary programs that participants would be eligible to take?

BRANDON GRANT: It's a quick answer: no.

BEN JESSOME: Further to that, I'll ask - if you're tracking this information, it's likely too soon to have much of a conclusion - are people migrating to the traditional industries, or do they have an intention to work in these agricultural or traditional industries here in Nova Scotia?

BRANDON GRANT: As we shared, we're seeing that 60 per cent are now considering the agricultural sector as a real possibility, which we feel is a real positive outcome of the program. Ms. Knight also shared that we now have somebody that is accepted into the Agricultural College as well, which we feel is another positive sign.

As the program matures and we have more young people that have participated - getting to the point where they're ready to have post-secondary applications in place - we should have more data at that point.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bain is next.

KEITH BAIN: When you made your presentation, and I realize that the program is new and you're growing, you're expanding the areas that you serve, you did say that when you named the locations at or near the locations - I'm going to use North Sydney as an example. Is it the clients that are served by the North Sydney office, or does it go beyond that? I guess, that's going to be my first question.

BRANDON GRANT: I think we focus on the clients that are served there as well, but again, if there are folks in feeder areas and we share that we've expanded what those areas are, we would consider that and work with folks on making sure that they're able to participate.

KEITH BAIN: The reason I ask that is because my constituency is totally rural, and the industry is resource. People rely on fisheries, forestry, agriculture, and it's a big constituency. I'm just wondering, there is a Community Services office in Baddeck, and there is an office in Ingonish as well, but because of geography, it puts them at sort of a disadvantage at this point, I guess. How can they become part of the program now, rather than having to wait for it to expand beyond that, because transportation is limited for a lot of them? I guess my question would be: How can you reach out to them today with the way things are set up?

BRANDON GRANT: I think the member raised a really important point, and one of the challenges that has been raised is around transportation. That's certainly something that folks who have worked within the program have been working through very creatively on how we make this work. Oftentimes when we talk about communities - when we say Kentville, it's actually outside smaller areas in which youth are participating, so we would work with individuals and either cab companies or individual service providers in this area to find ways to make things work around getting people to their job sites. It is a big challenge, there's no doubt about it.



[10:45 p.m.]

What I would say is that as we move forward, we're going to have to work through those issues. As we move into more rural areas and expand further, we have to find ways in which we can get people to their sites, get people to their training, and have a sustained solution around that. People have to be on time on a regular schedule in order to be successful. We have been working through those areas of rural transportation and accepting clients who are outside of those core centres, because usually that's where a lot of the businesses are too.

We're working through that, and as we expand, that's something that we're going to have to address.

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Honestly, I'm listening to you and thinking, this is an amazing program. I truly hope it's going to expand and reach all other industries, as well as the city.

When you started this, whoever came up with this program, did you have a target? You said you had 3,000 youth from ages 15 to 19. Did you decide on, you know, within five years we're hoping to reach at least 50 per cent of that group? What are your targets, and how are you going to evaluate your program?

BRANDON GRANT: We had set a goal for 60 youth to participate within those four sites. What I would say is that the evaluation we've embarked upon is to get client surveys completed, as well as the evaluation that has been completed by our partners with the Co-op Council that understand areas of challenges, and also where we can improve upon the program.

As I was mentioning to the previous member around transportation, that's an area that we want to make sure we're finding creative solutions that lead to sustained participation. We also want to work with young people to make sure that the placements are a right fit, because it's not just about how many people are participating in the program at the outset. We want to make sure that people are able to complete the program and benefit from the full part of the programming, including the post-secondary trust as well.

There's lots of learning around how we can make improvements so that our young people understand what the program is and the industry that they'll be working in. We keep learning that over the course of the first couple of years, and we anticipate we'll learn more as we go along the way.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: You also talked about mentorship. To me, this is an amazing thing as a sibling mentor - if you get one out of the cycle, then there are five or six other siblings, or within the family unit, who can get out of the cycle as well.

Have you also thought about reaching out to the private sector? I know in business here in the city, we can have businesses as mentors to others, so once they get through your program, can you link them to some business or mentors who will guide them through to make sure they stay on track? Do you have that relationship with the private sector?

BRANDON GRANT: I think mentorship is so important. From what I've learned over the last number of years, and previously working with young people, having that individual, that one person to speak to, considering all of the challenges that our young people face, is absolutely critical. What is really important, too, is the whole conversation around providing a bit of hope that there is somebody out there working with you in order to help advance your life.

Many of the businesses have stepped up and provided that role. Our caseworkers across all of our programs are very mindful that good case management around ESS is really about building strong relationships with good standards around how often we're interacting with one another to make sure that any challenges that can be quickly addressed are addressed. I think that, over time certainly, I'll take the member's feedback around what things we can do further in terms of engaging the private sector or other sectors around where we can build up the important pieces of making sure that these young people are feeling supported and, ultimately, are being successful in completion and moving on what we hope will be post-secondary education, working in the field that they're passionate about and, ultimately, having a better life for themselves and their family.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to follow up a little bit on the conversation between my colleague and you about the tuition. When you were talking about it, I was doing a quick calculation and I was struck by the fact that the department will pay 50 per cent of NSCC tuition for the Educate to Work program and then this \$1,200. I was just thinking about the benefit of getting people out of the cycle of poverty, so I just took a very basic \$700 which a lot of my constituents without children get on ESIA and all of that stuff. Let's just say that their benefit from ESIA would be \$700 for 12 months, \$8,400, which is just about the price of a year of tuition at university. It's in that ballpark. I wonder about the thought process around only paying 50 per cent at NSCC and only \$1,200 at university.

For a short amount of time you could invest this same amount of money that someone might be on for their entire life if they don't have university education. You could stop the cycle of poverty right there, because we know that when people are university or college educated, they are way less likely to live in poverty. I put that out there in this conversation, because doing the reckoning around how long we're going to allow cycles of poverty to exist in our province, I think it's time that we really look at an upfront

investment in people instead of allowing - I think this program is great, don't get me wrong, but in terms of actually confronting the issue, there's so much more that we could do, and it wouldn't take that long. But that's not what I want to ask about. (Interruptions)

THE CHAIR: I didn't hear a question in there, so we can have a question now.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I do have a question. We've been talking about this for a long time; it was a big subject during Budget Estimates. We know that last year Nova Scotia was the only province in the country to see a rise in child poverty rates. We had more than 5,000 more children living in poverty last year than we did in 2016 - so a 5,000-person increase between 2016 and 2017, a total of 27,000 children living in poverty in the province and the minister has responded that these numbers are from 2017 and that the department has reached out to Statistics Canada to see why they would be up. She also replied to me twice in Question Period, and also in Estimates, that when we saw these numbers, they weren't taking into account the fact the department has stopped clawing back child support payments; yet, we're looking at an increase between 2016 and 2017. That part of the child support payment thing doesn't really come into these numbers.

I ask the people responsible for the program of last resort, can you offer any insight into why we saw such a dramatic increase in child poverty between 2016 and 2017?

BRANDON GRANT: Mr. Chair, as the minister alluded to, we are looking into the numbers and understanding the implications of them, understanding whether or not the core issue is families that are outside of the system and whether or not there are any sort of interventions that could be done as a department because, as a department in the ESIA program, we provide supports for our clients, but as well low-income Nova Scotians, the Nova Scotia Child Benefit being an example. We need to understand that fully in order to make proper next steps to intervene in an area, which is important for all Nova Scotians.

The other piece was around the investments that were made in 2018. Government has made investments around building income security for low-income Nova Scotians.

The member mentioned the exemption of child maintenance which helped 1,600 families in this province, with an average of \$275 difference. That's an important shift and a change in terms of how we address this issue within income assistance.

We doubled the Poverty Reduction Credit, as well, in 2018. The Poverty Reduction Credit is an income-based program that supports the most vulnerable Nova Scotians. You have to earn less than \$12,000 a year and you have to be single without children. It was doubled from \$250 to \$500 in 2018.

We introduced the new wage exemption structure as well in 2018; we reduced what was quite clear to us from our conversations with clients, that it was a deterrent to people entering the labour market. What we've done is created a new wage exemption structure that is more generous. At the full exemption rate, in a tiered system, as people earn more

wages through the wage economy, they are able to see their income assistance decrease at a far less steep rate than it was before.

We've also implemented a Personal Items Allowance - which from what we can see is fairly unique to Nova Scotia - where we provide financial support to folks who are in homeless shelters, as well as transition homes. That was also introduced in 2018, as well as the bus pass program for the HRM, which has helped thousands of new individuals to the city to access unrestricted transportation. Members know that before, people had to go through the eligibility criteria in order to receive financial support through a transportation allowance.

These are the measures that have been undertaken by the department in 2018. Again, to the specific question around 2016 to 2017, we really need to understand what's happening so that we can address the issue.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc, I think you have a supplementary, even though that last question made me lose count. Your supplementary, Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, thank you for outlining all those upfront investments. I do agree with you that they are making big differences in people's lives. Yet, if you count up all the changes, even if someone was to benefit - well it's impossible that people benefit from all the different programs and all the different changes, it just doesn't work that way - people are still living in poverty.

I guess my point was, why not do a real upfront investment of helping people? I know it's not going to be right for everyone, I totally get that, but for the people who it is right for, a university or college education could just end it. Then that whole group of people could be out of the system and working and contributing to our economy.

You mentioned the Poverty Reduction Credit. With respect, again it's great that it was doubled, but it only applies to people who make \$12,000 or less, which means that they're now making \$12,500. If anyone here has ever tried, and I certainly haven't tried to survive on that amount of money, I think we would realize that it's just simply not enough to make ends meet.

I do thank you for your response about looking at the numbers because that was going to be my supplementary. Two-thirds of the children who are living in poverty are not on the system, so what can we do? Yesterday we heard that the federal government is now going to index the child benefit, their portion of the child benefit, to inflation. That would be a great place for the province to start because we haven't seen an increase in that child benefit in years and years.

I'm wondering if you would look at the indexing because my question is: Are you considering making an increase to the child benefit, the Nova Scotia portion, and will you commit to indexing it.

BRANDON GRANT: It's not my place to make commitments. What I would say is that the department, over the last number of years, has been focused on a variety of things, and that has been around the things that I talked about. We've gone out and spoken to hundreds of folks over the last number of years and it has been entirely clear that there are key themes coming out of those meetings and discussions that we've had with clients.

The first is financial support. People have raised that as the key concern. People have raised a number of issues, including the barriers in which people enter the labour markets. We talked about the wage exemption structure, which was a direct result of the conversations I've had with folks who have said that we need to change not just the financial support, but the rules that regulate how we provide financial support as well.

[11:00 a.m.]

What I would say on the whole discussion around post-secondary, I think what is entirely clear is that there are clear signals that the department is looking at ways in which we can break down those financial barriers - investing our time and energy around the promotion of the Canada Learning Bond, around creating the new stream for our ESIA dependents so that we can work with our kids in care and our ESIA dependents to make post-secondary an option.

We expanded the Career Seek program where, before I got here, you could remain eligible for income assistance; now we're providing the first year of tuition for our clients and 100 per cent of books and fees. We're providing \$1,000 a year for incidental costs, paying for things like Internet. We're making steps towards finding ways in which we can support our young people, but our not-so-young people too, to break that cycle.

I think what's clear to me is that investments are being made and we're trying to find ways in which we can also ensure that our young people are ready for post-secondary, so that we're not working with young people who come to us at 19 and they don't have the skill sets in place, they don't have any work experience, and there are also all these other issues that we have to work through. That's why we're trying to work more preventively and proactively with the programs that we're developing, including Career Rising, the EDGE program, Inspiring Success - all the ways that we can support young people in a different way.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: I understand that about 62 per cent of the employers are in the agricultural area and I'm just wondering, as was mentioned earlier, about getting other employers and other types of industries involved such as fisheries and oceans and stuff like that, but the communities you've already looked at are probably not in that area - the fisheries end of it for the communities that you're looking at now.

I'm just wondering if you can give a general overview of the employers and how you recruit them to become involved and then match them up with the recipients.

BRANDON GRANT: There are a number of ways in which we are able to recruit employers. Some of those relationships exist because of the employment programming that was offered through the department, so we have pre-existing relationships built within the communities on that.

We've also leveraged the partnership we have with the Co-op Council, with their vast network of employers, and as Ms. Knight sort of alluded to, the good thing about having a multi-year view of this is that our best recruitment tool is actually the employers that have participated in previous years, their positive experiences on that.

As we look to expand, we will probably take a similar approach in identifying strategic partners within the community because the key component of that is making sure that our employers understand the program. This isn't merely just the department trying to find employment for folks; we want to make sure that businesses understand the needs of our clients so that they can be successful as well. As we look to expand, we will take a similar approach and learn from the previous years on what is the most successful area.

I think what's exciting is that oftentimes we will have enough employers; it's been successful from that standpoint where we've had lots of businesses step forward. They really see the value in supporting our youth within the community, so we're heartened by that partnership with our businesses.

BILL HORNE: I've heard mention of the credit unions being involved with the program. I'm just wondering how they got involved.

JOY KNIGHT: When we were working with the members of the Nova Scotia Co-Operative Council to figure out the best approach going forward and what employers we were going to engage with, the credit union came to the table saying they were very, very interested in supporting the program. The Colchester Cumberland Community Credit Union, in particular, came forward and wanted to put forward their bursary component, \$500 for each participant who completes the program, so that credit union came forward to support the program.

The conversations that we've had have been very fruitful, and this summer, I think we're looking at around 10 positions within different community credit unions across the province, to offer and expand our opportunities to the financial sector for our participants.

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I also wanted to know approximately how much this program is costing the taxpayer; how much have you got and what is it working out for the numbers - for example, for last year, this year, per student, or per participant; and where are you hoping to be in 2019-20? What are the projections?

BRANDON GRANT: It's about \$100,000 per site, that's what the cost is to support the program in each community.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Your budget for this program is \$100,000, or how much is it? You said four locations. How is it in the budget for next year and the year after, and what are your hopes; what are you asking for?

BRANDON GRANT: I'm not asking for anything today. (Laughter) What I would say is that we always look at a variety of things in order to expand, not just the budget. One of the things we look for is to make sure the conditions are right, that there are partnerships in place, and that we have the staffing capacity in order to seek referrals. We're carefully monitoring where it makes the most sense to expand from there, and we do so under our allotment for Employment Support Services. That's how I would answer that question.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I was looking at the statistics between 2017 and 2018, and I just had a couple of questions. In both cases, a certain amount of youth were placed and then a certain amount completed. Of course, in the second there were more, but there were 20 that didn't complete. I'm just wondering if you can talk a little bit about that. I know that's sort of a negative spin, but I'm just curious to know: What are the challenges that youth would face, what would make them not be able to complete the program?

BRANDON GRANT: It's a really good question. What I would say is that there are a number of factors, there's no one reason, and I want to be clear that that's the full completion of the program.

We have a variety of youth for a variety of reasons; some are going through some very difficult circumstances with their families and some folks wanted to take a week off in the summer. These folks are young, and they would like to take a week off in the summer. We actually made adjustments in terms of the work-term period, and we made adjustments based on that information. It's a variety of different factors that come into play, but through good case management we want to understand what those are to see if we can mitigate them in advance.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc, do you have a supplementary?

SUSAN LEBLANC: No, I'm good for now.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Zann.

LENORE ZANN: The latest data from Statistics Canada shows that there are about 27,000 children living in Nova Scotia in low-income families and that ESIA is only engaged with about a third of the children living in poverty. How are we working towards improving the lives of those two-thirds of the children who are living in poverty, whose families are not receiving ESIA?

BRANDON GRANT: I think one of the things that you're hearing from us is we're looking at the preventive programming piece. We've expanded our view to not only dependents of the programs, but also our kids in care and youth that are served by third parties as youth at risk, so we're trying to take a broader view on that.

One of the things we've seen within the ESIA system over the last number of years is a trend; we're seeing fewer families under the ESIA program, more single individuals without kids. Right now it's about 71 per cent or 72 per cent of our caseload where the bulk of who we serve are single people without children.

When I say that, some folks are surprised, but other folks that encounter work with folks on ESIA understand that intuitively. There has been a shift, so one of the things that we're trying to do is work and develop programming that's preventive for our young people, but also understand about the changing complexity of our caseload and who we're serving now.

There are mechanisms within the ESIA and DCS system that supports people, like the Nova Scotia Child Benefit. It's the building up of the preventive programming, too, that benefits folks outside the program. These are some of the strategies that we are employing.

LENORE ZANN: I'm going to ask this kind of two-part question. I'm very curious, when we're talking about ESIA transformation, what is the ultimate goal? Also, this program helps youth up to the age of 24, but is there anything like this that is in place or planned to help others who are older than 24? As we know, there are many people in the system who are also living in poverty. What is the ultimate goal of the transformation and what is in place to also help the older people?



THE CHAIR: Mr. Grant, it looks like you've got a couple of questions there.

BRANDON GRANT: No problem, I'd be happy to answer them.

The ESIA transformation has a number of outcomes that we're trying to achieve. The first is a set of client outcomes. Client outcomes include labour market attachment, we want clients to have more control over their own lives, to be able to meet their basic needs.

On the system side, we want our service delivery partners to be able to empower our clients, we want to reduce administration. We also have to have a system that's sustainable as well. We have a number of outcomes in which the department is measuring our impacts. Some are easier to measure than others, so we're monitoring carefully in terms of the labour market attachment of our clients and building up our outcome measurements around our various outcomes for transformation.

Those are the goals we're working towards through transformation. It's something that guides our work, and as you can see with the component pieces of this program, you'll begin to see where some of those outcomes align with the direction that we're trying to take with Career Rising.

I want to stress that what you're hearing about today is one of many programs that are available for people who work within the ESS system. We have a number of programs that are available for clients of all ages, including wage subsidies, the post-secondary supports around the Educate to Work program. With the Career Seek program, we have job placements, we have programming like the Work Activity Centres. We have a whole set and suite of programming that's available for the thousands of clients we support through the Employment Support Services stream of the income assistance program.

On Page 1 of the presentation, I outlined some of those programs that are in place, but I don't want folks to think that's the complete picture of what's available for Employment Support Services and the clients that we serve. Through transformation, you'll see the initiatives that I talked to your colleague about around building the income security programming.

I talked about some of the things that we've done around promoting labour market attachment that seeks to address our outcomes: the focus on youth and reducing our administration. The bus pass is another example of where you get rid of the administration attached with "show me your need" every month. All of that is going away, and that addresses the outcome that we're trying to achieve through reducing administration for our clients, and quite frankly, for our staff too. Those outcomes are the guiding principles of the transformation that we're seeking, and it's what really guides us as we do new programming, new regulatory changes, and new policy changes as we move forward.

[11:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bain.

KEITH BAIN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of questions on awareness. I guess it refers to along the lines of what Ms. Zann was asking, but it's the group under 24, like a 19-year-old who most likely is not in high school anymore. Is it more difficult to get the word out to them or create that awareness? If so, how are you doing it?

BRANDON GRANT: It's a really good question. It is a challenge. It is always a challenge as you have individuals, young people transferring between systems. One of the things we are certainly mindful of is how to engage with service providers that work with young people, that understand what those needs are and what the best approaches are. We've had to do a lot of rethinking as a department in terms of our engagement approach to making sure that we're reaching those young people.

The EDGE program, for example, was designed by a group of 19- to 26-year-olds who were within our caseload. It's a bit easier to reach those individuals because we're able to send letters and be in touch with young people, but we know that we're in a changing world. Most individuals want to be connected through text and other areas to which we've had to make changes as a department in terms of our engagement.

To give you an example on the EDGE program, we were able to provide support for our service providers to text with the clients who participated in EDGE. That was the best way to reach individuals on a day-to-day basis, versus our old traditional ways, which weren't successful at all. We've had to change fundamentally as a department in our approach on this. It's always a challenge but we're trying to work with individuals who have far more experience than us on this, who know the best way to engage with young people and are able to reach them in a different way. It was really eye-opening for me when we got the feedback during the EDGE work. We talked about mentorship.

That was a big gap, but young people also talked about environments. They talked about how often with service providers, you come into a very sterile-looking, white painted room that didn't feel very welcoming for a young person to come into. It can be intimidating. A whole bunch of different pieces of information have been really helpful for the department to understand - how do we engage in a different way? Sometimes it's as simple as having youth-designed spaces. If you go to the EDGE youth-designed space, it looks very different than what you'll find in rooms like this and rooms where often you see service providers. It's beautiful. It's colourful, youthful, and far more welcoming than what I've seen before. Sometimes it's those little things that can have a big impact.

KEITH BAIN: Wouldn't be much good for an old guy like me. (Laughter) I guess the other side to this cycle is the employers. It's going to be a two part again, if I may. How do you determine the number of employers you need; how does the word get out to them? I'm thinking of the greater area that might have agriculture industries but might be willing to become a sponsor or whatever name you might want to give it. I guess it's a two part.

THE CHAIR: That's actually pretty close to a one part. Go ahead, Mr. Grant.

BRANDON GRANT: I'll actually give a two-part answer too. I would say it's a two-way street. We want to make sure that we have good employers who want to step forward, but we also want to make sure that they're good fits. In terms of what the youth might be interested in, it's a two-way street where it's a mix between understanding what the youth needs are, making sure the employer knows what they're getting themselves into, and what the needs are of our clients.

The good news, and why there's a focus on the agricultural sector, is because of the diversity of the functions, the roles and the jobs that you can participate in in the agricultural sector, it creates some really good and dynamic jobs for young people to participate in. It's been a situation where the employers and the young people have found that they're good fits.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I wanted to ask about other aspects of how children are supported in the ESIA program. We know that CPP children's benefits provide monthly payments to dependent children of disabled or deceased CPP contributors. According to the ESIA Manual, Policy 5.7.27, folks must apply for the CPP benefits if they're eligible, and then they're charged at 100 per cent against their benefits.

The effect of this policy is that a child who is entitled to CPP survivor benefits is having these deducted from their parent's monthly ESIA payments. But other benefits that are directed to children are excluded; for instance, the Canada Child Benefit, the child disability benefit, and most recently, the child maintenance.

We did a FOIPOP on this and we discovered that the cost to the province to include the CPP child benefits in the excluded children's benefits would only cost the province \$400,000. As you've already indicated, with all of the little changes that have been made so far, that little bit of money would make a significant difference to the family that it is afforded to.

First of all, I'm wondering: Do you think it's appropriate for the department to be clawing back the CPP benefits from children whose parents are disabled or deceased?

BRANDON GRANT: A couple things; one is, our primary concern is around achieving the outcomes that we've set through ESIA transformation. That includes making sure that clients are able to meet their basic needs. A number of decisions have to be made around how do we get there; what's going to be the most impactful way in which we can support families to achieve that outcome? It could be any number of policy measures that the government could consider in order to get to where we all want to be, which is to support families that are in poverty in this province.

Another thing I want to sort of stress is that the costing of exemptions is always challenging for my staff for a variety of reasons. This is a bit of insider baseball for everybody's benefit; we have a good understanding of what exists within the system, so what is reported within the system. Whenever you hear numbers like \$400,000, that's what's reported within the ESIA system.

The challenge with exemptions is that you don't fully understand what's outside of the system and understanding that once you have a 100 per cent exemption, who are the eligible families that may be outside of the system? So just a cautionary note around the costing pieces to that, because I don't think we have a full understanding of what it might cost to exempt certain incomes over that.

I think the department's view is that we're working towards these outcomes, not all income is treated the same within our system. There's a variety of reasons for that. I think the member has outlined a key feature of the program as it's been stated, that we seek for our clients to seek out all sources of income, and in this case, that's the current policy.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you for the answer, but I guess I just don't understand - I do understand your answer in that you have to figure out how you're going to pay for things; I get that. But I don't understand basically why that type of income, which is 100 per cent allocated to children, is being treated differently than the other types of income allocated to children, like the Canada Child Benefit and the maintenance enforcement.

Don't get me wrong, I think it's really important that those families that receive those benefits don't have them clawed back. I fought for that and I'm glad that change has been made. Why can't we add in a benefit that is earmarked specifically for children?

I'm not talking about the whole CPP benefit right now, although that would be great too. I'm talking about just the part that's for the child - why is it treated differently?

BRANDON GRANT: I think it goes back to that core principle. I wasn't around when the Act was written. What I could say is the core feature of how these things have been structured is that people make themselves available for all sources of income.

I think the member has highlighted that individuals with families are trying to find ways in which they can support their families. I think through ESIA transformation we're trying to find the ways in which we can have the most impact in order to build that income security. When you look at personal allowance increases over the years, the \$20 increase costs \$7.5 million once you add in the DSP component.

When you look at the wage exemption structure, an investment was made around \$3 million and the impact is close to \$200 more per month. We're trying to find ways in which we can meaningfully move the dial in a way so that individuals can see their incomes climb in a significant way so they can feel it.

I can tell you that as I went out in the Fall and spoke to hundreds of our clients directly, it's those types of policy shifts that are truly felt where they could feel and see on their cheques the impact that is going to move the dial meaningfully. The maintenance example as well, the average change in impact is \$275, so it's that type of impact that has been the focus of transformation where people can truly feel and see the difference in terms of what they're able to receive.

I guess what I'm saying is probably not a very satisfying answer, but there are a number of ways in which we can get to that goal. The focus has been on investments that move that dial in a way in which people can see hundreds of dollars more in their pockets through the transformation and issues that have been invested to date.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. That comes to the end of our questioning here. I guess I would like to turn it back over to Mr. Grant and Ms. Knight for a few closing remarks.

BRANDON GRANT: Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about Career Rising. Our goal is to give our youth the tools and supports they need to grow into successful and independent adults.

With the Career Rising program, we are helping put students on the right path. Each summer we make adjustments based on youth surveys and employer feedback to make sure we are truly offering a program that meets the needs and sets them up for success. So far, they have told us we are getting it right and we're excited to watch the program participants moving through Career Rising and into post-secondary. Seeing the success of this comprehensive support and action is exciting and rewarding for everyone involved.

I also want to mention that we have individuals here from the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council as well, Dianne and Brittany, who have been absolutely wonderful partners in this. Without them, we wouldn't be where we are today with this program.

We're very proud of Career Rising and its impact to date. I want to thank you again for inviting us here today to share this important program with you. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Grant, Ms. Knight, and thank you to the Co-op Council for being here. We just got that late-breaking news.

Thank you to my colleagues. We had 35 questions in quite a reasonable time. They were all, for the most part, short and concise and I appreciate the concise and to-the-point responses that we received from our delegation today. Again, thank you. This program seems to be having early success and something that's really worth building on.

I'd like to thank Mr. Grant, Ms. Knight, and your staff for innovating this program and making it a reality and achieving success.

I will just wrap up the meeting; there's no committee business. Our next meeting will be held on June 4<sup>th</sup>, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. The Department of Community Services will be back on the topic: Protection of Confidential Information.

With that, I'll adjourn our meeting today. Thank you all.

[The committee adjourned at 11:30 a.m.]