

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, October 6, 2020**

**Legislative Chamber**

**Adult Service Centres - Community-based Vocational Programs for Adults with  
Disabilities**

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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Rafah DiCostanzo, Vice-Chair  
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Hon. Margaret Miller  
Steve Craig  
Brian Comer  
Lisa Roberts  
Kendra Coombes

In Attendance:

Kim Langille  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

### Department of Community Services

Tracy Taweel, Deputy Minister  
Maria Medioli, Executive Director, Disability Support Program

### Summer Street Adult Services Centre

Bob Bennett, Executive Director



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2020**

**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 the meeting to order. This is the meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services. My name is Keith Irving, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Kings South and Chair of this committee.

I'd like to first of all remind everyone to turn your phones to vibrate or silent. As well, just in terms of safety procedures, if we need to evacuate the building, please exit on Granville Street and proceed to the Art Galley of Nova Scotia courtyard located on Hollis.

I'd like to begin by asking my colleagues to introduce themselves, beginning with Ms. Roberts.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. Just a reminder that we have some new procedures in the Chamber. We actually are meeting in the Chamber because of COVID-19 and our ability to distance ourselves in the larger space here.

A reminder to please keep your masks on during the meeting unless you're speaking. Bottled water has been provided. Just make sure you don't drown your microphone accidentally because that may drown out your voice.

Please remain in your seat as much as possible. What we will do, as other committees have done, is take a 15-minute break at approximately one hour. If it's with the agreement of the Committee, we'll extend until 12:15 p.m. Do we have agreement with that? Great. Thank you.

As if you were flying on an airplane, please exit to the doors at either side and come in through the doors at the front of the room.

Today we're here to discuss the adult services centres and community-based vocational programs for adults with disabilities. We've had a couple of changes to the witnesses. Unfortunately, Mr. Townsend from the DIRECTIONS Council for Vocational Services Society is not feeling well this morning. Given COVID-19, he has prudently decided to not be here. If it's all right with the Committee, his comments will be read by our second guest from the sector, Bob Bennett, who is here with the Summer Street Adult Services Centre.

We are also joined by Tracy Taweel, the Deputy Minister of the Department of Community Services, and by Maria Medioli, the Executive Director of the Disability Support Program. Welcome to our guests here today.

I would now like to turn it over to Deputy Minister Taweel for some opening remarks.

TRACY TAWHEEL: Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss community-based vocational programs for adults with disabilities.

As mentioned, my name is Tracy Taweel. I am the Deputy Minister of Community Services. Joining me today is Maria Medioli, Executive Director of Community Services' Disability Support Program as well as Bob Bennett, Executive Director of Summer Street Adult Services Centre. We are sorry that Mike Townsend wasn't able to join us today.

Mr. Chair, the Disability Support Program is committed to supporting the overall well-being of participants and providing opportunities for growth, whether that's through volunteering, recreational activities, or skill building for future employment.

To give you a bit of background on the program: the Disability Support Program, or DSP, supports just under 5,600 adults through a range of community-based residential and vocational day programs. The majority, 80 per cent, of our participants live in community housing, with the remainder living in larger residential homes. Participants are mostly between the ages of 45 to 64 years and have varying ranges of support needs. Most have an intellectual disability, followed by long-term mental illness. We also support those with physical disabilities.

Collaboration and partnerships are essential in delivering programs to DSP participants. We have many stakeholders, volunteers, community organizations, not-for-

profit organizations, and service providers who work tirelessly in communities across the province, and I would personally like to thank them for their work.

To support this work, government has continued to increase our annual budget. This year our budget is \$389.5 million, with \$23.1 million of that total dedicated to supports for adult day programming. These resources are allocated to a variety of day programming, including pre-vocational and vocational day programs, with the goal of providing meaningful opportunities for participants to contribute to their communities.

Centres are allocated funding based on the number of participants they serve and the staff required to support their work. We currently fund 44 day programs delivered by 30 adult service centres and a mixture of residential service providers and community-based organizations. Day program providers also run social enterprises and engage in fundraising activities and a variety of other creative endeavours that generate additional revenue.

Social enterprises help adults with diverse abilities work as part of a team to gain vocational skills through training and meaningful employment in areas like woodworking, food services, retail, and more.

At the Department of Community Services, we are committed to enhancing day programming, further strengthening social enterprises, and helping day programs build capacity. Last year, government made a \$6.1 million capital investment in facilities across the province that provide day programs. That funding will be used for renovations, expansion of programming, and creating more space to deliver that programming.

To give you a few examples: Horizon Achievement Centre in Sydney received \$2 million and 2.2 hectares of land from the Province to support the building of a new facility which will allow for expanded programs and services; Corridor Community Options for Adults in Enfield received \$1.5 million, a contribution from the Province to support the construction of a larger, more accessible building and a more central location; the Flower Cart Group in New Minas received \$500,000 to support a new building which will allow participants to produce goods and services to provide to the public.

Ultimately these investments will help programs meet the growing demand for community-based services.

Recognizing the positive impact of day programming, we have been working to expand opportunities for young people and seniors. We are currently piloting day programming for youth aged 16-24. This pilot is yielding positive results. We are also wrapping up a three-year pilot in which participants offer supports to seniors. This has provided meaningful work for participants while offering at-home supports for seniors.

Mr. Chair, I cannot emphasize enough how meaningful day programs are for participants and communities alike. They offer a wide range of options and activities and

help support a well-rounded life and the ability to be independent and develop essential skills. Day programs also promote to the wider community that people with disabilities have extremely valuable skills to offer.

Our Disability Support Program participants are at the heart of everything we do, and it is important that they have the autonomy to pursue their interests and participate in their communities, whether that be in a day program or in another social, recreational, or employment opportunity of their choice. Our communities are richer and more dynamic when we ensure people with diverse abilities are welcome to fully participate.

Thank you very much. I'll be pleased to answer any questions you may have after Mr. Bennett delivers his remarks.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms. Taweel. Mr. Bennett.

BOB BENNETT: I want to start by acknowledging the resolution by Premier McNeil proclaiming Social Enterprise Week in Nova Scotia. That was unanimously passed in this Legislature in February 2020, so thank you all.

Social enterprise is the economic driver through which Summer Street delivers impact in a financially sound, sustainable, and increasingly self-sufficient way. By creating new models with cross-sector collaboration in systems-disrupting approaches to doing business, we are developing a culture of change with lasting positive social impact.

Throughout this presentation, the word "client" refers to a person with disabilities who voluntarily takes part in a life enhancement program and/or skill development program and/or is an employee of Summer Street. What I am about to share with you is a direct result of the ongoing, positive, and collaborative partnership we have with the Department of Community Services, or DCS.

Summer Street believes in the individuality of all people. We are a person-centred organization and it's reflected in everything we do. We meet the unique and diverse needs and desires of individuals as much as possible. Our spectrum of services takes into account personal interests and varying degrees of ability and independence. Adult programs range from personal care and health to social skills and employment. There is considerable interconnection. On any given day, a client might voluntarily take part in a life enhancement program, learn new skills through skill development programs, volunteer in the community, and later work as an employee in one of the organization's social enterprises.

Summer Street currently provides services to 200 people. Of the 70 people who are employed by the organization, over 40 live with disability. Summer Street's participation agreement clearly distinguishes between voluntary participation in a program or working as an employee of the organization.

Through Summer Street's anti-poverty strategy, participants receive an honorarium when voluntarily participating in programs and are paid at least minimum wage when employed by the organization. Summer Street is always working to provide a wide enough range of opportunities to include everyone. As new skills are developed, levels of independence, desires, and opportunities can change and new doors are opened.

Summer Street's goal is to provide choices that help each client achieve a meaningful work-life balance of their choosing. At the end of the day, all outcomes are measured by whether or not they have improved a client's quality of life.

Summer Street carefully aligns its organizational priorities with DCS goals - in particular the goal of having control over one's own life. We are creative in the development of new services and work closely with our clients to promote individual self-determination through things like: helping Archie position himself as one of the foremost philanthropists in Pictou County; helping Cathy fulfill her lifelong dream of becoming a published poet; helping Mike get his hand-tied fishing flies to market; helping Sy learn to use the Access-A-Bus; and helping our clients become involved in and develop friendships at the YMCA.

We have a reputation in Pictou County of bringing the right people to the table at the right time with our client, using tools like PATHS and ISP. Combined with our secure, robust case management software, we are able to help our clients promote, explain and celebrate successes with service agencies, families and our most significant funding partner, the Department of Community Services. It really is amazing what can be done to enable a person with disability when the right people are in the room at the same time.

Summer Street has a vision of a community of champions whereby everyone who is involved with the organization in any capacity champions a belief in the abilities of all. The organization and its clients are credited by many for having the tipping influence in the decision to establish a fixed route transit system in Pictou County.

Summer Street has a mission to create and facilitate opportunities for people with intellectual disability one person at a time. The organization strives to create opportunities that are mutually beneficial for its clients and the community because the organization believes that engaging all abilities benefits everyone.

Summer Street offers a spectrum of services encompassing life enhancement programs, programs for seniors, pre-employment skill development programs, personal development programs, wellness programs, literacy programs, employment services, and mental health counselling services. The organization partners with people with intellectual disability, those closest to them and the community to create opportunity and improve quality of life.

Summer Street clients train and work within various social enterprises. They actively participate in board-driven "blue sky thinking" events, and customer and donor

appreciation events. Clients report directly to the board on organizational performance through an annual score card that's prepared by the Summer Street Client Council, which is a democratically chosen group of individuals who represent all clients receiving services. The board and management team make strategic operational decisions based upon this report. In the last couple of years, similar approaches have been developed in the sector, often with the assistance of our clients and staff in a consulting role.

[10:15 a.m.]

Summer Street has a number of strengths contributing to its success, including dedicated and experienced volunteers at the board, committee, and program levels, complementing motivated and competent staff developing and delivering programs and services.

The people of Pictou County support Summer Street as a charity of choice by purchasing goods and services. Summer Street has developed strong partnerships with employers, service clubs and the municipal units in Pictou County.

We are always exploring new collaborations and partnerships to further our mission and are in the early stages of developing a new partnership with the private sector, which will open up new employment opportunities.

All programs and services offered through Summer Street are designed for people who have intellectual disabilities who may in some cases also have additional disabilities such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disability, or mental health challenges.

We take our direction from the people we provide services to. Our clients are fully engaged in the hiring of new staff. Just imagine: the end user directly hiring support staff. By doing so, we have changed our culture from a quality caregiver to an innovative enabler.

Summer Street is well-known and well-respected in Pictou County. We help others when we can by providing in-kind donations of our products and services. Our signers are sought after for public gatherings and events. Everything we have done and plan to do is based upon our clients' interest and funded through our strong working relationship with DCS, which provides 60 per cent of our operational funding. The remaining 40 per cent comes through our social enterprises and through a grant from our foundation.

The Summer Street Foundation has raised millions of dollars for infrastructure and programs which otherwise would have been an additional funding pressure for DCS. The Summer Street Foundation oversees all gift-planning relationships with donors, manages our investment portfolio, and just delivered its 26<sup>th</sup> successful Summer Street Scramble.

In collaboration with like-minded agencies within DIRECTIONS Council of Vocational Services Society, and with the ongoing innovative and forward-thinking



support of DCS, we are creating and facilitating opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities one person at a time.

With the additional challenges caused by the current health and economic crisis, it's even more crucial for Summer Street to adapt how it provides services and interacts with the community. In closing, I want to share with you some positive examples of what has taken place in our approach moving forward.

By purchasing and circulating iPads and computers in June, we were able to virtually put in place programs and services that enabled us to provide support and mental health counselling, and regularly deliver over 50 online educational programs for our clients. We have and continue to support our community through food service projects that enabled us to prepare and provide food boxes and frozen meals for vulnerable people, including students and families who wouldn't regularly participate in SchoolsPlus programs.

We are delivering a pilot project for DCS in the northern region now to support persons with disabilities in developing and directing their own personal plan, so that each can achieve their lifelong goals and dreams. The various federal programs and services available to Canadians have given many of our clients, for the first time in their life, their first experience in positive self-esteem that actually comes with having cash in your bank account.

By implementing cross-sector models and systems-disrupting approaches to doing business and developing programs, Summer Street can achieve even greater results and create a culture of large-scale change and lasting social impact in the community. By growing its capital assets and engaging in community support-focused enterprises, Summer Street will ensure that it has the resources needed to continue delivering excellent programs, implement new social enterprises, and build a vibrant, inclusive future.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Bennett. Would you now like to share the comments of Mr. Townsend?

BOB BENNETT: On behalf of DIRECTIONS and Mike Townsend:

On behalf of the DIRECTIONS Council network of 30 agencies in the broader vocational sector, I would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Community Services. The services and supports provided by these organizations play an important role in assisting individuals having a disability to be active contributors to their communities.

Some of the examples that are included in this presentation are specific to the DIRECTIONS Council Network but generally reflect the operations of vocational service providers.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our many community, corporate, and government partners. In particular, we have enjoyed a close and productive relationship with the Department of Community Services. Together, we continue to improve the availability of quality services across Nova Scotia. Recent funding contributions from the provincial government towards renewing and expanding infrastructure for multiple agencies across Nova Scotia are a major advancement.

From an overview perspective, vocational services provide an array of supports and experiences that can include skill development for work and daily living, social enterprise, internal and community-based employment, entrepreneurship support, community inclusion experiences, recreation and leisure, social supports, and retirement transition planning. These services are typically delivered through centres, community sites, and venues.

Our objectives are to assist individuals to identify and reach their life goals, provide a diverse range of supports and experiences, expand the number of individuals participating, promote a person-directed self-advocacy approach, and encourage community inclusion. From a social enterprise perspective, most vocational agencies operate social enterprise as a means to create training and employment experiences as well as to generate revenue that supports the mission.

The types of enterprises vary by agency. Some common examples include wood manufacturing, thrift stores, cafes, catering and bakeries, promotional products, recycling, product packaging and assembly, support services for seniors, and business services such as mailing and document shredding. As part of an effort to expand our social enterprise-related capacities and outcomes, we have delivered a social enterprise management certificate program for staff.

Also, beginning in 2016 with funding from the Department of Community Services, we have introduced collaborative enterprise options. This involves multiple agencies from different locations in the province managing an integrated business. The Ability Wood Products Co-operative evolved from this work. It involves six agencies manufacturing items for larger corporate customers. There is also the Home Services Nova Scotia group involving nine agencies providing support services to seniors in their homes. Other shared enterprises will be considered moving forward.

Self-advocacy: with funding from the Department of Community Services, we are working to expand efforts to encourage individuals to become stronger self-advocates. This is critical given our primary focus needs to fully reflect what people need and want for themselves. An initiative was launched in 2018 that included 27 agencies.

Staff champions received training on how to enable and support self-advocacy within their agency. Participants supported by these organizations attended regional sessions designed to promote leadership, confidence building, and decision-making skills. If the circumstances of the pandemic permit, the next step of the project will involve a

consultation with self-advocates and agencies to determine how project funds should be invested.

The pandemic impacts on the sector: the pandemic has a dramatic impact on every aspect of community life. In the case of the vocational sector, we were closed to providing in-person services for participants or operating customer-facing enterprises such as retail and food services. However, our operations continued to function by providing virtual supports and in some cases delivering essential items to individuals while adhering to all health protection measures. Work was also engaged to strengthen our skills through online training and prepare for reopening.

With respect to reopening, the sector received comprehensive guidance from Public Health. Each agency has used these directions to develop a reopening plan. This has allowed the return of participants and the restart of any suspended social enterprise operations.

Given plan requirements for on-site physical distancing, the number of individuals who have been able to return is reduced from previous levels. As a result, agencies may offer a rotational schedule in an effort to include as many people as possible and some virtual services continue to be provided.

In closing, we made important strides as a sector. Future progress will be best accomplished by continuing to engage in collaborative approaches and promoting the full inclusion of the people we support in determining their path.

Again, we thank our provincial government partners and we look forward to working with you and in improving services and outcomes for individuals having a disability.

THE CHAIR: We will now move to questions from the committee. As normal, I will keep a list of folks wanting to ask a question. We'll have one question and one supplementary, and depending on time, if we get to a second round, then that will perhaps be just one question at a time because we will be wrapping up at about 11:55 a.m. for some closing remarks, and then on to committee business.

I would like to begin with Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I had a quick question about the 16- to 24-year-old pilot program that you're working on. I have a close friend - a young lady who is almost 30 now - who grew up with my daughters. I've always seen the programs and what is available through this family. If I remember one thing that her mother said, there was a lot of help until age 16. After age 16, it was that much harder. As soon as I heard about this program, 16- to 24-year-olds, I wanted to hear more - if you can explain what it is, how it's successful, and it's a pilot so where you are going with that after the pilot.

TRACY TAWHEEL: Thank you very much for the question. Your friend is correct - there is certainly a gap in supports in that age range between 16 and 24 years of age. Certainly, we are very excited about the pilot project, which is now in its second year and showing great promise.

The scope of the pilot project, working in partnership with service providers, is to provide participants in that age range with skills that will help them live long, productive and healthy lives, driven by choice - so the areas that are of interest to them, programs that will support them exploring who they are becoming as they move from aging out of the teenage years into young adulthood and understanding what their opportunities may be to live full and productive lives within their community.

I want to stress that with this pilot project - as with all of the programs that we fund, and I think it came through very clearly in Mr. Bennett's comments - participant choice and making sure there are a variety of opportunities available for participants drives all of the pilot projects that we embark on and all of the programs and services that we fund. Likewise, this pilot program - which as I previously mentioned, is in its second year - is being driven by support through service providers who are working in partnership with us, but importantly, is also being moulded and shaped by the participants who are part of the program. They will help determine what that project or that service should look like in the future.

[10:30 a.m.]

We are partnering with a number of organizations to deliver the program. We have 14 participant organizations partnering with us and a number of participants who, as I mentioned earlier, are enjoying great success.

In its second year, we will evaluate at the end of this year - in conjunction with the service providers and participants - and make decisions about what the future will hold for this service offering.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: This is a two-year program right now? Is it just a two-year program?

TRACY TAWHEEL: It is a pilot; we're piloting this right now. It's in its second year. We'll make decisions hopefully at the end of the second year in terms of what the program should look like in the longer term. So it's in the second year of a two-year pilot.

LISA ROBERTS: Thank you very much, all of you, for your presentations and for this important work. Certainly work and what one does during the day is an important time, an important space for people to be able to make choices and develop their independence and their skills to the full extent of their potential, and it's wonderful that we do have such a network of agencies across the province that are supporting folks to do that. That includes the Prescott Group, which is in my constituency, whose work I value.

I wanted to talk, taking advantage of the fact that this topic is here and that you are here, about another sphere where independence is so important and choice is so important, which is housing - where people live. In 2013 the government accepted *A Roadmap for Transforming the Nova Scotia Services to Persons with Disabilities Program*, and that included the need to ensure equal access to housing. That road map came with a five-year implementation plan, but the government opted to implement over 10 years instead, and we're now well past the halfway mark.

I'm sure you're aware that approximately a year ago, an independent board of inquiry ruled that the Province violated the human rights of three people with disabilities: Beth MacLean, Sheila Livingstone and Joey Delaney, by not providing access to housing options. We appreciate that the government has committed money to build some small options homes, but the number falls far short of what is needed to address a wait-list of more than 1,600 people on the DSP housing wait-list.

As noted in the opening remarks, 20 per cent of DSP clients are not living in communities, so there are hundreds still living in institutions. From dialogue with constituents, I hear of families where the children are ready to move on. The children are ready to live independently in their whole lives, not just during their work lives, and yet they're stuck on a wait-list that feels like it doesn't move.

I'm wondering, Mr. Bennett: based on your dialogue with your clients, do you feel that we need the government to move quicker to address the need for appropriate and accessible community housing for adults with disabilities?

THE CHAIR: This is a bit off our topic. I don't know if our witnesses are prepared to move over to the topic of housing, but I'll leave that up to the witnesses here. Mr. Bennett, do you want to comment on that question?

BOB BENNETT: I think any opportunity to talk with people with disability about their whole life is an important thing to do. I know that this is going on - the people that we provide service to are very forthcoming with their comments. I can speak from a Pictou County perspective that there seems to be a wide variety of options for people. There could be more, for sure, and more are being added on a regular basis.

I guess the short answer is yes, but I wouldn't want that to imply that there's not work being done, because there is work being done. Maybe not as fast as everybody would like, but it is being done.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Taweel, would you like to comment?

TRACY TAWHEEL: Certainly. I hope the member would know the department is very firmly committed to delivering on the road map and to ensuring that we do move individuals who currently reside in large residential facilities to community. In this year's

budget, as you noted, there is \$7.4 million committed to begin the process of moving individuals to community. I guess I should have also prefaced that by saying that over the past number of years, we have been working hard to ensure that participants are aware of all of the options that are available to them and working collaboratively with families and participants to determine what living option makes the most sense for them.

With regard to moving individuals out of large residential facilities, we have identified that we will move 50 individuals this year - 25 who currently reside in residential facilities and 25 off the wait-list that you referenced - into small options homes. We will continue to do that at a rate of approximately 70 per year for the next number of years as we move to action the commitment to close our large residential facilities.

You would probably be aware eight new small options homes have either recently opened or will open very soon, by the end of this fiscal year. We will also be building new small options homes to support the movement of individuals out of residential facilities into community. That's not to say that everyone who moves out of a residential facility will move into a small options home. There are other options that will be available, which takes me back to my earlier point around participant choice.

Supporting participants to move out of residential facilities where they may have lived for a very long time will be a very intimate and detailed process. We will not simply notify someone you're moving next week. We recognize that individuals - that's their home. So we need to work with them, their family, their friends, whoever forms that support network to make a decision about what makes the best sense for them. Is it a small options home? Is it an apartment where they have some supports coming in so that they can be full and productive members of community on their terms - what they need - and ensuring that we meet those needs?

Day programming actually does link into this. Certainly, as we move individuals from residential facilities to community, they may want to pursue involvement in day programming, or they may want to pursue other opportunities and we will be there to support them through our care coordinators and other supports in the department, and other supports that exist in the community that are quite apart from the work of the Department of Community Services. We will be there to make sure that they have all that they need to be successful in that transition.

LISA ROBERTS: For relatively younger people with significant disabilities that have left them without choice - I think just yesterday on the radio, I again heard quite a heartbreaking story of a young person living in a nursing home, which is an entirely inappropriate housing option, but that was the only choice that was available to them. I guess my question is: do they have the option to both live in a nursing home and participate in a day program and/or where is the milestone on the road map for those individuals and for people seeing that as the choice that they are being steered toward as a result of a lack of other options in the community?

TRACY TAWHEEL: You're correct in saying that an individual whose medical needs are such that we can't provide support through any of our disability service providers is supported through the Department of Health and Wellness, and there are some of those individuals who are younger who do live in long-term care facilities. You are correct. I'm sure we have all heard those stories.

We are working and continue to work creatively and in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness to determine the best way to support those individuals, recognizing that living in a long-term care facility is not optimal for someone who has not reached an age where it is an appropriate place to live. So we are working collaboratively to come up with models and different options to support those individuals who maybe don't fit the traditional kind of age range that we would normally find in a long-term care facility.

For participation in day programs, I'm not sure I can actually answer that question. It would really depend, I would think, on a case-by-case basis and on the interest and ability of the individual if they participated in any other programming, whether it's day programming or anything else outside of the long-term care facility where they would reside.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Miller.

HON. MARGARET MILLER: Thank you for being here today. It's really exciting to know that you were going to be here and that we could discuss some of these great measures that are taking place.

I was fortunate enough to be with the Premier for the announcement in Hants East for the CCOA funding, and I can tell you that that announcement was met with cheers and a lot of tears of joy. They're such a hard-working group that have been doing so much in the community and so much for the people with decreased abilities, and this speaks to their ability to expand and to be able to service so many more people in the area. Fundraising in our community, since this is a large project - I know they received \$1.5 million, which seems a lot, but I think the project was \$6 million or \$7 million, so certainly the community is involved with this as well. One supporting business donated almost \$150,000 as their share of Jig the Joker - that was one small business. The community is really invested in this project and with the residents who receive the support of CCOA.

For those who don't know, it's somewhat like Summer Street as well. They have a lot of facilities going on: they have a catering business, they have a coffee shop, they have a large thrift shop. I can't wait to be in there after COVID and everybody cleaning out their closets. It should be really good right now. They do a woodworking shop where they make those large chairs. I think we've seen a picture with the Premier sitting on them. It's the only time I've ever seen him look like a small man. They do washer toss boxes, kindling and more.

I can tell you from personal experience, every time you visit that facility, you walk away feeling good because their smiles are so bright, they work so hard, they're so accommodating. You just go away the whole day having this warm feeling about you, but I have been concerned about them, as well as many of the other facilities.

As with other entities, CCOA closed because of COVID and was not able to supply the same services as they always had, and their private funding basically stopped. There was no more ability to do any funding. How has the Department of Community Services supported them, and how has this affected them? Are they still on an even keel, or are they going to have to play catch-up for a while?

TRACY TAWHEEL: Certainly throughout the first wave of COVID during our response phase, there were impacts - as I believe Mr. Bennett mentioned - right across all of our adult service centres, and all of them did in fact have to close, as you have articulated.

We worked collaboratively with each of those organizations to provide them with the support that they would need to continue to support their participants. We also provided families with additional funding for respite care and things like that, that might help to make that period of isolation a little less burdensome on families and participants.

[10:45 a.m.]

As Mr. Bennett has referenced, organizations like Summer Street were very creative in terms of ensuring that they continued to stay connected to their participants, to their employees, so they continued to feel socially connected, and also connected from a recreational and a social perspective. We worked collaboratively with CCOA and all of the organizations that we support to make sure that they had what they needed to continue to support their participants.

As we have worked through recovery, organizations did follow advice through Public Health. We worked collaboratively with Public Health as well to ensure that they understood the scope and the reach of adult service centres, provided advice in terms of how to safely reopen, and since that time have been continuing to work collaboratively to provide the supports that are required, whether that is additional funding to support participants whose needs may have changed or whatever other need the organization may have that has come about as a direct result of COVID-19 response.

MARGARET MILLER: My next question is for Mr. Bennett. I certainly see the benefits in my community of how they've impacted my community. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit more in general about how the organizations have impacted on both the participants and the community.

BOB BENNETT: Although not the most desired way to encourage innovation, the necessity of the pandemic made it so. From a positive perspective, we continue to have participants who are choosing to receive services virtually - in some cases totally virtually



- because they're not comfortable in returning to a physical structure. We have people who are doing it part-time. I would foresee that could be the norm moving forward and the result would be probably much like it's going to be with universities and community colleges. There's going to be more opportunity for more people because there's less requirement for the physical space. That would be one positive thing.

I know we have positioned in Pictou County our organization and our participants to be actually givers back to their community during this crisis. We have been working closely with seniors in their homes, as was mentioned in the presentation by DIRECTIONS Council. That has been started up and is ongoing. As I mentioned, we provided food for vulnerable populations and that's just starting. We've just expanded now to Guysborough County for the same reasons. So there are some opportunities that came up.

The downside is that some people are very isolated and very lonely. As good as virtual communication and counselling and that kind of stuff can be, it has taken a heavy toll on people - some people more than others - no different than the people in this room and the people that you know. There is good and bad that has come out of this pandemic.

BRIAN COMER: The last summary report for adult service centres that I could find was done in 2008. I'm just wondering if that's correct and do we know the current wait-lists in the province for adult service centres.

TRACY TAWHEEL: The 2008 report that you would have seen posted on the Department of Community Services website - that was the last report of that nature. However we evaluate on an ongoing basis and have service-level agreements in place with all of our service providers, so we are actually evaluating more regularly now and work more collaboratively than we ever have before, I would suggest.

With regard to your question around wait-lists, there are approximately 400 people on a wait-list for day programs. I would use that number, however, with a bit of caution - that 400 people are 400 people that we are aware of that are on wait-lists. There are many others who are not clients of the Department of Community Services who may also desire access to a day program, so 400 would be what we are aware of.

Adult service centres approach wait-lists very differently. I think Mr. Bennett's approach at Summer Street, if I understand correctly - they don't maintain a wait-list. If someone has an interest, they figure out a way to accommodate. It's not always possible for all service centres to do that, but I can't stress enough how flexible they all try to be to meet the needs of their participants.

Likewise, if a participant on a wait-list that has access to a day program requires a little more support, we in turn will work collaboratively with the service centre to determine if maybe additional staffing is required or what might be required so that individual can enjoy success with the service centre to determine if maybe additional staffing is required

or what might be required so that individual can enjoy success in the day program once they're able to enter it.

BRIAN COMER: I'm just wondering what kind of analysis has been conducted to maybe get a picture of the inability of these adult service centres to fundraise due to COVID-19. Is there any risk of any closures of these service centres across the province?

TRACY TAWHEEL: We work very collaboratively with all of the adult service centres, as well as with Mike Townsend, who is not here today, who is kind of the executive director of diversabilities, who brings all of those organizations together.

I would certainly suggest adult service centres, like other not-for-profits, have struggled to fundraise during this time. I would say that I have never witnessed such a high degree of creativity and collaboration in community. I think Mr. Bennett's comment about how Summer Street is so strongly supported by the community - I think that is absolutely showing up for all of the adult service centres.

There is no question they will experience - and will have experienced - some challenges to their fundraising capacity as a result of COVID-19. So we will work collaboratively with them to ensure that we don't have any adult service centres closing. There is not a risk of that. We will ensure that they remain open and serving their participants.

BILL HORNE: This is a very important subject that we need to be more aware of as MLAs. I was very intrigued with Mr. Bennett's discussions and Mr. Townsend's presentation that you read for him.

I have interest in the Department of Community Services' involvement in these community groups that look after those who are in need and intellectually challenged. Building Futures is the one that I started attending when I became an MLA. I've enjoyed it immensely. We go there weekly for their lunches - normally every week. It's nice to see the younger people and the older people who have challenges working there, and it puts a smile on my face every day we go in there.

Having said, that, I know your operation has been going for about 50 years. I would like to know how well you support other groups that are setting up these types of community groups - how easy it is. Do you interact with them on a yearly basis or monthly basis, co-operating with each other to other parts of the province, maybe, with people who are considering some of the programs you are starting and have started - how that helps the community. I'd like to know a little bit more about how you interact with other community organizations similar to yours.

BOB BENNETT: Speaking as a member agency of DIRECTIONS to start with, that's probably one of DIRECTIONS' best qualities. It's a network of people who willingly share and brainstorm any challenge that is presented, and we try to deal with it as a group.

Everyone is willing to share best practices and information almost on a daily basis. You get an email from somebody and it usually starts off with “in case you haven’t seen this.” So people are kept in the loop on things that maybe they wouldn’t necessarily know. That’s just touching the tip of the iceberg in terms of sharing of resources, ideas, and ways to approach things.

In Pictou County with us, as I said, we’re known for bringing the right people to the table. We make no apologies for that. If you are our client, and these people need to be at that table for you to have your work-life balance that you want, we will make sure these people are in that room when the decisions are being made along with you - not for you - along with you. If you don’t have the right people in the room, it just doesn’t work. It will fall apart somewhere - at least that has been our experience.

We don’t try to solve the problems for everybody or all the issues. We just try to make sure that we get the right people in the room. We do it in a nice way - we’re not confrontational - so people in Pictou County want to join us. We have a very wonderful relationship with the Department of Community Services at the regional level. They attend ISPs. They’re part of it. They like to know more about it. When they’re there, they ask good questions. What may seem to an individual or the family of an individual like “we’re never going to be able to solve this issue,” for example - often you’d be surprised.

Again, people are very creative and open-minded. When you get drawn into somebody’s personal life challenges, you really work hard to try to find solutions because, to be honest, it makes you feel good too.

BILL HORNE: For Community Services, about small option homes: before homes are put anywhere, are there any discussions with the communities themselves? I know we’ve had option homes where there has been a problem with the person who was living there and it created quite a stir in the Department of Community Services, I think.

I’m thinking: should there not be more interaction with communities when you are thinking of putting small option homes for individuals that have been taken out of the system and put in there to be much better for them? I’m just wondering about the kind of discussions with communities before that happens.

TRACY TAWHEEL: When we look for locations for small options homes based on the needs of participants - where they can access services and where they can be actively involved in the community - we don’t routinely consult with communities. Quite honestly, it would be no different than if I decide I’m going to move to Tantallon. I’m not going to consult with the community. Maybe they’d want me to, but I’m not going to consult with the community that I will be moving there. (Laughter)

Likewise, those individuals - persons with disabilities, participants that we serve - are no different than you or me. They deserve to live in a community in an integrated and fully participative fashion.

I guess the short answer would be that there is not community consultation because it's really not required. I think communities that are blessed enough to have some of the small options homes built within their midst will be that much richer for it - for the difference that comes when we embrace all Nova Scotians as part of our communities.

THE CHAIR: I see we're one minute to 11 o'clock, so this is perhaps a good point for us to break for 15 minutes and return at 11:14 a.m.

[10:59 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:14 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order, please. I'd like to call the meeting back to order. We'll continue with our questions and answers from committee members. Mr. Craig, you're up next.

STEVE CRAIG: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here today. I see in you a grit and stuff it takes to help our most vulnerable and their families. What we're talking about in disability support are for those who are, indeed, the most vulnerable across all social economic realities of our province. It takes special people to do the work you do. I want to thank you all personally for that. I sincerely mean that. Without you, things probably would be a little bit tougher for more people. Thank you very much for being here today and presenting and being able to take our questions.

I have two lines of questioning. One will be around governance for Ms. Taweel. My second supplementary will be for Mr. Bennett.

Relative to governance, you had mentioned earlier that there are service level agreements, and I don't know how recently they've started. Within those, though, I'm wondering what the metrics might be. We have, as you all know, profiles from Level 1 support for minimal support, right up through to the most intensive at Level 5. Within the service agreements, is there recognition that we need to take a look at the whole spectrum? We absolutely need to do that. If so, in that, does it indicate by region, for example, and does the department have an overall strategy for looking at that and divvying up the pie, if I could phrase it that way?

With Summer Street, the people I talk with - and I've got the Building Futures Employment Society, which used to be the Anchor Industries Society, out in my community - I've been very involved in that for decades. We also have Quest Regional Rehabilitation Centre on Memory Lane, and many other areas. My mother, in fact, worked with a disabilities support program in a group home here in Halifax in the North End, probably in the 1980s. I have a great admiration and appreciation for what's going on. I want to help make you even better, if that's possible.

Relative to the service level agreements, what types of things are in there to take a look at, for example, wait-lists - where you have your participants, or "clients" some people may call them - varying levels of support that's required, and how often do you take a look at those service level agreements, check in with the providers and so on? I think you get the gist of my question.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I will start, and I might invite my colleague, Ms. Medioli, to also augment my response. We do have agreements in place, and as I think I mentioned a number of times this morning, we meet and discuss very regularly with all of our service providers, so in this instance certainly adult service centres. We're meeting very regularly, talking about creative paths forward. I believe Mr. Bennett referenced diverse abilities, having a very unique way of putting a challenge on the table and then organizations coming together to work together to solve that challenge.

Likewise, we are part of many of those conversations and work very collaboratively with adult service centres to ensure that they have what they need to meet the needs of those that they are serving.

The way the Department of Community Services is structured, we have care coordinators who would be working very collaboratively with participants and in turn working with adult service centres. We also have a role called service provider relations. We have four service provider relations roles, and those individuals have a particular region in the province. Their job is basically to visit all of the sites that we fund, including adult service centres, to work with Bob and his colleagues to determine how things are working at the facility: how are the participants doing? Is the adult service centre adequately resourced to provide and meet the needs of the participants?

We do have conversations very regularly about wait-lists and the composition of individuals who are on wait-lists. I neglected to say earlier - when I referenced wait-lists in response to an earlier question - being on a wait-list doesn't necessarily mean that a participant isn't already receiving other services. It may mean that they just want to receive more. In the context of determining what's being received by a participant, we would also be looking at adult service centres to say, okay, your service array, could that perhaps meet the need of a particular participant on the wait-list?

We obviously look at things like budgets and things along those lines, and meeting set protocols and standards that are in place for all adult service centres or other organizations that we fund.

The secondary part of your question about divvying things up around the province - I'm not sure I was completely clear on that, so I will hazard a response to that, and if you require more clarification, please just indicate. Adult service centres are spread quite well across the province. There are a number from one end of the province to the other: 30 adult service centres. There are more providers of day programs, though, than just adult service centres.

In some residential facilities, day programs are provided. I also would like to make the point that while we are here today talking about day programs, day programs are but one option in a whole suite or spectrum of options that are available for persons with disabilities. Just because an individual doesn't go to a day program doesn't mean they aren't meaningfully engaged through another community organization or employed in their community, et cetera.

Perhaps Maria would like to augment that.

MARIA MEDIOLI: Thank you. As you mentioned, we do have service level agreements with all of our service providers and they do all contain outcome measures that they will report against. I could provide the exact wording of those measures, but they're more around the achievement of outcomes of participants. Those are the types of things that we would measure; the number of outcomes achieved, the number of programs delivered, things like that. I don't believe there's an outcome specific to a wait-list.

Also, in terms of the service level agreements, they're reviewed annually when they're re-signed. We're in touch with our program providers in a multitude of ways checking in. For example, I actually have a weekly call with Mike Townsend, the Executive Director of DIRECTIONS, who identifies issues and challenges. I attend the biannual conference of DIRECTIONS.

We have engaged a number of joint problem-solving initiatives, whether it's around pension challenges, funding challenges, et cetera. I would say we have a relationship-based approach as well. I probably speak weekly with a number of different providers just as different issues come up and we have an opportunity to check in.

If you want me to provide the exact outcomes from the service level agreement, I can do that afterwards.

STEVE CRAIG: I will take you up on that offer. Maybe you can share it with the total committee. I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Bennett, with the folks I talk with, you set the gold standard in your organization - in Summer Street. You have a foundation. You don't have a wait-list. You are accommodating to participants as best you can be. That's a wonderful position to be in. You've got the geographic location. You've got a community that is absolutely interested and intrigued by what you do and totally supportive.

I do want to also mention that in the comments earlier about how DIRECTIONS works - and again in talking with a number of people who are representatives on that - they've indicated it is a great opportunity to exchange ideas and run. Does this work? Does it not work? That collective collaborative impact is impressive, as well.

Relative, though, to staffing - your staff: these are the staff who would be “professional” staff, not some of the participants who you would employ. What are the challenges in obtaining and retaining staff in this environment? We’ve heard - in similar environments in the last six or eight months about challenges with long-term care, health care, and so on - that there are challenges in having staff. Also, too, the ability of staff to perhaps move around relative to middle management. Some of the labour relations issues around salary and perhaps even squeezing some of the middle management - if I can phrase it that way - and their opportunities to improve their financial means and moving around with the skills that they obtain.

I guess my question comes down to: what are the challenges you face with your staff? They’re all professional, granted, but as far as an employer of professional staff to do what it is, to achieve your mission - what are your current challenges?

BOB BENNETT: When I’m speaking now, I’m speaking on behalf of Summer Street and not the sector.

We as an organization spend a lot of resources investing in staff at the various levels - whether they’re front line or whether it is an instructor or a manager or director. We do invest in that kind of thing in a big way, so I think that is looked after.

I’m trying to think of the other things that you mentioned. In terms of what we pay people, the province sets the standard for front-line staff wages. That’s not set by us as the employer, so that’s looked after that way.

In terms of people who are not front line - in the service agreement, you get an allocation of funding that includes positions that are funded by the province at the management level. As an organization, we supplement that because we do recognize that it’s not necessarily where it could be. That’s how we offset that.

In terms of advancement, to be honest, we don’t have a whole lot of turnover so there’s limited opportunity for advancement, but if we have a manager who is going off on a leave for one reason or another, we do promote within first to give people the opportunity. We think that’s just the way that you make your organization grow.

I think maybe one of the reasons why we don’t have a lot of turnover is because - my role in the organization is really to make sure that when people apply to work for us, that they’ve got the skill set, the credentials and the qualifications to do the job - but I don’t hire them. Once that’s done, that means that they get sent to a hiring committee, which would consist of the manager in whatever department they’re applying for - but more importantly clients that receive services there. They’re the people who make the decision on the final hiring.

By doing that thing, I think it has positively contributed to not having too much turnover, because they’re tough. They’re very tough interviewers and they score very hard,

but they get the best possible person. The best thing about it is that if that was you and you got offered a job, when you come to work tomorrow, you might see me in the hallway, but you're not going to look at me and say, "there's Bob, he hired me," because I didn't. The person who hired you is the person you're providing services with or supporting. That just changes the whole dynamic in the work environment.

That's the Summer Street perspective. On behalf of the sector, I don't have the answer for you on that, but we can get it.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you all for coming. This issue is very close and personal to my heart. My brother happens to have Down Syndrome and takes part in these types of programs. This question I'm going to ask is very close to our family. In Nova Scotia, people with disabilities make up a higher proportion of the population than in the country as a whole. Twenty-two per cent of Canadians have a disability and 30 per cent are Nova Scotians. We also have an aging population.

My first question is: As parents age out of caring for adult children with disabilities, will it or how is it going to impact the need for services like the ones that are offered?

[11:30 a.m.]

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I would say without a question it will absolutely impact the need for service. We are working on forecasting models to try to get a better handle on exactly what that impact will be. I think just purely based on the demographic shifts that are happening, there will absolutely be an increase on demand for service.

The other aspect that I guess I would add to my response is that we're also working hard to learn more about what younger parents with younger children who have disabilities, what service array they may be interested in, recognizing that the models that we've had in place for many years that - while they continue to evolve and change and be responsive to participant needs - it may not be the model that will work for families as their children get older.

We look at constantly changing and modifying our program offerings to make sure that we do meet the needs of those that we serve.

KENDRA COOMBES: Yes, and it's along these lines similar to this. With regards to the department, how is the department planning for the service's needs, particularly in terms of budgeting for the replacement costs of care services that in many cases family members, mostly women, are providing on an unpaid basis?

THE CHAIR: Quick clarification on your question, Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Would that be part of the forecasting?



THE CHAIR: Your microphone didn't quite come on. She asked, was that part of the forecasting?

TRACY TAWHEEL: The budget in the Disability Support Program has grown over the last five years and continues to grow in response to demand and to the needs of our participants. I again will invite my colleague if she wants to augment my response.

I would say that the way we are approaching the changing demographics and needs is in kind of a multi-faceted way. As I've referenced earlier, we work very collaboratively with all of our service providers who are working hand in hand every single day with participants and have a very good read on what participant needs are now and into the future.

We also are looking at a more robust forecasting model so that we can better predict what the needs for services will be - the full spectrum of service. Additionally, as we work to close larger residential facilities, we recognize that for the needs of those individuals who will be moving out of residential facilities, we need to make sure we have appropriate services to support those individuals. Some of those services will be through adult day programs, certainly, but there's also a lot of other services that they may want to avail themselves of at the community level.

I guess that is another piece, working with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, working with other partners right across the province, to make sure that communities are open and welcoming and recognize the value that Nova Scotians with diverse abilities can bring to the workplace, can bring to recreation facilities, to not-for-profits, to every facet.

I'm not sure if I've covered every aspect of your question or not. I guess the main point I want to make is that we are very aware of the changes that are coming - we're in the midst of them now - and are working with every available resource to make sure that what we offer remains relevant and meets the needs for our participants. Nova Scotia is not alone in this challenge. This is a challenge being faced right across the country.

I guess the last component I would add is that we work very collaboratively with other jurisdictions on best practice, on program and service arrays that they may be creating or that they may offer to see if there's anything in that mix that could be of value for those that we serve here in this province. That work happens at a variety of different levels.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Medioli.

MARIA MEDIOLI: I have to say that the concern of aging parents is one that I hear every day. It's real, and it does touch me on a daily basis when I meet parents and they talk about the worry of who will take care of their kids when they're gone.

In that regard, I think there are a couple of pieces: there's dealing with where we are right now, and then there's planning for the future. All studies show that the key to

supporting persons with disabilities successfully - there's sort of a couple of key points in their timeline of life where you can support them to independence and set them up for success. That really is a key piece, and we've heard about the 16-to-24-year-old cohort, for example. That's a key time.

There's also supporting families early when children are young so that they have the tools and skills they need - both the families and the participants.

We are developing a children's array, and that's about the future. That's about making sure we have the services in place to provide the supports at those key timelines in a participant's life. That's being developed right now. There's a range of programs and services that we're looking at. That also includes, for example, the youth day program pilot and those types of life skills that would set up those participants to be able to live independently. That's for the future.

In terms of the present, we also have another pilot. It's a person-directed planning pilot which is about helping to develop a person-directed plan for participants using what we call natural and community supports - so not necessarily paid supports, not necessarily supports for the Disability Support Program. It's a sad life if all of your supports and activities are related to somebody who's paid to be with you.

The person-directed pilot is focused on those participants who aren't currently receiving a service, necessarily, through a residential service provider so that we can start to connect them with supports in the community through other avenues. That's happening at the same time. That's the kind of program that would help support some of the people that you're talking about who might be living at home. How can we connect them with those unpaid supports, natural supports, other community supports - whether it's a recreation centre, those sorts of things?

At the same time, as you've probably heard us mention before, we are creating new placements and new capacity in the system. Hopefully, we can start to move some of those participants off the wait-list. We have 50 this year and then we have, hopefully, 70 for the next five years. That should make a big difference in terms of creating additional residential capacity for participants.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We've got about 18 minutes. I've got Mr. Jessome for a question and supplementary, and I've got three others on the list for our 18 minutes, so it probably will fill our time. Let's see how it goes. Maybe they're short snappers coming up. Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I'll just invite both teams to weigh in on this and I'll refrain from asking a supplementary.

It's clear that there is an appetite and an ability to bring the right people to the table to help inform a person-centred approach to decision making. There are mechanisms in

place. I'm thinking of the survey that was referenced and that appetite to go back to individuals about how to improve, what's working and what's not. I believe in that practice and it's clear that there is a strong, demonstrated effort to achieve that.

I'm just curious. We see organizations, both government and otherwise, turn over as time progresses. In terms of the composition of these decision-making bodies - the board, the individuals with offices within the department - I'm wondering what type of conscious, purposeful effort your organizations make to include people from the African Nova Scotian community, from the youth population, from the Mi'kmaq community - things of that nature? While today we may have an appetite and an ability to be inclusive and considerate of these different segments of our population as a province, we should be conscious about embedding that structure into organizations, government and otherwise.

THE CHAIR: Maybe we'll begin with Ms. Taweel.

TRACY TAWHEEL: There are a number of pieces that I'd like to address in response to your question. Some relate specifically to the topic today, and some are broader and relate more to the Department of Community Services: how we deliver services and how we look at our policies and programs, et cetera.

Within the department, we are aggressively working through and on an anti-Black racism strategy that is helping us to develop and raise awareness within the department so that in turn we can more holistically and appropriately serve African Nova Scotian clients, whether they enter the system, if you will, whether they come to the Department of Community Services through income assistance or through the Disability Support Program - regardless of which door they come through - ensuring that we have all of the culturally appropriate supports in place to make sure that their experience and their outcome is optimized.

That work is under way now within the department, along with a number of other initiatives to ensure that all of the policies and programs that we offer have had a thorough and deep review from a cultural competence perspective, and we are also taking a look at our programs and services to ensure that we have pulled out any of the inherent biases that may be baked into our programs and services that we are not necessarily even aware of.

We've begun that work around some of our income assistance policies and programs. We will continue that work throughout all of the programs and services that we offer in the department.

From a staff perspective, we have been quite aggressive in designating positions so that we start to change the composition of the workforce inside the department from the senior levels right through the department, so that we do have persons with disabilities employed in the department. We have African Nova Scotians employed in the department. I don't want to make it sound like there is no diversity in the department. There is certainly some, but we know there should be more. We should be representative of the clients that

we serve. By extension, therefore, the experience of our clients will be that much richer and their outcomes will improve as a result.

With regard to the topic at hand today in terms of disability support programs, we are looking at taking a very hard look at the intersectionality between, for example, race and disability, and how the experience of a racialized Nova Scotian who also has a disability - the complexity of their experience in navigating programs and services, and society generally. I don't think we fully understand and respect how significant a challenge those individuals face. As a resource, as a support, we need to be better informed and more sensitive to those challenges, so we are taking a very close look at that within the department.

I think I'll pass it over to Mr. Bennett. I don't want to take up all the time, but I really do appreciate the question, and want the committee to know that it's absolutely part of our day-to-day work and a high priority.

[11:45 a.m.]

BOB BENNETT: In terms of board recruitment - I think that was your line of questioning - our board members serve two-year terms, which they can elect to be considered for two more times. The most they can stay on the board is six years. That's by design. They do commit to a two-year term. We do use a simple matrix, but it's a very detailed matrix when we're recruiting board members. We try to have a group of people around the table with enough diversity in their thinking, with the thinking that at the end of the conversation, the consensus will be a better decision than if just one person made it.

Recognizing diversity around the table is one of the matrix columns, for sure. It's one that we consistently talk about and it's one that we haven't been able to achieve the results that we hope to get, but we're still trying.

The other thing I'll mention is that from a diversity perspective - as I mentioned in my comments - we employ about 70 people in the organization and over 40 of them have some level of disability. We really try to hire our clients as our employees to the greatest extent that's possible. More recently, we created a new category - COVID Assurance Officers. They make sure that we're sanitized.

BEN JESSOME: Just to dig a little bit deeper - to Mr. Bennett. The board structure is one thing, but more targetedly I'm curious about an appetite or a thought around the actual board composition. Organizations as large as Hockey Canada are taking measures into their own hands as the next round of elections takes place at that national level, in that national board. They're taking strategic measures to ensure that the composition of that organization represents a diverse spectrum of people.

I truly believe that we're all well-intended to try to achieve that, but I guess I'm just curious if there is an appetite or any discussion - and this is a question I'm going to continue

to ask of people all around the province: what measures are you taking to ensure that the structure of your organization is achieving diversity from a decision-making perspective?

BOB BENNETT: I probably should make it clear that that's not an executive director's decision to start with. That's a board decision, and the process that we go through for recruitment, it is talked about a lot. I know from sitting on that committee as a non-voting member that the board is very keenly interested in trying to complement the board table with as much diversity as possible. But to be honest, it just hasn't found the right mechanism to do it in a way that meets the needs of the board at any given time.

It's not a conversation at every board meeting, but I bet it's a conversation for a few minutes at the very least at every second board meeting: how are we going to do that part better? So it is on our discussion table a lot.

THE CHAIR: We've got seven minutes and three folks, so it may have to be short snappers to get to everyone. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: It's actually on a similar line, and we didn't plan our questions, but for me I was thinking about the immigrants and how are they taking up on your programs.

I also wanted to compliment the amount of services that we have within the Department of Community Services. I would never have known about them until I was a medical interpreter. I actually worked for Community Services as an interpreter as well. I'm amazed at the amount of services available, especially for the newcomers. They were more than grateful. I also know that they come from countries where these things don't exist, so they are not likely to go ask or to be enrolled in any day program.

I'm wondering - thoughts of many of the families that I worked with. Are they taking advantage of your programs? How many of them are on your list and how are you dealing with the language issues if they are? Are you working with the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia on that? Are they enrolling in your daily program?

MARIA MEDIOLI: We're certainly aware of the challenges of new Canadians, and I am aware of several participants who are from families of new Canadians, but our program is really individualized. We do have the flexibility within policy to address specific and what we call special needs of participants. I can't say that I know of a situation in which we're paying for an interpreter, for example, but I think we would have that ability under a policy to meet that need.

I can't say that we've done a full-throttle reach-out to all the organizations with new Canadians, but we have a variety of networks whereby that information can be distilled. I'm sure there's an opportunity to do a broader reach-out to new Canadians, but as I said, I think we have the ability within our programs and the flexibility to meet their specific and unique needs.

KENDRA COOMBES: This question is for Mr. Bennett and Ms. Taweel. I understand from the vocational day program review report from 2008 that government funding used to make up 75 per cent of program budgets. I'm wondering what the percentage is now.

TRACY TAWHEEL: The percentage now is about 60 per cent.

THE CHAIR: That was a short snapper. Mr. Comer.

BRIAN COMER: My question revolves around COVID-19. I'm just wondering what the current capacity, ratio, or reduction in these adult service centres is - specifically meaning social distancing. Would we need more physical infrastructure to accommodate the same number of participants in the programs?

TRACY TAWHEEL: I would say yes. It would be the same as any workplace. To accommodate more and allow for that appropriate six-foot distance, the footprint would certainly have to be bigger if I'm understanding your question correctly. Similar to any workplace or any indoor facility, you'd need a larger footprint to accommodate more people.

THE CHAIR: Great. I think that finishes up our questions. I'd like to thank our guests and maybe turn it over to Ms. Taweel for some final closing remarks.

TRACY TAWHEEL: I'll be very brief - just to say thank you to the committee for the invitation. It is absolutely a privilege to be here. It is certainly a privilege to work at the Department of Community Services. As discussed this morning, day programs do certainly contribute meaningfully to the fabric of our communities and our province. They provide a wonderfully supportive environment for participants.

I'd also like to thank Mr. Bennett as well as Mike Townsend for their contributions and all that they do each and every day and all of our colleagues at all of the adult service centres. As well, the Disability Support Program staff and the Department of Community Services staff who work very hard every day to do their absolute utmost to make sure that anyone who comes to Community Services, to the Disability Support Program, receives all of the supports that they need to be successful.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Taweel. Mr. Bennett?

BOB BENNETT: I want to finish by saying what I said at the beginning. The proclamation that you unanimously passed - and I was here that day - was really important. You should be really proud of that one. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all of you for joining us here today and for your ongoing work in this sector. It's obviously important work

throughout all of Nova Scotia, as you indicated - over 30 facilities and partners across the province. I'm most familiar with the Flower Cart in my constituency. The places are a buzz of activity and smiles and important parts of our community.

I want to thank, in particular, Mr. Bennett for your work in your region and working collaboratively with others and, of course, the work that you do with the department and all the staff at the department who work in this sector.

Thank you all. You can depart over the wing of the left side of the airplane (Laughter). The committee will now move onto committee business.

We'll first begin with correspondence. We've two pieces of requested correspondence that have come in and have been provided electronically to members. The Department of Community Services provided information requested from the November 5, 2019 meeting. The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage provided information from the discussions at our February 4<sup>th</sup> meeting. If the Committee is satisfied with that information, I'd ask for agreement to post those responses to the Committee web page. We're satisfied there? Thank you.

We have other correspondence. The NDP caucus wrote on June 2<sup>nd</sup> requesting the Committee to reconvene. The PC caucus requested on June 7<sup>th</sup> for a similar request. PC caucus also wrote on July 13<sup>th</sup> with respect to a meeting on children in care with a follow-up letter on the 13<sup>th</sup>. So that is the correspondence.

I understand, before I go on to meeting dates, the PC caucus has a motion or two. Mr. Craig.

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Comer and I both have motions. I move that the Standing Committee on Community Services meet at least once monthly while in a state of emergency so we can ensure that the essential community services and housing program stakeholders have the opportunity to express their concerns directly to the Legislature's committee members. I so move.

THE CHAIR: Any comments? Mr. Craig?

STEVE CRAIG: As referenced in previous correspondence, we have seen a significant increase in our constituency offices in the PC caucus about concerns around COVID-19 and the impacts on provision of community services and housing programs. In that correspondence previously I had mentioned too that I believe that the legislative committee ought to be hearing from our constituents directly in this House. That's the genesis for this particular motion.

It's important that the stakeholders do have a voice, and that voice is done at this level too. We all have direct activities and means that we can go to ministers. However, there is another level of consideration here, and that is the authority and responsibility of

this committee in my opinion. So I would ask that the Committee members do approve this and should that happen, we can also agree on who we ought to be hearing from and set the agenda accordingly.

LISA ROBERTS: It's my pleasure to speak just briefly in favour of the motion.

I think all of the points in our society where there was already a lot of pressure have had additional pressure put on them by COVID, whether it is the experience of income assistance clients who have received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and are now transitioning and dealing with difficulties related to that, whether it is the number of people who are homeless and with shelters at reduced capacity - actually living with no address and therefore not receiving any income assistance because they're not eligible currently. There are many different issues that we could be adding to the agenda that are specific to the changes that we have experienced in Nova Scotia over the last six months and which might help some of those issues to be addressed. Certainly having an opportunity to add new items to the agenda because we have additional dates I think would be very positive.

THE CHAIR: Anyone else? Are there any comments? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is defeated. Mr. Comer.

BRIAN COMER: I move that the committee write a letter to the Department of Community Services requesting the Department of Community Services update its statistics on adult service centres and to be updated to include at least the last three years of data and current standing of adult service programs within the province, including wait-list costs and budgetary shortfalls as a means of better understanding the impact COVID-19 has had on these operations. I say this because the last publicly available data that I could find, and which was confirmed today, is 12 years old, so I think it's a completely reasonable request of this committee.

THE CHAIR: Are there any comments? Ms. Miller?

MARGARET MILLER: I would like a couple of minutes to discuss this with our caucus members.

THE CHAIR: There has been a request for a recess. The committee will recess for a couple of moments.

[12:00 noon The committee recessed.]

[12:01 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: The committee will now reconvene. Ms. Coombes, you wanted to speak to the motion?



KENDRA COOMBES: Yes, please. I think it's really important for this motion - I thank my colleague for bringing it forward. It is important that we have the most updated information so that we are aware and decision making can go ahead based on that information. So I look forward to supporting my colleagues in voting for this.

MARGARET MILLER: We have discussed this as well, and we have seen correspondence here from the department in a response that came from the Honourable Kelly Regan, and actually the PC Party has that ability to write themselves to the minister's office and get their own response to that, so we will not be supporting the motion.

STEVE CRAIG: As I mentioned in the previous motion that was defeated by the majority here, there is a difference between an individual MLA and a collective standing committee. The rights and the authorities - responsibilities of committee, I would suggest, as being collective members of this House - a standing committee would have added weight to the importance of the issues. This is an absolute proper place in my mind to ask that the committee support that rather than having - and in fact in COVID, we had feedback from different ministers and caucus members that we needed to consolidate a request and our ask into the government. To facilitate that we agreed to do that.

It's one of those things where I don't think anybody brings to this committee something that they think they could have made a difference of by doing it themselves and wasting the time of the committee. That is not the intent of these motions. So I would ask that the individual members support the motion.

THE CHAIR: Any further discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is defeated.

Next on the agenda is our meeting dates, and we do have a couple of things to decide here. The next meeting is on November 3<sup>rd</sup> and the following meeting December 1<sup>st</sup>. On both those dates, the witnesses are not available and are asking the committee if we could meet on Tuesday, November 10<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup>. The only difficulty in terms of scheduling is that both meetings would run up against the 1:00 p.m. meetings of the Health Committee. They would like two hours to clean the Chamber between committee meetings, so the recommendation from staff and the Legislative Assembly is to have those two meetings at 9:00 a.m., allowing for that COVID cleaning. Is that agreeable to the committee members to make sure that we get our witnesses and keep our committee business flowing? I see no opposition to that.

Our next meeting will be November 10<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m. The subject will be child poverty in Cape Breton with the Department of Community Services, the United Way Cape Breton, and the Cape Breton Family Practice Resource Centre.

If there's no further business, I would like to adjourn the meeting. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 12:05 p.m.]