

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, December 8, 2020**

**Via Video Conference**

**Families Plus Program**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Keith Irving, Chair  
Rafah DiCostanzo, Vice-Chair  
Ben Jessome  
Bill Horne  
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

Natalie Downey  
Acting Executive Director of Child, Youth and Family Services

Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia

Nancy MacDonald  
Executive Director



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2020**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**9:00 A.M.**

CHAIR  
Keith Irving

VICE-CHAIR  
Rafah DiCostanzo

THE CHAIR: Order, please. Order. I'd like to call the Standing Committee on Community Services meeting to order. My name is Keith Irving. I am the Chair of this committee.

We will be conducting this meeting by video conference over Zoom and be doing our best. We've had a few technical glitches. That's why we are late starting. Hopefully, we'll be able to get through our two-hour meeting here together without too many hiccups. Bear with us; we'll be doing the best we can.

I want to thank, first of all, Legislative Television and the clerks who have worked to set us up and try to work out all the bugs beforehand. I guess that's a bit of an impossibility, but here we are.

I'd like all members of the committee to keep their microphones on mute until I recognize you. Then during the question period, if you could indicate that you would like to ask a question, please do that by raising your hand and I'll do my best to keep track of the hands as they go up.

We are here to hear from witnesses from the Department of Community Services and, as well, the Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia to discuss the Families Plus program here today. Let's begin by asking the committee members to introduce themselves.

[9:15 a.m.]

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We'll now ask our witnesses to introduce themselves and move into their opening statements. We'll begin with Deputy Taweel, who has Natalie Downey by her side there this morning. Deputy Taweel, over to you.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Good morning, everyone. Thank you again for inviting the Department of Community Services to have an opportunity to speak with you today about the Families Plus program. As the Chair has mentioned, joining me is Natalie Downey, Acting Executive Director of Children, Youth and Family Supports at Community Services.

I'm also very pleased to be here this morning with Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, which provides the service of Families Plus for families in our communities. We are very thankful to that organization for all the work they do in communities to support families, children, and individuals in many ways.

Our partnership with community-based organizations is so important. They provide expertise to help plan, develop, and implement programs and services needed by children, youth, and families right across our province.

As the committee knows, safe and healthy children, youth, and families are vital to building a stronger Nova Scotia. The emotional, social, and physical development of children has a direct impact on their psychological and physical health, and on the adult they will become. Evidence clearly shows that prevention and early intervention are key to helping families at risk. Working with parents at the community level to help them manage challenges and provide support can dramatically impact the outcome for families at risk.

At the Department of Community Services, we often support families and children when there is a crisis. As committee members are aware, our aim is to move to a child welfare system that focuses more on prevention and early intervention and away from crisis. That is why an additional \$1.9 million is being invested this year in prevention and early intervention. This includes making Families Plus available to more families in our communities.

Families Plus is part of the Prevention and Early Intervention program within Children, Youth and Families Supports. Families Plus was developed here in Nova Scotia

and is designed to work with families in crisis whose children are at imminent risk of removal and placement into out-of-home care. The goal is for children to stay home with their family in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment.

This program is truly a partnership that involves child protection and adoption, Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, and very importantly, eligible families. Families are referred by child protection and adoption staff after an assessment is completed. To take part in the program, there must be a reasonable prospect of improvement within the family with the right supports.

As I have mentioned, the staff of Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia offer the program and do so in the community right across the province. The staff are registered social workers led by a team of clinical staff.

Families who take part in the program do so for up to 36 weeks. This happens in two stages. The first phase is an intensive one where children and families have access to home-based supports and 24-hour, on-call assistance for up to 12 weeks. This is followed by a step-down phase, where home-based supports continue for up to 24 weeks. At this time, the family may also connect with more services available in the community.

It's important to note that participation in Families Plus is entirely voluntary. Children and families work as part of a team to identify the tools and supports they need. A plan is developed based on the unique circumstances of the family to meet those needs both during the program and afterward.

Families Plus began as a pilot in Sydney during 2016. Two years later, the program expanded to New Glasgow. Based on this success, service was added in August 2019 for families in the Sackville area. I'm pleased to tell you today that Families Plus is expanding again this year to support more children and their families in the Halifax region. A second case worker is being added to the program in Sackville, allowing more families to access supports in their community.

A new designated program is also being launched for African Nova Scotian families in the entire Halifax region. African Nova Scotian families may be referred by our offices in Halifax, Dartmouth or Sackville. The designated program is very important because children from African Nova Scotian communities need services that are grounded in their culture. We know from evidence that having culturally grounded programming is key when supporting families - particularly families in crisis.

Families Plus is now in its fifth year and is still relatively new, but we know it has had a positive impact on the lives of children and their families. We know Families Plus is working because children and their families have told us so. As one participant of the program said, "It was great. We all sit around the table and talk things out. We never did that before."

Over the last five years, 36 families have accessed the service, including 83 children. I'm pleased to report that the majority of those children remained at home after the program. It is a success any time a child can be prevented from coming into care by supporting a family to have the tools and supports they need.

Given the high intensity of Families Plus, the caseload capacity is low. Eligible families are referred if there is space available in the program. If not, the family will continue with case management and child protection.

I've already mentioned that Families Plus connects children and families with supports they can access in the community as their journey continues. Family Resource Centres, Boys and Girls Clubs, and men's intervention programs are examples of services available on an ongoing basis. These programs, like Families Plus, are funded by Prevention and Early Intervention.

As I mentioned, funding for these types of supports has increased by just under \$2 million this year. Through this new investment, programs and services like Families Plus are expanding to more communities, providing more at-risk children and their families with targeted services and supports.

The Department of Community Services is also working to enhance supports, including having programming for the specific needs of our African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw Nova Scotian families. Our partnership with local organizations to offer community-based support is so important to improve results for young people and families. We know children do better at home in an environment that is safe and nurturing.

Prevention and early access to supports and services also reduces the need for more costly, intrusive, and less effective government interventions later on. For all of these reasons, I'm pleased that more families can access programs like Families Plus this year.

We also want young people and their families to be happy, healthy, and have the tools they need to overcome challenges. Families Plus is part of the shift we're making to a system that is driven more by prevention and early intervention, and less by the need to respond to crisis. The work we are doing with families and community partners is important and must continue. Together, we have much more to do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Taweel. I was wondering if you could bring onto the screen . . . (Inaudible)

NATALIE DOWNEY: Good morning, everyone. I am the ghost person in the room. I am the Acting Executive Director for Childhood and Family Supports. I'm happy to be here and look forward to this discussion.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Natalie. I'll turn it over to Ms. MacDonald to introduce herself and make some opening remarks.

NANCY MACDONALD: Good morning, everyone. Nancy MacDonald, Executive Director with Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia. I just want to share with the committee a little bit about our organization.

We're an active member of the national Family Service Canada organization which is committed to building healthy and resilient families across the country. There are over 27 member organizations and we're all community-based, social-serving agencies that believe strongly in collaborative relationships with government partners in the development and delivery of services.

Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia is also an active member of Family Service Atlantic. The coalition is made up of six family-serving agencies across New Brunswick, P.E.I., and Nova Scotia.

Specifically, our organization has been providing community-based services that support healthy development and well-being of individuals and families in Nova Scotia for over 51 years. We're governed by a volunteer board of directors and are a registered not-for-profit.

Historically, we provided services primarily in the Eastern Region as well as in the northern parts of Nova Scotia. Within the past two years, Family Service has extended to Central Nova Scotia through the expansion of the Families Plus program in Sackville. Recently, we've reached a provincial scope with the implementation of the 24/7 Men's Helpline.

Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, I'm proud to say, is a leader in providing counselling supports and services that contribute to the healthy development and well-being of children, youth, families, and communities. Our workers are licensed and insured social workers and counsellors and we're considered to have an ability to deliver Tier 3 services within the province.

Over a year, we serve thousands of families through strong collaborative relationships with various government departments and numerous community-based organizations. We're currently a staff of 33 full-time and 15 part-time employees.

We're very excited and honoured to host the Families Plus program and I look forward to this in-depth conversation about it. It's a program that we're very, very happy with. A quote that I just wanted to end with was from a mom who says, "Thank you for taking our family onto your team. Your team has made a significant impact in the healing and growth of our family."

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms. MacDonald. We'll now move to questions from the committee. I think I had three hands up. If I've missed anybody, you can get your hand up in a moment. I'll be starting with Ms. Miller, then Ms. Coombes, and Mr. Craig.

We'll go to approximately 10:50 a.m. so that we can move to committee business. I'm just going to add Ms. DiCostanzo, Mr. Comer, and Ms. Roberts. I've got you as second here, Ms. Coombes.

Ms. Miller for one question and one supplementary.

HON. MARGARET MILLER: Thank you so much. Can you tell me a little bit more about the program? It sounds fascinating and I can see how beneficial it would be to people to get involved.

How do families actually get involved in the program?

[9:30 a.m.]

NANCY MACDONALD: The families are referred directly from child protection. This is an interesting program because it is a single entry point. They are identified through the child protection team as needing the highest level of prevention necessary to attempt to keep the kids out of care. Unlike many of the other programs we run where community referrals can be made, this is a single entry point of program referral.

I'm not sure if Natalie or the deputy minister want to add anything to that.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I think Ms. MacDonald covered it very well. I guess the only thing that I would just reference is that there are three sites where we deliver the program, which I referenced in my opening remarks - New Glasgow, Sydney, and Sackville - and we are expanding in the Halifax area.

Ms. MacDonald is quite correct about how the referral is made is through child protection. I did want to stress that while the referral comes through child protection, it very much is a partnership between Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia as well as the child protection team and the family. To Ms. MacDonald's point that it is a very unique program, I would suggest it's also very unique in that regard. The families have a lot of very active involvement in working collaboratively with their team, and I think her quote very much shines a spotlight on how collaborative the relationship really is, which I think is key to its success.

MARGARET MILLER: You mentioned that 36 families are taking part in that, which is very impressive, but I can see where this could be expanded to many, many families. Do you actually have a waiting list?



NANCY MACDONALD: Because of the nature of the program, because these families are requiring the highest level of prevention possible in order to keep the kids out of care, the program can't function with a waiting list. What happens is if there's not availability in the program, then the child protection team then reassesses what else is available.

Yes, there is a need for further access to it, for sure. I think the department has been very diligent and careful with how it's been rolled out. We wanted to try it to see what the results were going to be in Sydney, and from Sydney then it expanded to New Glasgow and expanded to Central Zone, with a second expansion in Central Zone.

It's been very intentional. It's been very responsive over the time to make sure that we're following the program, but also making sure that we're delivering and it has outcomes based on what we had hoped that it would have, but I agree with you completely. Having access for families across the province to this who require it would be a wonderful goal.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Coombes - and just for everyone's information, I've got Ms. Coombes, Mr. Craig, Ms. DiCostanzo, Mr. Comer, Ms. Roberts, Mr. Horne, Mr. Jessome.

Over to you, Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: I was trying to get on for a second turnaround for questions.

We know that 100 per cent of families in Nova Scotia who rely on government support as their only source of income live in poverty because the amount of support falls below the poverty line. I'd like to ask Ms. MacDonald: based on her organization's work with families, does poverty play a role in the issues that they are facing?

NANCY MACDONALD: I think if you look at the overall social determinants of health, poverty is present, for sure. I think one of the wonderful things about this particular program is that it really tried to be as barrier-free as possible, so it is without any cost to participate. Also, because it's a home-based program - I live and work in rural Nova Scotia, and the access to service in terms of transportation is a huge issue, especially for families who are living below the poverty line. The fact that our workers go into people's homes wherever they happen to live, whatever version of home they're calling - that is a huge benefit to this program.

You talked about families living below the poverty line, and I also think this program has been responsive and reflexive in the sense that it is a 24/7 program. Families get to identify when they need the service. If it's in the evening, then our social workers are in that home. If it's in the morning, to get the help to establish a school-time, wake-up

daycare routine, then that's when our workers are in there. If it's a Sunday, then our workers are in there on a Sunday.

I like to think that this program actually helps support families that are struggling in a whole bunch of structural and system ways. It's really unlike any other program that we've had the honour of offering, truthfully.

KENDRA COOMBES: Along the same lines of questioning, it says in the presentation from the department that the goal of the child welfare transformation is to move from a child welfare system that is crisis-driven to one that is focused on prevention and early intervention. With that, my question is for the department. How are you addressing the root causes like poverty that make children, youth, and families vulnerable?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Certainly, as Ms. MacDonald has outlined, poverty can be a contributor to causing instability in family situations, but we also recognize that frequently, poverty in and of itself is not a driver for a family finding themselves in crisis. It is often a complex mix of a variety of different traumas like intergenerational trauma, substance abuse and addiction issues, mental health issues. There can be a number of issues that bring a family to the point where they are effectively experiencing crisis.

To help address some of those underlying issues, as the member referenced from my remarks, we spoke in our presentation about starting to shift our system from being primarily crisis-driven to stepping more into the space of being able to provide preventive and early intervention supports much earlier on in terms of our relationship with the family in crisis.

The support that a family needs will be as unique as every family itself. It would be impossible for me to talk about all of the various supports. When we talk about Families Plus, the topic at hand today - as Ms. MacDonald has referenced, this program provides full wraparound support, and initially 24/7 support that looks at addressing all of the risk factors that family may be encountering.

Families Plus, however, is but one program that we offer in our full suite of prevention and early intervention programming options. Each of those programs, along with other supports that exist out in the community, delivered through organizations like Family Resource Centres, Boys and Girls Clubs, et cetera, tackle and address other unique challenges that families may be experiencing - and so working collaboratively with their case worker, with their social worker, they can develop a plan to determine which supports may make the most sense for them.

That's not to say that families who don't have involvement with the department can't access those services as well. There are services available within communities right across the province. Regardless of whether the family has contact with the Department of Community Services or not, they are still able to access many programs and services that

are available that may help to stabilize the family and prevent any encounter with the department.

The last comment I would make is that, as I referenced the last time we were together just about a month ago speaking about poverty within the province, there are a number of other investments that have been made: for example, the Nova Scotia Child Benefit that works to provide more money to families who are at risk and who are living in lower-income situations.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Craig.

STEVE CRAIG: Good morning. First of all, let me make a statement briefly. I'm in full support of the Families Plus program. I think early intervention and prevention is paramount in what we all do and to avoid us getting into a crisis situation. Congratulations on this program that's in its infancy. I think there is more work to do and there is a lot more capacity to be had.

My question is for Ms. MacDonald. In your model, you are funded primarily by the Department of Community Services, and I think you're funded quite well, over and beyond this particular program. To this particular program, what are the challenges to get allied professionals involved when you're doing these wraparound services that the deputy minister speaks of? There are many agencies in my experience in Sackville who are well-intentioned, yet they don't always have the ability to be in sync with whatever you're doing.

I wonder if you might comment on that and also indicate beyond those challenges what you might be able to do and what we might be able to do to assist in removing some of those challenges.

NANCY MACDONALD: Thank you for the question. I think I'd like to say that the history of our organization - one of the core foundational philosophies of our organization is about relationships.

We mentor and we model it within families in terms of their connections to their communities, we mentor and model it within ourself as an organization through our reflective practice and our relationship with the board, and we really mentor and model it through our relationships within our own communities.

We encourage our staff to participate in community collaborative tables, and we have never once lost sight of our need to be able to actively participate in system change within the province. We are very intentional in the time that we spend with building relationships across every community that we are currently working in. There is never an organization that is too small for us to partner with or too large. That's why we carry the importance of government departments and our relationships with them, but also at the

same time with local food banks or the libraries. We really value that whole philosophy of there is no wrong door, and we don't get to decide as a service provider what's best for a family.

The more we can support - I'll use an example of our local library in Antigonish. They're currently the site of a men's drop-in program that is currently funded through the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and it's just an example of - in a core foundation, we believe in those relationships.

One of the interesting things you mentioned: it was new for our organization to be delivering Families Plus in the Central Zone, so the very first thing we did was start to reach out to those community organizations and build those relationships. The families that we deliver the service for and with are better off the more relationships our organization has.

The second part to your question, what can you do to help? That's a good question. I guess from your positions as MLAs, if there's organizations that come to you, or if you can pass that information about us out to your other organizations as somebody that might be interested in having a conversation or a cup of coffee with, once we're through the pandemic - because I do believe truly that we are stronger together. We can't do this work alone, and our organization would never dream, nor would we want to do it alone. That's, I think, in your roles as MLAs how you can support the work.

STEVE CRAIG: I'm going to take you up on that offer. Certainly I'm going to ask if you can have whoever your on-the-ground person is here in the Sackville area, Central area, if they would contact me, I'd be pleased to sit down, and I have deep roots in this community as well.

NANCY MACDONALD: We would be honoured to do that, for sure.

STEVE CRAIG: Please do. I believe I've got your contact information, or I'll get it and I'll make sure you have mine.

Relative to COVID - you alluded to it - it has been a challenge. It has been an extreme challenge for everybody, especially those in social services, and we're getting it every day in each of our constituency offices. My question is this: with COVID, how has that impacted your ability to provide the Families Plus program?

NANCY MACDONALD: COVID has created a complexity that has permeated every piece of the work that we do. At the exact same time, it has also created wonderful opportunities for transformation and change. Specifically to the Families Plus Program, it has never missed a day of delivering a service during the pandemic. The type of service had to transform itself while we were in lockdown: we needed to move to telephone- and

Zoom-based services; we needed to make sure that our families had the technological resources available for them to stay connected to us.

[9:45 a.m.]

That was a growth opportunity for our organization, and we've continued to be able to - if a family is undergoing testing or there's something around a Public Health guideline that is preventing us from being in that home, now we have the ability to remain in contact with those families. The pandemic has been a complexity and a huge opportunity for us all at the same time to better our services and how we deliver them to families.

STEVE CRAIG: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald. Mr. Chair, I'd like to come back on the second round.

THE CHAIR: We've got Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: This is amazing information. I actually didn't know about this program because it does not exist in the city. As an MLA, I'm very excited to hear more about it and hope it will be in the city so we can use it as well.

I was thinking as you were speaking: how do you prioritize families and the number of hours for the social workers? How does that work? I know as an interpreter for our association, it was so difficult to keep the same interpreter with the same family or the same patient. How do you overcome that as well? There are two or three questions in one.

NANCY MACDONALD: Maybe I'll speak to the second and ask the department to speak to the prioritizing of the families. I'm pretty sure I understand the question.

The model is an intensive, home-based visiting family preservation program. It comes with pretty specific requirements. There are three to five home-based visits per week in the first intensive phase. Then that kind of moves to every second week or once a month, depending on where the family is during the step-down.

In terms of prioritizing our social workers, I have to tell you honestly, when we first started in 2015 we sat down with the first round of interview candidates and they asked us the hours of the job. Mary-Jo Church, our director of professional services, and I said there aren't any hours to the job - it's a 24/7 program and we just require you to work the 35 hours for the home-based part, not the on-call part, but those 35 hours need to be spread across the week to match what the families' needs are.

The delivery of this program is not for every social worker, and every social worker is not a fit for this program. We have been very fortunate that we have a wonderful, passionate group of current social workers who thrive in working in this home-based, intensive program. They have figured out a way to work their 35 hours based on the

parameters of the program. They are in those homes when those families need them the most. Can I get the department to answer the priority questions?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you very much, Nancy, for that description. As we've been discussing, Families Plus is an intensive family restoration program. It is intended for children involved in child protection who are at risk of coming into care - not children who have been taken into care.

There is basically a risk management conference that happens with the professionals who are involved in supporting the family. They weigh out the opportunity to show improvement within the family. They look at all of the risks and all of the opportunities within the family.

The family must also be ready and willing to participate in the program, which is not always the case. That is a key component because it is a voluntary program.

The other deciding criteria in terms of priority is that without the program, the child or children in the family will certainly come into care. Conversations happen on a very regular basis regarding families at risk and a particular number of factors need to come into play in order for a family to be eligible for the program. Once that referral is made, then Ms. MacDonald's organization would step in and begin work to support the family, as she has articulated.

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

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I have two, actually. I'm going to hold the other one about the city for the second round. The other question is are you having issues with the same social worker going in and the families rejecting somebody different or are they working well together in replacing each other? Rotation can be very difficult to have that same person go to the same family. How are you managing with that?

NANCY MACDONALD: That's a wonderful question. One of the things that this program - the beauty of this program is that the province needs child protection. We need those social workers. We need that legislation. At the same time, those social workers and that legislation often are viewed as not part of a continuum of care. One of the things that this program does is because the child protection worker and the family and the Families Plus worker form a case management team, those relationships get built.

What we have found is that the presence of our Families Plus social worker results in such a strong relationship built with that family because the caseloads are small and they are in that home so intensively, it actually helps with the relationship with the child protection worker. Everyone is all on the same page working and moving together.

I would like to say that of those 36 families that we've had since 2015, there were 83 children involved in those families. Eight were taken into care and 54 have remained in their homes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald. To complete the first round, Mr. Comer, Ms. Roberts, Mr. Horne, Mr. Jessome, then we're back to Ms. Coombes, Mr. Craig - and I think Ms. DiCostanzo implied she was looking for a second round. I now have Ms. Miller on the list as well.

We'll move to Mr. Comer with one question and one supplementary.

BRIAN COMER: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald, for the work that you do. My question revolves around the crisis-driven situations. Are there any commonalities to the types of crises you see and any kind of preliminary data that have been collected to kind of guide the early interventions that will be offered by the department in the future to focus its needs, whether it's mental health, poverty, or safety? Could I get your thoughts on that?

NANCY MACDONALD: We might have the department join in because I think it was specific around what future programs the department might be implementing. I will answer that first part.

There are all kinds of data collected on this program. Our organization has a very robust, secure data management program so we're able to record the time spent and the nature of the concerns that the family has. We've also got all the research that has come in from child protection and that case plan at the very beginning. I think some of the information around the choice of what communities this program has been delivered in is based on the child protection information.

You're talking about conflict. Families have all kinds of different conflict. Some of the things that our social workers would do while we're in those homes would be child behaviour management. We would help with strengthening family relationships. I have a quote from a dad that said he wishes that this program were able to be available for all single parent or complex family situations where there are multiple co-parenting situations.

Family dynamics can be quite varied and they're very diverse. I wouldn't say there was one thing that we would have been able to funnel it down to other than the fact that families struggle all the time. Parenting is a tricky, tricky thing and the more support that the Province can provide families in their homes, the better off the province is and the healthier we all are. We all can use support at some point in our lives.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you for that, Ms. MacDonald. It was, I think, a really comprehensive response.

Shifting our system to much more the front end, if you will, prevention and early intervention involves looking at all of the things that Ms. MacDonald referenced and ensuring that we have a good suite of prevention and early intervention programming options available from one end of the province to the other.

The supports, certainly, as Ms. MacDonald referenced - what we see with families who are in crisis and families who are at risk is there are a number of compounding factors typically that would characterize what has brought that family to the point of risk. Looking at each family uniquely and putting together a bit of a menu of options that can support that family in building healthy relationships, in learning and developing coping skills, and getting mental health supports if those are required, and considering if potentially there is risk of sexual exploitation with youth in the family. There are a number of factors that come into play and we effectively need programming to support all of those factors. Importantly, we can't force-fit families into programming.

We need to ensure that our programming is responsive to what those families need. That's what we are trying to do through expanding our prevention and early intervention programming and working in partnership with organizations such as Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, and many others right across the province.

If I can just say one technical thing at the end here. I am continually being kicked out of the meeting so I'm coming in and out every two or three minutes, so if I need to ask to have a question repeated, I sincerely apologize for that. That's the reason why. I'm missing pieces of the conversation.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for bearing with us on the technical challenges a few of us are having. We'll do our best to pause. If you need a question repeated, please don't hesitate. Mr. Comer, you have a supplementary.

BRIAN COMER: My supplementary is for Deputy Minister Taweel. I'm just curious - no one has mentioned if this program is voluntary. I was just curious within the department of how exactly intensive early interventions are offered to families who will not voluntarily participate in such a program - if you don't mind elaborating on that.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Essentially, if a family is unwilling to voluntarily participate in programming such as Families Plus, unfortunately, there is very little that we can do to intervene to support that family as a family unit. We will obviously take steps to ensure that children are properly cared for and are protected. That may mean taking a child or children into care, but if a family is unwilling to voluntarily participate, we can't force them to participate.

When a child comes into temporary care, there is still an opportunity and we are always striving for family reunification. Bringing a child into care is the absolute last resort. When a child comes into care, that may mean that they are placed in an alternate



family care setting with another family member, et cetera. That doesn't necessarily mean that they're coming into the care of the minister.

We are always looking at ways to - if we cannot keep that family unit together, we look to extended families so that the family unit is effectively still together, but all of the protective measures that are required to keep that child safe while we continue to try to work together toward reunification - we always take those steps. Taking a child into care is the absolute last resort when we can no longer work with the family or the child is at imminent risk.

THE CHAIR: Ms. MacDonald, would you like to add to the conversation?

[10:00 a.m.]

NANCY MACDONALD: Yes, I would. It is a very rare occasion that a family would have a hard no. What we find is that families are fearful. Families often have not had great experiences with systems so have undergone system harm. What this program also offers is an opportunity of a joint meeting between the Families Plus social workers and the child protection workers and the family to answer questions to begin to work through that fear and relay some of those worries that a family might have about what this program is.

In our experience, those joint meetings actually allow the families enough space and choice that they choose to come into the program. It would be a rare occasion that it would be a hard no.

THE CHAIR: The next question goes to Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: (Inaudible).

THE CHAIR: Can people hear Ms. Roberts? No. Ms. Roberts, we've lost your audio.

LISA ROBERTS: I'm sorry. Can you hear me now?

THE CHAIR: We've got you. Please go ahead.

LISA ROBERTS: Thanks very much for the conversation. I was just making references back to Ms. MacDonald's comment about the library in Antigonish, and Deputy Taweel has also referred to Family Resource Centres. The government, and we as a society, are relying on a whole host of non-profit community organizations to provide support to families.

The stated goal of the Department of Community Services is to shift the child welfare system to focus on prevention and early intervention. There are many ways in

which community organizations are best positioned to support families that have been made vulnerable before they reach crisis. My concern is whether the department is funding adequately the organizations for that essential work.

My first question is for Ms. MacDonald. I'm wondering if you can share what percentage of your funding comes from the Department of Community Services, and how much time you, your board, and staff commit to funding applications and fundraising efforts to reach that broader group of families that might not fit into this Families Plus program.

NANCY MACDONALD: Thank you, Ms. Roberts, for the question. To start out with, Families Plus is completely funded by the Department of Community Services, and I will say that we have funding from other government departments too, and we can't do the work unless the relationship with the government-funded department is a truly collaborative relationship. I have to say that the relationship with the Department of Community Services is that.

As a community organization, we are not just provided funding. We are often invited into the development and the research and the implementation ideas around the program, so it truly feels that we are working together for a common goal of improving the services to families.

My experience with the Department of Community Services funding is it is adequate. What we're finding is that for the number of families - not to do with Families Plus but to do with other parts of our organization - the families requiring assistance outside of the Department of Community Services funding always exceed what we are able to provide. For our internal therapeutic supports program, the families that are coming outside of the Department of Community Services' funding folder are quite profound.

We have a waiting list in that program, and to continue honouring our mission and mandate of never turning anyone away from services, our organization has come up with a very creative and diverse funding platform. We don't rely on grants. We don't rely on fundraisers. We have a few social enterprise contracts where we deliver social work services to academic institutions and collaborative practice sites, and the revenue earned from those sites helps us put back into our bottom foundation of our core budget and allow us to not have to turn anybody away for service.

It's a very diverse organization. We run 28 different programs across the entire province, and our operating budget is about \$3.5 million.

LISA ROBERTS: I'd like to direct my supplementary to Deputy Taweel. In the department's brief to the committee, which the public can't see, there was a graphic that showed what the goal is of the department, versus what the reality is right now of child protection.

The goal would be a pyramid where at the base of the pyramid, the bulk of the activities and the resources are going to prevention and early intervention, and very few children at the top of the pyramid would end up coming into care. Whereas the system that we're starting with, or that has evolved over time, invests very little in prevention, more in protection, and a lot in actual placement.

Earlier we talked about intergenerational trauma and, of course, one of the incidences of intergenerational trauma is, in fact, that intervention of children being taken into care, which we want to do our absolute best to avoid.

I'm wondering, Deputy Taweel, if you could talk about - in terms of departments' spending and budget - the relationship between what we spend on prevention and what we actually spend on placement and actually taking children into the care of the state.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, you are quite correct. As the graphic shows, our goal is absolutely to shift our system to much more of a prevention and early intervention focus and less on those more intrusive interventions. This is basically a flip from where we are now.

Certainly, the investment that is made more on the crisis end of our budget is higher than what we invest in prevention and early intervention. We are on a path to increase the investments that we're making in prevention and early intervention programming. That began this year with an additional almost \$2 million investment in prevention and early intervention. It will grow over the next number of years to almost double the investment in prevention and early intervention by 2022-23, taking us up to just under \$16 million being invested in prevention and early intervention.

Importantly, all of that money goes out into community. All of that increase in investment goes out into community, and that will mean that organizations like Family Resource Centres will see both their base budgets increase and also the funding that is available for expanding programming.

It will take programming out to other sites and do what I referenced earlier: to have a bit of a blanket effect from one end of the province to the other so that we have services available in every region of the province. That will take us closer to our goal of being able to provide prevention and early intervention much, much earlier in that relationship with a family in crisis.

We also work very collaboratively with our community organizations to look at what the needs are at their community level. We always aim to be responsive in the programming that we are providing to those families, children, and youth in those regions who require support.

We are on a path to increasing the resources that are spent on prevention and early intervention. That's a very, very positive step forward. Every family and every child we can prevent from coming into care is a huge success. Certainly, Families Plus is a prime example of the type of programming that can really pay significant dividends in the strength and structure of families. It's important in preventing those children from coming into care.

I guess the last comment that I would make is that I've already talked about the strength of our community-based partnerships through organizations such as the one that Ms. MacDonald represents. I would be remiss if I didn't also speak to the fact that our child protection social workers working within the department very much want to see a shift to prevention and early intervention, as well.

Through robust training and education about all of the programming options that are available, they too are able to look at families and make recommendations and decisions about other programming options that might best serve that family. There may be programs and services that those families are not fully aware of at the time that we first come into contact with them.

THE CHAIR: Ms. MacDonald, I saw you doing a lot of nodding. Do you want to say a few words on this topic or shall we move on?

NANCY MACDONALD: I was just going to add something that tweaked my memory on Ms. Roberts' conversation. The department has also created tiered languages, and I'll just speak to how useful it is as a funded program of the Department of Community Services.

This Families Plus is a Tier 3 intervention program, which is clinical-based. It requires a social worker. The tiered language - what the deputy minister was referencing was that now we have an opportunity to understand the importance and to value the importance of organizations that are a Tier 1, a Tier 2, and a Tier 3.

Part of the momentum in the last little while has been an overuse of clinical services for families. I run a clinical organization and therapy isn't necessary for all people. Therapy has its time and place. I believe strongly in the work of our therapists and our social workers, but we also require the Tier 1 and the Tier 2 services for families.

One of the things that the department within the transformation has done that has been useful to us is that we are providing a continuum of care now with the other early intervention and prevention organizations that deliver Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. So when we're talking about Families Plus in the step-down, the goal with those families in step-down is to make sure that they are connected and have ongoing relationships with the Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations.

Families should never stay involved in a Tier 3 organization for long periods of time. That means that they're remaining in kind of a crisis or behavioural or emotional management phase. That should not be the goal for any family.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: I understand that you have approximately 36 families and it's not taking in all the province - or it doesn't appear to be, like the southern part of the province and so on. I may be wrong there.

Is the 24 weeks that it takes to do this intervention long enough? Can you take more families that need the help than just the 36? I assume that's what is happening this year. I don't know what you planned to do when you expand to other parts of the province.

NANCY MACDONALD: The model has specific case numbers attached to each Families Plus social worker. The reason for that is that the research and the evidence indicates that with the intensity of the program, the caseloads need to be small.

With the expansion, every single social worker is working to the full scope of their files that they're allowed to have or that the model allows them to have.

There are four families within - for a double site of two social workers, there are four families involved in intensive, and then as those families move out of intensive, new families come in and those families move into step-down. Every time the program gets expanded, in the Central Zone for example, it adds capacity in caseload potential to that site.

Your answer is, yes, we're currently in Sydney and New Glasgow. There is a Sackville site and, soon to be after this week, an African Nova Scotian-centric site in the Central Zone.

BILL HORNE: As you expand, I'd like to get an idea of how you evaluate your programs, and what recommendations you might have for the evaluation.

NANCY MACDONALD: I will ask the department to add anything in terms of their evaluation. I view every program that we run with any government department. We have our own internal evaluations that our organization runs to make sure that our workers are doing what they need to do. The department - our funders - also have evaluative components to any funded program to make sure that we're meeting the outcomes.

Internally for us, our workers are involved in reflective supervision, so once a month they're individual, and once every two months they're group, and that is a very informal method of evaluating to make sure that the workers are able to provide the

program and are reflecting on their own sense of self and what they're bringing to that program that might be getting in the way of working with those families.

[10:15 a.m.]

Then at an organizational level, our director of professional services ensures based on review of the data with our case management system that the files are being maintained as they should, that the model fidelity is being maintained, that the communication back to child protection - all those stopgap mechanisms to make sure the program is being run.

Then once a year, the department asks us to participate in kind of an overall scan of the program - how many families come in, how many kids were able to remain at home, how many visits there were - and then the department is able to use that data to make sure that the program is meeting the outcomes.

Also, the most important part of this is that the program also has the ability for first voice evaluations, so the actual families that participate are encouraged to give verbal feedback about the programs, and that's where those quotes that I was speaking to and the deputy minister spoke to - that's where those come from. The first-voice stories are always the most important for me.

THE CHAIR: Just a reminder for everyone to keep your videos on, but I believe what is happening - given a few messages I've got and what's just happened to me - is that some of us are being booted off for some reason and needing to take a few seconds to reconnect, so a technical issue that I don't think we have any control over at the moment.

We'll do our best to work through this and perhaps Leg TV can see if we can determine what the issue is for future meetings. Let's go to Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you, everyone, for being here today. Just wanted to request some information. The program itself is expressed to be voluntary. I'm wondering if this is an intervention that a court could request or require a family to undergo, or if it's in the court system, is it too far gone to be considered as an option for that particular family?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you very much for the question. The point of the Families Plus program, as we've talked to before, is to not reach the point where we actually have entered into the court system. It is not a program that the court would order. Once we've reached the point of moving to that stage in our relationship with a family, this is not a program that the court could effectively order a family to participate in. Once we've hit that point, we've kind of passed the point, if you will, for this program.

This program, we make recommendations, as I referenced earlier, to support a family who are basically right at the cusp of entering that next stage of involvement. Their children are at imminent risk of being taken into care, so it is absolutely a very delicate line

and a very delicate point in our relationship and our assessment of the point that that family has reached.

In answer to your question, no, this is not a program that a court would order a family to participate in.

BEN JESSOME: Ms. MacDonald, I see you nodding your head yes, so thank you for that as well.

Related to ongoing connection to a family that has completed the program, is there any type of extension of the connection with the department - or your organization, Ms. MacDonald - that a family could expect to experience beyond that? I believe it was 30-some-odd days with the program.

NANCY MACDONALD: It's the most intense program that we offer and the longest running program that we offer. It was 30-some-odd weeks is how long that we're involved - not days - with the family.

That being said, there is an opportunity and there have been circumstances where at the end of the intensive and the family moves into step-down, some significant life event occurs and the family then goes back through and gets re-identified as needing the second round of intensive.

This program is meant to be responsive to the needs of the families, so there's no way that the program could be responsive to the needs of the family if we just dropped families, so that's not something that happens. You can make a second referral and we've had families go through the whole length of the program more than once. Twice, just based on life experiences, but also based on the fact that we're a community-based organization with a mission and mandate to never turn anybody away from care.

The great thing about our partnerships that we have with all the rest of the community not-for-profits that are funded by the department or elsewhere is that we strive to make those connections with those families so that we would never leave a family at the end of step-down without anybody. That wouldn't happen. Either we've already got them connected to another program around early intervention and prevention - so a Family Place Resource Centre or a Men's Intervention Program - or they're still attached to our organizations.

This province that we are all living in is a very powerful province in the sense that we really care about our citizens. The not-for-profits and our funded part, government, really and truly try to provide the best care that we possibly can to families with that perspective of that we are all in this together and that we're better together.

THE CHAIR: We've got about 28 minutes and I've got four on the question list at the time, so I think we can continue for now with a question and a supplementary. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Based on the information from the 2017 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPOP) response we received at our caucus office, there was a striking rise of social workers' short-term illness hours in 2013-14 and then again in 2016-17. There was an increase of nearly 10,000 hours.

A 2018 report from the Canadian Association of Social Workers said that 44 per cent of social workers have experienced threats or violence on the job and 45 per cent of social workers who left the field did so due to stress or various other traumas.

My first question is for Ms. MacDonald. How much of an issue is recruitment, retention, and burnout for your front line workers and the ability to provide your program?

NANCY MACDONALD: The care that we provide to families' needs to be mirrored and mentored into the care that we provide our workers and each other - I would say that within our organization, we have intentionally worked really hard at maintaining a reflective practice stance and one that is based on ongoing support.

A tangible example of this is that Families Plus required pretty significant transformation from our organization. We were not a 24/7 organization and when the department came with the request and they asked if this is something that we would look at, we needed to really think hard and long about whether this was something that we could actually work towards. We were an 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. organization that offered an evening of services to families. Within that time frame, we are now a 24/7 organization that is open four nights a week.

With that came an intentional need to make sure that our staff were feeling supported in order to do the work but also challenged within their scope of practice. A social worker has a pretty broad scope of practice, and Families Plus is a program that encourages this social worker to work within their full scope of practice. Not every social worker job is created equal. This is one of those positions where they are full-scope.

We have a 24/7 supervision consult availability. No matter when a social worker is working within our organization, there is a supervisor on call for a consult. I don't mean crisis - I mean a call such as: this is something that I'm thinking about, can we process this? The field of social work requires processing. Your sense of self is what you bring to the job. We encourage our social workers to really pay attention to what they're thinking, what they're feeling and how they are. That can only come if there is somebody available to process that with them.



Our own Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, we have a pretty good retention rate. I am the longest-serving worker with the organization. I have been there 22 years this coming year. We've got probably five other workers that have been there upwards of 18-plus years.

That being said, because of the open and honest dialogue - and this work isn't for everybody and this particular nature of work isn't for everybody - we also strongly have a lot of good conversations around self-exploration with our workers: what type of social work are you truly interested in? And maybe you can find it within our organization. We offer school-based social workers across Cape Breton - Cape Breton University, we offer social workers. Maybe the fit isn't right, so we try that.

Sometimes we encourage workers and we work with workers to actually transition to another job - back to child protection, to our collaborative practice site. Our experience has been - in terms of employing social workers for 51 years - that the more open and honest and authentic conversations you can have about what their needs and wants are as workers, than the better they're able to provide the service to the families.

KENDRA COOMBES: This is for the department. As I previously said, 44 per cent of social workers have experienced threats and violence, 45 per cent of social workers have left the field due to stress and violence and various other traumas. What is the Department of Community Services doing to address these issues for all their front line workers?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Certainly, social workers who work in child welfare often find themselves in very challenging and difficult situations. As Ms. MacDonald has referenced, this work does involve individuals pouring a lot of their own selves into the work and into the relationships that they build with families.

We've undertaken a number of initiatives to assist our child welfare social workers, including looking at how we work to remove some of the administrative burden that can sometimes take up a huge amount of time from social workers and front-line workers in our system. We have re-prioritized some of the vacancies within our department and shifted them toward adding more social workers to the department.

The other point that I would make is that we have begun a new collaborative forum with the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers. Our goal is to work together with the College to identify supports and changes that we can make that will better support social workers within the department. Social workers who work at the Department of Community Services are members of the College of Social Workers and so we therefore have a vested interest in supporting those social workers as our employees and their members.

The last point that I would make is that we've talked a lot today about the importance and the impact of shifting to prevention and early intervention for families. I

would argue that the shift to prevention and early intervention is equally as important for front line social workers working within the Department of Community Services as well.

Moving away from a crisis-driven system will allow our social workers to engage in a different kind of work. Working collaboratively in a team-based setting allows that burden to be shared. Families Plus is a prime example of that - as has been articulated by Ms. MacDonald and in some of the comments that I've made - where we work effectively as a team. There are colleagues with whom you can debrief and engage in that reflective practice. You have an opportunity to share the load and also to support the families in sharing in their success. That shift to a prevention and early intervention model, moving more of our work there, will not only benefit families and children at risk, but will also very importantly have a direct impact on our social workers working within the Department of Community Services.

[10:30 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: We've got Mr. Craig, Ms. DiCostanzo, and Ms. Miller with about 20 minutes remaining, so I think we can continue with one question and one supplementary unless we get too long of a preamble or answer, but about six minutes for two questions from each person and responses. We should be able to get through here. Mr. Craig.

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Chair, you cut out, but I'm only going to ask one question.

Ms. Taweel, we've talked over the last year and a half since I was elected about the transformation of the child welfare system coming from a crisis response balance to more of an early intervention and prevention model. I see that the Children and Family Services Act is currently under mandatory review, and by my calculation it should be completed early 2021.

From the website, the review is conducted by a project team made up from people from the Department of Community Services, Department of Justice, and Mi'kmaw Family & Children Services, but the review is focusing on three aspects: the duty to report third-party abuse, the prohibition on publication, and the child abuse register.

My question is this: why this focus, given the scope of the Act, and how are actual DCS clients engaged?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you for the question, Mr. Craig. Yes, you are correct. We are mandated through Section 88A of the Children and Family Services Act to do a review of the Act every four years. This is our first review that we're doing, and you are correct - there are three particular areas that we're looking at: duty to report third-party abuse, prohibition on publications, and the child abuse register.

I'll just maybe run through in turn the reason why we're looking at each of those sections. Section 25, the duty to report third-party abuse: we felt it was necessary to look at that particular aspect of the Act to clarify terms when reporting third-party abuse and examine whether the age differentiation within the legislation is still appropriate. Further, not all jurisdictions in Canada have a mandate to specifically report third-party abuse, so we want to make sure that the parameters around that aspect of the Act remain accurate, which is why we're looking at this section.

The prohibition on publication is basically, we're looking at that to determine if the Act sufficiently protects the privacy of children who are no longer receiving those child protective services they would have received through us.

The child abuse register - we are also looking at that because only three jurisdictions in Canada maintain a child abuse register, including this jurisdiction, and we want to make sure that the parameters for placing someone on that register are sufficient to protect Nova Scotia children.

You are correct in naming the members of the review committee. The review committee has also sought the input and is consulting actively with a number of groups: the Association of Black Social Workers, the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers, as well as the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition. Those groups have a particular expertise and knowledge within the full scope of the Act, but also we felt that we could work very collaboratively with those particular organizations to ensure that we have a good, well-rounded view of whether those pieces of the Act are actually working, or if they require modification.

Importantly, we're also working collaboratively with the Office of the Ombudsman to ensure that we are receiving their feedback on these aspects of the Act. While we are mandated to undertake a review every four years of the Act, that is only one piece of the work that we are doing with regard to looking at our policies and programs and practice.

The legislation is obviously a foundational piece that guides our work in supporting vulnerable children, youth and families in the province, but it is but one piece. In addition to the legislation, which is arguably a bit of a blunt tool, we have policies, procedures and programs that allow us to be more nuanced in terms of the delivery, in terms of the actual social work practice and how we work with those whom we serve.

We are constantly looking at how to best adapt our policies and procedures to meet the needs of clients, to be responsive to the direct feedback that we receive from clients and other community-based organizations, others who have contact with children who are at risk or with families who are in need of supports coming from the Department of Community Services.

Training, as well, plays a critical role in terms of ensuring that our social workers are effectively delivering on both the foundational aspects of the Act, but importantly on those policies and procedures. All of that training is geared toward ensuring that first voice and that feedback from those whom we serve is incorporated into the way that we respond and the way that we build relationships, and the way that we effectively engage with families, youth and children right across the province.

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: My question is about locations. Just because I see that you're in Sydney, New Glasgow and Truro, I'm just wondering if you have had any uptake from new immigrants for your program. If you haven't, and as part of your expansion and reaching the \$16 million, are you looking at coming into the city and how do you anticipate the issues?

We have a large population of new immigrants who have different needs when it comes to domestic violence. The understanding of domestic violence is so different from one country to the other. They all fall into that trap and they learn by getting separated for three months and four months. Prevention is really key to that community. I'm just wondering if you have had any talk about this and if you're intending to expand to the city and how you will deal with this community.

NANCY MACDONALD: I was hoping someone would ask that question. We actually are in Central Zone - we had the department probably a little over a year ago, in the Sackville area. Our very first family with that site was a newly immigrated family.

Yes, we're in Central Zone and yes, we have some experience - a lot of lessons learned from that family. That family required us to transform how we delivered that particular program. We needed to engage interpreters. We needed to engage the language line in terms of the changing of all of our forms into a language that they were able to read and be able to communicate in. In order for them to feel safe in the process, they needed to be able to see the forms in a language other than what we were originally presenting them to.

That family went through the entire program - the intensive and step-down. Their kids have remained in their home. We learned so much from that family. We're very excited to be able to involve - whoever child protection decides at that team level and collaboratively with us - whatever family they identify as needing the program, we are certainly willing, capable, and able of having this program respond to the needs of that unique family. That one definitely was a unique situation but a very positive, positive outcome for that family.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: That's wonderful. I hope they get to know more about your program. Another wish that I have is hopefully you will hire a lot of social workers

who have those languages. They can be the medium to tell you what to expect and what the needs of those families are that are so different from a Canadian family. It could be something so simple and you can avoid many hours of work because of that simplicity. Whether it's an interpreter or the actual social worker herself if she's from that country or that culture, they will solve it so much faster.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Miller.

MARGARET MILLER: Thank you so much for all the information today. I wasn't fully aware of the programs and what they do. When you start looking at the potential of this and where it could be going and what it could be doing, it's pretty exciting.

We have the East Hants Family Resource Centre here in Elmsdale. I've always been fascinated by a lot of the programs because I think I've grown up in an era where parenting was assumed. For them to have Mommy2B programs, parenting programs, different things for young people or not-so-young people to get more information and feel more confident about their parenting skills.

I think it's been a huge benefit to our communities. I really want to commend all that. This just fits so well. When there is an issue or something happens, you're able to step in before it escalates and gets so bad that there's no way back. I'm really happy to hear about this program.

I know every program has a wish list or a vision of where you think it's going to go. Can you share with us, Ms. MacDonald, about what you see as your vision for this program? Where do you think it's going to go? I think it's something you're probably always going to need, but what's your vision for the future and what are your wishes for the program?

NANCY MACDONALD: I guess my wish would be in collaboration with the Department of Community Services that they continue to value the work of prevention and early intervention. I wish that this program would be made accessible to every child protection office across the province so that we don't have to ever say no to somebody about accessing the program because the program doesn't actually exist in that community. That's one of my wishes.

I also truly wish that the families across Nova Scotia need less Tier 3 interventions and more Tier 1 and Tier 2. I've spent my entire career working with families and that's what our organization does. I love the fact that we have Tier 3 services available but I also really want to honour the fact that the earlier Tier 1 and Tier 2, the less intrusive and the less intensive services, are also where I hope families can get to long before needing ours.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for all the questions and responses by our witnesses. I'll now turn it over to them for some closing comments. Perhaps we'll begin with Deputy Minister Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I'll be brief, just to say thank you once again to the committee for your interest in the programs and services provided by the Department of Community Services. A particular thank you to Ms. MacDonald for her comments. Her organization is a fantastic partner and really exemplifies what it means to work in partnership and in support of those families and children who need us the most in this province. I really can't thank her and her team enough. There are many more like her organization right across the province that we are really privileged to partner with, to support children and families in this province. Thank you again for inviting us to appear today.

THE CHAIR: Ms. MacDonald.

[10:45 a.m.]

NANCY MACDONALD: I just want to echo what the Deputy Minister said. Thank you for the invite. Just to highlight the fact of when we all work collaboratively together, wonderful things can happen for the citizens of this province.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald and Ms. Taweel, and really to all the social workers who are working hard out there supporting families. It can be very difficult and challenging work, obviously, but it's extremely important. I'm sure those who spend 21 years at this work are obviously being rewarded by that work and certainly all that work is making Nova Scotia a better province.

Thank you for joining us today. You can now leave the meeting and the committee will move on to its committee business.

The first item on the committee business is to do our agenda-setting for the next six topics of the committee, because we've concluded our six topics that were set six meetings or so ago. I'll be looking for an individual motion for each of those.

Perhaps we'll begin with the Liberal caucus. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I move to accept the following three topics for the Liberal caucus . . .

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo, I believe the clerks want us to deal with them individually. I think we'll do just one motion at a time.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Our first one will be phasing out adult residential centres and regional rehabilitation centres - both facilities - so the first one is the ARCs and the second is the RRC facilities.

The witnesses would be Ms. Taweel, our deputy minister, Maria Medioli, the Executive Director of the Disability Support Program, and Joyce d'Entremont, the CEO of Harbourside Lodge.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: I have a friendly amendment, and that is to add a representative from the Community Homes Action Group as an additional witness.

THE CHAIR: There is an amendment. Are there any comments from committee members? Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Ms. Coombes, can you add a little context to the addition and what the organization would bring to the discussion? I think it's kind of obvious, but just for context, please.

KENDRA COOMBES: I think it's very important for us to have additional groups at the table such as the Community Homes Action Group because they are families. They are the families of these individuals so I think they have a lot to offer us in information as well as any go-forwards that we can have, to have a more positive impact. They help to evaluate the work that's being done, and I think it's important for us to have them at the table.

THE CHAIR: We're going to deal with the amendment first and then the original motion. Any further discussion on the amendment?

Would all in favour of the amendment, please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Now to deal with the original motion, with the amendment. Any further discussion?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. Roberts, do you have something to add here before we go to the second topic?

LISA ROBERTS: How many topics are we likely to approve from the caucuses? Is there a limit on the number of Liberal topics, or is there a limit on the number of ours today, just before we go forward?

THE CHAIR: The standard practice is six topics are set for the next six meetings: three Liberal topics, two PC topics, and one NDP topic.

MS. ROBERTS: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: You're welcome. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Our second topic for the Liberal Caucus will be supporting community transportation. The witnesses are Justin Huston from the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage and Bill Greenlaw for the Nova Scotia Community Transportation Network.

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

The motion is carried.

The third topic, Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Last but not least: Access by Design 2030, and the witness will be Dawn Stegen and Gerry Post from the Department of Justice.

THE CHAIR: I believe Gerry Post has resigned and has been replaced by Dawn Stegen, so I think there's only one witness there.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: So we'll bring it down to just one witness, if everybody is in agreement with that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Any discussion on this topic? All those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Just before we go any further, because we have started 13 minutes late, my intention is to finish up hopefully by 11:13 a.m., but I've been cautioned by the Clerk that we may just need a motion to extend to 11:13 a.m. because of the late start due to technical issues.

Could I have a motion to extend to 11:13 a.m.? Ms. Roberts, thank you very much.



Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I hope I'm not going too fast with the delays that are happening. Please jump up and down if I'm moving too quickly here.

Let's move now to the PC Caucus. Mr. Craig, I think you had your hand up earlier - I'm assuming to introduce a couple of topics for us.

STEVE CRAIG: The first topic is impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of vulnerable Nova Scotians who utilize the Department of Community Services supports. The witness would be Pamela Magee, Executive Director for the Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division.

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

The motion is carried.

Thank you. Mr. Craig, you have a second topic for us.

STEVE CRAIG: The Progressive Conservative Caucus is putting forward the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Housing Nova Scotia on housing. The witness would be the new deputy minister, Catherine Berliner.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion?

Mr. Craig, are there any specifics that you could add? That's a pretty broad topic, housing. Do you want to have a general discussion, or do you want to investigate any particular issues around housing?

STEVE CRAIG: There are many issues around housing. What I want in particular is to have somebody from that department in front of this committee. I know a number of people have tried to communicate with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Housing Nova Scotia and have had little response.

The deputy minister, I think, would be appropriate to appear before this committee so that we can ask about a wide ranging number of topics. In particular, I am interested in what they're doing about housing shelters. I do have a motion to put on the table on the floor after we're finished this part of it.

THE CHAIR: Is there any further discussion? Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Given, frankly, that the NDP only gets to put forward one topic and also maybe to focus this PC topic of housing - Mr. Craig did just mention shelters. I wonder if we might be able to add the proposed NDP witnesses related to homelessness to the topic and then the deputy minister could particularly talk about or prepare some comments related to the department's actions and results and programs related to homelessness.

I certainly hear Mr. Craig, as the NDP has heard, that there many things that we would like to understand better from that department. I think homelessness is certainly the issue that is of most acute importance for the Nova Scotians who are not sheltered at this time. I'm hoping Mr. Craig might accept that as a friendly amendment to the topic.

THE CHAIR: Let's deal with the suggestion by Ms. Roberts as an amendment and Mr. Craig may want to discuss that. If you could put that in the form of a motion just quickly here, Ms. Roberts, and then we can discuss that.

[11:00 a.m.]

LISA ROBERTS: I move that the witnesses proposed by the NDP on the list of topics related to COVID-19 and the homelessness crisis be added to the PC topic being considered with witnesses in addition to the deputy minister including Michelle Malette, executive director of the Out of the Cold Community Association; Art Fisher or Lisa Ryan from the Family Services Association of Western Nova Scotia; and Fred Deveaux, Executive Director of the Cape Breton Community Housing Association.

THE CHAIR: We have a motion from Ms. Roberts to amend the PC topic to include those additional witnesses. Is there any discussion on the amendments?

Mr. Craig.

STEVE CRAIG: The intent of our topic is to dwell on what the government is doing. I know we've heard a lot from the community and from organizations, which has prompted all of us to approach the department on this particular topic.

It would likely be more agreeable to have only one of those witnesses appear, if that's okay with Ms. Roberts. We as the PC caucus want to focus on the department and what the government is doing. All of these witnesses that Ms. Roberts has mentioned deserve every attention at the table, but it's through this attention that we're going to specifically focus on the government's deputy minister that is so important. To have too many witnesses on this particular topic is going to water it down somewhat.

I think we would be agreeable for one of those witnesses, if Ms. Roberts would like to put forward one.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts, are you willing to amend your amended motion?

LISA ROBERTS: Yes, I would be glad to amend it. I would suggest Art Fisher from the Family Services Association of Western Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: We have a motion from Ms. Roberts to amend the motion on the topic of housing to include that additional witness. Is there any further discussion?

Would all those in favour of the amendment please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

We'll go to the original motion now from Mr. Craig with respect to the witness being Catherine Berliner on housing, with the additional witness proposed by the amendment by Ms. Roberts.

Is there any discussion on the motion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Thank you, Mr. Craig. We'll now move to the NDP to select their topic. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: The NDP Caucus is putting the motion forward to accept the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous people in the justice system, and calls on witnesses from the Department of Justice; Emma Halpern, Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia; the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition and its coordinator, Vanessa Fells, or another appropriate ANSDPAD representative.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on the motion? Would all those in favour please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

That sets our agenda for the next six meetings. We'll turn that over to the Clerk to book those meetings and we'll forge ahead. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I do have a quick motion I'd like to put forward as well. Is that the right time now?

THE CHAIR: I'm just finishing the agenda-setting. I've got two more items on the agenda here to deal with under our business - that's virtual meetings and prorogation of the House. Is it on those topics?

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Yes, it is about the virtual meetings, so the timing is right.

Mr. Chair, I move that the Community Services Committee continues to hold virtual meetings until the committee sees that it's safe to meet in person, both for witnesses and staff.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on the motion by Ms. DiCostanzo?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The next item on committee business is prorogation of the House. As you know, it's being prorogued on December 18<sup>th</sup>. That would mean that on the 18<sup>th</sup>, committee business is wiped from the committee. I believe there's an intention to proceed ahead with the topics that we have just approved.

After the proroguing, I think we need to poll unanimous consent - I believe that is the direction I've been given from Legislative Counsel and the Clerks. Is there any discussion on this that immediately after prorogation, we would poll the committee to unanimously accept the six topics that we just approved? Any discussion on that?

Alright. We'll proceed on that. We'll ask the Clerk after the 18<sup>th</sup> of December to poll the committee looking for unanimous consent to proceed with the committee's agenda that we just set.

We've finished committee business. I've got Mr. Craig and Mr. Jessome. Is someone wanting to speak on this issue before I close it off?

STEVE CRAIG: I had mentioned earlier, and I had forwarded the motion to Ms. Langille, so I'd like to put a motion on as soon as possible.

THE CHAIR: Very good, Mr. Craig, thank you, but I'm just going to go to Mr. Jessome who seems to nod his head that he wanted to speak on prorogation.

Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Just along the same lines and to keep us aligned with the other committees that we've seen this motion on, I move that pursuant to Section 36 of the House

of Assembly Act and pursuant to Resolution No. 2 (a)(i), passed unanimously on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017, that this committee meet after the House is prorogued for the life of the General Assembly, abiding by Public Health protocols and continuing with virtual options if required, which we've already committed to doing. So moved.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Jessome. We did that in some of the other committees, but I forgot we didn't dot that "i" and cross that "t" for this committee. I appreciate you bringing forward that motion. Is there any discussion?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

That concludes committee business. Mr. Craig has a motion. The floor is yours.

STEVE CRAIG: I move that the Standing Committee on Community Services write to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Chuck Porter, asking him to provide the following information as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. He will have some time to work on this:

1) the bed capacity in Nova Scotia's emergency and temporary shelters by type and location;

2) the estimated unmet demand for emergency and temporary shelters by type and location;

3) the total 2020-2021 provincial capital and operational spending estimates for emergency and temporary shelters by type and location;

4) the total 2020-2021 third quarter provincial capital and operational spending for emergency and temporary shelters by type and location; and

5) quantify any additional funding being provided by the Nova Scotia Government to meet the unmet demand for emergency and temporary shelters by type and location.

THE CHAIR: I've got three hands up here. Ms. DiCostanzo's was the first, I believe.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I believe we need at least a 5-minute recess to read it properly. Can we have it emailed to us or emailed to the Clerk so she can send it to us, please?

STEVE CRAIG: The motion was emailed to the Clerk earlier today and should be on its way to you now.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I move that we extend the meeting to 11:20 a.m., if necessary.

THE CHAIR: I was going to ask for that as we are approaching three minutes. Before we recess, we have a motion to extend to 11:20 a.m. Is there any discussion?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

We will now recess for five minutes.

[The committee recessed at 11:10 a.m.]

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

THE CHAIR: Order. We're returning from a recess to consider the motion put forward by Mr. Craig. Is there any further discussion? Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Just to speak in support of the motion: given that the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia has more than 400 individuals on their by-name list, and certainly we know that there's a significant gap in shelter beds available to address even those known individuals, and given how cold it was last night and yet there was no emergency shelter available in Halifax, I certainly welcome this method of at least getting us a picture of what the department knows to be an issue in the form of this committee writing a letter. Thank you to Mr. Craig for bringing the motion forward.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Just on behalf of the Liberal Caucus, we want to acknowledge this is an important topic for discussion and information-finding, and we'll be supporting this as well.

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

The motion is carried.

Thank you very much. I believe that concludes our business. Our next meeting will be on January 5<sup>th</sup>, and for that meeting we can return to our normal time of 10:00 a.m., since we will be dealing with it virtually, and the topic will be determined with the Clerk setting forth to arrange the next six meetings.

I want to thank everyone for their patience today as we dealt with some technical issues on this virtual meeting, but we did get through it. Thank you to Legislative TV and the clerks. This was a new undertaking for them, and I certainly appreciate the training sessions to kind of work through the bugs. I think we made it, so congratulations, everyone.

I believe we'll be seeing many of you at the Health Committee later this afternoon, and again, I call this meeting to a close. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 11:17 a.m.]