

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

Video Conference

Recreation Facilities: Impact and Recovery from COVID-19

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Chair)

John White (Vice Chair)

Danielle Barkhouse

Tom Taggart

Nolan Young

Fred Tilley

Lorelei Nicoll

Kendra Coombes

Suzy Hansen

[Kendra Coombes was replaced by Susan Leblanc.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Recreation Facility Association of Nova Scotia

Jennie Greencorn,
Executive Director

Paul MacDonald,
General Manager - Centre 200, and Manager of Facilities for CBRM



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2022

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

VICE CHAIR

John White

THE CHAIR: I would like to call the meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee for Community Services. I am Melissa Sheehy-Richard, MLA for Hants West, and I will be chairing the meeting.

I just want to run over the regular reminders, that everybody please keep their mic muted until you are called upon to speak. Also, wait until I have recognized you so that Legislative Television are able to coordinate the volumes. Please indicate that you'd like to speak by raising your hand and leave it up until I call on you so that I don't miss you, and also make sure that all your devices are on silent during the meeting.

At this point I would like to ask the committee members to introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: On today's agenda, we have officials with us from the Recreation Facility Association of Nova Scotia . . .

SUZY HANSEN: Hi, everyone.

THE CHAIR: Oh, Suzy. I'm so sorry, my apologies. Ms. Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: No worries. I'm Suzy Hansen, the MLA for Halifax Needham. I'd like to recognize that this is February 1st, the start of African Heritage Month - we've been here for over 400 years. As well, it's the Chinese New Year.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On today's agenda, we have officials with the Recreation Facility Association of Nova Scotia, and they're going to speak to us on impact and recovery from COVID-19.

I'd like to welcome Ms. Greencorn, who is the Executive Director of the Recreation Facility Association of Nova Scotia, as well as Mr. MacDonald, who is the General Manager of Centre 200 and Manager of Facilities for CBRM. At this time, I welcome them to begin their presentation.

JENNIE GREENCORN: As you've heard, my name is Jennie Greencorn. I am the Executive Director of the Recreation Facility Association of Nova Scotia. I've been working in and for rec facilities for over 15 years, both as an arena manager in a small rural rink and as part of the management team of one of the province's largest multiplexes, and like Paul, I'm a long-standing volunteer with our association.

Paul is a past president of RFANS, the General Manager of Centre 200, the Manager of Facilities for Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and Paul has been a strong leader in our association and in an advocacy role for facilities since the pandemic began.

RFANS is the only membership-based provincial organization dedicated to rec facilities in Atlantic Canada. We provide professional development opportunities, industry training, grant programs, resources, support. We advocate for large multiplex facilities, such as Centre 200 that Paul manages, and small rural community facilities and hubs like the one I managed in Canso.

Our association has one staff person, and a committed and engaged volunteer board. Our board is a diverse representation of our facilities and consists of facility operators and managers, rec directors, and consultants from six designated regions in the province. We have years of experience and expertise in the recreation facility industry. Whenever I get a chance to speak, I reinforce the fact that we represent not only facilities that are members, but we are a voice around the provincial table as sector lead for all facilities in the province.

As a result of this pandemic, RFANS has had to refocus its efforts and accept an elevated responsibility of assisting our facilities in navigating ever-changing restrictions and protocols, the financial impacts of COVID, and to advocate for support from the Province. Over a span of 18 months, RFANS collected financial data from provincial facilities with which we initiated a mobilization strategy and a call to action to create awareness to inform, update, and focus on the imminent situation that was and still is facing our facilities.

Based on that data from the sector, we determined an urgent need for financial assistance, particularly for small rural not-for-profit facilities that are really the most vulnerable, and we requested support from the Province, of which we secured much-needed emergency funding. RFANS continues its advocacy work well into Year 2 of this pandemic, providing support on a daily basis for our rec facilities as they navigate the challenges of the fifth wave and the restrictions that continually negatively impact them.

It's been a real learning curve over the past couple of years in educating government, our provincial sport organizations, and our stakeholders as to the wide range of facilities RFANS supports in the province: their organizational structure, the type of ownership, as in what percentage are municipally operated versus board, or not-for-profit versus privately owned. Although they all have the basic mechanics - they're all the same - they all operate differently.

Here's a very quick snapshot of what that looks like: Of the 193 facilities, 65 are rinks, 50 are pools, and 30 are curling clubs. There are 26 multiplexes that have additional pools and rinks that aren't included in those numbers. Twenty-two of those facilities represent multi-purpose facilities, like soccer domes, field houses, tennis courts, playgrounds, and the like.

Who owns those facilities? Seventy-eight are municipally owned, 68 are run by a board or a group of volunteers, 38 are privately owned, 9 are owned by a band, federally or by a community organization like the Lions Club. Fifty-six per cent of these facilities are not municipally owned. That's 108 of those facilities, and 90 out of those 108 facilities - or 47 per cent - are not municipally owned and are also considered rural facilities.

I'd like to focus on these points today: The impact of rec facilities on our communities, the impact of facility closures on our communities, the impact of COVID-19 on our facilities, and the impact of funding. I also want to talk about recovery, what that looks like.

There's no question you all appreciate the value and the important role that sport and recreation facilities play in our communities. They are critical pieces of our community's infrastructure, facilitating recreation, sports, arts, and culture. They support mental health initiatives by encouraging more active lifestyles, improving physical and mental health, helping to build healthy communities, and minimizing health care costs, therefore improving the overall well-being of our citizens.

Sports aside, as that's the obvious first purpose for many of these facilities, they're safe gathering places essential for counteracting social isolation by promoting social inclusion, connection, and engagement. They're places of history and pride, they give us a sense of belonging, they keep our kids off the streets, and they give our seniors a place to go.

For a lot of these rural communities, these facilities are the only place that can host a wedding, a funeral reception, a dance, a dance recital, a festival, or your organization's fundraiser. They pull communities together in times of celebration and in times of loss and need. They put people to work, they have spinoff employment benefits in the community, but they serve a greater purpose particularly in more rural communities like Newport, Middleton, Dominion, North Sydney, Canso, Chester, Canning, Barrington, Tatamagouche, and Westville.

They're social hubs, and they are an integral part of our communities. The value of these assets, like our schools and hospitals, is almost immeasurable, and there's a huge gap that is often irreversible when they close, or we lose them. Having said that, let's take a minute and talk about the impact of both temporary and permanent facility closures, because they are a constant concern for our facility operators.

What's the impact on the community and on local businesses? Well, there's an overall decrease in health and well-being, there's a loss to local businesses, for restaurants, hotels, shopping, for contractors like landscapers and snow removers, security, garbage, electricians who service these facilities, and for suppliers that supply food, beverages and cleaning chemicals, and the loss of community infrastructure.

Rec and sport facilities have two major revenue streams: rentals and events. Both have been adversely affected or non-existent for months due to Public Health restrictions. Operational costs have not changed - if anything, they've increased. There's little to no way to reduce these costs. In some cases, this has already forced increased rental fees, which in turn increases the cost to our users and sport organizations like Hockey Nova Scotia and Skate Canada Nova Scotia. In some of our rural facilities, this means a loss of members and users.

What we've seen over the past two years is that there's much support for sports and sports organizations, but we need to continue to support facilities, because if there's no facility, there's no sport.

Now, the impact of COVID-19 on our facilities specifically. We've experienced lost rentals, cancelled events, lost food and beverage revenue, increased cleaning and building and maintenance expenses, and staff layoffs - or in some cases the need to hire more staff to deal with cleaning or contact tracing or proof of vaccination, therefore increasing those expenses. Many of our facilities have experienced mechanical issues and equipment failures from idling systems, which increase their expenses when they're closed. Their ability to fundraise has been diminished or is nonexistent.

Many of our facilities depend on annual fundraisers just to survive. Many have depleted whatever reserves they had just to get through the year. Facilities depend on those reserves for multi-year operations to cover expenses for next-season start-ups. Right now, retention and recruitment is a serious issue in our sector, and we're limited as an

organization - through capacity and through our funding - to deal with those retention and recruitment issues through training or recruitment. It's challenging. Everyone is experiencing major COVID fatigue with changing and ongoing restrictions.

I would be remiss not to mention the impact that COVID has had on our association as we continue to support rec facilities throughout the province. As a sector lead, RFANS's responsibility to these facilities is immense and requires full-time attention, with no revenue generation to support those efforts or the operation of our association. A portion of RFANS's revenue is generated through the delivery of pertinent industry training to our operators and our stakeholders, and COVID severely impacted our ability to do this, resulting in a significant revenue loss to our association.

We're doing important work, providing invaluable advocacy on behalf of our provincial facilities, but at the detriment of our association. The amount of core operational funding provided by the Province to support our association has actually decreased by 9.5 per cent over the past 10 years as we see a 20 per cent climb in inflation. We not only need to support our facilities, but to continue to do the good work we're doing, more funding is needed for the association that supports these facilities.

I wish I could paint a more positive, rosier picture about the impact of COVID on our facilities and what could happen if we lose those facilities in our communities.

As mentioned several times throughout this presentation, our facilities have seen a significant financial loss over the past couple of years. Without the support they received via the emergency financial support grant for not-for-profit facilities to assist them with operational revenue losses, some would not be open today. That is a fact.

The addition of the arena-specific rink revitalization program for capital projects has also provided them with much-needed support. It has been a tremendous help and very much appreciated, and we thank the Province and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage for their ongoing guidance and mentorship and express our sincere gratitude for this support. We actually have a member of CCTH who sits on our board ex officio and she's wonderful. She's provided great support for us, great leadership. We're thankful to have her on our board, along with the rest of the team we deal with on a fairly regular basis. They're probably tired of hearing from us.

In the slide presentation, you'll see some testimonials from people who have received that funding. There is a testimonial from John Wadden with the Dominion rink, who received \$40,000. John is still being challenged today. He spent the last closure in Wave 5 having to lay his staff off, work alone and deal with rentals in his building by himself, although \$40,000 helped him get through, they're still seeing significant challenges with this last wave. There's a testimonial from Randy Palmer who received funding in Thorburn, and as well from Cory Keeping, Emera Centre Northside.

The big question is, what does recovery look like? I'm not really sure that I can answer that. We're all in uncharted territory and we really have no way to forecast the future. I don't think right now we know what recovery looks like for this sector or how it will all spin out, but what we do know is the impacts of COVID are ongoing and there's still much uncertainty.

What our facilities should be doing right now is working on a long-term recovery strategy, because they will need one, but they can't see past this wave to the next season. Our facilities continue to operate at a limited capacity, creating further loss. The emergency financial assistance they received from the Province was an enormous help and bridged them through the first couple of waves of the pandemic, saving some from permanent closure. With each wave of the pandemic, it gets increasingly harder to recover. They will continue to need capital, operations capacity, and training support, and we'll continue to lobby on their behalf.

[10:15 a.m.]

Any facility that is not attached to a municipality right now is at risk. Not to say that our municipal facilities have not sustained loss; it just puts them at the bottom of the list. Paul can tell you that their facility saw a \$1 million loss in unrecoverable revenue last year. The municipalities and taxpayers carry the burden of that loss for a facility that hosts large events in Sydney. Where they have nothing on the books until 2023, it's hard to look at recovery. We continue to access what limited funding is available to sustain our operations, and we wait and hope that Public Health increases gathering limits and that COVID goes away.

In closing, if I could end my presentation with a little bit of a personal story. I managed a hockey rink for 10 years in rural Nova Scotia, and like many of our small facility operators, I did the ice scheduling, the accounting, I drove the Zamboni, I painted the ice, I cooked the fries, and I cleaned the toilets - whatever needed to be done. For a large part of the year, not unlike other small facilities, it was a one-woman show. We lost our ice plant over the Christmas holiday, and our rink was shut down for 10 months as we struggled to raise funds to buy a new ice plant and get our rink back open. Trying to raise \$300,000 in a community of 800 people seems pretty insurmountable.

I felt the weight of our community to do everything possible not to lose our rink. Our facilities are feeling the same way today. Not just rinks - curling clubs, arenas, pools, soccer domes, all kinds of facilities. I understand the struggle these facilities are going through. We've literally worked in the cold and the dark. We struggled to turn the heat and lights on, to pay the bills, to make payroll, just to keep the doors open.

All this was in a time when we were able to do events and we weren't in the middle of a pandemic - where I had the means and the capacity to fundraise and write funding

applications - and it was still a struggle. It was a different time, but the struggle is real and it's ongoing and it's gravely impacting our facilities.

I'll leave you with that. I thank you again for supporting our facilities, giving us the opportunity today, and a special thanks to the department for giving us a voice at the provincial table, for listening to our concerns, and doing the work that needs to be done to keep our doors open.

That's it. Paul and I certainly welcome any questions that you have and we'll do our best to answer them.

LORELEI NICOLL: Madam Chair, just a quick question: Was I the only one who didn't have a shared screen for the presentation?

THE CHAIR: It was there, but perhaps it was smaller. I didn't pin mine. Can you see it there now?

LORELEI NICOLL: I pinned it, but it was still - I just wanted to let the presenter know that some of us may not have seen it.

THE CHAIR: It is in the email that the clerk sent out this morning if you want to have a peek. Sorry about that.

Thank you for the presentation. It was very sad to hear the situation. I too have a background in minor hockey and a lot of volunteer work for the Newport District Arena here in my area, so I appreciate all the work and effort that your association does for our facilities.

As we determined at the last meeting, we're going to go with questioning 20-20-20. We will - I will invite the Liberal caucus to begin their 20-minute question period. Which of you would like to ask a question?

JENNIE GREENCORN: Can I ask a question? If the questions are directed to me and I want to hand them off to Paul, or vice versa, can we just do that?

THE CHAIR: Absolutely. Sometimes it's hard for us to determine who would have the answer to the question as well.

Is there anyone from the Liberal caucus who would like to ask some questions at this time? Ms. Nicoll?

LORELEI NICOLL: Thank you for the presentation. That's why I was asking about a shared screen. Usually the presenter does that, but anyway.

Thank you for the update. Like you said, there are a lot of facilities, and everybody has the same business case, trying to provide the various services, but they're all unique in some ways, and yet they're all the same in other ways. When it comes to funding and where we find ourselves in a pandemic, we're all the same.

You used the term "more vulnerable" in the rural areas, so I wanted to ask you just to expand on that. You spoke to it, but because of the wide range of facilities, everybody was vulnerable not just to the pandemic but the virus itself. That was what I wanted you to expand on: in between the COVID-19 waves where there were less cases and community spread overall, did uptake at the recreational facilities eventually increased to normal levels, or did they continue to remain low overall?

What you saw the trends to be - just expand on that and provide a snapshot of where we are currently because, as we know, we're very much into it. We're hearing from commerce people and they're all saying everyone's staying home, so all the businesses are suffering. I just wanted to know what impact that is having right now on recreational facilities, and whether this funding is something that is going to be required for some time.

JENNIE GREENCORN: That was three questions, not one question. (Laughter)

LORELEI NICOLL: Well, I have 20 minutes, and you can take all the time you want to answer.

JENNIE GREENCORN: When we collected the data over those 18 months, what we pretty much determined - and I kind of reiterated that in my presentation - was the lack of ability for our rural facilities to come up with that operational loss. They used their reserves, they couldn't find the extra money to sustain themselves.

What we did find is that the municipalities were picking up the loss of their municipal facilities and the likelihood that we'd lose a municipal facility because they were showing a loss. When you have a group of volunteers trying to raise money to keep a facility open in a small community like my own, we felt that those not-for-profit facilities were more vulnerable than the municipalities. That's basically why - just their ability to come up with start-up money in the Fall or that they were struggling more so than the municipal facilities.

In terms of trends, can you repeat that piece about . . .

LORELEI NICOLL: I just was asking what we happened to see during the COVID waves and where we are now.

JENNIE GREENCORN: In amongst those waves, our facilities did reopen at limited capacity. We did get to a point where probably in September of this year the Scotiabank Centre had 5,000 people for an event. I worked up until March of last year at

the Pictou County Wellness Centre. We were doing cohorts of 100 where based on your access - how many doors you had and how many bathrooms you had - you could put a certain number of cohorts of 100 into your facility.

Things did increase. They never increased to full capacity, but based on where we were in the middle of those waves, some of our facilities may have been closed during some of those waves that were in a better situation - say we were improving in July and August - well, our rinks are closed in July and August anyway.

Right now, I think in this fifth wave - and probably not the final wave - it's been the most challenging for our facilities. They'll all tell you that. That's the input that we're getting from our facilities - there's not as much support. The wage subsidy has stopped. They feel that it's the most difficult wave of all so far.

I don't know, Paul, if you would like to add to that? Paul is in the middle right now. He's in a facility right now.

PAUL MACDONALD: I think it depends on the type of facility you're operating as well. I operate three on behalf of the CBRM that are owned by the municipality. There are others in our community. During the first wave, one of the challenges was that it was the end of a season, so most of the facilities - we're talking about rinks now - had gone through their ice season and it was at the end.

What hurt them was the inability to fundraise in the off-season, which allows them to have some money available to open. It's expensive to open facilities. I can say that from - when you make the commitment to put ice in, all of a sudden our power rates increase. All of these sunk costs are already in place. Putting ice in and taking ice out is not an option, usually, for most of these facilities.

Now I can speak for larger facilities. Event-wise, we haven't had an event in our facility of any sort in at least 18 months. Currently, we have some looking, maybe, into the early Summer or late Spring, but nobody can make a commitment because they're worried about another wave. Moving the event is always difficult.

I'm seeing some bright light, maybe, in the Fall of 2022. It's starting to look like there's a possibility that we may get back to what was considered "normal" prior to the pandemic. Overall, I think most facilities - whether they be rinks, pools, or community halls - have all faced the same challenge. We have expenses that are current and continue and our revenues have disappeared. It's going to be an interesting road.

I agree with Jennie. These particular restrictions in place have been a big challenge for a lot of us. We're in our midseason for a lot of these facilities, and we're not going to get that revenue back. That's gone. We're hoping that eventually we can again work with our friends in the Province who've been great with us. I was on this project for the last 18

months. We've had great dialogue with the Province. They've come through with some much-needed support. I think going forward, that has to continue if facilities continue to operate going forward.

[10:30 a.m.]

LORELEI NICOLL: I'm just going to close with saying thank you for that information. I would tend to agree, especially with Paul and your response. I was on a board for decades for Cole Harbour Place, and I know all the operational overheads that are had. On a daily basis, you're just trying to - you're struggling at the best of times. This pandemic certainly would put even more pressure on in that regard. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Nicoll. I would ask if Mr. Tilley has any questions.

FRED TILLEY: Thank you to Jennie and Paul for that great presentation. Really, I think it highlighted very well the issues faced by recreational facilities here in Nova Scotia. From the time I was a young kid up until the last couple of years, I've spent a lot of time in rec facilities over the years, and can't say enough about the volunteers and employees who have to come together to keep these facilities open. It's not easy to keep the facilities open in the best of times, especially in some of the smaller communities, as you mentioned, Jennie.

I grew up in Sydney Mines. The Sydney Mines rink has been here for a long, long time, and without the support of board members, it wouldn't have lasted. I know rinks and facilities all across the province are struggling right now, and as Paul mentioned, in the middle of their season, especially for rinks.

My question is around seniors. In the Northside area, especially at the Emera Centre in Northside, they have a beautiful facility with an amazing walking track. So many seniors use that, especially in the Wintertime, for their physical well-being and their mental health well-being as well. I was up there last week chatting with Cory. I pulled in and I was a little bit shocked because I noticed a bunch of cars, and the seniors were walking outside in the parking lot in groups of two. It just kind of broke my heart. They're walking around.

When you look at some of the multiplex facilities - and Paul would see the number of seniors who attend the Screaming Eagles games and their inability to do that. My question is around seniors and what impact you're hearing from your members or from seniors in general about the ups and downs and the closures during COVID.

JENNIE GREENCORN: Coming from the last seven years I spent at the Pictou County Wellness Centre - that facility also has a walking track and houses the local YMCA. We probably see as many seniors in that building on a daily basis as we do young people. They come to skate, they come for fitness classes, they come swimming. There are two

pools, two arenas, a conference centre, a gymnasium, and a walking track in our facility. I say “our” - I’m not there anymore, but I’ll always feel like it’s mine.

They complain, of course. I don’t know if that’s - I don’t want to talk negatively, but they certainly miss the facilities. They miss their ability to get out and they don’t always understand the reasoning. Not just them, but our own facilities. We’re trying to understand the restrictions and why you can put 25 here and you can only put 10 there, and why can’t I go on the walking track, and do I have to wear a mask? You’re trying to help them understand and explain to them regulations and protocols.

When we were operational, we got the best response from seniors in terms of feeling safe and our facilities trying to ensure that the protocols were being covered. They were getting sanitizer as they walked in the buildings, and they were supposed to wear masks, and the seats were sectioned off and they couldn’t sit next to each other. They felt comfortable to come into our facilities.

They miss that. For some, it’s the only social interaction that they have. They go to a Crushers game on Thursday night and hang out with their buddies. They’re all missing that, and we’re all missing that. How do we feel as just regular everyday - missing the interaction with other humans?

It has a negative impact on their health and well-being. They complain about it and we hear it all the time. When you think about that, here you are, you have a walking track and you have people outside on the ice and snow. It’s affecting everybody.

Paul, do you have anything to add to that?

PAUL MACDONALD: Again, the type of facilities we have here that we operate - we have a large entertainment facility at Centre 200, and to Mr. Tilley’s point, our demographic - I ran the Screaming Eagles hockey club for about 20 years, and we understand our demographic in the CBRM is skewing older. If you talk to our rec people, they have seen a change in what the expectation is, especially in this pandemic. You’re going to see that coming out of the pandemic too. There’s going to be a shift in what people’s expectations are from facilities, I believe. What that will be, I don’t know as of this time, but we are hearing from our recreation people there is going to be a change.

People are doing different things. They’re still looking at team sport, they’re still doing organized sports, but they are going to be looking for other things as well, so we’re going to have to again, as we have done for many years, adapt. I think we’ve always been able to do that. Our sector has been doing that for years.

The one thing I would like to add as well, and I want to blow our horn a little bit: During this pandemic, I think most facilities have done a really good job of managing all of the expectations of our user groups and following the protocols as they were laid out by

Public Health and the Province. I think if you look back over this period, we've done an excellent job of managing expectations. I think people understand why we're doing what we're doing, and I don't want to speak for every facility, but I know everybody's been hyperaware of making sure we have a safe environment for our user groups.

I think we've done a really good job of that, and again, it doesn't go without support from all the other folks, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration and the Department of Health and Wellness. We've had a great rapport with them, a great conversation. I think everybody has worked well through this pandemic to service our customers.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Tilley, you have four minutes. Are there any other questions that you or Ms. Nicoll would like to ask?

FRED TILLEY: I just want to thank Jennie and Paul for answering that question. It's tough, and Paul's correct in the fact that organizations have done such a wonderful job, and I can only speak for the Cape Breton side, of working together to make sure that all of the populations are met.

Something I read in your briefing around the helmet program: I think that's amazing, the ability to provide helmets to different facilities at that cost. Just quickly, similar to seniors I'm sure, areas with low income and low-income users are feeling the impact of not being able to get out to the facilities as well. Thank you very much for a great presentation.

THE CHAIR: Does the Liberal caucus have any other questions in their last three minutes?

LORELEI NICOLL: I just wanted to thank the presenters. As you said, all the facilities are very much social hubs, and they're all trying to provide that, even though they have different amenities within their buildings. Thank you again. You can use up the last two minutes or whatever.

THE CHAIR: I invite the NDP caucus, whoever wishes to go first. Ms. Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I just want to say thank you so much for the presentation and how insightful it is. I'm in Halifax, and a number of our recreational facilities have been limited and restricted. I know how hard it is, especially where I have seven children who are constantly involved in sports and recreation and needing that outlet for their social health and their mental health. I do understand that there is a struggle and it is real, in the sense that we need these types of things, because it impacts our health and well-being.

You answered a number of my questions that I had. You spoke to the importance of recreational facilities in our communities, and you also spoke to the importance of them

in rural communities and the impacts that it makes when they're not actually functional or they're not able to do the work that they need to do. I commend all of those facilities and the people who are managing them and taking care of them, who are volunteering. It's a lot of work - a lot of hands go into that type of work. I'm grateful that it continues on even though there are these challenges.

Through the pandemic, there have been many pauses in the services. We've seen that. Child care is one example. We know a number of recreation facilities utilize that space for child care. How do the recreational facilities fill some of these gaps and other kinds of services, both during the pandemic and during the normal times?

JENNIE GREENCORN: I'll use the wellness centre as an example of that. The facility houses a daycare in that building which managed for the most part during the pandemic to stay open and service families. They also have a gymnasium where, at times when schools were closed and they could put 10 kids together, they would have day camps or daily opportunities for kids to get together under the restrictions and the protocols and still offered space for families and children to go.

I'm not sure, really, in all our small facilities - in a lot of cases, those facilities have had to close and can't stay open and provide those services, but the ones that can and were able to kept going, kept the program going to try to find spaces for kids. In a lot of cases, I know in this building that I worked in, when they weren't allowed to be inside in Summertime, in the Summer months - between May and October - they had those kids outside. They still grouped them together and found a community space where they could - and if it had to be outside, they would continue to do programming outside with children to ensure that they were still getting social connection and physical activity and all those things that are important for children. Paul, if you have anything you want to add to that.

PAUL MACDONALD: I think community centres are another place, whether they be in urban or rural centres - areas that are important. I know when we talk about facilities that people focus on rinks, but we are more than just a rink organization. We started out as a rink organization. We've expanded our horizons and expanded our reach, and we have so many different groups now that we deal with. Whether you're municipally owned or a society or private or whatever, a lot of these community centres do provide that service of providing space, as the member mentioned, for child care, which right now is very important.

Again, as with other recreational or sport-based facilities, those folks are still struggling as well to find a way of managing through this pandemic. I think as we sit back and take a look at everything, assess it in the broad scope, it's going to require some additional supports. I don't think it'll be an ongoing thing. I think most of these facility operators over time have gotten the know-how to fundraise in the off-season, know how to keep themselves afloat without looking for government support, I guess - for lack of a better term. But in the short term - and we talked about recovery and what that's going to

look like, and I think Jennie and I both agree that we're not quite sure yet - but I think it's still going to need some sort of support for both - even our organization, as we work our way through. We're operators as well.

SUZY HANSEN: Thank you so much for that. We know there are going to be many elements to economic recovery in our communities and the province in the wake of this pandemic. Your presentation mentioned a recovery strategy. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on this idea.

I was really glad to hear that you were having conversations with government, that government was having conversations with the associations, because we want to know how government can support facilities to do this and work together with this recovery plan.

JENNIE GREENCORN: Paul, I'll let you take that one on, if you want, and I'll tag on at the end.

PAUL MACDONALD: Right from the beginning, when the pandemic first hit and we were - actually, it was funny. We had a board meeting in Halifax, and I remember the call. It came from Public Health, and it really took us all aback. We had at that point, way back in March of - I'm not sure, 2021 or 2020, whatever it was at the time - we never expected to be where we are now. I don't think there was a single person in that room and probably across Nova Scotia or Canada, for that matter, who thought we were going to be in this situation.

I think the path to recovery is going to be a measured one for facilities, and I think we've gotten used to this now. I know I speak for my space. The planning is just going to be very cautious as we move forward. We're all hoping and expecting things to be back to "a pre-pandemic normal," I guess we'd want to call it. I hate using the word "new normal," but anyway.

It's a hard one to really put your finger on until we see where this is going to end, and how we manage living with COVID-19. I think that's going to be the first question we need to answer. How are we going to live with COVID-19, what's it going to look like? Once we know that, then we can, as operators for various facilities, whether municipal, private, society-run, then we can make those decisions.

At the same time, right from the beginning, Community, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, they were very good with us. They really worked with us well. In the early days, we had to educate a little bit on the importance of facilities versus sport organizations or rec organizations, and that's okay, but they really stepped up and came to the table when we really needed them.

I think the one thing I'll say that came out of this, and Jennie and I both agree from RFANS's standpoint - people now know who we are as an organization. Secondly, the

level of communication between all of our groups now - whether it was a sport organization, rec organizations, provincial advocacy groups, the Province itself - I think it's been unbelievable actually over the last 18 - 24 months. I don't think people could say we were taken for granted. I don't think people even knew who our association was at some level.

I will say this: RFANS really has done a great job during this pandemic representing the sector. I'm proud of that, and I think going forward we will be a very important piece to this recovery puzzle. What it'll look like I don't know right now.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald. Ms. Hansen, did you have anything further?

SUZY HANSEN: I'm going to let my colleague speak as well.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thank you to our guests. I will just chime in with my own personal experience here. I have the two young ones in hockey - proud Dartmouth Whalers mom right here. The difference between the end of last season, where we were dropping them off at the door - they were going in, playing their game, doing their practice, and then picking them up and like, oh, how was hockey - to the beginning of this season where we actually got to sit in an arena again and order fries and watch a game with all the other families was really palpable.

It was really exciting to be back in the rink and have the arena experience. It's a shame now, again, that we're back to dropping them off at the door, and we only hope that we'll be able to see a game by the end of the season.

It really speaks to the impact of a cultural space or a recreational space in the community. It affects so many people, as we've already heard in the meeting. I just want to give a shout-out to the folks who are running those facilities and the organizations that use them for their nimbleness and their ability to react and make the everyday user of the facility feel safe when we have been able to go in. I think that's really important.

First of all, I have a real technical question: can you give me an example of a private facility in Nova Scotia? I'm trying to think of them, and I can only think of board-run or municipally-run ones.

JENNIE GREENCORN: I can give an example, yeah: the Deuville's arena. Do you remember Hockeyville several years back at the Deuville's Rink in Truro? That is a family-run arena. They're privately run.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thanks very much for that. I just couldn't think of an example.

We already heard from you about how effective some of that government support was - the grants, the testimonials that you gave in your presentation. I'm really happy that those were helpful. You did mention that facilities closed, but I'm wondering if any facilities have closed their doors for good because of the financial impacts of COVID.

JENNIE GREENCORN: I'm not aware if anyone is permanently closed - I don't know, Paul, if you're aware of any. I know there were many on the verge that without \$40,000 or \$50,000 - that makes a huge difference to a small facility.

I'll give you a personal example. Back in 2003 or 2004 when the rink revitalization money - the first time that program was run, it was a one-time grant for every rec facility in the province, of \$27,000. At that time I was in Canso trying to keep a rink alive, and my sprinkler system was shot and I didn't have the money.

I often refer to this. It was like Christmas. Someone hands you \$27,000. We all applied for it. The Province gave out \$2 million to facilities at the time. Whether it's a small curling rink and they get \$5,000, that is a lot of money for a small curling rink. It might be the difference of them being able to stay open or not. I'm not aware at this point of any facilities that closed that were not already slated to close or already on the verge of closure.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That is good news, I suppose. Speaking of the support that organizations did get, talking to your members, would you say that the support that was offered was adequate? Was there any talk of support other than financial support that the government could have offered that would have been helpful to your members?

JENNIE GREENCORN: Paul, I'll let you take that one.

PAUL MACDONALD: That's an interesting question. I suppose the one thing we all talk about is that asset management and identifying in these facilities - for instance, the one I operate is Centre 200. It's now 36 years old. Equipment ages. We identify some of that equipment, but at times it can be challenging to come up with the funding required.

For instance, a lot of programs are a third, a third, a third: a third from the facility or municipality, a third from the Province and a third from the federal government for some of these support programs. The challenge with that at times is coming up with your third. Especially if you're a board-run facility or a community-run facility, it's a challenge.

I think if you're looking at funding models, sometimes it might be useful to maybe consult with the sector and ask what is the best approach to take. I think everybody's intention is fine. There's programming out there, and I know there's a wage subsidy

program that was presented, but most facilities couldn't meet those parameters. That's what I guess I'm saying. If you're interested in funding, I don't think it should just be handed over. I think there should be a way of following a process.

I will mention this, if you don't mind: A grant application process is cumbersome. I will say that at certain times for certain grants, and if you're a facility operator - a municipality is different. We have folks who are good at that. That's their job - they can go in and write a grant or an application. I think there's a better way of streamlining some of that, and I think Jennie and our association would be excellent conduits to helping the process along with that. I think that would be one area.

I think it's always going to come down to the financial. I know people are talking about dealing with Nova Scotia Power. That would probably be the largest expense for most facilities, but that's probably not realistic. Nova Scotia Power is a private company. It's a little bit different to go to them and say, we'd like to maybe change the rates to make it more feasible for some of these facilities. I think there are other ways of doing things. Streamlining the process might be helpful for a lot of facilities.

You have to understand, some of these folks only have one or two folks operating these smaller facilities. It's just not in their realm to be sitting down and writing grant reports and doing all that stuff. I think that's a way, maybe, we could help. Of course, money always helps, but I'm just saying if you're putting funding out there, it may look great on paper - yes, we're supplying funding - but it may be cumbersome for those to apply. That would be one comment I'd make on that.

JENNIE GREENCORN: I can add to that, Madam Chair. With that third/third/third funding, people will say, well, they always come up with that other third or that other two-thirds. But it's the facilities that need it who just don't apply, because they know they can't come up with that other third.

Suzy had asked the question about how government can help. In terms of even our own association where we're trying to help these facilities on a regular basis and we're struggling ourselves, like these other small organizations - in the case of us, we just spent 18 months lobbying and advocating for \$1 million in funding for our facilities. While doing that, not being able to create our own revenue, and that time is money. That's our time that we can't recover either.

When we're doing things like that for the Province and our facilities, having the ability to take an admin fee or to help our own association with the cost of doing that work for our facilities at the rate that our facility funding is at right now, it's hard for us to be sustainable, to try and find ways to increase that funding pot. Our association has seen the same funding for at least 15 years. It's just not sustainable.

I went back to take a look and in the last 10 years, really, our funding's decreased by 9.5 per cent. All our expenses have gone up. Being able to provide that training and the support and the things that those facilities need right now, we're limited in capacity as to what we can do for them. We wish we could do more, but we're limited. Paul talks about how we can help the facilities. Well, the association needs to work together.

Sorry, Ms. Leblanc, because I just diverted from your question and answered the rest of Suzy's question.

THE CHAIR: Order. At this point, I believe that we've gone through the 20-minute question for the NDP caucus. Thank you, Ms. Greencorn and Mr. MacDonald, again.

I would now invite the PC Party. Ms. Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: First, I want to say thank you both for being here. You're both absolutely right: These are very important to our communities.

Some of my questions have been grazed a little bit, but I'd like to try to narrow it down. Could you talk a bit about participation and utilization rates for your members prior to COVID-19, and how it compares to current participation? That's for either of you.

JENNIE GREENCORN: I think Paul kind of talked about that a bit. We've been an association since 1992; we're almost 30 years old. Like you said, originally we were arena operators, and we went to arena and pool operators. We amalgamated and our scope has certainly grown over the years. Over the last two years, our members are much more engaged, participating in our town halls, our webinars - the information that we've been able to offer them.

We're on the phone daily with the Tommy Graveses of the world, Cory Keeping and John Wadden, those guys, just trying to help them through. I think they see the value in our association and what we've been able to offer them and certainly have increased their awareness. We've grown. We've gotten more memberships since COVID has started, and we'd like to build on that as well.

We are doing an outreach program where we're going out into the facilities and we're meeting with facility managers and meeting with people who are potential new members and letting them know what we do. We're hopeful that will increase our membership and increase participation and activity in our association.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacDonald, did you have anything you would like to add?

PAUL MACDONALD: Just one thing. One of the things we also have done better as an organization is working with our user groups. We had a number of consultations - this was prior to the pandemic but it was related to it, with our sport organizations. I think

it's kind of funny, we're in the same building as Sport Nova Scotia, and most of the PSOs - provincial sport organizations - and RFANS have offices in that building. Maybe at times we were in silos. Now this has forced us to have direct communication again with our user groups and find out from them what their expectations are, and then they can find out from us how we operate, what the challenges we face are.

[11:00 a.m.]

We had a great summit - speaking of arenas - way back when this all started. Hockey Nova Scotia, Speed Skate Nova Scotia, Figure Skate Nova Scotia, Ringette - we all got together and would have regular calls every two weeks just to have a discussion about where we're going and what we're doing. What it did was, it broadened our interest in what they're doing, and they certainly learned a lot about what RFANS is all about. I think there has been a shift in RFANS and what it's here for now, because of this pandemic. As a matter of fact, I think we as an organization are in the midst of a strategic planning process that is going to probably change our outlook going forward.

It's going to be an interesting exercise, I know for sure. I think as we go forward, we are certainly going to change as an organization. I think we have to. I think everybody coming out of this now is going to have a better understanding of what facilities do, and the importance they have for people in our province.

THE CHAIR: I just want to remind committee members to put their physical hands up for questions. Ms. Barkhouse, did you have any follow-up that you would like to ask?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I do, actually. Tommy Graves is just fantastic. We would most likely be shut down if it wasn't for receiving the grant last month. I'm very appreciative to government for that program.

Speaking of which, are you aware of any communities or groups that have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and do you see any challenges for the recreational facilities serving them in their ability to recover?

JENNIE GREENCORN: Paul, I'm going to shoot that off to you as well, if you're okay with that.

PAUL MACDONALD: I think, generally speaking, everybody has been affected at different levels. I think sport organizations certainly have had a very challenging time over the last 24 months. It's just the stopping and starting, where we are going. It doesn't matter at what level. You could be at the high elite level or just at the recreational level.

I think community groups that use facilities have been affected. I don't think there's any one area that's suffered, if that's the word to use, more than others. I think it's been

equal. I know outside of sport, the arts and culture sector has been extremely hard hit by the fact that we can't put events on. That has really impacted a lot of folks.

Timing is timing and there's nothing you can do about it. This wave of the pandemic came to us in December, and that is a very important time of year of a lot of musicians and folks in the arts community. I think as we come out of this, if we can all come together and work as a group, we can put something together to help support us in the short-term. I don't want to speak out, but I think it's going to be a short-term fix and get us going again, get us up and running.

By their nature, that's how most of these facilities and organizations operate. You fundraise, you do all that stuff. You're not looking for support, generally speaking. I think if we can get short-term support and then move past that, down the road we can put the pandemic behind us and move on and get back to the way we were prior to this.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald. I see Mr. Taggart has a question.

TOM TAGGERT: Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much to the presenters. My question is going to be for Ms. Greencorn. I just want to drill down a little bit more on this rural/urban rink question.

For me, I never set foot on a piece of ice with a roof over it until I was 17 years old. In the intermediate time, several communities and community leaders and business leaders got together and built an arena, a skating rink, in Debert. It worked its way along with a board - we speak about board-operated and private.

I think a lot of those board-operated facilities are really community-owned in a sense, but supported at least capitally by municipalities. I believe that they have a much more difficult challenge to survive in these times. I just wonder, can you drill a little bit deeper on that for me?

JENNIE GREENCORN: Absolutely. I often refer back to my own experiences with a small rink. Our rink in Canso, like the rink in Debert, was built by a group of volunteers and we were run by a volunteer board. At the time, we were owned by the Town of Canso, but the Town of Canso didn't put a cent into our facility. They owned the land, they owned their own electric light utilities, so they gave us a cut. We didn't pay demand for our power, but we were stand-alone and we struggled. Every year, we struggled to come up with the fundraising.

I worked in that facility for 10 years. I got paid for 19 weeks, and the rest of the year, I did the work, I fundraised all summer long, I did wedding dances, and I did receptions, and I did fundraising events. I did whatever I needed to do in the span of the end of March until October so that I had \$15,000 to \$20,000 to put ice in our facility. A facility like Paul's, they're not dealing with those same issues when it's a municipality.

I don't mean it's easy, Paul, but the difference between what's happening in these small communities where they just don't have the capacity. They have lots of volunteers, but then you're dealing with volunteer burnout. There are all kinds of issues like that, that those smaller facilities are challenged with.

Right now, there's no ability to fundraise. There's no ability to come up with that support that they need to get from the end of March 'til October. That's where they did the majority of their fundraising, or, in some cases, they get a grant from the municipality or the town, and it's sustaining them. The Antigonish Arena is a case where they're run by a volunteer board, but they receive a funding grant from the town and a grant from the municipality. It helps them get through.

The difference between a small rural rink that's board run and not supported by a town or municipality, to a facility like the Antigonish Arena where they have some supports, to a facility like Paul's - and I'm talking about rinks, but pools are done the same way, or community rec facilities - all these small facilities that are not able to open their doors and have more than 10 people. You can't rent a facility for 10 people. Those are the challenges.

You see the tiering in not-for-profits or municipally-owned or government-owned. I don't know if that answers your question, Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGERT: It does. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. White.

JOHN WHITE: My question is to Ms. Greencorn. Community rinks, pools: They're a great place for volunteers to get experience. Volunteering is so important to develop our skills and to build a sense of community involvement, which is what we're really talking about here, as community centres are. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the members' ability to attract volunteers?

JENNIE GREENCORN: I think in some cases, in our PSOs - our provincial sport organizations - it's actually increased the number of volunteers. In sports organizations, in order to be able to deliver the programs, they need volunteers who are doing contract tracing or volunteers who are keeping track of their sport teams - who is able to play and who isn't able to play. So in some cases it's increased volunteers.

In other cases, our facilities are not doing the events, not doing the things that they would require volunteers for to raise money or to put an event on. I guess it depends on the facility. It depends on what those facilities are doing, if they're doing events or if they're - I know in our - I either refer to my time in Canso or my time at the Wellness Centre, as small facility/big facility, but we had a lot of volunteers at the Pictou County Wellness Centre in order to be able to do cohorts of 100, where you're monitoring doors. So those

members had to recruit volunteers to just be able to keep the doors open and provide a safe environment for patrons to come in and participate in the events that were going on there.

JOHN WHITE: Thank you, Ms. Greencorn. You raise a good point. The type of facility and what they're providing certainly makes a difference.

[11:15 a.m.]

Are there particular areas in the province that were affected that you're aware of? I know that rural versus urban - I don't know if that matters, or if it's the size of the community, but are there particular areas that have been affected by COVID that you're aware of?

JENNIE GREENCORN: Not in particular. Again, as Paul alluded to earlier, there is not a facility or a community that hasn't been affected by COVID, or our ability to deliver services to the community. I don't know of any specific communities that were worse off - the urban centres or the rural centres. Again, facility-wise, I do believe that the rural communities' challenges are different than those in the larger urban - I'm not talking about the centres. I'm talking about those larger facilities, those larger municipally-run facilities.

Everybody's challenged. I don't think I can pinpoint one community that was worse off than the other. I think everybody's affected by COVID and our facilities have all been challenged. Our volunteers are challenged and are tired. Our facility operators are tired and challenged. Everybody's just ready for it to be over. I don't know if that answers your question, Mr. White, but we're all ready for it to be done and just try and find some new normal - that term Paul doesn't like.

I think everybody's changing. I think every organization, every facility - we're all having to reroute and think of other ways to manage now that we have to deal with the challenges of COVID and what comes after that. In our own association, we're regrouping because we can't do what we normally did. We're all sitting here in little tiles looking at each other because we can't do what we normally did.

But in all that, I think there are always some positives and some silver linings to really bad situations, like the ability for us to gather with our members in those facilities, in communities - rural, urban, wherever - and communicate with them like this in this type of setting, in this platform. It's allowing them to talk about their concerns and voice their issues, and for us to be able to help them through that. All kinds of positive things.

We're building new relationships. We're strengthening old relationships. I hope that those facilities and those communities that are struggling know that we're here to help them and support them, and help navigate them through the tail end of this mess we're all living in.

THE CHAIR: Mr. White, there are two minutes left for the PC caucus.

JOHN WHITE: I'll share that with Nolan Young.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Thank you for your presentation. I guess that's a good opener. COVID threw the brakes on everything and we had to learn to do things differently and adapt. I'm just curious, from your presentation and discussion, is there anything that stands out about how certain buildings may have adapted - whether it's the people who are administering it or the public? I know you touched on it with the seniors in the parking lot. Are there any other examples of how your group adapted?

THE CHAIR: There's only one minute left, Ms. Greencorn, if you can answer that.

JENNIE GREENCORN: I just want to tell you, I spent a lot of time on the phone with Shane Rogers in Newport. We've all adapted. Every facility has had to adapt with the restrictions and trying to be able to make it work and allow people to come into our facilities. We've all had to adapt. I don't know if you're talking about our organization specifically, or the facilities or . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. I'm sorry. We'll have to maybe get back to that in the second round of questioning.

I would invite the Liberal caucus to ask their second questions in this round. It's 10 minutes for your caucus.

LORELEI NICOLL: I think we're sort of reiterating the same questions and concerns, having listened to them all, so I don't really have anything, if Fred does have something to add.

At the end of the day, we're tired of "the new normal" and "pivoting," and that's what everybody on this call has been doing - trying to figure out what the future holds for everybody. We're all in this together and I'm sure we will advocate more because, as you mentioned, these are social hubs for our communities. We do need to get back to providing the services that we need for all, from low-income to seniors to our youth.

We do hear from them on a regular basis. I remember when the restrictions started and people weren't supposed to go on trails, and as a former councillor it was kind of like, that's the healthy thing to do. Again, our focus is going to have to be on preventive health going forward, and all these facilities are going to provide a great opportunity for that to happen.

Good luck to everybody. If Fred has anything more to add? Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Tilley, did you have a question or anything to add?

FRED TILLEY: No question. Just, again, if there's anything that the association thinks that we can help with to get the message out, we'd be happy to participate in that. Again, thank you both for a great presentation. I think all of the questions that I had were answered through the different questioners. I hope as we move out of this pandemic that your facilities are able to thrive and get back on track.

THE CHAIR: I will invite the NDP caucus. Ms. Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I want to say that I'm very appreciative of the time and the presentation, like I said earlier. Very, very thorough in the answers, and I'm grateful for that.

We were talking about supports. We know that there was a huge impact on the facilities. Did you have any member facilities that did not qualify for support? Were the guidelines too restrictive? That was something that Mr. MacDonald had mentioned - streamlining the grant process in some way so that there's not a barrier to being able to access funding.

For example, in the most recent round, recipients must have a minimum gross monthly payroll of \$1,000. Have there been any member facilities that did not qualify for support?

JENNIE GREENCORN: In terms of the most recent Sector Impact Support Program grant that's available - and Paul and I have talked about this - you have to have a payroll of between \$0 and \$15,000 to be eligible for \$2,500, or you have to have a payroll between \$15,000 to \$25,000 in order to be eligible for \$5,000, or \$25,000 or above in order to be eligible for \$7,500. For our smaller facilities, if they have a payroll between \$0 and \$15,000, they might get \$2,500. We're always appreciative of whatever funding and whatever opportunities are there, but you'd have to have a payroll of \$300,000 a year in order to be eligible for \$7,500. There are challenges in that regard.

In terms of people not being eligible, there are all kinds of facilities that are still looking for regular upgrades and capital projects. Again, that funding formula of a third, a third, and a third - if there was a little bit more flexibility as to what the portion is that the facility has to come up with, that would help our facilities. In terms of the emergency support that was received, of course the municipalities were not eligible for that. No funding program is perfect, but there are ways that you can help in terms of that funding piece.

Again, I don't want to go back to us, but in terms of our association's funding, that hasn't changed. I think that's the case for a lot of the not-for-profits and organizations under

Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, where that funding has been static for a lot of years.

If we want to continue to do what we are doing for our facilities - we see the potential for growth in our association. We're doing training, but we want to be the lead training provider for facilities. There's a whole process to go through to do that, but we can't do that. We don't have the means to do that or the capacity to do it. We want to grow. Help with that would be helpful. Helping us helps our facilities as well to provide the support that they need.

There's another piece that we've talked about around our board table where we've gone through this process over 18 to 24 months as Paul said, and the government has come to us and asked us, well, how many facilities do we have and where are they at and who runs them, how many pools are there. We don't know. We know who our members are, we know - we all - there's a lot of expertise around our board table.

I'm the Executive Director of the Recreation Facilities Association of Nova Scotia, but I took this list of emergency support grant recipients, and I'm like, oh my God, I didn't know all these facilities. There's a lot of facilities on that list that we could be better supporting.

The point of all that is that in terms of asset or inventory mapping, it would be something else that potentially RFANS could help the Province do so there is an inventory of what kind of rec facilities we have in the province because we don't know. There are community halls, there are church halls that are turned into community halls, there are trails, and anything that are in the built environment or the non-built environment are considered recreation facilities. How do you manage those, and how do you support all those? It's big.

If there was a way we could work with the Province to create something like that, that would be helpful to everybody. There are things that we look at that we'd like to be able to do, and ways we'd like to be able to better help our facilities, but our hands are tied in a lot of ways.

SUZY HANSEN: Thank you. I'm going to pass this on to my colleague Susan.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc, you have three minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thanks. Well, I guess I'd just say I did want to clarify really quickly, Ms. Greencorn, because I do have some comments, too, but if you can just clarify if there are organizations in your organization that receive operational funding from the province on a year-to-year basis. Just a simple yes or no would be great.

JENNIE GREENCORN: Our facilities that receive funding from the Province? I would expect so, but I wouldn't have that information about who's receiving provincial funding on a regular basis or not. That would be a department question, maybe.

[11:30 a.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. So, I guess that just speaks to what you've just said and what Mr. MacDonald said earlier, especially about the collaboration between sports and recreation facilities and arts and culture. I'm speaking as an artist, and also as the critic for the NDP for this department. I hear this across the board in the department, from the arts and culture side and the recreation side: number one, more consistent funding is necessary; number two, an increase in historical funding levels is massively necessary.

There's this idea that recreation and culture are at the bottom end of the funding scale where, in fact, if we funded those types of organizations and those facilities to a proper level, we would be able to spend less money on health care and on mental health care. We would be able to spend less money on education and on justice, right? These are the places where we should be funding our community to a proper level so that folks are - yup. It's like upstream funding, folks. Recreation and culture is upstream funding, and it only makes sense.

I really hope that the government and the department is hearing you today, as people who represent organizations on the ground, and see the benefit of increases to organizations - not just the umbrella organization, of course, but to the actual facilities that need it.

I also want to say, Mr. MacDonald, that this issue around grant applications and streamlining grant applications totally resonates with me as someone who spent much of my administrative time - which should have been creative time - writing grant applications for this bit of money and this bit of money and this bit of money. It's a huge administrative waste and could be better spent in so many other ways. I very much empathize with that. I guess my last thing ...

THE CHAIR: Actually, order - I'm sorry about that. The time has flown in this lightning round. I call on the PC caucus - we'll go back to Mr. Young to finish his question.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just briefly, when COVID put the brakes on things, we had a look at how we could do things differently. Do you have any examples of perhaps some of your facilities that may have fundraised differently or offered new programming or alternate means of programming? Any way that some facilities may have innovated?

JENNIE GREENCORN: I'm going to defer that to Paul, as he's right in the middle of managing a facility right now.

PAUL MACDONALD: It was a great question, actually. That was the one thing during COVID that we had to look at operationally, make changes. We were forced to, and some of those changes we're going to implement going forward.

For instance, in my facility, Centre 200 is a little bit different than some of the others, it's more similar to Scotiabank Centre and maybe some of the larger facilities, but crowd flow, how they enter and exit the building, security generally speaking, how we manage that. Cleaning the building was something that we obviously had to deal with and we made some changes there and we found some new product and we found some innovations. That, in itself, was good.

Also, the food and beverage service, delivering food and beverage for us in our facility, we developed an app locally in Sydney, a local company that now allows people to receive food and beverage in their seat without getting up. That, in itself, from a COVID standpoint, worked really well, and also, I think from a dollars-and-cents point of view it's going to work really well. It gives us different options.

Even from dealing with our sport organizations, I think we now have a greater appreciation for what they're offering, and we're working more collaboratively. Not that it was an us-versus-them mentality, but I think initially, when we had our first conversations, I said way back when with these sport organizations, there was a bit of that. They're paying us money to use the building. Anytime you have someone paying you, there's always going to be a little bit of friction. But once we had that dialogue, which I think was so important, we all saw that we're in it together, we're working as a group trying to do the best for those that use our facilities.

I think that's the biggest thing that's going to come out of this from our point of view with our partners. I think you're going to see that collaboration continue going forward. Even with our government folks that we deal with; that collaboration, I think is also going to continue going forward, which I think is important for everybody.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I think this would go to Jennie probably, on the rink revitalization plan. I have four rinks, but I thought one of them should have got in for funding, and I think they didn't get their application through in time. I'm not sure if there's a second round or not. I believe there is.

Anyway, with that in mind, Pictou County Wellness Centre is an example of a facility that got funding. I think they got some money out of the Rink Revitalization Fund, and I think they got some money for ventilation, which is pretty critical these days. Can you give a little bit of an idea of how they benefitted from that fund?

JENNIE GREENCORN: In terms of who gets the money and who didn't get the money and who is eligible and who isn't eligible, RFANS has no say.

TOM TAGGART: I'm not leading it that way. I just want to try and understand the benefits.

JENNIE GREENCORN: Sure. In the case of that facility, the Pictou County Wellness Centre, I think they got \$115,000. I only know that because I know what's on this list, and I don't work there anymore. What I do know after being there for seven years are the challenges of trying to maintain these large multiplexes and pay for them. First off, I think that the perception of these big facilities, where the community thinks that they should be able to pay for themselves, is ridiculous because they can't.

The perception in the community is that these facilities should be providing a service, just like everybody else - like your health and wellness service, like your fire department. The community doesn't always look at that. They look at what the deficit is.

In terms of this funding, they're trying to reduce their energy costs. That facility opened in 2011, and the building was built with multiple systems trying to work together to provide the best energy. It really didn't work. After multiple years, they went in and they had to recommission everything. You're trying to heat the pool with leftover waste from the rink. They're complex facilities, they really are. These are big multiplexes where you really shouldn't be putting pools and rinks in the same building together, but people do. The hope is that they'll be able to benefit from reduced energy costs.

I know because I worked my buns off for that facility, that we worked on a skeleton budget. We did. We really worked hard to try to keep the expenses down in those facilities. In any of those major facilities, your biggest expenses are wages and energy costs, so you're going to try and do whatever you can to reduce your energy costs and maintain your wage costs so that there are people to function and work in those buildings and do the job that needs to be done to keep them open. The hope is to reduce energy costs and be able to sustain these facilities.

TOM TAGGERT: I appreciate that. I may not have framed it up just right there, but really, we spent most of our time talking about struggles just to keep our head above water. I guess I was headed to that Rink Revitalization Fund plan.

Also, you kind of twigged me there - the idea that these are community assets. It's not like the deficit idea. A deficit is not paying itself. It's a community asset that we have to have. Sorry. Anyway, thanks very much.

JENNIE GREENCORN: You don't have to be sorry.

TOM TAGGERT: It's for the rest of the panel - I'm rambling too much. I sometimes do that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Taggert and Ms. Greencorn. The PC caucus has a couple of minutes left, if anyone wanted to do any more comments.

Mr. White, I see you have your hand up.

JOHN WHITE: Given what the tone of our meeting was supposed to be - you only have a few minutes, I won't be long. I just wanted to know if there are any lessons we can carry forward, either for the government or for your organization, Ms. Greencorn. Do you have any ideas, like lessons learned from this? I don't know if this is the end of it.

JENNIE GREENCORN: I think the open communication with our government, with Community, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, is critical to understanding the issues that our facilities are facing, to keep those lines of communication open. Ask us. We want to be included in decisions that are being made about our facilities. I think it was Ms. Leblanc who referred to the trails being open all of a sudden - sorry, Ms. Nicoll.

There were times during the pandemic in the first wave, where all of a sudden trails were opening, and they're telling you the day before that you're going to open a facility, but they don't understand that there's a lot of work. You've got to get staff back, you got to - there's all kinds of things that have to happen in order to get these facilities up and running. You can't tell us the day before that we're going to be open the next day.

Open communication is critical. It is certainly a lesson learned that we maintain good relationships. It's the same thing with our sports organizations and our stakeholders and our users. Keeping the lines of communication open is key.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacDonald, do you have anything to add?

PAUL MACDONALD: Similar to what Jennie said, I think from our sector point of view, we as an organization have a better understanding of where we are within our sector. I think we've done a good job of communicating that to all of our partners, and I think it's going to continue. I think we will see better days ahead.

We've had a tough two years. I think everybody understood that, and I think we're excited - at least looking forward - that we're going to manage our way through this. I think once we come out of this, we'll be in a good position to take advantage of the opportunities we have in front of us.

It's certainly going to be different over the next little while. From my point of view, I'm just hoping that we see some brighter days ahead coming into - I'm looking ahead to the Fall. That's really where we are, realistically, and I don't think I'm too far off in that.

Hopefully I'm wrong and that it'll be earlier, but I think from everybody's point of view, that's going to be where we're going to go.

Otherwise, I do think we as an organization and our group have done a good job. We're looking forward to continuing that. Our strategic plan is going to come out, and that's going to be a real guide for us.

THE CHAIR: I want to thank you for your remarks. If you have any last comments or input that you would like to give the committee in the last few minutes, that would be well received.

JENNIE GREENCORN: I'd just like to say thank you for giving us this opportunity today to present to you and let you know what's happening on the ground with our facilities and our association. Thank you for your support. I think Paul is actually going to present some closing remarks.

PAUL MACDONALD: I appreciate the opportunity to, again - I don't want to use "educate," but every chance we get, we like to talk about RFANS and who we are. We're the only recreation facility association in Atlantic Canada, representing facilities in Nova Scotia. That's something that we're proud of. We have a vibrant board of directors and membership.

This exercise with COVID is something I don't want to go through again, but I do see some positives to come out of this from an organizational standpoint. We are more engaged with our membership. I think our path is going to change a little bit. I think we have a lot more to offer, and hopefully as we move forward, we are going to continue to work with our partners, whether they be government, our sport organizations, user groups, to better understand where we're going.

We are going to need support, both as an organization and as facility operators, operationally in the short term. As we go through this process, I think down the road we can assist government. Speaking from our municipality's point of view, we did an exercise in recognizing the age of our facilities, what's needed from a budget standpoint. It actually was very helpful for our financial people, because then they can start mapping out a plan as they go forward as to what may be needed.

There's always something that comes up. You guys know that yourselves. There's always something that comes out of the blue, but if you can start planning, it makes life a little bit easier for everybody involved. As we go forward, I hope we can get collaboration.

This was a great exercise today. I know from Jennie's and my perspective, it's a great exercise to be able to take a look ourselves at what went on and where we're going. I hope it was useful for you folks as well. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you both very much for the input in today's committee meeting. You are welcome to stay for the last few minutes as we finish committee business, or are free to go about your day. Thank you again on behalf of the entire committee.

Unless there is something that anyone wanted to bring up for committee business, there's nothing listed on the agenda for today. Any show of hands that there was anything that we wanted to discuss?

Seeing none, then I just want to remind that we will reconvene on March 1, 2022, 10:00 a.m. until noon. The topic is to be announced.

Ms. Langille.

KIM LANGILLE: I wanted to mention that just this morning I have confirmed a witness for March 1st. The topic is going to be wraparound supports for homeless Nova Scotians. It's Community Services, Shelter Nova Scotia, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Society, and United Way. That was just confirmed this morning.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you for that information, Kim. That will be on our agenda for the topic on March 1st.

If there is no further business, I would like to adjourn the meeting. Take care, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 11:45 a.m.]