

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, June 6, 2023**

**Committee Room**

**Update on Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence**

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Chair)

John White (Vice Chair)

Larry Harrison

Danielle Barkhouse

Tom Taggart

Hon. Ben Jessome

Lorelei Nicoll

Kendra Coombes

Suzy Hansen

[Tom Taggart was replaced by Kent Smith.]

[Hon. Ben Jessome was replaced by Braedon Clark.]

[Suzy Hansen was replaced by Susan Leblanc.]

### In Attendance:

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Tamer Nusseibeh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

### WITNESSES

#### Department of Community Services

Tracey Taweel  
Deputy Minister

Meredith Naylor  
Acting Senior Director, Status of Women Office



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2023**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**10:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

**VICE CHAIR**

John White

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services. I'm Melissa Sheehy-Richard, the MLA for Hants West and Chair of this committee.

Today we are going to hear from presenters regarding an update on Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence. Just a reminder about your cell phones and any other devices, to put them on silent mode. In case of emergency, we will use the Granville Street exit and walk up to the Grand Parade.

I would now like to ask the committee members to introduce themselves, and I will begin on my left with MLA White.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

[10:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Chief Legislative Counsel, Gordon Hebb, and Legislative Committee Clerk, Tamer Nusseibeh.

The topic: Update on Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence. I want to welcome our witnesses here today and ask them to introduce themselves, then we can begin with your opening remarks. Deputy Minister Taweel.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'll welcome Deputy Minister Taweel to begin with her opening remarks.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Good morning again and thank you for inviting us to be here today to talk about the work of Standing Together. I just introduced myself; my name is Tracey Taweel. I'm the Deputy Minister of Community Services and the Status of Women office, and I'm very pleased that Meredith Naylor is joining me here today.

The Status of Women office includes eight public servants whose work is focused on equity for women and girls. The office is a separate entity from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The Council consists of appointed members who represent a broad range of women and represent the diversity and geographical regions of the province. They are tasked with bringing forward the concerns of women and are asked to participate in advising the minister around issues of gender equity in Nova Scotia.

Last year in our province, 1,666 instances of domestic violence were reported to police - that is an average of five a day. As we know, not all incidents are reported. Of those reported cases, 79 per cent of victims were women. Gender-based violence undermines a person's sense of self-worth and their self-esteem. It prevents them from focusing on their personal growth and success.

In 2018, the provincial government launched Standing Together, Nova Scotia's commitment to preventing gender-based violence. Standing Together set out to work with community organizations, groups, and experts to understand and break the cycle of domestic violence. The action plan focuses on three pillars: preventing domestic violence; supporting victims and survivors of domestic violence with an improved system of programs; and shifting policies and interventions so that support systems can better respond to people's needs, understand and promote gender equality, and address barriers facing the most vulnerable Nova Scotians.

Through Standing Together, the office provided funding to over 80 projects to help community and government agencies test innovative ideas to prevent domestic violence and support those affected by it. We're taking valuable insights and lessons from our partners and adjusting our approach to make sure we're giving people the supports they need.

We've learned that engaging and supporting men and boys is critical to preventing violence against women and children. We need to support healthy masculinity, normalize seeking help, and support everyone's mental and physical well-being. Part of that is expanding GuysWork to more classrooms throughout our province and beyond. This was made possible through a co-investment with Women and Gender Equality Canada of \$1,050,000.

We continue to support the 211 Nova Scotia men's, women's, and all genders helplines, which have been successful in providing compassionate navigation, information, resources, and counselling support. Over 15,000 calls have been made to the helplines since they began in September 2020. The helplines are available 24/7 and have seen an increase of 230 per cent between December 2021 and December 2022, with 99 per cent of callers saying they would reach out for help again.

Throughout Standing Together, we have remained committed to eliminating violence against Indigenous women and girls. We worked with care to ensure that our actions and responses aligned with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the Calls for Justice.

One of the most significant ways we are moving forward is in partnership with our support of the resilience centre in Millbrook First Nation. A first of its kind in Canada, it is a symbol of our commitment and action in responding to the MMIWG Calls for Justice and to advancing reconciliation.

The resilience centre will be run by the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association. It will provide Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people with a safe space to receive the trauma-informed and culturally appropriate healing and wellness programs they need to live happier, healthier lives.

We know that partnering with community organizations is key to ending domestic violence. Our province has a range of women-serving organizations that are committed to the safety, well-being, and prosperity of women. I'll take just a moment to highlight a few of those partners today, and the work they do.

The Transition House Association of Nova Scotia plays an important dual role as an advocate and an organization that supports women and the transition houses across our province.

The Status of Women office provides annual operating funding to 10 transition houses, nine women's centres, and Alice House, as well as the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, the Jane Paul Indigenous Resource Centre, and Naomi Society. These organizations all perform critical support roles, and provide direct intervention help to women and their children in Nova Scotia.

We can create a future without gender-based or domestic violence - a future where young people have safe spaces to express their feelings openly and honestly, and to learn how to model nurturing, loving, healthy, and safe relationships. It will take time and collective effort.

We have learned a lot about disrupting the cycle of gender-based violence through Standing Together, and we will continue building on that knowledge to make a difference. We know from this work that it requires stronger connections between organizations, service providers, and government. As we move forward, we are committed to working in a way that will help to prevent domestic violence. I am very pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, deputy minister. We will begin, and remind everyone to wait until their names are acknowledged and their lights turn red.

We will begin the first round of questioning with the Liberal caucus. MLA Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the presentation, Ms. Taweel.

The presentation was primarily on the Standing Together plan, but I wondered: the Department of Justice *Domestic Violence Action Plan* was last updated in 2012. Are there any ongoing conversations between the Status of Women and the Department of Justice to update this plan? It's all about this report, but typically, plans of 2012 would have had reviews or been looked at at certain intervals. I just wondered if that happened, and going forward.

TRACEY Taweel: Certainly, that plan was a very important plan for the Province of Nova Scotia at the time that it was written. Learnings from that plan were incorporated into the goals and priorities set around Standing Together.

We've taken all of those learnings and woven them through Standing Together. I would say Standing Together and the investments made since 2018, as well as the learnings along the way, have helped shaped our response to eliminating domestic violence in the current context.

Absolutely, it was a useful and very valuable document. Lots of learnings came from that document that helped to shape where we are today.

LORELEI NICOLL: I guess it's not something that we should be referencing anymore - since it seems like it's shelved and now this is the new plan going forward? You can answer that in addition to my next question. You said the helplines are available 24/7 and you've seen an increase of 230 per cent, with 99 per cent of the callers saying they would reach for help.

I know all of that information is confidential, but to the department, do you look at where the hotspots are, or the red flags, as a means of saying how you need to provide the services? At the end of the day, the callers are telling you what is happening and what is most prevalent in society. I want to know how your department's responding to that.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Certainly, the helplines are a very important service that is now in operation across this province. Yes, as I stated, there has been a steady increase in usage of those lines. Some of that increase, I think, is from increased promotion of the availability of the lines, as well as word of mouth at the community level, and through service providers sharing this important resource that is available.

It is accessed through 211, and it is operated by Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia. They track monthly call volumes as well as trends with the calls, in terms of which line is receiving the call, be it the men's, women's, or all genders helpline. They track all of those calls to see where the calls are going. As I referenced in my opening remarks, the lines are available seven days a week. Our service is also provided in 130 different languages. Calls are received from Nova Scotians ranging in age from 18 years old to seniors.

Ninety-nine per cent of callers do say they would reach out for help again because the support that they received was very tailored and specific to their needs at that moment when they called. The support that is requested ranges from everything from: I need some support coping with a life event, to calls that are much more specific, where there could be an issue of an individual unable to manage their emotional state and concerned that it may result in domestic violence or an intimate partner violence incident. It really runs the gamut of support. Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia, as I said, tracks all of that so that we are aware of the volume of service that's being requested, and ensuring that we have properly resourced that line as well, so that we can meet the demand when the calls come in.

LORELEI NICOLL: To your point, a lot of it is because we're raising awareness of the situation, the Mass Casualty Commission report did that very much. It highlights the severity and impacts of domestic and community violence. It includes many recommendations regarding said violence, and I wondered how you will use that report to inform the strategies when addressing the problems in the future. One of the main findings was:

“Despite widespread community knowledge of the perpetrator's violent and otherwise illegal, intimidating, and predatory behaviour over a number of years, there were impediments to safely reporting concerns, including a fear of retaliation, ineffective access points, and a lack of faith in an adequate police response. These impediments were magnified by the operation of power and privilege, and by a lack of trust and confidence in police and other authorities, particularly for members of marginalized

communities. The barriers to reporting resulted in missed red flags and opportunities to intercede in his behaviour.”

These barriers to reporting are something we hear a lot in cases involving domestic violence. What is the government doing to reduce or eliminate these barriers?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The Mass Casualty Commission report provides us with a series of recommendations that the Status of Women office, as well as Department of Community Services - in fact, all government departments - will be looking at and working collaboratively to identify appropriate responses across all program areas.

[10:15 a.m.]

The work of Standing Together I think positions us well to respond to many of the recommendations that came forward through the Mass Casualty Commission report. It is absolutely accurate to say that there remains a significant stigma with regard to intimate partner violence and domestic violence and a tremendous level of fear, a lack of trust in institutions. As we know, women are primarily the victims in intimate partner violence, and marginalized populations are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence and intimate partner violence as well.

Standing Together, through the 80 projects that were invested in across the province, we’ve learned a lot about the need to increase trust in institutions that are tasked with protecting us, with providing services.

Some of that requires local-level, community-based supports. Standing Together invested, as I referenced, in many projects that were community based through existing service providers, investing in programs like - I referenced GuysWork in my opening remarks. Starting young, focusing in on men and boys, looking at those additional barriers that affect and impact marginalized communities disproportionately, and providing services and supports that are culturally responsive.

We invested in a program called Creating Communities of Care, which focuses on the Mi’kmaw community as well as the African Nova Scotian community. It looks at customary laws that exist in Indigenous populations, as well as an Afrocentric approach to ensuring that programming that is offered to women and those who may have come in contact with the criminal justice system or may be victims of intimate partner violence receive supports that are respectful of and take into account those cultural nuances that exist within those populations.

To kind of come full circle, I guess the Mass Casualty Commission points out some of the significant gaps that remain in our system. Standing Together, as well, does the same and points a path forward for us to work collaboratively with community-based organizations so that we can ultimately move toward a province that has eliminated



intimate partner violence by providing supports and services that begin at the community level, and that ultimately hold the strength of community at the core, and break down some of those barriers that prevent victims from coming forward and reporting.

LORELEI NICOLL: And in that full circle that you speak of, do you feel that the current level of funding that you receive is commensurate to address the scale of these problems?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The budget for the Status of Women office increased by \$4 million this year, and we have had significant increases over the course of the past year. In March, there was an additional \$8 million investment for transition houses and women's centres to help them meet their program needs. We are working collaboratively with transition houses and women's centres now to identify what some of their ongoing needs may be.

Within the Department of Community Services, we also received a \$30 million-plus increase in our child and family well-being division. That division, formerly known as Child and Family Services - or Child Welfare, as many would know it - invests primarily in families, family resource centres, providing those supports, those wraparound supports to vulnerable families. There has been significant increase in budgets focused in this area.

I think moving the continuum so that we're focused more on prevention is key. That is one of the findings in our evaluation of Standing Together. I think it shines through in the Mass Casualty Commission as well. We know that if we can engage with vulnerable individuals, families, marginalized communities early, at the earliest possible phase and stage, we can prevent a lot of harm from occurring.

Investments in prevention can go a long way to disrupting the cycle of violence, and to that end, we have also seen significant investment in our prevention-based programming. We know prevention investments, program changes - they take a longer time to bear fruit, so it is very heartening to see over the past number of years we have had increases in prevention funding. I believe there is a growing understanding of the need to increase funding in this area.

LORELEI NICOLL: To that point about reorganizations, I've seen it many times in government that it really is a setback when everything is changed around, and people try to get back on their feet as to what they were doing. My question is leading into: There was some concern about the whole structure changing with the Status of Women office itself and folding into a branch of the Department of Community Services, instead of its stand-alone structure of the past. Could you explain the current structure - how it's working, and why the change?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: There actually has not been a change. The Status of Women office has been, if you will, affiliated with the Department of Community Services for a number of years. The office has physically located in with the Department of Community Services now, so it has its own space within the department so that the office can take better advantage of some of the support services, for example finance, some policy support services, corporate services.

The office remains and has always been staffed by public servants. It is a government office that has a relationship with the Department of Community Services. The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women is a separate external body, if you will, that advises the minister on issues relating to equity for women and girls. That remains a separate entity. The Status of Women office has been and continues to be tied, if you will, to the Department of Community Services. There has not been a change in that regard.

In fact, I think the relationship is even stronger now. The co-location is really helpful. My colleague, Meredith, sits at the executive table for the Department of Community Services. We have assigned an associate deputy minister as well to ensure that the Status of Women has the profile that it should have, and that we are placing the appropriate focus on this area of work. I hope that answers your question.

LORELEI NICOLL: It always required clarity, because as a woman in the general public wondering what roles that they play, but I know that there's a board as well. I'm just wondering what role the board currently has, and how that brings forward any decision-making when it comes to what's best for the Status of Women.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: There is a board. It is known as the advisory council, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Their role is to advise the minister, who has responsibility for the Status of Women and the Act, on matters relating to equity for women and girls. In this fiscal year, the advisory council will be focused on economic participation for women and girls primarily, and will be engaging in community-based conversations across the province to ensure that populations from one end of the province to the other have an opportunity to contribute to the conversation. The council then provides advice to the minister.

LORELEI NICOLL: I have one quick question before I pass it on. Is that the typical structure for all provinces across Canada?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The structure varies across Canada.

LORELEI NICOLL: It is unique - a stand-alone kind of approach in Nova Scotia?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Each province has its own structure, but they are all fairly similar. I wouldn't say that this is necessarily a unique structure in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: MLA Clark with three minutes.

BRAEDON CLARK: Just a question about something you mentioned in your opening remarks. You said that we've learned that engaging and supporting men and boys is critical to preventing violence against women and children. I think that's very well said, and a really important piece of the puzzle that sometimes isn't talked about often enough. As I think you said, 79 per cent of victims of domestic violence are women, so therefore, the vast majority of perpetrators are, of course, men and boys. Any serious attempt to solve the problem needs to really look seriously at issues that might be happening with men and boys.

You mentioned this GuysWork program. I'm just wondering if you can maybe give us a little more insight into what that is and what the goals are, and any results you may have seen, if you have those?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: GuysWork is a really successful and interesting project. It's a school curriculum that is focused on addressing issues around masculinity and social issues facing Grade 7 boys, including things like dating violence, domestic violence, et cetera. It began in 2012. I'm just going to make sure I get my numbers right. Over 3,400 students from 49 schools have participated across the province, and an additional 400 students have participated in GuysWork in the last two years.

The evaluation of GuysWork showed specifically that those who participated reported decreased loneliness, reduced stigma with help-seeking behaviour, increased feelings of comfort and safety for participants - a safe space for them to share confusion or thoughts that they might be experiencing about what it means to be a boy or a man in our society. The program, I'm pleased to say, is expanding. As I referenced in my remarks, it will be expanding thanks to a contribution, as well, from the federal government. It will now be present in all Atlantic provinces, implemented in up to 40 more schools right across these provinces.

Part of the goals of this program is to strengthen this engagement of boys and young men as allies. We know that it is critical to preventing and breaking the cycle of domestic violence and increasing capacity within that particular cohort to challenge and change social norms. Without that changed conversation, we are not going to see the results that we need to see in terms of eliminating domestic violence.

The developer of the approach of GuysWork speaks very highly of the program and has video testimonials and things of that regard . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Sorry, the time for Liberal questioning has elapsed. We will move to the NDP caucus with MLA Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you. Deputy Minister, you mentioned opportunity - economic opportunity, I believe. How is your department - the Status of Women office, as well as in your department, working to improve the access to child care?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Certainly, we work in partnership with our colleagues right across government. Primarily with regard to your question, we would work in partnership with our colleagues at Education and Early Childhood Development to increase access to daycare spaces and to ensure that appropriate after-school care is provided so that parents - women - can enter the workforce and know that their children are appropriately cared for.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, minister. It's good to know. Community organizations and women's groups have urged the government to bring forward the legislation to address the abuse of non-disclosure agreements. The minister has committed to doing this. When will it be brought forward?

[10:30 a.m.]

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Non-disclosure agreements are certainly a very serious and significant topic that has impacted a number of primarily women. I would not be in a position to comment on legislation. That is a decision that is made by government in terms of when legislation is to be advanced. As the member, I think, would be aware, the Department of Justice is the lead department on examining options around legislation with regard to non-disclosure agreements.

KENDRA COOMBES: Is the council working with the Department of Justice on this issue?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: We work with the Department of Justice on a number of issues. This would be one, yes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Just to be clear, the Status of Women office is working with the Department of Justice on NDAs? Is that correct?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The Status of Women office engages with the Department of Justice as requested on this issue and many others.

KENDRA COOMBES: Access to safe and affordable housing for survivors of domestic violence is crucial and a major issue. What are the government and the department and the Status of Women office doing to work on this issue?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I agree with you completely. It is a very serious issue for women and those who identify as women in our province. We know that marginalized populations experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate and are precariously housed.

We have options available at shelters, for example, where there is dedicated space for women and those who identify as women. We also have significant partnerships with organizations like Adsum for Women and Children. Our transition houses also play a critical role in terms of women who are fleeing domestic violence and require a place to stay.

We also partner with organizations like the YWCA to provide programs and supports to help those women who have identified as victims of intimate-partner violence secure safe and stable housing. Organizations like the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia as well as Coverdale Justice Society provide housing support, as well, for women who may have become criminalized as a result of some of their life experiences and may require some support transitioning back into society after being incarcerated.

KENDRA COOMBES: I agree - all of those organizations do amazing work. They do great work, and they are at capacity. They are filled all the time. They have not much room and they barely receive core funding from government.

What I'm asking is, what are the Status of Women office, the Department of Community Services, doing with regard to housing besides having organizations do the really heavy lifting?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I think, as the member would appreciate, the best providers of support are community-based service provider supports. Our role is to ensure that we provide funding and that we work collaboratively with community-based organizations so that they can provide the supports that are required to those who require those supports.

KENDRA COOMBES: Deputy Minister Taweel, I'm asking about affordable housing, not domestic violence supports. I'm asking about safe, affordable housing for women, and the first thing you listed off was shelters, transition houses, the Elizabeth Fry Society. I'm talking about safe, affordable housing. A shelter, one, is not appropriate; two, transition houses are at capacity. The Elizabeth Fry Society is also at capacity. What I'm asking about is what the Status of Women office and the Department of Community Services are doing with regards to safe, affordable housing for victims of domestic violence.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Today's topic is focused on Standing Together and results of Standing Together and those investments. Safe, affordable housing is certainly a component of ensuring that victims of domestic violence and intimate-partner violence are appropriately housed. Transition houses, as well as shelters and other services that are available at the community level, are all part of a continuum that provides people with - as I know the member is aware - a safe place to transition into safe and affordable housing. Working with our partners in the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we are focused on increasing the development of affordable housing in this province.

As the member and other members would be aware, we also have launched the province's first supportive housing action plan out of the Department of Community Services, and certainly marginalized populations, those who have experienced intimate partner violence, are a priority area of focus for our supportive housing approach.

KENDRA COOMBES: The gender pay gap remains in Nova Scotia, and it's worse than in any other province. How is the Status of Women and the Department of Community Services and the government addressing this?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: A wage gap does remain, absolutely, in this province. There have been investments made to support reduced costs around daycare. There is programming that's in place that will support allowing more women to enter the workforce. There's been a focus through the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration on supporting more women to enter trades, which we know is a very - women are underrepresented in trades.

Looking to create increased employment opportunities, getting more women into the workforce is certainly an area of focus for the Status of Women office. Our role is to work in partnership right across government and with external organizations to look at some of the barriers that prevent women from first entering the workforce. Then, upon entering the workforce, to advocate to ensure that we do work toward an economy where there is pay equity.

The reality is that it's going to take a long time to reach pay equity. That is not unique in this province; that is a worldwide phenomenon. While we have made some increases, we know that for every dollar that is earned by a man, women earn 76 cents in this province, and we need to close that gap. Part of the work of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women will be to bring forward recommendations, as well, to the minister this year on how we can look at closing that gap and, again, working in partnership with our colleagues, such as those in Labour, Skills and Immigration, for example, the department of business, and others to ensure that we try to close that gap.

KENDRA COOMBES: You mentioned, over a series of your answers, organizations that you partner with. My question is: The last budget did not include an increase in core funding to women's organizations. Why?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: In March of this year, the government invested \$8 million in a one-time funding for transition houses and women's centres. As well, in the current Budget, there is a \$3.8 million increase to participate in the national action plan with the federal government, the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. We are working in collaboration with transition houses and women's centres to identify their ongoing needs, and to look at how, in response to the Mass Casualty Commission and other reports, we can increase their core funding over time.

We have increased funding to women's centres. There was an increase last year, and that increase continues this year, but we know there's more to do and we're working in partnership with those organizations to do that. The one-time funding in March: We are working collaboratively with Women's Centres Connect and the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia to use those funds over the course of the next two years to ensure that their needs that they have identified are best met, and, at the same time, looking at what does ongoing funding look like in the future? Where do we need to expand? What are some of the other core programs that need to be offered? Are they adequately staffed? We're working collaboratively with them on developing a plan to move forward.

KENDRA COOMBES: Minister, with regard to that one-time funding, it was one time. Some feel that this approach actually causes damage to communities when supports are provided but not in the manner that means that they can be available permanently, which can cause a lot of unrest. It causes a lot of damage. The inquiry from the Mass Casualty Commission recommended that funding should be adequate and include stable core funding: "Priority should be placed on providing adequate and stable core funding to organizations in the gender-based violence advocacy and support sector."

I don't think any organization doing the work, such as the Elizabeth Fry Society, the transition houses, and others, are going to balk at getting core funding. My question is: What is the timeline for this to occur?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you for calling me "Minister" repeatedly. (Laughs) That's okay. It's a promotion, I guess. The timeline for that to occur: We are working collaboratively with, as I referenced, the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia as well as Women's Centres Connect to look at what an increase should look like, as I referenced earlier, in terms of not just core operating funding, but what the staffing model looks like, what the programming model needs to look like, what the other resources are that need to nest in with these services.

Family resource centres are also a key component of this, and we are engaging in conversations with those organizations as well to determine what preventive actions look like, what kind of programming needs to be available at the community level. Those conversations are ongoing. As government takes some time to review all of the recommendations from the Mass Casualty Commission, just as one input into this conversation, we'll be continuing to work collaboratively to land on a recommendation to move forward with funding options for these organizations.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes, with just over five minutes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Am I correct in saying there is no timeline for core funding and for this - study, I guess? I don't know if it's formal or not. Do you have a timeline for this to be fully completed? In the next budget, are we going to see some core funding for organizations?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: As the member would be aware, I can't speak to what will be in the next budget, but we do have a regular budget process. Departments bring forward areas of priority. Given the importance of the Mass Casualty Commission recommendations and the speed with which government is analyzing those recommendations across all departments, I expect we will see responses in a number of areas within an appropriate timeline.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm going to switch to a few things here. In February, the government sought public input for much-needed changes into the outdated Matrimonial Property Act. The proposed changes include providing common-law couples with the same property rights as married couples or registered partnerships. These changes are badly needed. As you know, Nova Scotia remains behind other jurisdictions in modern legislation that reflects current relationships. Women are disproportionately impacted by these delays. Could the deputy minister please provide an update on this work and a timeline for when we could expect changes to the Act to come forward to the Legislature?

[10:45 a.m.]

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I would be unable to provide you with that timeline. That would be a question best directed to my colleagues at the Department of Justice.

KENDRA COOMBES: The Status of Women office and the Department of Community Services - have you as deputy minister had a role with regard to making changes to this Act?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: We are of course consulted on pieces of legislation like this. The timing of the legislation, however, is not within the purview of the office or the department.

KENDRA COOMBES: Have the Status of Women office and the Department of Community Services, deputy minister, discussed with the Department of Service Nova Scotia name changes with regard to domestic violence victims and survivors? In many cases, women who are married have to get permission from their abuser to change their last name fully in order to hide from their abuser. Don't even ask me the logic on the fact that you have to ask permission from your perpetrator to change your name.

Has the Status of Women office looked into this issue? I did bring it forward to the minister and the deputy minister last year, I believe.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: That is not a topic that we have aggressively explored at this point. It is on our agenda to have that discussion with our colleagues in - yes, you are correct - Service Nova Scotia.



KENDRA COOMBES: What is the progress towards adopting a gender-based policy analysis across government? I do believe this is a role for the Status of Women office, to create a gender-based policy regarding budget, regarding legislation, and regarding policies and regulations.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, gender-based analysis is a high priority for the office as well as the department. We've been working collaboratively with the Public Service Commission to roll out training across government so that policy advisers - those who work in policy - are trained in gender-based analysis. That training is ongoing. A number of individuals from across government have participated in that training. The Executive Council Office, as well, has been involved in the development of the training.

After this session, I can provide you with a bit more of a timeline in terms of how much longer the training will continue before we're in a position to say that we have trained those who have responsibility for gender-based analysis.

THE CHAIR: The time for the NDP has elapsed. We will move to the Progressive Conservative caucus. MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: We know that human trafficking is a horrific form of abuse. We know it's another form of gender-based violence. What are we doing to respond to this serious issue?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, I couldn't agree with you more. Human trafficking - sexual exploitation - is devastating for victims and their families and communities. This is yet another problem that certainly government cannot address alone. We are working collaboratively with community to address this problem. One of our most significant partnerships is with YWCA Halifax and their Trafficking and Exploitation Services System, otherwise known as TESS. The committee would be familiar with it.

TESS has three key priorities: developing a coordinated provincial strategy, developing communities of practice, and capacity building. Part of that work involves convening a provincial partnership for action committee, increasing community awareness, mobilization, research, knowledge, discussion - that work has been quite successful. We continue to invest in TESS and thank our partners at YWCA Halifax for their significant work. They are leaders in the country in this area. We're very fortunate to have them here working with us.

We also know that African Nova Scotian and Indigenous women are overrepresented in human trafficking. The YWCA and TESS have worked with the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and the Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers on another project that I'll perhaps highlight for a moment. It's called Hearing Them. This project gathered first-voice experiences from those who have been trafficked or sexually exploited, and the results of the Hearing Them project are being analyzed now.

They will help to inform the development of new programs and supports to help end sexual exploitation and human trafficking. We also, through the YWCA, fund a Safer Spaces Housing program, and that offers emergency and crisis housing for survivors of human trafficking.

From an Indigenous women's perspective, we have funded the Jane Paul Indigenous Resource Centre that supports women who have high vulnerability to be trafficked, focusing on Indigenous women in the Sydney area, many of whom are sadly victims of human trafficking or at high risk of sexual exploitation.

From the Department of Community Services perspective, we provide funding to sexual violence and exploitation prevention outreach programs for youth. These are delivered by community-based organizations and provide specific supports to underserved youth, such as those from the Mi'kmaw, African Nova Scotian, and rural-based communities.

We also have a training program. More than 500 social workers, foster parents, and residential care workers have engaged in this training program. The purpose of the program is to raise awareness of the signs and the dangers around sexual exploitation and human trafficking so that if we can recognize it early and prevent it from happening in the first place, then obviously the outcomes will be much better. The Department of Justice has hired human trafficking family and victim support navigators for the entire province.

That's a bit of a snapshot of the investments and the programs that we're focused in on. We are continuing to look for other opportunities. As I referenced, the Hearing Them project will help to shape, as well, some new programs and services moving forward.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I truly do appreciate your educated and in-depth responses for the people at this committee and all the viewers at home.

Last November, Nova Scotia joined the federal government and the rest of the provinces and territories to endorse the first-ever National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. I know it's been touched on a few times here and in your opening speech, but I'd just like to narrow it down a little bit. Can you tell the committee what is happening with that plan and how our province will benefit from it? The benefit is key for me.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: You are correct. Nova Scotia, along with all provinces and territories, has agreed to work in partnership with the federal government for the first-ever National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. Nova Scotia, I think, is extremely well positioned because of Standing Together and the work that has been occurring in that regard since 2018, some of which I've already highlighted.

The National Action Plan: Negotiations began immediately following the agreement at the last federal, provincial, and territorial ministers' meeting. Those negotiations are moving along very quickly. I'm hopeful we'll soon be in a position where we will reach an agreement with the federal government. It will result in an increase of an additional \$18 million investment from the federal government. The provincial government, we will continue to invest. As well, our budget highlights a \$3.8-million investment in this current year's budget to match the federal funds that will flow to this province. In addition to the investments in Standing Together, we will also have investments through the National Action Plan.

Again, as I stated a moment ago, we are, I think, very well positioned to take advantage of the increased federal funding. The goals and priorities around the National Action Plan align beautifully with our findings around Standing Together, the focus on marginalized populations, the focus on raising awareness, decreasing stigma, as well as ensuring that men and boys remain a significant focus for this work.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: That was fantastic, and I really do appreciate your last comments as well.

I'm actually going to share my time because there are four of us and only 20 minutes. I will hand it over to MLA White.

THE CHAIR: MLA White.

JOHN WHITE: Apparently, some women-serving organizations expressed concern to the Province - did not want it to fund advocacy work. Is either of you able to explain that to the committee, please and thank you?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, there was some confusion, I guess, with regard to the role of advocacy in terms of the funding that we provide to organizations. I do appreciate the question, and I believe the minister clarified this during Estimates debate, but it's wonderful to have an opportunity to do so again.

We fund women-serving organizations to deliver programs and services to those who need those programs and services. We also fund those organizations for advocacy. Our systems are made better by the advocacy of organizations like transition houses, women's centres, et cetera. We have service level agreements in place with all of those organizations, and advocacy is part of what we fund those organizations for.

I apologize to those organizations if there was some confusion in thinking that we would no longer fund advocacy. We recognize and, in fact, we need them to continue advocating. They are a voice on the ground. They know what individuals need who are accessing their services. We need them to continue advocating and to work with us in partnership to best serve those individuals who require support at the community level.

JOHN WHITE: Thank you for the clarification. Are you able to speak to a specific example of a prevention program that's been funded through Standing Together?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I did already speak a bit about GuysWork. Perhaps I'll quickly touch on that again and just finish off maybe where I left off when I was responding to MLA Clark.

The goal of GuysWork is to strengthen engagement of boys and young men as allies to reduce domestic violence and intimate partner violence and increase their capacity to challenge those societal norms. We know through research and also through the evaluation of this program that boys and men often find it difficult to seek help, to raise their hand when they need support. This program seeks to intervene at an early stage - at Grade 7, in fact - so that young boys, as they are approaching adolescence, adulthood, understand that help-seeking behaviour is normal behaviour. Asking questions, challenging societal norms is very appropriate behaviour. Starting this type of education as early as possible is critical in order to intervene as early as possible to change the way boys and men view the world.

In addition to the preventive program of GuysWork that I've referenced, we also invest in other programming, like caring fathers, for example, that supports young fathers to understand what it means to parent and to be a partner in a relationship, and how to channel emotions, perhaps feelings of anger or loss of control, how to seek help and support to navigate those feelings and to not have those feelings result in intimate partner violence or family-based violence.

Through the Department of Community Services, we offer a suite of programming that is delivered through family resource centers and other partners from one end of the province to the other that seeks to intervene early at the lowest level of intrusion possible in order to prevent family and intimate partner violence from occurring in the first place.

JOHN WHITE: Given the sensitive nature of the topic, has either organization been engaged with individuals who are directly affected by domestic violence? In answering that, are there ways that are more accessible than others, strategies that are used that are more accessible than others?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Absolutely. First, the input of first voice is critical in order to shape programs and services and to help understand what some of those barriers are that prevent victims of intimate partner violence from coming forward. We absolutely, through our partners in transition houses and women's centres, seek to understand the lived experiences of victims of sexual exploitation as well as intimate partner violence. Those experiences help shape the programs that are offered by community-based organizations, and also help us to define the components of new programming that we may want to engage with community-based organizations on.

[11:00 a.m.]

The stigma that exists around intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation remains, and it is a significant barrier, particularly for marginalized populations whom we also know have a greater risk of being victims of human trafficking, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation. Taking an approach that involves being sensitive to cultural nuance - for example, I referenced the Creating Communities of Care program that we've partnered in with our partners in the Indigenous community as well as the African Nova Scotian community - seeks to look at what will work to support those individuals, that respects cultural differences, that looks at a customary law approach that occurs in Indigenous communities in this province, and that takes an Afrocentric approach to programming, services, et cetera.

Breaking down those barriers and educating the public, as well, about the fact that victims of intimate partner violence and victims of domestic violence need support wrapped around them. They need to know that there is a network of support that is available to help them, and they should not feel stigmatized when they try to reach out for help.

JOHN WHITE: My next question I wasn't going to ask, but since you touched on it, it is that nationally collected data shows that women of colour - specifically Indigenous women - are subject to spousal abuse - twice as likely as anybody else in the community. Can you address the specific ways that Standing Together has focused on supporting individuals who are part of the higher risk group that we're talking about here now?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I'm going to invite my colleague to respond to this question.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Naylor.

MEREDITH NAYLOR: Through Standing Together, we've worked with African Nova Scotian women on a number of projects. We certainly recognize that certain populations are at risk of gender-based violence, or underserved populations are at greater risk. We are committed to working with African Nova Scotian women on projects, and certainly taking those learnings into the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

JOHN WHITE: I'm going to pass it over to MLA Harrison.

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: The Standing Together program itself - we know that there are many - a lot of the victims, certainly, are women. The Standing Together approach - can you elaborate a little bit on the success of that approach and some of the characteristics of that approach in Standing Together?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Standing Together, as I referenced earlier, began in 2018. We rolled out that program, or the investments began, in 2018 in response to the fact that domestic violence is a complex and serious problem. But we know it is a preventable problem. We know that prevention at all levels is critical in order to stop, to eliminate, intimate-partner violence and domestic violence.

Standing Together had a four-year mandate when it was initially announced. It has since continued and continues to be invested in. The approach taken through Standing Together was to engage deeply at the community level, across government, and with academia in order to better understand what is needed to prevent domestic violence. The Standing Together approach, if you will, provided funding support across a number of areas. As I think I referenced in my opening remarks, Standing Together invested in over 80 projects, programs, and collaborations from one end of the province to the other to help community organizations and government agencies have the space to create and test new, innovative ideas to prevent domestic violence and support those who are affected by it.

The initiatives and all the collaborations included real-time evaluation and learning processes that allowed us to look deeply at outcomes to gain better insights into domestic violence and to look to create those conditions that are necessary for change to work toward preventing domestic violence.

The evaluation of Standing Together identified a number of issues. I've touched on some of them, but in a nutshell, the evaluation shows us that domestic violence is complex and serious, as I said a moment ago. But it is preventable. It is preventable through strategic investments, through community-based support, and through prevention at all levels, including primary prevention - starting at the source, if you will. Starting early through things like GuysWork and engaging in supporting men and boys is critical if we're going to prevent violence against women.

The evaluation also demonstrated to us that no organization can solve this problem alone. It's an interconnected problem that requires an interconnected response. Also, we need to ensure that we are properly supporting our community-based . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Thank you, Deputy Minister Taweel.

We will now move over to 11 minutes, and we will begin with MLA Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: Deputy Minister, I'm just wondering: You say in your opening remarks here that last year, 1,666 instances of domestic violence were reported to police. I guess two questions here, if you know: What does that trend line look like over the past several years, and is there any estimate as to how many or what proportion of incidents might not be reported? I know you say that, but is there any sense that the true number might be double what's reported, or 50 per cent more? Just so we have a sense. I know

that's a really hard thing to track, but is there any estimate or sense of what that number might actually look like?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: You reiterated what I already said, but yes, we do know there is under-reporting that occurs with regard to intimate-partner violence. We estimate 15 per cent of cases are . . .

MEREDITH NAYLOR: Nineteen per cent.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, 19 per cent. Statistics Canada reported 19 per cent within the period that they measured in their last report that they released. Again, we know that there is underrepresentation in terms of that reporting, because of all the reasons that I outlined earlier - in terms of the stigma that is associated, in terms of the fear that victims of intimate partner violence have of reporting, the fear of reporting to institutions, but also ongoing concerns about what their next steps would be for them and their children if they do report intimate partner violence.

It's not possible for us to, I think, accurately pinpoint an exact percentage of the under-reporting. We do know that COVID-19 exacerbated that situation, because we had, if you will, a perfect storm of challenges within families of individuals not being able to leave the home and not as many, if you will, eyes on situations that were occurring within families. The pandemic did exacerbate, we suspect, the under-reporting.

BRAEDON CLARK: Thank you. I guess this is why you don't ask two questions at once. You can't expect people to deal with that all at once.

Back to my first question, I guess - the trend line: 1,666 reported last year. Do we know, is that fairly stable? Has there been - I know you mentioned COVID-19. Was there a spike there for COVID-19? How are we doing overall in terms of reportable incidents to police?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: We saw a decrease in reporting as a result of COVID-19, but overall, the trend line in terms of reporting is increasing, which is a good thing. We believe it's demonstrating that raising awareness and decreasing stigma is occurring, so more individuals are coming forward to report. It is still under-reported, but more individuals are coming forward to report.

We want to eliminate intimate partner violence and domestic violence. We need to eliminate those forms of violence. But a step on the path to the eliminating of violence is to increase the level of reporting at the same time as we are increasing our efforts to prevent it from happening in the first place.

BRAEDON CLARK: That's, I think, an important point that seems counterintuitive to people at first, to say the number might be trending up, but that might

actually be a good thing, because that indicates that we're getting a better grasp of the problem and people are actually feeling comfortable or able to report these incidents. That's an interesting point.

I was just curious, and this might be a question better suited for the Department of Justice, so if it is, I apologize. The federal government recently passed Bill C-233, which is basically around education and ongoing training for judges. I'll just quote: "establish seminars for the continuing education of judges, including seminars on matters related to sexual assault law, intimate partner violence, coercive control in intimate partner and family relationships and social context, which includes systemic racism and systemic discrimination."

I'm just wondering if you have any sense of that kind of program, either in discussions at the provincial level, or if that's something that you see some value in.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: There is absolutely - 100 per cent, there is value in this level of training and raising awareness. All of our systems - the judicial system being one, of course - we all require a greater level of understanding and training about the nuances that exist within particular communities - a level of sensitivity, a greater level of understanding. I wouldn't be able to comment specifically on how that will roll out in this province.

But I can say with confidence that I know my colleagues in the Department of Justice will be looking closely at that and will engage with us, as well, in terms of some of the training that may be required and some of the education that will be welcomed, I know, by colleagues across all systems. Not just specifically to this piece of federal legislation but in all of our institutions, we require this level of education, training, and awareness to bring about the level of change that's required if we are to eliminate intimate partner violence. We need to understand the complexity of the issue and create safe space where those conversations can happen, and to diminish that fear of coming forward and being further victimized through the supports and services that are intended to help victims.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'll ask one more question, then turn it over to my colleague for the last couple of minutes. I just wanted to go back to the GuysWork program, because I do think that's really important and interesting. I read a story recently - this is U.S. data, I believe - but my understanding is that it was applicable in most peer countries, finding that teenage boys, if you compare them today to, let's say, 30 years ago or even 20 years ago, the levels of loneliness, levels of depression, drug addiction, suicide, number of friends actually was a very sad one, but the number of teenage boys reporting they had one friend or no friends has doubled in the last 20 years.

All of these issues, I think, are coalescing and moving in the wrong direction for boys. I think this concept of getting at boys at a young age, when they're 12, 13, Grade 7, is wonderful. I'm just curious: You mentioned a few dozen schools right now have the program, so obviously it's not universal in the province, but how were those schools



selected? I know there are plans, as you say, to expand the program. I just want to get a sense of where that program might exist in the province and any selection criteria that might make it most effective province-wide.

[11:15 a.m.]

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The individuals who run GuysWork - the program has been evaluated, as I referenced earlier, all the way along to look how to address some of those very important factors that you referenced. I think I know which study you looked at. It was U.S. data, I believe, but it would be very applicable certainly in a Canadian context, and certainly in our province, in both rural and urban settings. In terms of identifying other schools, we are working in partnership with GuysWork to identify schools where school administrators have seen a need. We will try to move the program into areas of greatest need.

Ultimately, as we look to evaluate this expansion and we look at the impact that GuysWork has as we expand across Atlantic Canada, hopefully we can look to expand and have this program present in every school. I think the success of this program, however, has been predicated on the fact that it has moved at a very deliberate speed in terms of evaluating along the way, making sure that the program is being responsive in real time to the experiences of young boys, and changing as those experiences and the environment around young boys changes. Evaluating along the way, looking at this expansion, and hopefully continuing to grow and nurture this program and see it expand from, as I say, one end of the province to the other, would be our ultimate goal.

I can certainly provide the committee with a list of the schools within which GuysWork is present. I don't have that with me today, but I can certainly provide a list of those schools.

THE CHAIR: MLA Nicoll, with 47 seconds.

LORELEI NICOLL: That's okay, because I was going down that path as well, about GuysWork. In a perfect world, my expectation is that programs would be initiated through your office and be spread out across the province. To rely on the curriculum of all the school boards and everything else to come to you and identify those who need to get these services seems problematic to me. My only question was why Grade 7 was the pinpoint. I would say, now that I realize, it was a group that came to you and said we can do this, and it's been successful.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for Liberal questioning has elapsed. We move over to MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I also want to pick up on GuysWork, because when you were first discussing it, I was like, why can't something like that just be in the curriculum so it's

in every school? Acknowledging that there are particular populations where it might resonate more, but I think about my own family. I have an eight-year-old son who struggles with matters of consent. It's not just him. There are a lot of kids at that age. I really think that in terms of when we're looking at how to cut off some of these issues at the root, it is literally in Grade Primary, where people need to understand that no means no and that you're not allowed to hug if someone says no. You keep your hands to yourself.

These are very basic things that we think about, but in fact, when there's not a focus on it, I really do think this is the beginning of abusive behaviour. I often think, I know there's this thing where you go to your grandmother's house, kiss your grandmother goodbye. I don't want to kiss my grandmother goodbye. This does not happen in our house, but sometimes you're not allowed or sometimes you get to make those decisions and sometimes you don't. Sometimes you have to do the thing. It's very confusing for children.

This is all to say that I want to know: What is happening in curriculum at those levels that is specifically tied to ending intimate partner violence? Can you draw any lines?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I can't speak with great detail about everything that's in the curriculum. I do know there are components in the curriculum starting, I believe, as early as pre-Primary in terms of issues around consent and my body is my own, I have the right to make decisions about my own body, et cetera. There are components of the curriculum certainly built in. With regard to GuysWork, the grade level was specifically selected based on - this is my understanding - the development where young boys are at in terms of their development.

I think the success of GuysWork - at some point the committee may want to talk to GuysWork specifically, but part of the success of that program I think is because it is not part of the curriculum. It is not a teacher delivering it. It is not part of school. It takes place in school. It is linked to curriculum, but it is delivered by individuals who are not the teacher; they're not necessarily within the school. They come in and they have these frank and honest conversations with young boys, and it's in a safe space. It's not with someone whom they're going to see for physics next period, if you will. It's a different environment. GuysWork just trained 12 new leaders within the last couple of weeks in order to continue to expand and grow this program.

I think your point is a good one. It's an iterative process and it has to start really early. I would suggest it needs to start very early, even from the point of when a family is making a decision to have a child, if you will. There are community-based programs that exist in family resource centres and YWCAs and YMCAs across the province. There are all kinds of avenues where we could be delivering and should be delivering some of these messages to help individuals understand.

These are not conversations that were happening when I was a kid, that's for sure. We know we need these conversations to happen.

SUSAN LEBLANC: It's a good point. I know when you have a baby, you get sent home with a thing about the Period of PURPLE Crying. There are things they do, prepare you with, as you leave the hospital. There might be an opportunity there.

I'm going to get away from this because I could talk about this all day. I want to say that this issue, obviously - and you've said this twice or three times - is extremely complex. There are all kinds of prevention. There's treatment. There's everything in between. But one of the things that I think - it's extremely harmful to a society to have an epidemic of intimate-partner violence, on all levels. We know this.

One of the places where I don't see us actually acting is in using the Status of Women office or the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women to be an actual vetting place for legislation and policy. I understand that there's training going on with senior government officials. That's great. But unless there is a dedicated focus - if I'm a deputy minister of whatever, let's say - let's just say the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. Actually, that's probably a good example. I'm worried about all the things that I have to worry about in a day. You know how busy your job is. Am I the right person to then say: Okay, here's our new piece of legislation on tax reform. Let's make sure that this is not harmful to women.

Is that actually going to be happening at that level? Maybe it does, but I would love to see metrics that every piece of legislation and policy has to go through to be analyzed in that way.

I will give you an actual example of tax reform, which is the tax break for workers under 30 in the skilled trades. That's a great program. I'm never going to say there's anything wrong with that program, except that it's largely a program for young men, and that is because we don't have enough women in the skilled trades. We know that. That's a whole other thing. But in the meantime, why are we not offering such an incentive to women in the skilled trades, i.e., women who are ECEs or CCAs? Those professions are largely populated by women.

If that legislation, or if that reform, had gone through a task table of women - Status of Women thinkers - and went: Oh, this is how this could be improved, I guarantee you that that would have looked different.

My question is, when is that going to happen in Nova Scotia?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: As I referenced earlier, there is gender-based analysis training that is under way, training individuals at all levels in the organization on the importance of doing what you have articulated - looking at things through a gendered lens. There is a series of policy lenses that are applied to legislation, to other changes - programmatic changes. There is a gendered lens that is applied. We know we can apply it at a deeper level through a gender-based analysis. There is a look through a

marginalized-population lens. There are efforts made to look at things like legislation and other program and policy investments and service investments to say, okay, who is this going to affect and how will it affect these individuals? We look at things through a rural lens, through an urban lens, et cetera.

There is a level of that work that does happen now. From a gender-based analysis lens, as this training rolls out and as we develop greater proficiency, if you will, with applying this lens, I expect we will see a greater level of gender-based analysis that's happening for legislation, for programs, and for services.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Time's a-tickin'. Well, great. I just feel like the Status of Women office or the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women is the obvious place for that, because the people working there, I expect - I don't know every individual person working there, but I expect they have an awful lot of experience, so it is the first thing that would come to their mind: how is this going to affect - is someone looking at the legislation and going: How is this going to advance an end, an elimination of intimate-partner violence?

[11:30 a.m.]

I just feel like it would be sensible to have it in one place. I also think that the training is totally essential. It shouldn't stop with the top people. Everyone should have it.

I want to say - oh my God, I had another thing. I guess I'll go back to the other thing. In terms of, again, prevention, what about trauma-informed therapy for abused children who undergo domestic violence, family-based violence? In terms of we know that there is very tough access to get to counselling, because there's a shortage and lots of people don't have coverage, and if you don't have coverage, you have to go through - and it takes years to get a counselling appointment in some cases. I'm wondering about that, in terms of, what is the Status of Women office doing . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for NDP questioning has elapsed. We will move to the PC caucus and MLA White.

JOHN WHITE: I'll say this: As a former teacher, and I spent seven years at the high school, I can certainly see the value in the GuysWork program. I don't remember it being at Glace Bay High School. I really don't recall it being there, but the work was being done informally, I guess you would say, because it was being done - I'll give him a shout-out. Mike McPhee, the drama teacher, was absolutely amazing. I was partaking in some of it, but he was really leading the way. A lot of this work was being done.

I remember taking part in some professional development up here at the Nova Scotia Teachers Union that was around this area, and some of his students attended that and did a fishbowl exercise for us. They were sitting in the middle of the room talking. We

were throwing them in and out. I get it, I understand it. GuysWork at that age, it's extremely important.

I really wanted to know if you could elaborate on the Strengthening Fathers program. That program, I understand, is a community-based program. I'm kind of interested in how it works. Is it a volunteer program? If it's around, is it in every part of the province? Is it a counselling program, or is it an at-home program? I see the difference as with the GuysWork program, we're talking about youth, which is where we definitely have to begin for the future, but nonetheless, there are women who are going through domestic violence right now whom we need to work with. I see the Strengthening Fathers program as the way to do that. I'm wondering if you can give us a little bit of information on that part.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Strengthening Fathers is an excellent program. It's a community-based program that supports fathers, again, to ensure that we're focusing in on boys and men. We've invested heavily in Strengthening Fathers to help ensure the safety and well-being of children, partners, and other family members. Just in a nutshell, the focus of that program is to provide fathers with the right services and supports at the right time to help prevent family violence from occurring in the first place, or to repair harms that may have occurred at the family level. It also is focused on understanding the root causes of family violence and looking at strengthening that kind of foundation that exists in every family, looking at stopping abuse from occurring in the first place - as I referenced a moment ago - and repairing harm.

It is a drop-in support program. The programming varies by location, and it is in a number of communities: Dartmouth, Truro, Colchester, East Hants, Amherst, Cumberland, Kentville, Westville, Pictou, Antigonish. It is in a number of different parts of the province. Linkages and referrals are made through this program to other community-based supports. Perhaps more intensive supports are required, so those referrals can be made.

It is group-based programming as well, which I think is important. You just provided an example of an experience that you had within a school setting of sitting in a circle and having a conversation, if you will. This group-based programming and support occurs in a similar fashion, so fathers not only have an opportunity to share their own personal experiences, but they can also learn from other fathers and understand that there is a community of support there of individuals who may have experienced the same thing. The programming also provides a doorway to clinical counselling at an individual level and also at a group level.

JOHN WHITE: You mentioned working with other fathers. Is it almost like a mentoring program in some ways? Is that part of it?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Certainly there would be a mentoring component as well, absolutely, and building out a network of support. There was a comment made earlier by

MLA Clark about some experiences of young boys and their lack of network and friends, and feelings of isolation and loneliness. That doesn't magically disappear when a man becomes a father. Helping that individual develop a network of other individuals who have perhaps experienced the same thing whom they can lean on at stressful times is a critical component to this program and to many other programs.

Communities take a variety of different shapes. They're not just geography based. A community of support can take all kinds of different shapes, and Strengthening Fathers helps to create, if you will, a community of support for fathers who engage within that program.

JOHN WHITE: In fact, it doesn't disappear as we age. In fact, that loneliness with men continues even into our senior years. There's an entire program based on that aspect, which is another story, but it's called Men's Sheds. It's the idea of sitting around having coffee in a garage and working and doing stuff like that, but it's a mentorship program. I think there's a place for this as well, because what we're talking about here is learning to be a man - whatever that mean - and if there's no figure in place to show what that example is, then sometimes that creates a problem where a kid decides what they want to do.

Speaking from experience with my students in the classroom, they think that a man doesn't cry, a man is tough, a man will fight right away rather than use words. There's a lot of that. I think the Men's Sheds is very much the idea of loneliness and turning to alcoholism, to be honest. There's a whole other program there.

Before I pass it down to MLA Smith, I just want to know: How would a community go about starting a program? It's community based. Would it be an application to Community Services? What happens with that? Are you able to speak on that at all?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Our team within Department of Community Services and in collaboration with the Status of Women office would be happy to have a conversation with any organization that might want to stand up a Strengthening Fathers program. It is community-based, yes, and the components of the program are, if you will, ready to roll. If there is an organization that wants to step into that space, they would work with us in order to stand up a program.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: I'm just going to chime in with one question, because after listening to your opening remarks, you touched on the resilience centre in Millbrook First Nation, which for me hits a little close to home, because there's a branch of Millbrook that is in my constituency. There's a satellite branch in Sheet Harbour and in Beaver Dam. I'm curious if you can share with the group and we can all learn more about the resilience centre in Millbrook and the services they offer.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The resilience centre is going to be an amazing centre. I believe it is still on track to open in 2024. It is the first of its kind in Canada, and it will provide culturally appropriate supports to Indigenous women and girls and those who identify as women and girls. It will provide programming. It will offer an opportunity to provide a safe space for a vulnerable population that may not feel comfortable accessing supports through other means.

The MMIWG Calls for Justice in that report really focus in on respecting and honouring the strength and resiliency that exists within our Indigenous communities right across this country. Certainly, we see that incredible strength and resilience here in this province with our Mi'kmaw partners and the Mi'kmaw level of government.

The Nova Scotia Native Women's Association has been a tremendous partner and leader in this space. They are leading in the development of the resilience centre. It will have, as I said, programming. It will also have opportunities for individuals to connect back to traditional cultural teachings, connect back to the land, and provide an economic opportunity, as I understand it, as well for women and girl crafters and other entrepreneurs to have an opportunity to start businesses. It will be very well rounded and all encompassing, and as I said, it is the first of its kind in Canada. We should be very proud that it will be built here in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith with a minute and 14.

KENT SMITH: Thank you, Madam Chair. Probably not enough time to get another question off, but I just wanted to say thank you for that information. I look forward to getting as much information as I can to share with the Millbrook community, which is part of my constituency.

On behalf of the government caucus, thank you very much for being here today and answering all of our questions. We appreciate it.

THE CHAIR: We would at this point welcome Deputy Minister Taweel to give some closing remarks.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you very much. I will be very brief and just say thank you to the committee for inviting us to be here today to talk about a very important topic. I'll thank my colleague Meredith for being here with me, as well as the team at the Status of Women office, who work very hard every day to try to advance programming in this area. A special thanks, as well, to all our partners at the community level, whom I've spoken about today. It is not possible to provide the support that is required without those professionals who work day in and day out tirelessly to deliver the supports and services that are required.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, deputy minister. We really appreciate having you here today.

At this point, we do have a little bit of committee business. You're welcome to leave. I'm going to call a five-minute recess, and we will commence after that.

[11:42 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:47 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call the Standing Committee on Community Services back to order.

We will move into committee business. Ms. Francine Vezina, executive director of the Office of Addictions and Mental Health, has responded to the committee's request for clarification regarding the assertive community treatment program, which I believe everyone has a copy of on their desk. Is there any discussion on this piece of correspondence? Seeing none.

I also want to bring to the committee's attention that a letter has been sent to the Department of Health and Wellness to inquire about the status of unattached newborn clinics, per the committee's request.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want to introduce or acknowledge that in the room today during committee we had Chris Melanson. He is the president of CUPE 5047, which is the union that is on strike in the Halifax Regional Centre for Education, representing early childhood educators in the pre-Primary program, representing educational program assistants and African Nova Scotian and Indigenous student support services and library technicians.

I would say that given the topic of today's meeting - which was intimate-partner violence - I think we know that wages for women and autonomy of work and that kind of thing, have direct impact on intimate-partner violence statistics in Nova Scotia and everywhere.

I think that it's appropriate that we welcome Mr. Melanson here and thank him and his workers for the work that they're doing, and to highlight the fact that most of those workers are struggling to make a minimum wage in Halifax, or HRM. That puts stress on their families. The effect that the strike is having - because there's no coming back to the table - puts stress on the families of the students who use the services that the workers provide, and that puts stress on their families. It's all connected.

I want to welcome Mr. Melanson here and thank him for his work, and just have that on the record.



THE CHAIR: If there's no other committee business, I just want to remind everybody that the committee doesn't meet over July and August, so our next committee meeting is September 5, 2023. The topic is the impact of the cost of living crisis on energy poverty. The witnesses will be the Department of Community Services, Nova Scotia Power, EfficiencyOne Nova Scotia, the Town of Bridgewater, the Affordable Energy Coalition, and the Ecology Action Centre.

We will now call this meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:50 a.m.]