

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, April 30, 2019

COMMITTEE ROOM

New Opportunities for Work Program

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

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Bill Horne
Hugh MacKay
Rafah DiCostanzo
Alana Paon
Brad Johns
Lenore Zann
Tammy Martin

[Tammy Martin was replaced by Lisa Roberts.]

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 2019

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Brendan Maguire

VICE-CHAIR
Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

THE CHAIR: Order, the Standing Committee on Human Resources will come to order. Today our witness is LAE, and the topic today is the New Opportunities for Work program.

Before we jump into that, there's a little note here that there are no ABC appointments coming forward today, but there will be a full slate next month.

Also, we can discuss this now or toward the end of the meeting - we've run through our full slate of witnesses, so we do not have a witness for June. The committee needs to decide what it wants to do, if it wants to agree on a witness or if it wants to just move forward with no meeting. Do you want to have that discussion now or do you want to have that discussion after the witnesses?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: After.

THE CHAIR: Okay, so with that, I'll get the MLAs and witnesses to introduce themselves.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: There will be some time, approximately 5 minutes, for an opening statement, and you have a slide show. Mr. Montgomerie.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: We've already done the introductions, that's great, so I would like to begin by thanking you for the invitation to present to the Standing Committee on Human Resources today. We're very happy for the opportunity to be here today to be able to share with you the exceptional work being done to help bridge the gap between people who are under-represented in the workforce and Nova Scotia employers who need trained workers.

I want to assure the members that in addition to the NOW program, we have many programs and policies that are increasing the integration of under-represented groups in the workforce, and we will share some of those success stories later with you in the presentation.

Government, with our partners - and the key word is our "partners," this is the secret to success, aligning ourselves with partners - are stepping up together to contribute to a workforce that is innovative, inclusive, and diverse - one that is a genuine representation of our province. In March 2017, the province announced \$10 million in funding to support a program to increase the labour force participation of under-represented groups in Nova Scotia, including First Nations, African Nova Scotians, visible minorities, Nova Scotians on Employment Support and Income Assistance, persons with disabilities, and older workers.

The New Opportunities for Work program, or the NOW program, is connecting Nova Scotians from these groups with employers who are giving them the training and experience they need to succeed. St. Francis Xavier University's Centre for Employment Innovation - CEI - is at the heart of this work. CEI was launched in 2016 as part of our transformation of employment services in Nova Scotia, to ensure an ongoing system focus on research and innovation. As facilitators of community-based research, collaboration, and shared learning, the CEI has led the development and oversight of the NOW program. They work hand in hand with community-based organizations, directly with community-based organizations, to design and deliver the NOW program so that it has the flexibility necessary to ensure it meets the needs of each community across our province. I continue to see a real emphasis on this work.

This whole project has modelled and reinforced the importance of working collaboratively and directly with our partners. Our workforce should be reflective of our diverse communities. That is what the NOW program strives to achieve, to provide the most inclusive service delivery model present. All employers engaged in the program were provided with diversity and inclusion training. You will find as we go through this that that was the centrepiece of this whole program.

The St. F.X. commitment to diversity involvement in the community has earned them an outstanding reputation not only in the academic world or in the Town of Antigonish but across the province and even across the globe. We are so fortunate to be working in lockstep with St. F.X. The intent of this investment was to generate learning so

we could inform future programs. That's exactly what it's doing and will continue to do for us into the future.

We're always looking for new and innovative ways of doing things, and I am proud that we're able to create a program that directly supports government's desire to find innovative ways to attach under-represented groups to meaningful employment. The NOW program is unique. It's highly successful, and it wouldn't be possible without the knowledge and expertise of our partners.

Nancy and Jaime will be jointly presenting today, and then we'll take any questions that you may have. I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hoddinott.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Just to set some context here, the deputy mentioned the transformation of employment services in this province, which occurred a couple of years ago. I think it's important to know what all the parts of that system are.

We look at four key partnerships within that service delivery, in that research piece. There are the 18 service providers who the department contracts with to deliver those front-line employment services across the province, actually in 52 locations across the province. There's the Nova Scotia Career Development Association, which works with those organizations and their staff to provide professional development and to look at the certification of the workers who work in that system. Then there's the new piece with the Centre for Employment Innovation, which is really looking at the research and innovation and how we up our game, how we learn from one another, how we build best practices and actually get those deployed in those services across the province. The fourth partner is the Department of Labour and Advanced Education.

When the NOW program and the opportunity for this investment came along, we looked to the CEI as the right partner to do that work, given that focus on research and innovation, the focus on community-based practice and learning from communities, and getting that practice and those new best practices embedded in services across the province.

I'm going to pass it over to Jaime to give you an overview of the program, how that has unfolded, and things that we're learning over the past couple of years.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Smith.

JAIME SMITH: Thank you very much for having us here to speak with you today. I would like to acknowledge a number of members of the CEI team who are here with me today as well. It has taken a number of people to make the NOW program a success, and this is just a small group of those individuals across the province.

I would like to start by giving you just a brief overview of the Centre for Employment Innovation. We essentially focus on four key areas around ensuring that we provide leadership, conduct research, foster exemplary practice, and encourage collaboration in the development and delivery of employment services across the province. As Nancy has previously mentioned, we do all of our work with this notion of collaboration and partnership in everything that we do.

We do this through a number of ways, which include facilitating community-based and practitioner-led research. We're out working in communities with people who are working with the residents of Nova Scotia. We strive to foster an environment that ensures that we have a collaborative and shared learning space, and everything we do will come back to that when we speak to communities of learning a little bit later. Third is strengthening governance and distributed leadership for the employment services ecosystem. It really comes back to the systems-based approach to the work that we do. Together, these pieces support innovations for a skilled, resilient, and productive workforce and for those workplaces across Nova Scotia.

Getting into the NOW program specifically, NOW is focused on this key statement of purpose for the project. It is about increasing labour force participation, attachment, and integration for groups that historically have not had the same access or participation within the labour market in Nova Scotia. As has been mentioned, that includes First Nations Indigenous peoples, African Nova Scotians, visible minorities, Nova Scotians on Employment Support and Income Assistance, persons with disabilities, and older workers. We do that through what we feel is a very innovative demonstration project that's working with communities in local areas to ensure that there is equitable attachment.

As has been mentioned, there are essentially four key program elements. With the initial launch of the program, which came to us when staff came onboard in the CEI in April 2017, we knew that there needed to be a wage subsidy for a period of two years, which had a minimum \$10.50 per hour subsidy for a minimum wage of \$15 per hour. That was a very key component of this program.

What brings the innovation to the program, truly, is that it also provides supports for individuals within the program. On-the-job training education can include soft skills development, for example, communication skills, resume writing, interview skills and others, but also, on-the-job training. Those supports are for participants and individuals in the program.

What was really interesting within the first couple of months of getting into the work with our partners across the province, including the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, the Nova Scotia Works system and other key stakeholders, and through looking at the literature, we understood quickly that there was a component that also was very important; that included the workplace training and supports for employers. That really created a holistic approach to the program.

This is a little difficult to see up there, but we wanted to demonstrate the number of steps and the work that was put into really developing the program. It came from a vision from government in developing the contract in March 2017 when staff came on site. We called it a gift to the Centre for Employment Innovation; we were able to put our work into practice from day one on April 3rd when Dr. Paula Romanow and I started. Sitting down with Dr. Phil Davison and saying at 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, by the way, we have this wonderful investment in the CEI, we're going to be working with partners across the province and we'll be starting this week. So we were able to really put that collaborative practice right at the first steps of the CEI.

It did include, as I mentioned, gathering evidence; engaging with stakeholders across the province; going out and meeting with people where they were in their local communities; and getting a sense of the best practices that we were seeing within the province. That was done through an environmental scan, in addition to that engagement.

Then a Call for Concepts was created. We had seven proponent organizations bring proposals forward to the Centre. With a collaborative group of reviewers, we were able to move forward and negotiate contracts with all seven.

Because we do utilize the developmental evaluation with our project, we then took a pause in July of that year and reflected on what had happened within that first three months, what worked well and what we might have found to be some challenges. We were able to make a couple of small improvements to the process, and a second Call for Concepts was launched in the Fall.

We had a number of potential proponent organizations come forward and we selected five additional projects at that time. That included funding for 95 per cent of that pot of money. We're quite proud today to have 10 proponent organizations that we're working with.

Some of the ongoing activities around that include ongoing developmental evaluation. We're just beginning to finalize the first phase of that work officially. We have communities of learning where we're bringing together the proponent organizations from across the province to share best practices, build relationships and build partnerships, because as we know, individuals are very intersectional. They bring much complexity and different perspectives and experiences together as an individual. It's important to be able to support them as a whole person and through their work.

There is monitoring and evaluation that occurs as well quarterly, that's financial, quantitative, qualitative reporting. The narrative - the stories that are developed - are incredibly important to this research when you're talking about systems change and then the ongoing research as well.

As you can see, the 10 proponent organizations are listed here. They include the

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS); Island Employment Association, Nova Scotia Works; the Mi'kmaw Economic Benefits Office; the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre; the Native Council of Nova Scotia; the Trucking Human Resource Sector Council Atlantic; the Valley African Nova Scotia Development Association; Autism Nova Scotia; TEAM Work Cooperative, Nova Scotia Works; and the YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth.

[10:15 a.m.]

Another very important component of this work was then about six months into the project. Being able to work with the YMCA of Halifax/Dartmouth and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education to bring on an additional team member, Angela Bear, who is now our Navigator of New Initiatives and she came on to support this work fully, because of course this is only one of many projects that we're leading with the Centre for Employment Innovation.

In terms of results - this is also a little difficult to see, I do apologize - this is a bit of a breakdown of the participation by selected groups. You can see that persons with disabilities, African Nova Scotians, and First Nations/Indigenous People, make up the bulk of the program, including visible minorities. You can see that it says racially visible persons here, so we've had quite a bit of dialogue around what that name would be.

Although it did come originally as visible minority from the province, there has been ongoing conversation about that. We also have a smaller percentage of older workers within the program and persons who are on employment income support assistance. As I mentioned earlier though, what we're really noticing and we're starting to map out in different ways is the intersectionality. You know, the older worker who identifies as African Nova Scotian, this only represents what they primarily would identify through the project.

As I mentioned, the goal of the project was 150 individuals to be attached to employment. We're quite proud to say that with the leadership and the work of the proponent organizations across the province, there are 167 participants currently in the program. These are at different stages of development, but they will all wrap up by March of 2020 and they are attached to 128 employers across Nova Scotia.

I'll just touch on this quickly, and my team knows I could go on for a couple of hours and I'm not permitted to - this is some of the emergent learnings that are coming from this work. Number one - and this is what I will speak to - is the flexibility of the program has been really quite essential. What that is, is that it allows us to bring the evidence into the program, but also working with communities who have exceptional knowledge to bring into this work. It allows us to focus on the individual and the employer, their needs, but also the assets and strengths that they bring into the program, and perhaps we can get into that a little bit more as we go through.

I will end my comments with a quote by Alex Paul. Alex is the Executive Director of the Mi'kmaw Economic Benefits Office and it's actually not the quote that you see here, this is one of our participants up in the Sydney area, a welder. This is a comment that Alex made at the launch of the NOW program, in Wagmatcook First Nation: We often hear and heard earlier, the comments about reconciliation, and I often hear about initiatives where I wonder how they came about and who provided input for that particular initiative for it to have meaning.

While I can't say this was started as an act of reconciliation, what I can say for sure is that with the way partners have come together, the way they have lent their expertise, made their resources available to us, how they've listened to our feedback on what has worked in the past and what hasn't and were open to new and innovative ideas of how to move forward. For me, that truly is an act of reconciliation and I thank each and every one of our partners in that role.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hoddinott.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Just some final comments. Jaime has beautifully described the program and some of the learnings for the department and for the partners that have been actively engaged in this. While we went into this wanting to make a difference in the lives of 150 people in terms of finding employment, and in the programs and things that were available through the employers that were engaged as well, what we know and what we are doing now is taking the learnings as we gather them, as we understand them more, and actually we're making changes within the system, and certainly within the department, with a hope that those changes are going to impact the lives, employability and the welcoming work places in this province beyond the 150 and beyond the 128.

Some of the things that I can tell you now that the department is doing differently, directly as a result of the things that we've learned through NOW, I just have a couple of examples.

Youth was not an initial target group for this program, but through the calls for proposals, Phoenix had put together a really good proposal - I think in the second call. While we weren't able to fund it through the NOW program, Jaime gave me a call one afternoon to say, you know, it was a really good proposal. I know we don't have a youth component. Is there something the province could do to add that piece into this learning? So what we did outside of the \$10 million funding envelope was add some additional dollars so that we could actually work with a group of youth.

What Phoenix is doing is working with 10 individuals, 10 youth in Mulgrave Park in Halifax, who are interested in training, who are interested in finding employment, and work with employers to do the match. They're also engaged with the CEI around the evaluation and the learning. The learnings from this piece will be infused into the learnings

of the broader program.

Another couple of things that we're doing within our Nova Scotia Works system - and this actually was over coffee one day; we were having a meeting with the CEI and Career Development Association - is looking at the workforce within Nova Scotia Works across the province and wanting to ensure that that workforce in career development and in employment services is actually reflective of the population of the province. So what we will be doing this year through LAE is providing an internship program for 15 practitioners to enter this career development field to be employed through Nova Scotia Works.

The first year we'll focus on African Nova Scotians. We'll do a wage subsidy for two years and also provide them with the opportunity to move through with the Career Development Association and the certification process. At the end of two years, they will be certified career practitioners with employment opportunities in Nova Scotia Works across the province. In future years, based on the learnings of this first internship, we will broaden that out to other groups as well.

The other piece that I think is important, because when we look at the data around if we are moving the big yardsticks around - those stats around African Nova Scotians, the stats around First Nations and their employment in the province - we recognize that a program like this, which will attach 150 people to the workforce, is not necessarily going to change those big statistics, but what this program is doing is changing system practice and system programs. The Nova Scotia Works centres are learning and doing things differently. Employers that we've reached out to are learning and doing things differently. Sectors are learning and doing things differently. At LAE, we're actually looking at and changing some of our programs and policies.

For example, we have a wage subsidy program called START that has been providing wage subsidies for individuals attached to the workforce for a number of years. What we want to do, based on the NOW learnings, is recognize that if we really want employers to embrace diversity inclusion and we want to ensure that those workplaces are welcoming for individuals when they come into them, then in addition to the wage subsidy program through START, we will be adding some funding for employers to invest in and work with Nova Scotia Works around diversity inclusive training, to look at their HR practices so that they're ready and able to welcome these people into their employment. We will be providing those funds as an additional piece to the wage subsidy piece.

We are changing our policies and practices as we go and learn some things. Those are just a couple of examples. There are many other things happening in the system, in the department, that we'd be happy to share with you if the questions allow. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Who's starting for the Progressive Conservatives?

Ms. Paon.

ALANA PAON: Okay, I'll go first. I have so many things going through my head right now with regard to this - I wish we had half a day to really discuss this. I'll apologize in advance if my voice goes - I'm just getting over a bad cold here this week.

I just had a meeting yesterday with a group in my community that is very keen on trying to fund a program in co-operation with the Department of Community Services for youth between the ages of 15 and 30. In my community in Cape Breton-Richmond, there are a huge number of youth who are either under-employed or just not employed at all. They are knocking on my door continuously at my MLA office needing assistance, wanting to stay in our community, and yet the opportunities for them are very limited. I don't want to say "bleak," because that's very harsh, but it's very limited.

So in putting together this proposal with the Kingston community centre, which has been doing some fine work in my community - they are having some difficult times being able to find the right funding to put this program together which would allow youth - it would basically be a series of workshops that would get youth together, all the way from some basic cooking skills which we're really missing these days, to trying to encourage people to come together to assist seniors, working in co-operation with a program that we've started in Cape Breton-Richmond, a time bank, which is basically an exchange program of services. There are seniors in my community who can't afford to, say, get basic lawn care done, so we're trying to establish this time bank system where you can trade as opposed to having to pay actual physical money.

In co-operation with all these partners together, we're trying to find the right fit. I think it's very serendipitous that I've come here today and listened to you. I think I've met you before, Ms. Smith, in some past life that I probably had with the RDA or with the Centre for Entrepreneurship Education and Development. I'm wondering if there's something there that you could sit down with me - I actually have a copy of the proposal with me - to see if there would be any kind of connection that we could make so we could make this program happen.

Part of it, too, is trying to connect young people to agriculture - they're calling it Seed to Feed - because there's a massive need in my community for a food bank and a lot of the time, they don't have the supplies they need. We have the second highest poverty rate - and I really don't want a silver medal for that, it's horrible - in all of Nova Scotia in my constituency and we need to do something about it. If we can get youth on board and the extraordinary grey-haired population that is really the backbone of our volunteer system in Cape Breton-Richmond on board, working together in a program base like this in some capacity - and I don't know how it fits in, but I feel like I need to tell you about it today. I plant that seed hoping that we can at least follow up on this and see if there's an opportunity there. When I heard about Phoenix House my ears perked up.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: First of all, I very much appreciate the question because you are centring on the whole philosophy on a go-forward basis. It's not about giving

grants, it's not about that, it's about doing partnerships. We would absolutely welcome the opportunity to sit down with you and hear what you and your youth are trying to do and see if there are some connections that we can make with those partnerships.

When you talk about cooking, I think of the community college, I think of other partners that may be able to help out. I'd like to say to all the members in our department, we very much value the relationship with MLAs. You know your citizens, you know your constituents, and any time you approach us we really welcome that opportunity to share and try to do things better within your community, so we'd be more than happy to connect with you after.

ALANA PAON: Thank you so much for that. I like to look at things in a very holistic type of way with the work that I've done before my life of being an MLA. People always say you're a politician now, and I say I am just an extension of being a facilitator, I'm supposed to be making things easier for people - plus facile.

With this program - and we are very fortunate to have NSCC in Port Hawkesbury and we're very fortunate that St. F.X. is really just down the road, but we do have these hiccups. We are very rural and large - not densely populated but a very sparsely populated area - so obviously we need transportation to get people from point A to point B. We have the Strait Area Transit system, which is extremely important. To be able to keep that means getting people from point A to point B, but especially to be able to have it for people who are obviously not able to purchase a vehicle - that's a high-ticket item for most people - to be able to keep that service in place. We're having a very difficult time with that right now so that's a component here, actually.

It's wonderful to have a program available and have outreach, but if people can't actually get to the services it's not going to be successful. We have to be able to actually look at the whole gamut, I guess, of roadblocks that are being put up, to make sure that we can have a successful program at the end of the day. Public transportation or some form of alternate transportation needs to be part of that.

[10:30 a.m.]

I'm going to say that I have taken the bus recently to come to Halifax, and I hadn't taken it in a really long time, and I have to tell you, it's really nice actually not to have to drive my Jeep to be able to come up. I got a lot of work done, so I might actually start making that part of my routine as opposed to having to drive up four hours.

So if we can actually sit down and take a look at the whole picture - seniors and youth and people who are under-employed, people who are struggling, our veterans who are in our communities who are struggling as well. There are people who are hungry in my community and I can tell you they're of a certain age group that they will never say anything. They will go hungry and they will go without. They will stay cold because they

have too much pride, and it is a generation that sees coming forward and asking for help as a sign of weakness. We need to change that mentality because people are suffering. I don't want to see that any longer.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Government policies for seniors - the SHIFT policy, the poverty policy and so on, at the very centre of it is transportation. We have two major tables of deputy ministers - the economic deputies and the social deputies - they have come together in a strong working group to begin an in-depth, innovative look at transportation issues and challenges across the province.

It's really interesting when you begin to really focus on a single issue and put a lot of fire power behind it, you begin to see innovative ways you may look to do things differently - particularly in rural Nova Scotia, quite frankly. We're in our beginning stages, but I just want to reassure the honourable member that you're bang on - transportation is a huge, huge challenge. We're all over it and strongly supported by the government to go in that direction. We have a little way to go.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Ms. Hoddinott referenced that with 160 people attaching to the workforce through this program, that's not going to shift the numbers, but I do want to ask about the numbers, which as of 2018 seem to be going backward in terms of African Nova Scotians' attachment to the workforce. For African Nova Scotians, as I have it here, the employment rate was 4.5 per cent under the provincial average in 2011, but now it's 5.2 per cent under. Assuming that we all have access to the same numbers, I'd like some comment as to why that might be that we're going in the wrong direction.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: The impetus for the NOW scenario is the exact data that you're talking about in the AllNovaScotia report - that over here we're seeing First Nations and African Nova Scotians being educated in greater numbers than ever, and over here the employment rate is not changing. So we need to look at things differently.

Part of the learning system in NOW has really accentuated that. Let's go back to the partnership comment. When you have a true partnership with an Indigenous community, but also with the employers, it's a two-pronged approach. Over here are the Indigenous with special needs and challenges and so on; over here are employers who you're trying to incent to open their doors, their hearts and everything else to do that. What the NOW program really accentuated is the wraparound support those employers got through Jaime's team and others. They felt more confident to be able to go into that space.

I'll give you an example. Dalhousie had an amazing program at the medical school where they offered free tuition for African Nova Scotian students - no take up. No take up. It's one thing to have a program, but if you don't work hard with the partners that you're trying to get into the program - so they set up, and we helped them set up, PLANS -

Promoting Leadership in health for African Nova Scotians. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development joined with Dalhousie and joined with the African Nova Scotian community to get young people of African Nova Scotian descent into the Dalhousie Medical School.

I'm just absolutely amazed that Dalhousie graduates six medical students of African Nova Scotian descent and another six students in 2018, and there were eight designated seats in nursing at Dalhousie that were filled. It's one thing to say, here's a program, but the key is, we need to work collectively to reach out to the African Nova Scotian community to give them confidence.

The other thing they do is they work with the school system to bring in African Nova Scotian young people to go to a nursing part of Dalhousie. I remember the one with the med school where they had an African Nova Scotian resident speak to those young people and say, look at me, I was able to do this.

You're right, the data was going backwards, and we're really trying to change that. That's part of the reason for this impetus.

LISA ROBERTS: I appreciate what you have to say. At the same time, I think there are many structural reasons why those numbers are historically low. I question whether the decision to eliminate certain community-specific employment and education supports - the Watershed Association Development Enterprises, which had 30 years' experience in community, and also the Women's Employment Outreach - did fairly abrupt changing and eliminating, or abruptly changing supports for some of those longstanding organizations, do you see that that may have actually contributed to lower employment attachment, because of loss of knowledge and loss of partnerships?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: When we took the step to blow up Careers Nova Scotia and refocus it around Nova Scotia Works, we were seeing that, in the community of Windsor, for example, there would be an African Nova Scotian office, there would be a disability office, and there would be a Careers Nova Scotia office. We're saying, we need to be better at this so that a citizen can walk into a Nova Scotia Works office and feel that we would understand where they're coming from. That's the reason why we partner with St. F.X., because St. F.X. holds our feet to the fire to make sure that the practices we're making available in those offices represent true practices. Jaime might be able to speak in better detail around that.

We have had some blips along the way, but overall, we have felt a really positive response from the community to that approach. You have a Nova Scotia Works office that also has in there a private sector person whose job it is to work in that community to look at job opportunities or work with businesses to ask, what kind of workers do you need?

If an African Nova Scotian walks into that office, first of all, we need to know and

understand the culture and the challenges that individual faces. We also want to be able to articulate what the employment opportunities are, or not, in the community.

One of the best stories I can remember is part of the YMCA Halifax/Dartmouth involvement in Jaime's program. My ADM and I visited the East Preston office when they were actually in with 14 or 15 African Nova Scotians who were in the program. Some of the help they were getting was, we're going to help you over here - because the person wanted to go to the community college to do early childhood training. It was trying to understand how you bridge a gap, help someone here so they can get over here, and get to a better outcome.

We're always open to feedback on how we can do things better, but that was the rationale behind the move.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Smith, did you have something to contribute?

JAIME SMITH: Perhaps I would go back to the slide that we have before us as well. For myself, I can't think about the NOW program without thinking about the larger employment services system within Nova Scotia and that ecosystem approach to the work that is occurring.

It's a careful balance of bringing the evidence together around those best practices but relying on community-based organizations that are African Nova Scotian-led, Indigenous-led, for example, and ISANS is another, and ensuring that they're at the forefront and working together with us. I came into this work shortly after the transformation had occurred, but I think one of the wonderful outcomes of this program, and potentially an unintended consequence from the beginning, is creating those learning spaces where we can create more diverse, inclusive environments with Nova Scotia Works.

Perhaps Nancy wanted to add more to that.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hoddinott.

NANCY HODDINOTT: Jaime said that very beautifully. If you look at the diversity and inclusion piece, for me, over the last two years since the change in the Nova Scotia Works system, it has sort of come alive in terms of the interest in doing this - the desire for best practices in doing this work.

The energy for Nova Scotia Works to work together beyond their organizational borders - and I think I mentioned this a little earlier - when organizations are looking for money it is a very competitive environment and so they don't necessarily work across the organization because it's your life, you are looking for funding.

I think what this NOW program has done, and with the work of the CEI around that

approach - around innovation and best practice and the community of learning - is to bring the Nova Scotia Works centres together to sort of learn differently, to work together differently, to truly look at what it means to be a partner in the system.

Then, beyond Nova Scotia Works to those other organizations that haven't been traditionally part of that system but are doing incredible work in communities, whether it's MEBO or ISANS or some of those very specific organizations, they have come into this work now to be seen as a partner in this work as well.

The learnings, I think, are richer. It's just honest dialogue around how we shift the culture in this province, because it is a massive culture shift to change the employment dynamic to ensure that if people or individuals are ready to come into work, that the employers and the businesses are providing a welcoming work place so that they can be successful in that.

I think you can feel that shift in the system over the past couple of years and the NOW program has contributed to that.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for being here and your excellent presentation.

Just a couple of comments perhaps first. I was very glad to hear Deputy Montgomerie speak to, as I understood it, an interdepartmental committee of deputy ministers, economic and social, looking at transportation.

Certainly, a number of us - the Chair, Ms. Lohnes-Croft, our colleague Ms. Paon, and myself, representing rural communities, transportation is very evidently a great issue. I'm glad to hear that these interdepartmental meetings are occurring because I think it continues to support our goal of achieving safe and connected communities in Nova Scotia and I think this is clear evidence of that.

Circling back from that, but related, a lot of what I've seen and heard is demographic in its nature. I am wondering if you could address geographic because, again, coming from a rural constituency and from Yarmouth to Cape Breton, from Amherst to beautiful Chester-St. Margaret's, there is a lot of geography in this province.

I am wondering, could you comment as to how NOW has been applied in a geographic rather than just simply a demographic perspective?

JAIME SMITH: Thank you for that question. We do have participants and organizations across Nova Scotia. We have approximately 50 per cent within HRM - not saying Halifax-Dartmouth, but within HRM. We have another approximately 20 to 25 per

cent within the Sydney, Cape Breton, area, and others dispersed. I would say where we do have an area with lesser participation, much lesser, is along the South Shore-Yarmouth area.

It certainly was welcomed, and organizations were encouraged to apply across all geographic areas of the province, but those organizations didn't step forward at that time, so that would be the one area, but it certainly is, I would say, quite reflective of the population and geographic dispersement across the province, with that exception.

HUGH MACKAY: Thank you for that. I certainly consider it, as I am sure most of my colleagues do on either side of the House, a responsibility on the part of an MLA to convey back to the communities and work with them to take advantage of such programs. Of course, we have to be fully knowledgeable and your coming here today is very helpful in that aspect.

I'm going to flip over now to something else that I always care to look a little deeper into and that is on follow-up and metrics and so forth like this.

[10:45 a.m.]

As I understand it, this program will be ending fairly soon, and I believe I saw somewhere that there are quarterly reports and reviews of financials and so forth. That's all fine and dandy, but when the program ends, is there going to be a very deep dive into the metrics on the program, what were the successes? How will that be shared so that we can support you, we can support Nova Scotians in moving this forward and making the best of the results that have come out of this?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: That's an exceptional question. Part of the dynamic when the final data information is in and we report back to government - we obviously have been reporting to government along the way - the key scenario is how we're changing how we work now.

There is an interesting thing in the innovation community that I've learned through my relationship with universities, community colleges, and the private sector, and that is that if you are going to do innovation and you're not talking to the end-user first, you're doomed to failure. Our philosophy in LAE is, if we're not talking to the Indigenous community or the African Nova Scotian community or the people with disabilities community, we're doomed for failure, so that's part of the dynamic on a go-forward basis of how we will really work hard to up the data in this particular area.

You see successes. For example, the university presidents and ourselves, we have a great relationship. We have a Fall retreat where we look at what our key priorities are. The university presidents said we need to up our game with First Nations and African Nova Scotians - we have to up our game. The universities and community colleges are doing

some pretty good things, but we need to come together, so we have set up an innovation table on social equity. They are actually working with Community Services, Education and Early Childhood Development, and others to say how we can up our game.

Ten university presidents and I went to Glooscap First Nation and spent a day with leadership in the Mi'kmaq community to ask how we can work better together. We heard first-hand how, for example, in Glooscap, they're close to Acadia, so what Acadia does is once a week bus their First Nations kids to Glooscap because that's part of the wraparound support to give those young people comfort that they're away from their homes, they're away from their communities, but they make sure that on a regular basis they're able to touch - those are the kinds of learnings that we're trying to impart to our partners.

The last comment I'll make is, we started off with a program called Study and Stay where we took immigrants from China and India and the Philippines, 50 of them at a time, and we connected them with the private sector. We had a mentor sit with those young people over a period of time. The first cadre of those 50, 80-some per cent stayed in Nova Scotia. We couldn't have done it without the private sector making that commitment to stay with these kids. It's the same with First Nations, it's the same with African Nova Scotians. If we don't work harder to provide the wraparound to the private sector that they say they need, we won't succeed.

THE CHAIR: Does anybody else want to respond? Okay, we'll move along to Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: I'm curious to know with the program ending in a year, is there going to be a recommendation to extend the program? It sounds like and seems like it has been relatively successful, so is there going to be a recommendation to do that? Who determines that?

I'm also curious to know in regard to the \$15 an hour and the community partners that are selected, what are the qualifications? Is there an application process for them to become a selected partner?

THE CHAIR: You're starting on four questions, so let's be fair to the witnesses.

BRAD JOHNS: This is where they need to write things down, right? I guess if we could go with the first one then in regard to the end of the program and what's going to happen at that point in time.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: As I mentioned before, a deep dive around the results and the outcomes and what are the best next steps. The other key learning part of this - and I'm trying to remember the wraparound of the first phase - in the room were African Nova Scotian groups, First Nations groups, people with disabilities, and what we found is that they rarely talk to each other. One of the learnings was, wow, this is cool. We're sharing

as African Nova Scotians with the First Nations with their challenges, and people with disabilities with their challenges and they are hearing a lot of the same challenges.

So, that's the other learning. Is there going to be another program specifically like this? I'm not sure, but I will simply continue to represent the government, where you can develop true partnerships; true partnership is worth the investment.

BRAD JOHNS: So, following up in regard to the \$15 per hour - well actually, no. I guess I'll go back to the community partners and how they're selected and the qualifications.

JAIME SMITH: So, we had a process, quite a robust process with St. F.X. University in partnership with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and others, where we did go through a call for concepts, a call that occurred in June and again in September to bring those proponent organizations onside. As a part of that process they were able to share with us how they would approach this project out in their local communities and bring forward some of their best practices and innovations to do that.

In terms of the project itself, the Centre for Employment Innovation does not have a direct relationship in terms of an agreement with a participant or an employer across the province, that occurs within that organization and they're doing that selection process. But with St. F.X. with the Centre for Employment Innovation, we were responsible for ensuring that we had high-quality organizations that would partner with us, that would bring their learnings and share with us around their best practices, and also create this learning community and share what is working well in terms of that screening process out in their local communities.

That varies very much depending on the diversity of the program that's happening within that sector, whether it's sector-based with the trucking industry for example, with ISANS - the Mi'kmaw Economic Benefits Office has two projects, one of which is a direct entry carpentry apprenticeship program, and I alluded to Alex Paul's comments earlier today.

So, they have very different approaches within the local community based upon the project, and that is also really great for us in terms of the research components. There are approximately 36 research projects that the proponent organizations would like to dive into. I guess success breeds success within that research innovation mandate, but we're able to then continue to look at what worked really well, and you know, in the early days of the program we were concerned that if only 150 individuals were successful in being accepted into the program, where would we be at the end of two years? We were able to work with the proponent organizations and them being very flexible and innovative within their budgets to exceed that target, and what we've seen is that predominantly, I think we have lost three to five individuals have left the NOW program over the two years so far.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Zann.

LENORE ZANN: First of all, I want to say thank you very much for being here and it sounds like really exciting work that you're doing. I actually can't think of anywhere better than St. F.X. to be doing it. A lot of the students come for the powwow in Millbrook every summer and it's so great to see the diversity that's there and the excitement, and they're loving Nova Scotia and learning all about our rich cultural heritage. So that's great.

I still do have concerns though about the fact that there was an elimination of these different community-specific employment and education supports that we had in the province, some for 30 years. That wouldn't have anything to do with the people that are running this particular program, but it does have to do with government decisions.

For instance, I'm also the status of women spokesperson for the NDP and you know, the Ann Terry Project in Cape Breton, that was such a shame when that was eliminated and the Women's Employment Outreach in Halifax as well; in Truro, we lost the Community Enhancement Association, which had three African Nova Scotians employed; they lost their jobs and were unable to find work after that. One of them was a good friend of mine and she has subsequently died of cancer sadly. She had called me and said that there were new requirements that had been put in place for staff, and it was such that many of the veteran career counsellors were not eligible for the new positions. I think that perhaps was maybe short-sighted on behalf of the government.

Is there any particular reason, maybe the deputy minister could respond, as to why those were blown up, as you mentioned earlier?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Quite frankly, they were inefficient. As I mentioned, in some communities you'd have three or four different places to go and it was confusing. More importantly, government hadn't done a really good job of providing wraparound supports to them to make sure that we were collectively working together to a common goal.

So, we, from the beginning, brought everybody together and said, this is where we're going to go - we're going to go down this road - and were there challenges and bumps? Absolutely there were. But the end result, I really believe is a positive experience for the Province of Nova Scotia. The number of citizens accessing Nova Scotia Works offices are way up over the number that accessed the Careers Nova Scotia offices.

With the support of Jamie and her team at St. F.X. to hold our feet to the fire, to make sure we're doing best practices in scenarios - again, always open to how we can do it better. As long as we stick to the credo of, if you're going to deal with stakeholders, you need to be honest and deal - whether it's with women, whether it's with First Nations - you need to be good listeners and understand where they're coming from.

If I can, I'm going to ask Nancy to speak to the comment on the certification of the counsellors.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hoddinott

NANCY HODDINOTT: The intent around the certification process was to ensure, with the launch of the Nova Scotia Works centres, it was to ensure that we had quality services across the province; that the people working in career development had some specific training; and, there was a consistency in what we were able to offer from one end of the province to the next.

While we have some targets around how many, we want to have people who have completed the full certification process. The Nova Scotia Career Development Association actually works very well and they're very collaborative and work in partnership with Nova Scotia Works around professional development in its broadest sense. So, there is a lot of ongoing training and things that they provide to people working in the centres. I think one of the major pieces they've done over the last few years is ensuring that staff have the competency - they're building mental health champions within Nova Scotia Works - so staff have the competencies to work with individuals who may come through and need some supports in that way.

The certification process, there are certainly timelines against that, but nobody had to sort of get there immediately. There were timelines to build those skills, to work with the CDA, to work with others just to build that competency and to build a focus on professional development.

LENORE ZANN: I would hope that the deputy minister wasn't saying that the people that were there for 30 years with the Ann Terry Project in Cape Breton, the Women's Employment Outreach in Halifax, and WADE, and for instance, the Community Enhancement Association in Truro, were ineffective or incompetent even.

How many of those people, those long career counsellors have actually been hired or are being used in this project? Do you have any numbers?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I want to very clearly say, I would never say that people are ineffective. The system was ineffective, and we weren't supporting people like we should be supporting people.

On a go forward basis, Nancy may have a better understanding than I. I know how hard we worked on that certification process to involve just about everybody we could who was in the system, because at the end of the day - like the Ann Terry folks, who are passionate and strong and incredibly effective in dealing with women, and knowing that they will continue to do that and reflect that to Nova Scotia Works offices and other places - they are part of the partnership.

[11:00 a.m.]

Nancy, I don't know if you have the figures on the other piece.

NANCY HODDINOTT: I don't have data - I can go back and look for some historical data around numbers of people employed in Nova Scotia Works pre-Careers Nova Scotia, pre- and post-transformation. I don't have those numbers in front of me.

I can say, though, with some of the changes in the system over the last little while and with this ongoing partnership approach, and comments specifically around women's services and the Ann Terry Project - the YMCA in Sydney has reached out to Ann Terry, and we're looking at how we can build some of that learning in as a system, how we can utilize those resources in that capacity to even build the supports that need to be available in every Nova Scotia Works centre across the province to work with women to support them in meeting their employment goals.

I know the Y has very proactively reached out to the Ann Terry Society to help them in doing that. I know that the Director of Employment Nova Scotia provincially is looking at it - not just around working with women, but around working with very specific groups across the province, do we need to tap into some very specific expertise to build a capacity of the system as a whole, to not have pockets of that capacity in just very specific geographic regions? We're looking at that as a system, as opposed to here, there, and in some communities and not others.

LENORE ZANN: I had asked how many of these people who were career counsellors for 30 years in these various organizations that I mentioned have been hired or are part of this particular project. Many of them are veteran career counsellors, and after 30 years, the doors for all of these programs, all of these organizations, are now closed. I'm surprised that we don't know that some of these people have actually been brought in to be working with people on this.

I'll leave it at that for now, and I'll take another turn in a little bit.

THE CHAIR: Did anyone want to respond to that? No?

Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I've been fortunate to be able to attend some events that Nova Scotia Works has offered at - I don't know whether it's a graduation or completion of a program, but I've been invited, and I've been really impressed by the testimonies of people who have been enrolled in their programs. I'd love to attend to see someone who has finished this program and see what they have to say. Just putting in a plug there for an invitation down the road.

Those are the true words. It's fine to come from bureaucrats, but really, I've heard people who thought they were stuck in a minimum wage job or people who were under-employed who now have dreams and hopes and a vision for themselves. That's really important, that that's coming as a result of the programs.

I'm really curious. It's nice to have all this in place, but what is the foundation you are building with employers to be welcoming? I think that's key. We can do all the training we want, but you put people with diverse needs into the community, what is there in place to make us - you know, I've heard we're friendly in Nova Scotia but we're not welcoming. What are you doing with that?

NANCY HODDINOTT: There's lots of work under way in that area. Over the last couple of years, a lot of that work has been informed through the NOW program and what we're learning around what works with employers. In particular, while this program was called a wage subsidy, I think it has been the wraparound supports piece that we're hearing from proponent organizations has actually made the biggest difference. What those organizations have told us - and interestingly, the stories are as important to us as the numbers are, so as the CEI and the researchers do their work, it's pulling the data from the numbers, but it's pulling the data from the stories as well. That's what's informing a lot of our work as we go forward.

What we're hearing from proponent organizations is the absolute value to the employers of having somebody come in and do some work with them around diversity and inclusion - being available to them if things don't always go well to provide that support has been incredibly helpful.

As I mentioned, how we're trying to adjust our wage subsidy programs now as a go-forward with LAE is to build that piece in so we're not just providing supports to hire an individual through a wage subsidy. We're going to provide funding and some supports to that employer to work with Nova Scotia Works and the employer engagement specialist to work with others so that you can have good HR practices in place prior to an individual coming in to work and so that you have some policies and processes and the ability to be comfortable in the conversation around: Is this working for you, and what is it we need to change in this workplace to make it welcoming to all? That's the investment we want to make through LAE with some of our go-forward programs and policies.

We have online tools and things as well, HR tool kits called Welcoming Workplaces. Those things are available to all employers, but over the next few years, we really, working with the CEI and others, want to work with employers differently around this to ensure that we're making a shift on a larger scale around welcoming workplaces.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: You have online resources. For someone who's not connected with the NOW program, what do I recommend, as an MLA, in conversation with an employer who is building up a more diverse workforce in their business? How do

I offer them help? Where do I send them?

NANCY HODDINOTT: I would send them to Nova Scotia Works. Nova Scotia Works and their community have people and resources that can help with that; certainly the employer engagement specialist can help with that. If Nova Scotia Works wants to link in CEI and others around some of that work, that ability is there as well.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Paon.

ALANA PAON: I'm just going through the presentation that we saw just a little bit earlier. It's good to see that there is partnership with Island Employment, and we have one of the offices in Port Hawkesbury, which is in my constituency.

Going back through, you're looking at integration of groups that are under-represented in the workforce. I'm just trying to make connection here with the fact that you said there's under-representation as far as participation with groups that come forward and the amount of participation in the South Shore area.

In the new Boundaries Commission report that has just come out, there are two protected Acadian ridings within the South Shore area. In Cape Breton-Richmond, Richmond is likely going to be going back to a protected riding, which is an Acadian riding. Preston, of course, is the other one, which is African Nova Scotian.

I'm a bit concerned, looking at this, knowing the amount of unemployment in my community and the amount of poverty, and child poverty in particular, and disenfranchisement of youth being able to connect with the workplace. I'm concerned that there's no representation within the programming here - that I'm seeing, anyway - that's trying to assist within the Acadian population as well. The Acadian population within the boundaries review constitutes a minority cultural community. It may not be a visible minority, but it is constituted as a cultural minority, which is why we're looking at putting these protected ridings back into place.

Can you please discuss with me if there is any particular programming that is happening currently within the Acadian population, which I represent, I am Acadian myself, and I'm just wondering, moving forward, would there be something that would be opening up to assist with the high levels of unemployment within those communities right now?

NANCY HODDINOTT: One of the Nova Scotia Works service providers is an Acadian provider. The other important piece in the transformation of Nova Scotia Works was to ensure, and we're still building this, that services in French are available where we have a population that would dictate we should have services available in French. So many of our Nova Scotia Works providers have practitioners who can provide services in French.

In discussions that I've had with the director of Employment Nova Scotia that oversees this, over the last little while and again, it comes back to your comment around women's services and other services, how do we work differently and how do we utilize those very specifically skilled organizations who are working in those populations to help build the capacity of the whole?

So, we're looking at some interventions over the next year, to look at how we ensure, if we've asked for a service, to be able to be provide it in French, are we doing that in the right way and how can we engage our francophone provider in helping build the whole system capacity in that area. We'll be doing that as well over the next little while.

ALANA PAON: I'm sorry, can I just have a clarification of the organization and where it's based? You said there is a francophone organization that's working co-operatively with your program.

JAIME SMITH: It is not working directly with the NOW program but CDÉNÉ, Julie Oliver is a member of the advisory board for the CEI, and they also hold a Nova Scotia Works agreement with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. When I think about the role of the NOW program, it's bringing those learnings back in not only to those proponent organizations, CEI, LAE, the Nova Scotia Career Development Association, but it's bringing them back to that advisory board where we have a number of folks from across the province, from employers, from organizations that are Acadian led as I mentioned CDÉNÉ, ISANS.

We have members from the Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities as well, who are involved in that advisory board. So, again, it's bringing it back to that systems level as Nancy had mentioned before and ensuring that those learnings are cross cutting as much as possible. We also have been able and have been very aware of the French language component and, so, with the CEI, when we're developing case studies, we're launching newsletters, we do have that available in French and English.

ALANA PAON: Thank you very much for that. I just wanted clarification though, where is CDÉNÉ? I have not heard of that group before so where are they based? I'm just wondering about as far as the group itself, is it representative more on a provincial level or is representative of the South Shore? Is it representative of Richmond?

JAIME SMITH: They are provincial in scope.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I'm going to take some tips because I've got more questions than I have time. So, I'm just going to do a bit of a preamble and then I'm going ask a question and then maybe you'll also talk about what I'm saying in my preamble. See, it's real sneaky.

Anyhow, I've been fairly aware of NOW at my constituency level, because I represent Halifax Needham and the YMCA is located in Halifax Needham, and the YMCA is a participant. In fact, I was contacted by the YMCA last December, I guess, 2017, to help spread the word at the point that participants in the NOW program were being sought. I was certainly very, very glad to do that and I would say that the North End Business Association also provided a lot of support in terms of getting the word out.

But for me, it's also an example that's quite clear in my mind as an example of how the best-laid plans sometimes hit bumps on the road because at the point that I was contacted, it was December 21st and they were trying to find employers to hire on somebody full time in February - it was the last date like February 21st or something like that and basically everybody was already in full-out holiday mode. There was this person who had just come on to the YMCA who was literally busting, just working so hard because it was this great opportunity and the timeline did not work with our world, you know. I'm like, I'm sorry it's the Friday before the holidays and I'm just leaving, you know, and I'm sending out e-mails and so forth.

[11:15 a.m.]

I'm seeing a lot of your staff nodding behind you, so everybody is aware of this and I guess I just want to flag it, because I think we do always need to be cognizant that timelines crafted in advance, and contracts crafted in advance, sometimes need to adjust to reality. Sometimes ticking the box on the contract is not as important as actually making sure it gets done right.

So, I am very glad to hear that only three to five individuals have left the NOW program, but I do wonder if some of that rollout and some of those constraints may have had implications down the road. Maybe I'll stop there because I think somebody wants to answer - and that wasn't even going to be my question because I have more than I have time for, go ahead.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: First of all, we echo the way you think. I tell my team all the time we're not a grant-giving department, we are not a "check the box" kind of department, we're a listening department. It's like our OHS inspectors, we changed them from being ticket writers to going on sites to educate employers about safety. Why I say that is they use their judgment rather than do a policy thing, because they walk on a job site and they know who is bad, who is not being a good employer and who's trying hard.

It's the same when we deal with any group or organization that we deal with. We work really hard to take into account human challenges that they may have faced in deadlines. Sometimes we can't do it for whatever reason, but we really work hard to try and understand that. I'm totally with you on that, that you just don't go oh, sorry you missed a deadline. You dig behind it and say well, what happened? What were the challenges? What's this group like? They've been really good to work with in the past and we work

hard to take that into account. Thank you for that point.

LISA ROBERTS: Okay, so now I will get to my real question, maybe the Chair will let me have three too.

I find it very interesting that the participants in this program are guaranteed to make at least \$15 per hour based on the \$10.50 subsidy from the province and the \$4.50 contribution from the employer. Obviously, I am here from the NDP caucus and we have been advocating for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. I'm wondering, is that an acknowledgment that our minimum wage is actually not enough for people to make ends meet?

I am also very curious because the program also provides ongoing wraparound supports as you've mentioned, including, I believe, support with child care, elder care, accessibility adaptations, assistive technology, transportation, and troubleshooting. And if we actually expect your typical Nova Scotian out there who isn't getting those wraparound supports to try to make accommodations for that, we're actually looking at a significantly higher minimum wage and I'm wondering what the department calculates if a person just needs to be trying to scramble that stuff together themselves, what sort of a wage we would be looking at?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: In doing this program I looked for input and advice, as did the minister, on what would help make this work. We do the same kind of thing like Graduate to Opportunity, where we do a subsidy program for graduates of university and there are different dynamics. We're also responsible for hearing from an arm's-length group to provide advice on our minimum wage scenario as it is, and the government recently upped that part.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts, you can have a third question.

LISA ROBERTS: Thank you. I appreciate you got advice for what would make this program work, but given the advice that you received does that indicate that the department - can the department comment on whether those sorts of things, other significant wraparound supports, and/or an increased minimum wage are actually requirements for many more Nova Scotians to succeed in our labour force.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I'm not quite sure what you're asking me, to be honest.

LISA ROBERTS: If \$15 an hour is a requirement for success for this program, wouldn't that also indicate that \$15 an hour is actually required by all Nova Scotians entering into the workforce and trying to be successful in the long term?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: As I mentioned earlier, there are different dynamics for the program that you're trying to run. Yes, there is a minimum wage responsibility that we

have. We take that very seriously and we make recommendations on minimum wage. Graduate to Opportunity would be a different wage scale, a different rationale behind it, because of the person you're trying to get workforce attachment for, as was this program.

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Before I start, I really want to thank you. I wish I knew more about this NOW program, but you've had almost two years. As you're speaking - my riding is the most multicultural and most diverse riding. Really, more than 50 per cent of what I deal with is people finding jobs.

I have a couple of examples that I've run into that I really want to share with you. I have a pharmacist in Clayton Park, who I think is using your subsidy program utmost and she has done an incredible job. She is an Egyptian multicultural. I think she has been your best team player. How can we do more of what she is doing?

I think it's much easier for somebody - it doesn't matter what program it is, whether we're trying to get Aboriginal people or trying to get African Nova Scotians - to get those leaders in the private sector who have done it to be the example.

You've got 128 companies that have joined you now. You have examples. You have stories. How can we publicize it? Maybe on the radio? We need that cultural shift.

I'm telling you this example because people like her and people who have the same feeling or when people come to me - I get a lot of them because they see me. I'm from that culture, so they come to me to ask for jobs. There's nothing that upsets me more than to see that they're highly qualified, some of them graduated from Canada, with so much. One of them sent 200 applications to jobs, and not one interview.

It's the name. I see the name. What do I do? Do I tell them, "Change your name and see what happens?" As an MLA, I can't do that.

I think that's something that we need. Those are the examples. They've actually hired people for multicultural and it's successful.

I sat next to somebody who I've known for 30 years. He owned a printing company. Now he works for a large company, I believe it's in Pictou. It's not even in the city where I can help him. He saw me and he was very happy. He said, "Rafah, I have such a shortage in labour. Can you help me with bringing immigrants to work?" I can hear in his voice the fear of the unknown. How does he do this? Who does he go to?

I'm going to call him and give him the NOW program or Nova Scotia Works. I think they're hearing enough stories of the successes that you've had. I need to publicize what you're doing, so help me with that.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Absolutely. I've noticed such a difference in the last five or six years to the private sector's reaction to the challenges that you're facing. I look at the Connector Program with the Halifax Partnership. We started with them five years ago and asked, will you mentor foreign students and others that are here? Not only have they been successful, that program is now across Canada, and the Connector Program is now with the Cape Breton Partnership. It's also in southwest Nova Scotia with the REN group. The Study and Stay program is another example.

The other challenge is we work with groups like the chamber of commerce. Four or five years ago I went to the chamber of commerce and said, how can you help us more with workforce attachment but also with attaching businesses to young people? We told them about the co-op program. So the chamber of commerce set up a co-op of rewards programs for their members and they would hold dinners. They would have a co-op student at the table with potential employers.

It's a collective will to work together to change the culture, to help our employers. That's why the wraparounds are so important to those employers, so they better understand the challenges of whether they are international students, whether they are Indigenous or whether they are African Nova Scotians. So it's a collective.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I'm just wondering if you would somehow publicize it, maybe on the radio. I know it's expensive - media is expensive - but they have programs for free, whether it's a businesses section, where those successful employers who are happy can speak about it. Honestly it's a cultural thing that we're afraid of the unknown or the unknown name, unknown culture, unknown this, but there are amazing successes and we're just not hearing them.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: The irony is I think in the paper today was the Graduate to Opportunity ad with a young international student who had been hired through our diverse program with GTL. So you are right, I'd love to be able to do more, but I'm more interested to see business leaders show leadership that they are to help change the cultures within their own organizations. To me, that is success.

What Jamie and Nancy and the team have been able to do highlights that people are prepared and willing to do it, if they have the proper supports to do it.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Zann.

LENORE ZANN: Listen, I have to say that one of the things I definitely agree with that you've said here today is the fact that Nova Scotia and in fact Canada, really need to have a paradigm shift in the philosophy and the understanding of multiculturalism, of diversity and of the importance of weaving it into society in a much more equitable fashion.

I agree with Ms. DiCostanzo about the problem as a MLA when so many people

come to us. In my community it's a lot of the Black community and the First Nations community who say they send out hundreds of CVs everywhere and they swear it's the name. They see the name Jones, they see the name Borden - they know the names - or they see the name Syliboy or they see the Gould.

My mother, as a teacher for many years in Truro, said that back in the 1960s and early 1970s when she first started teaching there she was appalled by some teachers who would read out the names, the list of the kids they were going to get next year - hadn't even met the children yet - some teachers would say, oh look, Syliboy and Gould or this or that, oh I can see where I'm going to have my troubles this year. They hadn't even met the kids yet. My mother, coming from Australia as we were, was pretty shocked at the overt racism. So today when people tell me that this is still going on it is very difficult for their children to get jobs, it's heartbreaking.

I do want to share a story, if the Chair will allow me to - this is hands-on experience. My first year as an MLA, I believe it was in 2010 - a young man and his father came to me from the Black community. The young man wanted to apply to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal for a permanent job. He had worked for a couple of summers and built up his seniority with the union and things like this and he wanted to apply for a permanent job.

I talked to some folks at the department and apparently a Black person had not been hired in 17 years in our area, in our entire region - we knew this because it was his cousin. So I told him to go the Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal bureau and hand in his resume because that's what I had been told he should do. He did that and he never heard anything. Then he called them and went by. The person who was in charge of doing the hiring - there were three jobs that came up all within a certain amount of time, and whites were chosen each time. They said they lost his resumé, that they couldn't remember him coming by. This is a tall, strapping, good-looking young man, and they couldn't even remember him coming by - they lost his resumé? It was ridiculous.

[11:30 a.m.]

I called the director of human resources at the time for the department, and I was appalled by what he said to me. He said, MLA Zann, can you tell me, why are there no Blacks working in Truro? I thought, is this a trick question? What do you want me to say - it's a racist town for many years and always has been? What do you mean, why are there no Blacks working in Truro? He said, well, do they even bother applying? I said, this young man has applied three times to your department, and they have lost his resumé, they don't remember him coming in. What the hell do you think? Of course people are applying . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The word "hell" (Interruption) We have to get to the question. Ms. Zann.

LENORE ZANN: I think it's important for us, when we have something that's authentic, to be able to express it - maybe not with swearing, but at least finish the story.

This is what I said to the human resources director. His response was: Do people even bother applying? Yes, they do bother applying.

I guess where I would like to take this is how do we do that paradigm shift, how do we change the underlying racism? The roots of it are still, sadly, here in our society.

For instance, I know that one of the things you have mentioned that you're trying to do is the workplace training and supports for employers to strengthen diversity and inclusion - does that include some kind of sensitivity training? What kinds of things are you doing, and foresee trying to do in the future to try and make this paradigm shift?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I absolutely agree with the honourable member that systemic racism is not dead; I totally understand that.

I grew up in Bridgetown near a large African Nova Scotian community called Inglewood. I went to school there, and a lot of my classmates and friends were African Nova Scotians. Then I came back and taught there. I'll never forget a woman named Edith Cromwell, who is now Order of Canada, who came with mothers from Inglewood and met with staff and said we're going to educate our children, and you're going to help us do it. You're going to work with us and our community, and we'll be at every parent-teacher night. I'm going, wow.

We had a barber in Bridgetown who wouldn't cut African Nova Scotians' hair at that time, to your point. A few years ago, my brother, who retired to Bridgetown, was at Inglewood at a reunion, and the community is almost empty because they did such a good job of educating their young people.

I totally understand the dynamic, and I also challenge my African Nova Scotian friends and leaders in communities, don't be afraid to reach out. Sometimes there can be a lack of trust, and you can understand why there's a lack of trust, with the history.

That a human resources director of TIR would say that to you appalls me. Deputy LaFleche is a real champion for diversity and an amazing colleague. We just recently had a high-level meeting with his senior staff looking at the major capital projects facing Cape Breton and how we can align with Indigenous and African Nova Scotians to better engage them in the workforce. I acknowledge the systemic piece, but we are trying to work hard to move.

The last comment I'll make is that LAE has a diversity committee. That diversity committee keeps our feet to the fire, and they do a wonderful job of representing different cultures and so on and the need for us to advance. My whole executive team is geared to

think that way. There are challenges ahead still, but I think a lot of people are making better choices.

LENORE ZANN; I'm sure we all have examples of this that we've experienced, I would hope we're all aware of it. What exactly though, when it does say workplace training and supports from employers to strengthen diversity and inclusion, what do you mean by that? Is there some training?

JAIME SMITH: Yes, that is occurring across the province and it's being led by the proponent organizations. For example, at our last community of learning that we hosted at St. F.X. a few months ago that was the focus of that session, to start building and surfacing the different kinds of workplace initiatives that are taking place across the project. So, we're currently working on that to bring those to light. For example, the Valley African Nova Scotian Development Association has created quite a robust workplace opportunity for employers to engage in that kind of training, but there are many others across the project.

That will all come up. That's why I think it's so important to have the university's role within this project, to bring those learnings, bring the evaluation and help build the evidence around the effectiveness of those programs.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Very enlightening these two hours have been. I have to say I didn't know much about the NOW program; a couple of days ago I started reading my notes and so on. What I've heard today is that you've migrated so many things to wrap around, every answer is some new group that has been coming towards this program.

I know it's an employment program for those who don't have the opportunities a lot of times to get into jobs and with your support, you've gone over that now and you're doing so much more for our communities.

I am involved with Building Futures, which is in Sackville. There are so many opportunities like that program, you have DASC industries in Dartmouth; they are groups that are very supportive of getting jobs for those who need it, but who have challenges, physically or mentally. You've kept it small, not allowing it to get out into the public to hear all these things.

I would like to ask, I guess, what are your communications people doing to try to make sure that we're hearing this? This is a good news story and unfortunately, it's not getting out there; maybe the future is going to be somewhat bleak for it if there's not more funding in the future to keep it ongoing.

I've heard everybody here talk positively of what you are doing. I ask anybody just

for comments on those types of things.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I'll take a quick run at it and then look to my colleagues to add to it. I am blessed to work in a department that is doing amazing things in many sectors: universities, innovation, occupational health and safety; our labour negotiators have a 95 per cent success rate. I also have skills and learning and the partnership we have with St. F.X. in this program. In every instance, to me, I wish I had all kinds of money to publicize and advertise, particularly successes.

I really impress upon my team it's about partnerships and if we work with the chamber, if we work with First Nations - Alex Paul's letter meant so much to us - that that's the kind of success that spreads. So we have this situation in the chamber where if somebody takes a co-op student or takes a Study and Stay student or takes a Connector student and they go "wow, that's a great experience" and they tell it to five other employers. So, I wish I had more money and Jaime may add to how we do publicize some of this.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Smith.

JAIME SMITH: We've been very fortunate over the past couple of years to be able to work with the proponent organizations; Jess Popp, who is sitting behind me, our Coordinator of Stakeholder Engagement and has been working with many of those organizations who presented some of the emergent findings. Because we are utilizing a developmental evaluation approach, we don't have to wait until the end of the three years to be able to get our findings out to people who would be interested.

We've had panel conversations at two different national conferences with Cannexus which is focusing on career development practitioners across the country, and with the CASE conference that was hosted here in Halifax last year in partnership with TEAM Work Cooperative. Many of our proponents were sharing their stories of successes. You'll also see that you have an Initiatives 2019 booklet there in front of you that brings it into context within the program. We also have newsletters, media scans that are sent out through the centre, and that primary audience is targeted with Nova Scotia Works, of course. Through their employer engagement specialists and others, they can help share that news.

We've also launched a video innovation series. The first phase was completed a couple of months ago now, and we're stepping into the second. We're starting to build case studies and really getting momentum on that knowledge dissemination, knowledge mobilization around that work, so that's a wonderful and very timely question. For us, it's really about ensuring that we're building on a body of evidence around that academic component but increasingly, perhaps most important, is ensuring that the knowledge that's being built is very accessible, that it's practical, and it's helping to ensure that at the end of the day, more Nova Scotians have access and can be part of our labour force.

BILL HORNE: Just that I think you should be doing more. (Laughter)

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: We're not disagreeing with you.

BILL HORNE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Paon.

ALANA PAON: I guess I just want to make a comment with regard to success. I agree with Mr. Horne that we should be encouraging more communication on success stories overall. We don't have enough good news stories being broadcast out to us on a daily basis. I always like those news programs that end off with a good news story at the end of the day to try to negate all the unfortunate things that we listen to in news programs.

Deputy Montgomerie, I just took note of something that you had said with regard to, I think, your experience down in Bridgetown, that the African Nova Scotian community had done such a great job in educating their young people that the community was basically empty. Now, I don't want to be critical, but I'm not sure that that is such a good indicator of success. It's almost my argument that I make that we do such a good job in educating kids that grew up on farms that our farms are not being taken over by anyone, because we're doing a great job in educating them right off the farm.

Again, I come from a community that's very deeply rooted in tradition and culture, very much a territorial-based community, which is why we're looking at putting it back to a protected riding. I'm very curious to know what you would see as measures of success within this program because for me, one of the measures of success would be to see that these young people, these people who are going through the program are actually being given opportunities to be able to stay within their home communities. I know it would be a success story because we have an awful lot of elders in the community right now that don't have any family members, they have no one advocating on their behalf.

It's part of what causes our long-term care crisis; there aren't any opportunities, or very few opportunities, for intergenerational homes. My grandmother lived with us when I was a child and I helped my mom out as much as possible to be able to keep her in her home, but that's part of what a success story is - to actually have multi-generations being able to thrive within a community.

Specifically within rural communities, we are very heavily challenged. Yesterday on my way to Halifax, I got a phone call that a cousin of mine passed away in his late 50s. I stopped in at the hospital on my way up to Halifax because another woman who I'm looking at, she's 49 years old, she's the same age as me, and she's passing away from cancer. We have a lot of death in my community, and I can tell you that that's probably one of the most striking of circumstances that I have noted since being in this position in a rural constituency. We're all very closely linked, so when one person suffers, we all feel

it.

One of the successes for me would be to see that young people and people going through these programs are given an opportunity to stay at home. We all want to stay at home, Nova Scotians just have the propensity to always want to come back to their roots.

[11:45 a.m.]

So, if the young people are already there and people are already there, let's give an opportunity to stay in any capacity that we can, and make certain that one of the successes of our programs is that these people are staying in the communities where they're most needed, and we need them in rural Nova Scotia. What do you say to that?

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Being from a rural community and having the philosophy that people know best who are in their community, what's good for their community, the challenges in rural Nova Scotia are huge and immense. Where there are true partnerships where people come together in the community, including the government and including educational institutions, private sector, I see potential opportunities for success.

The last three years, we've seen in-migration of youth in this province - three years in a row. That is huge for us. That's a signal. We have the lowest unemployment rate we've had in a long, long time. So, a long way to go, but I believe we're on the right track by not lending companies all kinds of money, but focusing on areas where we can help communities be stronger.

The government's announcement two weeks ago of three major facilities for the community college - one in Port Hawkesbury, one in Lawrencetown - those two in particular speak to the faith in rural Nova Scotia. Those institutions in Port Hawkesbury and Lawrencetown are world-known - one for digital, the other for marine. That's a signal of support in the value of rural Nova Scotia. But you're absolutely right - it's a real challenge, particularly to retain young people.

My Inglewood friends are exactly like you said - mixed blessings. They've done such a good job with their children given the economic situation. A lot of their children are professionals - police officers, teachers, and so on.

THE CHAIR: We don't have much time, so I'm going to pass it on to Ms. Roberts for the NDP.

LISA ROBERTS: I am just going to say very briefly that I have amazing people in my constituency taking such leadership around building equitable workplaces - a number of them doing it with no government support and actually never asking for government support. So, I think about DeeDee's Burritos. They pay \$15 to \$17.50 an hour for full-time

staff, and they hire from the local community and are actively actually training up young people who are then being hired by other community businesses. Amazing staff - no government support, never asked for it.

I think about Alteregos, which has been very much doing the same thing for ten years - longer now. No government support - never asked for it, to my knowledge. Also, a number of young African Nova Scotians who are actually doing really intentional learning and mentoring and amazing stuff, including in collaboration with youth through the African Nova Scotian Youth Lab.

My question is: Is the government doing enough with our own dollars and resources outside of LAE? There was reference just recently to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. We spend a lot of money in this province - where is our social procurement? Where are requirements that when we are actually putting out tenders and requests for proposals, that we are expecting people to come back to us actually showing how they're going to be using our public dollars to advance this?

It should be a requirement of private sector companies that get public money should be showing how they're moving forward. It shouldn't always be us having to totally hold their hands and guide them along. At some point, if you're getting public dollars in this province, you should be hiring and making sure that your workplace is diverse, welcoming, and supportive.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: First of all, I salute your comments on the private sector who are doing things without government support. They're our strength; they set the example on a go-forward basis. To me, that's the ideal. When I was the deputy of DNR, I used to ask: Why are we dealing with companies we loan money to? Why aren't we dealing with companies that we don't loan money to, but are trying to be more innovative or so on? I totally agree with that.

On the other side, yes, we've got work to do. Our deputy minister, Laura Lee Langley, is an absolute champion for diversity and for adding. We've made several changes within the Public Service Commission, and one of the easiest ones I saw is we got rid of that stupid "you have to have two years of experience before you can apply."

We just recently worked with TIR and the construction industry to ensure that if you get a tender for a government building you must have apprentices onsite. So you're right, there's more to do, but we're heading in that direction.

One of the discussions we're having with TIR in Cape Breton is around that very approach, that the contractors should be looking to have Indigenous or African Nova Scotians.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Montgomerie, I think you've been in government now for 80 or

90 years - you should know that the word “stupid” is not one that we . . . (Interruptions)

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: What was that, sorry? I missed that.

THE CHAIR: You can't use the word “stupid.”

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Oh.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: Tough chair today.

A comment to one of the earlier remarks by the deputy that we have to look at the efficiency of certain organizations, and if we have to make adaptations to how some of the programs are structured and who the delivery partners are based on efficiencies, I'd say that's far better than keeping things open strictly to create more government jobs.

To carry on from there, you had mentioned the attitudinal shift, the cultural shift that must occur, and it's great to see what you folks are doing. I was wondering if you could reference any examples within other government departments where you see that they are moving with you on this.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: I'm thinking of Community Services as an example, and seeing the fundamental shift in their approach. Why say Community Services? They have a program to help troubled youth obtain post-secondary education. They do it through Phoenix House, if I remember correctly, and it's like, wow, that is a real live place where you're making a fundamental difference in a person's life.

I see at the deputy's table, especially the social deputy's table - we're looking at transportation, as we mentioned earlier, and issues around - there are lots of different conversations and things going on in different departments, and I'd probably have to sit back and think about it, but there are lots of good things going on. I know how my colleagues think too. They think the same way I do.

THE CHAIR: That ends questioning. We'll give you about a minute to close it up. Who wants to do it? Mr. Montgomerie.

DUFF MONTGOMERIE: Well, the 80-year-old veteran will - or 80 years served, so I must be 100 years old.

First of all, my thanks to Jaime and her team at St. F.X. They're awesome. We deal with them on a regular basis. Nancy and her team - if you heard about ServiCom and the miracle that we're trying to work there, Nancy and her team and labour standards folks did a lot of that.

I will simply tell you one story that moved me considerably. I went to the graduation at the Irving Shipyard of the second cadre of women welders - I wasn't at the first one - I walk in, and there are these young women dressed to the nines with their families there, all excited because they're the second cadre. Now, all of a sudden, the doors open in the back. In walks the first cadre with their welders gear, their uniforms, etc., and Irving, who had been a little reluctant to do this, are totally on board because they see the results and the joy in what they're doing with those young women. They've now done it with African Nova Scotians and Indigenous Nova Scotians.

Those are the kinds of stories that we need to tell, where a corporation like Irving, because they had a shipyard they had to get up and running, joined with us to get that first cadre of young women. It's great.

The last comment I'll make: the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency has an ad. We do have an ad, and in it you'll see a young African Nova Scotian woman with welding gear walking. She spoke at the Irving Shipyard when we first brought on the African Nova Scotians. This African Nova Scotian woman told those young African Nova Scotians, "We're going in the program. I succeed. You can succeed."

They're all good stories. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, everybody, for their questions, and I thank all the staff for being here today. Much appreciated. Some good stuff going on.

We're going to jump right into committee business. Our next meeting will be May 28th, just having discussions back and forth here. It's a pretty full day. It's Women's Economic Security in Nova Scotia. We've got a whole list of witnesses, we do have some agenda-setting and ABCs that have to happen.

What we may do, if it's okay with the committee, is just send all of us back to our respective caucuses for agenda-setting; I think it's for June. We're going to need a witness for June. If everybody wants to go back to their respective caucus, take some time, talk it over, and potentially bring forward some witnesses.

Then in June, May if time permits, we could do the ABCs. If not, we could push that off to June, depending on how much time we have (Interruption) we have to do it by May. The ABCs will be done in May. I apologize. We're going to have a pretty packed May meeting; it's witnesses, agenda-setting for June, and ABCs.

LENORE ZANN: Will the agenda-setting be before 10:00 a.m. or at 10:00 a.m.?

THE CHAIR: We can feel it out. It will be up to the committee if you want to do it before or after the witness. We have the day right now as May 28th from 10:00 a.m. to noon for the May committee meeting.

LISA ROBERTS: I would like to suggest that the meeting do start at 9:30 a.m., given the number of witnesses and that they're coming from different organizations, it would be nice to actually have the time for debate on the agenda.

THE CHAIR: That's up to the committee. If the committee wants to come in for 9:30 a.m., I'm up at 6:00 a.m. with my children. A half an hour should give us enough time to debate, or we could do it afterwards. We could go 9:30 a.m. to noon, or we could go 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. We'll have to do a motion. What do we want to do?

Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I move that the May meeting be scheduled for 10:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. to allow for ABCs and agenda-setting.

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

The motion is carried.

Is that it? There we go. Have a great day. Enjoy, everybody.

[The committee adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]