

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Tuesday, June 25, 2019**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions  
&  
School Breakfast Program**

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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Brendan Maguire (Chair)  
Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Vice-Chair)  
Bill Horne  
Hugh MacKay  
Rafah DiCostanzo  
Brad Johns  
Tim Halman  
Tammy Martin

[Brendan Maguire was replaced by Ben Jessome]  
[Tammy Martin was replaced by Susan Leblanc.]

### In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

### WITNESSES

#### Nourish Nova Scotia

Margo Riebe-Butt,  
Executive Director

Aimee Gasparetto,  
Senior Food Coordinator - Ecology Action Centre  
&  
Nourish Board member

Heather Morse,  
Former Principal - AVRCE  
&  
Nourish Board member



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 2019**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES**

**10:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

Brendan Maguire

**VICE-CHAIR**

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting of the Human Resources Committee to order. My name is Suzanne Lohnes-Croft. I'm the Vice-Chair, but acting as Chair for this meeting.

In addition to reviewing the appointments to the ABCs, we will be receiving a presentation from Nourish Nova Scotia regarding the school breakfast program.

I would like to remind members and guests to put your phones on silent or vibrate. Should you need to use washrooms or need coffee or a refill of coffee or water, you may get them in the anteroom. Should we have an emergency, please exit through Granville Street and proceed to the Grand Parade, where we'll meet by St. Paul's Church.

I'll ask the committee members to introduce themselves. First, I would like to welcome Mr. Tim Halman of the PC caucus to the Human Resources Committee. He is going to be our new member.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We will get your introductions after we do some committee business. We are going to give our focus to our appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions. I do have a clarification as well from our last meeting. I'll ask the clerk to read it out for you.

JUDY KAVANAGH (Legislative Committee Clerk): At our May 28<sup>th</sup> meeting, some members asked about the titles of two people who were appointed to the Nova Scotia Municipal Finance Corporation as member UNSM representative. They wondered about the name because UNSM is in the process of changing its name.

I spoke with staff at the Executive Council office, who said on that date, May 28<sup>th</sup>, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities was in the process of changing its name to the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities and had already started using the name, but the change had not yet legally taken effect, so the appointment we made on May 28<sup>th</sup> was correct.

THE CHAIR: Any questions regarding that? I hope you all remembered that we were going to discuss this today.

We will move to the appointments. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: For the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, the Boxing Authority Board of Nova Scotia, we have three: Carmelita Cechetto-Shea as a member, Aaron Kinch as a member, and Lori Peters as a member.

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

The motion is carried.

Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: For the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, Nova Scotia Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation: Carol Barr, member; Jim Kavanaugh, member.

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

The motion is carried.

Thank you all for doing that bit of business. We will move on to the introduction of our guests from Nourish Nova Scotia. We will probably have you, Ms. Riebe-Butt, introduce the people with you and also do some opening statements.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: My name is Margo Riebe-Butt. I'm a registered dietitian and the executive director of Nourish Nova Scotia. To my right is Heather Morse, former principal at the Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education and Nourish board member. To my left is Amy Gasparetto, senior food coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre, also a Nourish board member.

Thank you for the opportunity to present on school breakfast programs this morning. For those of you not familiar with Nourish Nova Scotia, we are a registered non-profit and the provincial partner for school healthy eating programs.

We were established in 2012 by a network of stakeholders from around the province with experience in, and a passion for, growing healthy kids in Nova Scotia. We support the leadership, development, and implementation of school healthy eating programs by working in partnership with the Regional Centres for Education, the Francophone school board, Public Health, and other NGO partners like the Ecology Action Centre. We also advocate for investments in school food.

We receive core funding from the Government of Nova Scotia in the amount of \$275,000 annually, and fundraise as an organization and leverage partnerships and in-kind support in order to deliver our mandate.

In addition to breakfast programs, we co-developed and deliver a farm-to-school healthy fundraising program called Nourish Your Roots. Nourish Your Roots was created as a means for schools to raise funds to re-invest in their own school food programs by supporting the local farm economy.

Currently, we're looking to pilot our school food garden program: Grow Eat Learn. School gardens provide a hands-on opportunity for children and youth to build their food knowledge and skill, what we refer to as food literacy. Currently, there are over 100 school food gardens in the province.

Today's focus is breakfast programs, so please let me begin by giving a brief history of programs in Nova Scotia. Formerly, breakfast programs have been in Nova Scotia since the mid-1990s. Breakfast for Learning was the major player in the space beginning in the 1990s by providing grants and resources to form local BFL chapters. These chapters help to increase awareness and advocate for breakfast programs in their respective provinces and territories.

In part, due to the work of the Nova Scotia Breakfast for Learning chapter here, and with evidence to support, the provincial government began investing in breakfast programs in 2005. At this time, 98 schools had a program, which was about 23 per cent of all public schools at the time. Investment in 2005 was \$750,000, which was earmarked for P-6. A few years later, the funding opened up to include all grades - P-12 - based on the evidence.

The number of programs began to grow exponentially year over year; however, the funding was not keeping pace. This was when the idea to form Nourish came about. Stakeholders wanted to create an entity independent of government, but aligned in purpose to support children and youth in school food - one that could raise funds independently and issue charitable receipts.

Nourish Nova Scotia was launched to help enhance and expand breakfast programs and support implementation of the school food nutrition policy, as well as expand its mandate. The organization was created by grassroots stakeholders with vast experience working and volunteering in the field with supports from the Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

In 2018, funding for the breakfast program was increased to \$1.7 million under the new name School Healthy Eating Program, or SHEP as we call it. The focus on breakfast remained, but schools were able to move beyond breakfast to potentially offer a snack or lunch if they met the benchmarks of offering breakfast five days a week and the requirements of the Provincial Breakfast Program standards.

Our data collection for 2019 revealed that an impressive 94 per cent of public schools offer a universally accessible school breakfast program, most running five days a week - 91 per cent. Almost 38,000 Nova Scotia students access their breakfast program on any school day with over 6.3 million breakfasts served last year by a small army of volunteers numbering over 4,000.

The reasons for schools wanting to offer a breakfast program is simple: in order to learn well and reach the potential in the classroom and life, children need to be well nourished. Children come to school hungry for many reasons, ranging from long bus rides, early morning band and sports practices, busy family routines, household food insecurity, or simply not being hungry when they first wake up. Regardless of the reason, in order to learn and focus in the classroom, children need to fuel their minds and bodies.

The impact on education is substantial. Research demonstrates that students who eat breakfast at school perform better academically, behave better, and have fewer office referrals. They attend class more regularly and are on time. They participate more readily in class and showed improved concentration. Children spend the majority of their waking hours in school, and this presents an opportunity to offer them nutritious food and help them develop healthy eating patterns for life.

In addition to education, the health of children is a key factor in this discussion. At no other time in our history have we had a generation of children that won't outlive their parents. Our children are facing a health crisis. Over the past 30 years, obesity in youth has tripled, which puts children and adolescents at risk for many health problems, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and depression - diseases that would normally onset in middle age.

Twenty-five per cent of all foods consumed by children come from foods not in Canada's Food Guide. These are foods that are ultra processed and high in sugar, salt, and fat, and low in nutrients. Only one-third of Canadian children eat enough fruit and vegetables daily. Compounding the problem is the prevalence of food insecurity in Nova Scotia. The latest data shows one in seven households experiencing food insecurity. Child poverty rates are also among the highest in this country. Food insecurity can have a disproportionate impact on children affecting both their physical and their mental health.

Universal healthy school food programs are uniquely positioned to deal with issues of both inequity and ill health while supporting families. A universal healthy school food program presents a critical opportunity to offer nutritious food and support the development of healthy eating patterns for children and youth regardless of income. This helps to level the playing field and support children who may be vulnerable in a non-stigmatizing manner. Children who eat well-balanced and healthy meals have better health and education outcomes.

In Nova Scotia, about half of the provincial budget goes to support health care, and this number will continue to rise unless we increase investments in prevention, starting with our youngest citizens. The economic burden of diet-related disease in Canada is estimated to be \$13.8 billion annually, with over 47,000 people dying each year as a result.

Now I'm going to speak a little bit about how programs operate in Nova Scotia. They are owned and operated in the school communities where they exist. Nova Scotia breakfast programs are volunteer-driven, universally accessible, and offered at no cost to students or their families. Programs are intentionally diverse in nature and are designed to meet local needs and conditions. From hot sit-down breakfasts to grab and go to continental buffet and classroom baskets, no two programs are alike. School infrastructure, bell time, and bus arrivals all influence the type of program offered. Best practice standards are in place to guide program operations regardless of the delivery model.

A key best practice standard is one of universality, meaning all students are welcomed into the breakfast program. Evaluation data has demonstrated that school food programs targeting specific groups of students experience lower participation rates than those programs that are universal. In addition to being ineffective, targeted or means-tested programs are costly to monitor and to implement. Providing an open and universal program is effective in addressing social stigma that may be associated with breakfast programs. Breakfast programs are not merely a response to poverty. In fact, research has shown that ample family income does not guarantee that students come to school well nourished and ready to learn. Ultimately, universal school food programs reach a greater number of students who need the program.

Breakfast programs are funded by a patchwork of contributors. The Nova Scotia Government, through the Department of Health and Wellness and distributed by the Nova Scotia Health Authority, contributes \$1.7 million annually. The provincial monies provide

a sustainable source of partial funding which school communities leverage with local businesses, service groups, charitable sectors, and their own fundraising in order to sustain the program. The provincial program accounts for approximately 25 per cent of funds required. In addition to funding, schools identify kitchen equipment and infrastructure, support for menu planning, volunteer recruitment, and ongoing professional development as primary needs to continue to strengthen and build their breakfast programs.

You may be aware that Nourish is part of the Coalition for Healthy School Food, advocating to the federal government for a national school food program since 2013. I'm pleased to report that in the most recent budget, the federal government announced its commitment to co-create a national school food program with provinces and territories under the auspices of a food policy for Canada. More recently, the Minister of Agriculture, responsible for the food policy, included non-profits in the co-creation. We are excited for the opportunity to become involved.

Thank you for your time and attention. We look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your opening remarks. I have learned a lot about your program, and we'll learn more with questioning from our members.

We'll start with the PC caucus, and Mr. Halman.

TIM HALMAN: Good morning, and thank you very much for your presentation. As a former teacher, I can certainly attest to the impact you have not only on a school but on a community. I want to thank you for your ongoing work and efforts to support our youth. Your statement that outcomes are far improved when children have access to a healthy breakfast - I have seen that play out many times in my classroom. Certainly there were times when I could tell a student wasn't engaged, only to quietly send them to the breakfast program. Upon returning, you could see the difference in terms of attention span. So thank you so much for the great work that you do.

[10:15 a.m.]

On June 21<sup>st</sup>, I read an article in the *Chronicle Herald* by Dr. John Ross talking about the fact that hospitals aren't necessarily our health care system. Preventive care, in many respects, is a key part of our health care system. He referenced a lot about food and access to healthy, nutritious food. In the article, he indicated that on average, food travels to HRM - it's 4,000 kilometres, which is certainly a statistic that grabs your attention. Based on that, I'm curious - to what extent is there an emphasis on local products being served in our breakfast programs?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I think different schools own and operate the programs themselves, and so they deal with their own vendors so many just run to the grocery store,



but there are several schools that have made connections and are actually doing pilots to increase the amount of local food that is served in programs.

We have a lot of produce that's actually in season when it's typically out of season, so we do store root vegetables and apples and things like that very well in this province. Programs are encouraged, and they understand the benefit. I think the Nourish Your Roots program that we created as a fundraiser for schools helps to bring that message home. Some schools, in fact, have cemented relationships that are ongoing with farmers to have local produce delivered into their schools.

School food in general is a great opportunity to increase local food. I think some of the challenges are around procurement and having a system in place to easily get local food into schools. I'm wondering if I can ask Heather Morse to comment on that further in her experience.

HEATHER MORSE: Being a former school principal and teacher, and living in the Annapolis Valley, we're very fortunate to have a number of farms close by to the school. I found that they were constantly coming to our school and making donations, for example, during the apple season and so on, so we were able to access food through the local farmers. I'm not sure if it was always to their benefit when it came to costs, but we found that they were very generous in supporting us.

Working with healthy school communities, I still do that as a health board member and that is our constant message around the table of all the schools is trying to access and promote local school food with the local farmers.

TIM HALMAN: With respect to that - and I want to thank you for your comments - certainly it sounds like there are great initiatives being undertaken in our schools, especially with the Annapolis Valley.

I'm curious as to whether or not there is any sort of analysis where we look at whether or not students use the program because they've been impacted by the emphasis of eating healthier. That emphasis is in our school system - I know it is. Maybe not as formally as we want it, but that message is there. Or is it because they simply don't have access to food at home? Do we know what's driving this? Is it more that there has been a shift in attitude among our young people, that they want access to healthier food or is it simply that they don't have access to healthy food at home? Do we have any data on that?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I would say that we don't have data, but we have anecdotal data. People that are into programs - and I certainly never lose an opportunity to ask somebody why they're there and reports from principals that we gather annually - you'll see some of those comments.

For many, the breakfast program, in this day and age with parents being out of the house often early in the morning and kids left to care for themselves, it's a social place to come and enjoy a meal and get settled and ready for the day with their friends.

For some, it's because they don't have any food in the home. Even for some that may have food in the home but are living on a poverty line, the meal that they might get at school then allows the parents to be able to pack a lunch for them or to serve something maybe high quality for supper. So we do get those reports and motivations why kids come to the program.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to the NDP caucus. Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you for your presentation and thank you for the work you're doing. Before I ask my question, I just want to give a shout-out to folks working in food programs in Dartmouth North. I recently went to John MacNeil School and hung out with Diana and basically watched her do the breakfast program. She didn't need any help because she's so amazing at it.

She told me all about the different versions of the breakfast program that they do. They do a hot breakfast sometimes. Sometimes they do the grab and go. The one thing that struck me about it was after the kids came and went, and it was all over, that there were some extras, and she put them in a basket to give to the secretary. She said, those will be gone by recess. That was shocking to me. These kids all got what they needed, but there will still be more need after that. It just left me with a feeling of, what else can we do? What more can happen?

The other group that's doing amazing work in Dartmouth North is the library. Carla Foxe, who is our community librarian there, has taken on the work of providing lunches for the junior high kids at the library. She has presented to this community group - all the community groups come together once a month to speak about what's going on. She has presented some anecdotal statistics about the changes in referrals to the office, the marks - the actual achievement - of the students going up. This is from eating lunch at the library - hot lunches.

I also read an amazing book, when I was beginning to feed my own children, about this family that went to France and lived for a year - I forget the name of it now. These kids were super-picky eaters in this family. The husband was from France, so they went to live with his family for a year. At the school that the children attended, they had a full sit-down lunch. There was a chef. This was in a tiny little not-high-income town, I forget where but in rural France. At the school there was a chef. They ate family style with glass dishes, the whole deal, a three-course meal for lunch time.

Over the course of the year, the children's relationship to food changed because the culture of eating together was so different from their Canadian life. By the end of it, the

kids were cooking food and interested in all kinds of different flavours. It's quite an amazing book. The thing that I love about it is the idea that there is a lunch served at school, and the kids eat together.

Here's my question. Breakfast programs currently exist in at least 350 schools. Are you aware of any schools that are also offering lunch programs using a similar model in Nova Scotia?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Not similar to the France model for sure, but there are many pilot projects going on around the province right now that are showing really great promise for school food in terms of lunch programs. The timing is really nice because of course the government has announced working with provinces and territories to create a national school food program, which here could possibly be lunch.

I'm looking at the work that's being done on the South Shore right now in the food hub model and the fact that they're serving healthy foods to kids on a kind of a pay-what-you-can model. In Berwick there's a school food project going on where there's a salad bar and also the main options of the day, and kids are invited to go through. The only thing is they have to eat everything that they put on their plate. So they're trying things. Once again, I think it's that peer environment. When kids are eating with their peers, even though they might not eat that at home, or a parent couldn't force them to, they absolutely will there.

I'm very familiar with the France model and other models around the world. Some of my colleagues who are doing these pilots are also aware, and that's where we would like to get to. It's a cultural shift that we need to do here. We need to put value back into food. We're a culture of convenience, and what is convenient for life is not often convenient for health. They don't think that way in other countries. France has a very high value on food, and Italy and other countries. That's part of the culture shift that we're trying to do here - make it important here again for everyone.

I'm just wondering if either one of my colleagues would like to add anything to that.

HEATHER MORSE: Again, speaking as co-chair of our health board, the whole Western Zone of Nova Scotia, there's a health plan that's designed every three years and there are four priorities that we have received from many stakeholders and by way of surveys, in French and English. With those four priorities - one of them being food security and looking at community working together for a national school food program.

There is a lot of energy out there where people are trying to work together to promote this positive thing. What we're finding - and just to refer to the article that was in the newspaper - that's what we are trying to advocate for as a health board. We are not about getting more doctors - I know we need more doctors or faster surgeries - but looking

at starting with the children in the schools so that we don't have the incidents of diabetes type 2.

I worked in a very small rural school and I had five children that had diabetes type 2. I know that a lot of it was directly involved from their lack of good food. As Margo says, sometimes it could be someone that gets on the bus early in the morning to someone that doesn't have the food, to those living in poverty that's saying I'll provide a good supper for my children, but will you provide breakfast and lunch for them at the school.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: I would just add to Margo's point about the value we place on food and this being a cultural shift. In thinking about breakfast programs or school lunch programs, there are three components: there is the quality and the type of food that's being served, the availability of the food; there's the cost of the food and where it comes from, and trying to support local producers; but then there's also the environment in which children are being encouraged to eat and share food.

I would say those three elements are equally important to consider when designing programs that support healthy eating because quality, where food comes from, as well as the environment and that space that children are given to be able to share and prepare food together is equally important and I think contributes to the sort of value shift that we're trying to see, and create a culture of healthy eating across the province.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Certainly, even the amount of time children are given to eat - I know my own daughter who's in Grade 1 will come home and I'll go through her things and I'll say, you didn't eat whatever. She'll say, I didn't have time. I'm thinking, it's a sandwich and an orange. It's 20 minutes or something that they get to eat, and it's a big rush. It seems like even if we could give students more time to sit down and eat together it would be helpful.

My supplementary question is that we've heard from teachers. I know even at Dartmouth High School, I've seen the boxes of food in the principal's office where she has quick snacks to give out to people who need them, but we've heard from other teachers who fill in the gaps of hunger by buying food out of their own pockets and keeping it in their classroom so that the students have something to eat.

I'm wondering, as organizations, do you hear about that kind of thing? What are your thoughts on that, that teachers are having to fill in those gaps? Is there anything you're working on right now to address those specific hunger gaps throughout the day?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: That's a tough one. Certainly, those stories are true and they're throughout the province. Really, many years ago, breakfast programs were created to avoid the drawer opening and a granola bar being snuck to a kid because it wasn't respectful in many ways. It was like a child that needed something.

I understand certainly in areas where the socio-economic factors predict, you're always going to have kids at school hungry. That's why we've been putting so much effort around advocating for a national school food program. If there was a free breakfast program and potentially a pay-what-you-can lunch program where some kids wouldn't pay at all, then hopefully that problem would go away.

[10:30 a.m.]

To your point and your last question as well, with the example of the basket in the office with the leftovers from the breakfast program and the comment that they'll be gone, you'll see kids taking food home for later or perhaps a sibling who's too young to go to school. It's a real issue here.

I know the Ecology Action Centre and, Aimee, your work has been dealing with a number of those things. Do you want to comment further?

AIMEE GASPARETTO: Sure. I would say, as Margo stated in her opening statements, we know that one in seven across this province deals with food insecurity on a regular basis. For many communities, that can be much higher. Also, food insecurity disproportionately affects those who are already marginalized, children being part of that group. I think the thing to think about is that this is a multi-faceted approach.

Nourish Nova Scotia is part of a network of organizations or connects to a network of organizations across this province that are working to address food access and food insecurity. Breakfast programs and school lunch programs are a very significant part of that and do address many of the challenges that children are facing day to day. There are a lot of other ways which we have to start tackling this. I would say community centres and recreation centres and libraries are community spaces that are stepping up to fill the gaps of hunger, and there are other organizations across this province that are doing that as well. It's just to say a collection of organizations and government institutions are working on this from many angles. I think that's going to have to continue to be the approach.

For children from Primary to Grade 12, schools are a starting place. That's where children are every day. We know they're coming to schools, so to offer healthy food in our schools is a really good place to start to address this gap.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to the Liberal caucus. We'll have a question from Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: This brings me back, actually, to the late 1990s because my kids were born in the early 1990s, and they were in Primary in the late 1990s. I remember my girls would come home and talk about the breakfast program their school, Burton Ettinger, had, and there was a lot of lower economically - it was wonderful. I would

say to them, you shouldn't be at that program because you're not - they said, mom, nobody takes apples and oranges. They're left, so why can't I have it? Nobody takes them.

I'm just wondering what measures you have - I'm sure this is a lot more advanced now, hopefully than what they had at the time - of measuring. I know they used to have a lot of sugary cereals, and that's what went, and the apples and oranges were left. Kids were not used to them. What is your measuring of what goes? If every school has the right to put whatever they want, how are you controlling and measuring what is being served and the statistics of what is being used and what is being left?

I was just thinking as well, that's the time when you can capture them and maybe have a video of what is healthy eating in a language that children understand. This is an amazing time to capture them. My kids grew up on apples and cheese. That was the best snack they looked forward to. When they grew up, fruit was the snack - to have that kind of video showing them that is a snack. That is a more flavourful snack. I wondered if you have statistics or how the different schools are approaching this if it's left up to the school.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: First of all, let me say Burton Ettinger still has a thriving breakfast program, and if you have the opportunity to go back and visit, I encourage you to do so. You will see that the food offerings have changed significantly since your children went there.

One thing that's markedly different than when your children went there is that there is a school food and nutrition policy in place that came out in 2007. Adherence to that may not be great in some places, but it is an excellent guide to say what should be sold and served in schools, which covers the breakfast program as well. We have seen a shift - there are no sugary cereals, or if there are, I don't know where they are. The cereal list is pretty small actually of what is acceptable within the nutrient standards in the school food nutrition policy now.

Fruits and vegetables - that's something we've been working a lot on and we actually do track that data annually in meal day data collection - looking at encouraging schools to increase. Even by asking the question, sometimes it plants a seed.

Sometimes we don't consider juice to be a serving of fruit and vegetables. As a matter of fact, that is something that's not encouraged at all anymore. Canada's new food guide will support that because the sugar that's in juices is just like the sugar that's in other sugar-sweetened beverages like soda pop. Although there are other nutrients there, the portions of juice if they're served should be small. So we're really talking whole fruits and vegetables, and vegetables have become very popular.

I was at Dartmouth South Academy last week, supporting their breakfast program and just seeing how things are going, and one of the things that they offered in addition to whole fruit, which went very quickly, you'll be happy to know, were vegetables. There

were carrot sticks and celery sticks there, and the smallest amount - about a teaspoon - of ranch dressing. So that encourages the kids to take them and they went very quickly too.

What I do know is that when you present kids with those choices and they're offered without a push, that they're there to take, they will take them. I think the salad bar models that we're seeing going on across the province are real evidence to that.

So there is a strong policy to support. It needs to be revised because Canada's Food Guide has been revised and a lot of things have changed. The evidence that was based on is quite antiquated now, but there is new evidence that supports even healthier eating.

I encourage you to please go back. They have wonderful volunteers there too.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I would listen and say, why didn't I do that. So I will go to my school, but the school that my kids went to is not in my riding, but I can visit the other school breakfasts.

I also found that for me as an adult when I go to the store to get a cereal that has no sugar, honestly I have to go to three stores. I just want high fiber, no sugar. Truly, I have to go to three stores sometimes to find it, so how do the schools find it? Are you supplying it, or do they have to go to the store and get it themselves?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Part of our leadership role is, in fact, to help schools navigate the food policy and some of those requirements. We would produce lists annually that say what fits the policy, what is a maximum food, moderate food? Minimum foods are not to be served so we don't include those, but we do include the maximum and the moderate. We provide resources and menu planning and all those kinds of things to help support them.

To answer your question about the groceries, schools go out and procure their own food. Some do have it delivered. There are many different models around the province, but they're owned and operated in the schools where they exist, and so volunteers are often left to do the shopping. That's why having some of those resources available are so important.

THE CHAIR: We will go to the PC caucus - Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: Ladies, I don't if the Chair pointed out or not, but we have somebody in the back who records us, and that's why she keeps identifying who is speaking, so they can write it. It took me a while to clue into that. I thought it was kind of distracting in the beginning, but I got it now.

I really applaud the program; I'm a strong advocate for it. During the mid-1990s while in university, I was working one year at BC Silver Junior High in Spryfield, and I was working with inner-city youth. I'd stop at the No Frills that was out there on the way

to get my lunch every morning and I started to get in the habit of buying - you know how they'll have the clearance aisle of fruit, buy it today, it's good until tomorrow, type of thing? I'd buy some cookies, apples, bananas and stuff, and I'd take them in and lay them on the desk.

I figured the cookies and chips and stuff would be the thing that the kids took. What I found really interesting was that wasn't the stuff they took. The bananas, the apples - anything that was fruit-oriented went very quickly. It surprised me at the time that given the choice, the kids would take fruit - then as a father with two kids who are in elementary school, it's the other way around. Now my kids want all the junk food at lunch, and I let them take what they will eat because I would prefer them to eat at lunch. I'm fortunate enough to ensure that they have a good breakfast, a good supper, and usually a snack at night. I know a lot of people don't have that opportunity. I have also observed that the program is very much more social now that it's open to everybody. I think that that's a wonderful thing. It becomes a social opportunity for the kids to meet there.

My question is really around the 2015 Statistics Canada report that came out and identified Nova Scotia as having the highest poverty rate for children in Canada. I thought it was interesting because I think I read somewhere there is no such thing as child poverty. Children are affected by parents, so it's a reflection of poverty in the home, and thereby it comes down to children not having as well.

I'm curious to know, after the release of the report, what changes happened to the program. Was there an increase in interest and awareness from the public? Have there been any suggestions to change what the provincial funding will be since that report has come out? You just mentioned that 25 per cent of the program is currently funded by the province. Has there been an indication if there's an opportunity that that amount will be raising?

THE CHAIR: It was just in the budget. Ms. Riebe-Butt.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Interesting commentary on what kids will take. I think they often take what they don't have at home. I'm going to start to answer to this, and then I'm going to turn it over to Ms. Gasparetto.

In terms of the 2015 report and the provincial government investment in the breakfast program, prior to 2018, when the provincial money increased to \$1.7 million, it was stagnant at \$750,000 for years. So, 85 per cent of programs were still working with that same \$750,000, which really accounted to 2 per cent to 3 per cent of what the program cost, which was really nothing, for many years.

Perhaps the poverty report had something to do with it when the budget announcement came through in 2018, and there was new monies for a breakfast program. It was Nova Scotia then stepping up and coming on par with the rest of the country in terms



of provincial government investments, which usually are around about 20 per cent. I think it's important to note that these need to be cost-shared models. If the government funded 100 per cent, then the programs would not be valued in the communities where they exist, let alone the bureaucratic processes to manage them. These are community-run programs, and it was a very welcome investment to have that increase.

In terms of what the tipping point was to make that happen, I would like to say it's our great advocacy work and the fact that we're doing wonderful things and it's showing results, but I'm pretty sure it's probably not.

Aimee, would you like to comment on that report and anything that you have seen changed out of that?

AIMEE GASPARETTO: It's hard to know. I think what that report illuminated for many people across the province was just how pressing this issue of food insecurity is, particularly for our children in Nova Scotia. I think it was surprising for many that Nova Scotia has some of the highest rates of household food insecurity, particularly in Halifax as well. If anything, I think there's a building awareness and a momentum around the understanding of the direct links between poverty and food insecurity and that these issues co-exist and that in order to address one, we have to address the other.

At the Ecology Action Centre, we have been working on food access issues for 17 years, and we have had investments from the federal government around this issue. We have seen new partnerships and networks and a flurry of activity happening around this province to address issues of food insecurity. A lot of that is happening at the ground level. Communities are starting to step into action and to organize around these issues and start to initiate programs and advocate on behalf of good policy. I think it needs to be supported in a really big way. What I would say is that in general, there is a growing awareness of this issue and a real understanding to address this in a very multi-faceted approach.

[10:45 a.m.]

BRAD JOHNS: There was an increase in funding, basically an increase in awareness. Has that flowed through to an increase in volunteers or community groups? I know in our area the local Lions Club used to assist some schools. Have you seen other groups come on and more volunteers coming out who may not have students who are directly in school but are coming out?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Yes, there has been an increase in volunteerism actually. We do record that annually in data collection. This year we saw over 4,100 volunteers, which was up markedly from the years previous. That is one thing. I think a lot of times, schools need to have the time and the ability to reach out to their community to leverage support. There are some communities that have been doing - I'm just thinking about Bill Horne here with Beaver Bank-Kinsac Elementary School, and a program that has been in

place for 25 years with a backbone of volunteers and supporters you would not believe, in a beautiful program that that is. You're so lucky to have that in your constituency.

I just want to go back a little bit on the food insecurity issue and the poverty issue. We would be really remiss if we didn't talk about some of the policy drivers around affordable housing and a living wage that we have to talk about when we talk about food insecurity. Those are the bigger issues that we need to tackle. What you're finding right now and why school food is such a huge topic is because it's a tangible thing that community groups and others can cotton on to that has the ability to have an impact. It's a bit of a stopgap in many ways, but it's something that can also change the course and the trajectory of where we're headed in terms of health.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: I just wanted to add and build off Margo's comment, just to make note that it is an opportunity that people have in their communities to participate and to get involved. In order to participate as a volunteer or as an active citizen in your community, it requires basic living standards and basic needs being met.

I just want to point out that volunteerism - those are opportunities that are not afforded to everyone within our communities. These things that Margo is talking about like affordable housing, affordable transportation, and a living wage are the policy mechanisms that enable parents and community members to really engage and participate in their communities in a very active way.

I would like to say we are definitely seeing more engagement and a huge willingness to support these positive experiences in community, but they are opportunities that aren't afforded to everyone.

THE CHAIR: We'll move along to the NDP caucus. Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I think I'm going to switch gears and pick up on this discussion because I think that you're completely right. I think that also we have to look at the age of our volunteering population right now. Probably, when we think about those who can volunteer and have access to that, it's more than likely that a good portion of them are recently retired baby boomers. Eventually, that population of volunteers or people who are able to volunteer in that way is going to diminish.

I have been thinking a lot about this because over the last several years, I have noticed a turn in the current government's funding programs at various levels that enable volunteerism and encourage it, but I worry about those same programs, which do great things in communities. It's putting the onus on community as opposed to having actual government policy investment and value in the programs that they're funding. I think about the community transportation grants. I think about the Building Vibrant Community Grant. They're all great and the things that happen are awesome, but it's not sustainable.

Therefore, I'm wondering if you know of any breakfast programs or school food programs currently in the province that have any paid staff.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Paid staff might be a bit of a stretch, but certainly the funding is allowed to support some honoraria and wage replacement. I knew of a program in Yarmouth that actually had an educational assistant that was compensated for one extra hour to support the school breakfast program. She actually worked with an army of Grade 6 volunteers, which kind of speaks to your other point.

I do have some statistics here around volunteers. About one-quarter of them are coming from the community. A large number of volunteers are actually students. It's a way to help them build food skills and self-esteem and get them empowered by helping out the school itself. Breakfast programs draw a large extent on that - and staff. People think that school staff are told to do certain things or they have different responsibilities, but in fact, many staff volunteer their time for this program. I'm wondering, Heather, if you have any insights on the volunteer model?

HEATHER MORSE: With regard to staff - as a school principal, many times we would sit and look at the importance of our food program, and we would build the breakfast program as part of duty. So you'd have to do duty at recess time or at lunch hour, but they would take on two duties or whatever. We had our breakfast club covered by the staff at the school that I was at.

I think again, I go back to the health board. We are reaching out to more organizations and we try to have a number of youth sit around our table, which their input is invaluable, and some of the recommendations that our youth came up with - why don't we take food handling courses in the school? We not only get to do a few volunteer hours, but when we go off to university and NSCC or whatever, we're going to have that on our resumé. They came up with that idea so that is something that we're working on in the area where I am, of doing food handling with many food students in our Regional Centre for Education. I think that's going to be very positive - just in that small area, but it's a start.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I would just like to add that there is a little bit of a burning issue, especially in HRM around volunteerism because in the school system, in order to volunteer in a school, you have to have a couple of background checks, and it costs \$30. Everywhere else in the province, the municipality covers that. We're currently trying to work to make a case to Halifax Council to actually waive that fee for schools.

I recognize that it is a revenue generator and perhaps obliterating it altogether might not happen, but as a barrier in communities - and they often struggle with volunteers in those communities because they cannot afford the \$30 to get that background check. It's a problem. It has definitely been an identified barrier. I just wanted to raise that.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I have a supplementary comment - thank you for all of that. I think about the expansion - the hopefulness and the idea that we could have an amazing breakfast and lunch program in our schools and with federal funding and the wish list and all the things, like the future - what could be possible.

I do think that part of that system has to be people who are paid to plan menus and to source the food and to work with the farmers and to make sure that it's running properly. I just want to put that out there that I think part of the investment needs to be money for people to run the programs, and I wonder what you think of that. I see heads nodding.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: I agree wholeheartedly - whether we're talking about breakfast programs in schools or food access programs across the board. The federal government committed to a \$50 million investment in a local food infrastructure fund, and one of the things we're trying to communicate is that with physical infrastructure - whether it be kitchens or classrooms or food access hubs - there is a real layer of the social infrastructure.

We're trying to communicate this idea of staff time, people, the networks, the partnerships, the coordination of these organizations - the time that organizations are investing in connecting the dots between the food system, between local farmers, between schools, between parents. It's essential time and energy and knowledge and expertise that's being invested in these challenges we're facing.

One of the things we talk about often is the social infrastructure and the need to invest in that, so I think it's something we have to continue to do - knowing that the physical infrastructure and the spaces are very important as well, but the people and the connection between those people is equally valuable and important, I would say.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Certainly, we have heard from our liaisons all across Nova Scotia that should a national school food program by way of lunch come in, that it would not be sustainable on a volunteer model. We've already had conversations. We're trying to get the lay of the land to try to feel things out and what is required.

I think that's an investment well made. There's research that shows other jurisdictions that have made those investments and facilitators in the school that may look after physical activity and food-related programs, that it's very effective and I think it is money well spent.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to the Liberal caucus - Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you for being here this morning. I'm just curious about how your program considers the fact that probably initiating participation in the breakfast program can present a challenge in itself for people. I guess I say this humbly - it can be embarrassing probably for folks to participate in the program, and I'm wondering how your

organization works to ensure that students are comfortable in the schools and parents are comfortable participating in the program.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I'll start and then turn it over to Ms. Morse. Thank you for that question. I think it's the adults that really carry the stigma - it's not the kids. Programs have been universally welcoming, and one of the provincial breakfast program standards is really about promotion of a program. There are some schools that go as far as getting a stand-up banner, like "Welcome to the Breakfast Program." They're seen as social hubs where kids congregate in the morning.

I think we've done a pretty good job of removing that stigma. It's trying to get the adults to understand that now and not to carry that, so there's a whole promotional piece around that - making them welcoming and making sure that school staff understand why programs need to be universal. At the end of the day, kids that need them most will not come if it's a targeted or stigmatized program - they just won't, and we know that. So that's been kind of one of the number one things that we've done. Maybe Heather could speak to how she handled that in her time.

HEATHER MORSE: Margo is right on in terms of discussing with staff. I'd often put that on a staff meeting - the importance of everyone, because you do have people say, why is so-and-so going? Their mother or father has a lot of money.

I've also had many parents that would come in and say, I'm so embarrassed. I heard that my son went to breakfast club. I'm standing at the door when they get off the bus saying, "breakfast club, breakfast club." A number of children would come to me and say, why can't I go to breakfast club, because my friends are there? They were being told by the adults that you really don't need to.

[11:00 a.m.]

One of the discussions - and I had an extremely supportive home and school one evening - was to bring the students in and talk about the importance that they felt about going to breakfast club. So I would say to parents, if you really feel you don't want your child going there because you can afford it, often they would make donations of nutritious food for us. That seemed to make a lot of the parents feel that they were at least making some contribution and not taking it from someone else.

THE CHAIR: That's an excellent idea. Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: It sounds like one of the many lessons we can learn from our children. Related perhaps, how does your outreach or communication work in terms of engaging new parents who have children who are just beginning to enter the school system?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: A few ways. Once again, this is done on a school by school basis, but I know a lot of schools have that as part of their Primary orientation. I see Heather nodding, for the record. Also, newsletters home, promotion on the website. Schools have many clever ways to try to make that as open, welcoming and transparent as possible. "Our school has a breakfast program" would be part of Primary orientation - "These are the types of things that are served, everybody is welcome to come."

For some families, perhaps children only access occasionally - if somebody forgot milk for a favourite cereal or something like that at home. It happens to all busy families. It's promoted very positively in that respect.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Morse, do you have anything to add to that?

HEATHER MORSE: No, just the fact that I'm very much an advocate for students, obviously in my former years, of bringing the students into the school and often inviting parents to come into such things as breakfast club or the healthy snack or the lunch. Children would talk to them about the importance of it. Again, we can learn a great deal by empowering our youth.

THE CHAIR: We'll turn it over to the PC caucus - Mr. Halman.

TIM HALMAN: Ms. Riebe-Butt, with respect to fees as an obstacle to volunteerism - specifically within the HRM - I just want you to be aware that this might be something you want to bring up with Elwin LeRoux. For our athletics programs - I used to be a high school athletic director - we encountered that obstacle to volunteers because of the fees. I know we're all in agreement to the importance of these background checks. We used to just build those fees into the annual budget of a sports team, so that fee was absorbed. So there is a precedent and perhaps that's a conversation you could have with the HRCE.

Ms. Morse, I would have loved to have worked for you as a principal. What a community you built up with respect to the breakfast program. Certainly, as an educator, you know the informal mechanisms we build into things like the breakfast programs where teachers on staff are constantly monitoring how our students are doing. Those informal mechanisms are so important. Often a breakfast program in a school is a great safety net to finding out what's going on in the students' lives.

We have seen some very important investments into our breakfast program. We certainly see a cost-shared model. Outside of those informal mechanisms that principals and vice-principals and staff have - whether it's in the youth health centre or in the breakfast program, have there been any formal mechanisms built in to identify if students require enhanced supports? Is there any formal system being developed to try to put a student on a track to perhaps access mental health services or things of that nature, if we know that they require further supports?

HEATHER MORSE: Again, in the school where I worked, it was a small rural school so I didn't have a large population - but not really anything formal. I really have to say that the principal has to be a champion in the school for all programs, whether you agree or don't agree.

Often at the beginning of the year teachers would kind of identify people within their classroom that maybe had some issues, whether it be food, clothing, heat bills and so on. You hear children talking so often, we would identify a certain number of students for each teacher, and they, for example, would say, good morning, Heather, and talk to the child, even though it wasn't in their classroom.

I think from there, informally, we'd often say - and that was always on topic at our beloved staff meetings - what are some students out there that we may need to support and what can we do to support the families? It could be things like we supported maybe 20 families in a small area at Christmastime. Nobody knew about that. They would just give me a number of names and I looked after it because, again, trying to get rid of that stigma because that will stop not only children, but adults if they feel - I'm not going to be going to the food bank. There are so many things out there with stigma.

To answer your question, not really formal, but just a good vision of what's going on in the school, and then reporting it back to me. We had a committee that we would sit and just kind of look at - what are some areas that we might want to provide in the school? A lot of the children could not afford - again, we are fortunate to have a home and school that paid for school supplies. We worked for that. Children wanted to belong to sports teams and so on; we tried to help provide that support for some.

TIM HALMAN: Within the scope of your professional judgment, do you think we should develop some type of formal mechanism that could allow us to help students who go to a breakfast program, to take it outside of that informal mechanism that's often built within a school and, to your point, often is that the encouragement and leadership of an administrator? Do you see potential there for us to develop a formal mechanism?

HEATHER MORSE: We're all about advocacy and we need to be doing that in a variety of settings where we are. To get something into a formal process - I guess going back to my history at the school - I think we should, but it often takes a very long time to work towards that.

I'll go back to putting my hat on as working with the health board. I think working with other community organizations so that we know this is an issue because with the whole food security - I had invited all of our health chairs to attend a school meeting, hosted at the school, and people around the table were quite - why would you have a meeting in a school? Then we had the staff at the cafeteria serve the healthy food and it was, gee, we never had food like this at a meeting. We usually have muffins and coffee and so on. Then

we had our healthy school community nutritionist do a presentation about what our needs are. Many of the people around the table did not even know we had such an organization.

So my goal was to try to encourage - as a former educator and now working as a volunteer with the health board - to work within the schools to be able to do exactly what it is that you're suggesting. It takes a lot of people power and a lot of advocacy to do that.

THE CHAIR: We'll move to the NDP caucus - Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to go back to the federal government announcement of their intention to work with provinces and territories towards the creation of a national school food program, but we know in that announcement there was no real funding attached to it. I'm just wondering if you can talk about what you envision that program to look like in the schools in Nova Scotia and what your wish list would be. What would you say to the federal government? If this was a federal committee, what would you be asking for right now in terms of that program?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Great question. I'll address the first part of your question. There was no funding attached to that commitment. Personally, I was not disappointed in that and I'm going to tell you why. If there had been funding attached to that, then very quickly that money would have had to have been spent, and I don't think the program's creation is anywhere close to that.

I really see this as three different phases - the creation of this program. The first phase I see is consultation, so very broad consultation. This is Canada, and as different as the programs look in Nova Scotia, they look remarkably different right across the country. I think a real consultation that is actually meaningful and intentional and not for any other reason than to create the very best program that we can have here in Canada that we can be proud of will take time. I see that as the first phase.

The second phase I really see as the negotiation phase - how is the money going to flow from the provinces and territories and the federal government? What does that look like? Who will it flow through? Who is going to be responsible? All of that would have to be negotiated from the provinces and territories to the federal government. It's probably going to look a little bit different, depending on where you are. I see that as a phase. Then the third phase, of course, is the all-important implementation phase.

I see it as a little bit of a long process, but that doesn't bother me because I think it has to be really thoughtful. We can no longer throw money at a problem. It's wasteful. We need this to be a non-partisan issue so that government after government just picks up the ball and keeps moving it down the lane, so that we can actually make the impact that this was intended to do.



My vision might be very well different from the vision of my colleague in New Brunswick, but I think I can safely say for many members of the coalition that we envision a framework to set very high principles and standards that a program would be developed around. Obviously, the nutrition content is foremost, but there are many other things around a comprehensive program that would need to be addressed.

You talked about time to eat. We talk about infrastructure. We talk about all those really high level principles. I think all of those need to be sussed out and then respecting the diversity - even Indigenous food ways and how do we bring Indigenous communities into this? They are not currently supported through the school program.

So there are a lot of considerations and I don't think any one group right now has all the answers. I think we have to have open dialogue and a meaningful consultation. I think many of you around this table may be tasked with some of these tough questions and I hope you will think to give us a call and other groups that are working in this - because we're on the ground and we're doing it.

I was really pleased that the second announcement that came out of the Minister of Agriculture under food policy for Canada felt that non-profits needed to be part of that consultation, because I think very much we do. I'm not going to tell you how to manage your money and which pathways it should go.

It's an across-government initiative. It touches economic development. It touches agriculture. It touches health. Obviously it touches education - and there are probably many others I'm not thinking of. So yes, it's a big vision. I'm very excited for it - waited a long time.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: I think it's just enhancing what Margo said. I think one of the most important things about the delivery of this policy is that it does acknowledge the work that has already been happening within each province, and that's going to be different.

If we're talking about a federal delivery partner who's directing money straight into communities or provincial partners, those things matter because we already have established networks, established organizations that are delivering these programs on the ground. I think not only just consultation, they're critical to the success of these programs because of what we've been learning over the years.

I think Nourish Nova Scotia alone has a wealth of lessons learned and information and partnerships and network established that will help our province deliver a successful program and set up our schools for success. It's my hope and understanding that other provinces have the same, but recognizing that and really being thoughtful about that approach is critical.

Then of course, we've talked about principles like universality, flexible approaches - how you ensure that money actually serves the needs of particular communities, and that takes their engagement and involvement.

So I think those principles are there and we can articulate those, but ultimately, it's the engagement and the design that's absolutely critical to make sure that the programs are set up for success.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm wondering if you know what percentage of schools in Nova Scotia do not have a kitchen and/or cafeteria. I'm wondering if that makes a difference in what the schools are able to offer.

[11:15 a.m.]

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I don't know that exact percentage. I can tell you that there are a lot of them, and absolutely, it will make a difference. When I spoke to economic development and the opportunities that a national school food program can have not only for local farmers and procurement, but also for entrepreneurs and innovators, there will be things like hub kitchens where people are actually preparing on-site and delivering to the school - so long as it meets the nutrition standards of those programs.

That's happening now, unfortunately, sometimes the standards aren't where they need to be with businesses. Certainly, there are opportunities for that.

I would also say that it's an opportunity for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to think about the built environment as they're creating new schools and making sure that the infrastructure is in place to support a healthy food environment in school.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to the Liberal caucus - Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Going along what you've been talking about, it's very important that your programs, whatever they are, are sustainable. You've been talking about that all morning too.

You're looking at going slow, getting more corporate industry involved with the school programs, other community groups, and local groups too. I'm just wondering if you have any more expansion to see - we are giving all the food right now to elementary schools. Is that going to go up to the high school level at some point? I'm not sure of what you might be thinking about, so if you can think of ideas that you have that you would see the program being run smoothly and sustainably and also economically.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Can I just ask a clarifying question? Are we speaking about a potential national school food program or the breakfast program?

BILL HORNE: The breakfast program. It may end up going national - who knows.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: First of all, breakfast programs are now in all grades - P-12 - and that funding actually flows to all schools in the province. When it originally came out, it was just Primary to Grade 6, but the evidence pointed out otherwise. Actually, kids in their middle years have the worst eating habits, so they've been P-12 for some time.

Sustainability is always an issue. There are schools that do struggle for funding for their breakfast program as it exists. That's one of the reasons we created the Nourish Your Roots program. It's a farm-to-school fundraising program that's a win-win. Not only does it adhere to the policy in terms of a fundraising directive and role-model healthy food versus chocolate bars, it also is a way for schools to raise money for their food programs. That's the only reason we're in that business. If they were raising money for the other important programs they offer, that's nice, but that's not our business.

As a registered charity, we invest heavily in that Nourish Your Roots program so schools can raise a significant amount of money to run their breakfast program. Depending on the area where that program is, parents contribute to breakfast programs all the time. So the parent that is mortified that their child is going to the breakfast program - because they carry the stigma, not the child - they'll often contribute.

There are businesses that have stepped in and they may do a cereal drive. It's kind of a feel-good thing to be involved in a breakfast program, and a lot of people do like to step up and in.

Sustainability is hugely important, so that's why we're continuing to try to innovate and try to help schools. We have things on our website like template letters - how to reach out to service or community groups, how to fundraise yourself and all those kinds of things. I think maybe, Heather, in your formal role you could speak to that a little bit.

HEATHER MORSE: As I started to reach out more to the community - as a school administrator, often you think the responsibility is yours and yours alone. So reaching out to the community - and there were organizations like Rotary and Lions, as was mentioned, that would often come in and help support us with these initiatives.

From there - and again I'm going back to my role with the health board - we are reaching out to a number of stakeholders. As an example, I mentioned the meeting that we had at the school that was foreign to people and eating food from the cafeteria. We now have people working together as a community to go out and look at - we have a healthy food policy in Annapolis County - so looking at not only something that's happening in the school, but is now going out into the community.

Not everybody is jumping up and down to think, are they going to take the French fries out of the arena, because nobody will eat anything except the French fries and the hamburgers.

We have a healthy food policy in the Town of Berwick, where I live, and after I leave this meeting, we'll be meeting with individual councillors to talk about a healthy food policy in Kings County - deciding that when you only have a 10-minute presentation, we're not lobbying, we're just trying to give more information for when they come to the meetings.

Again, a lot of this started in the school and I have to apologize and go back to the youth again - a lot of these ideas are coming from empowering our youth, that we should be reaching out and working as a community. I see a real shift in people working in their little silos. I'm working on housing, so don't talk to me about food. I'm working on social isolation, don't talk to me about food. Again, I'm speaking only from the Annapolis Valley area but now I see a real strong banding of community as one.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: I think I just want to highlight the point - investments in school food programs in Nova Scotia present a real opportunity for our government to think about how to also leverage priorities within other departments. We've spoken about that a little bit, but in terms of sustainability, when we're investing in healthy food in schools, we can also be investing in local food procurement and support for our farmers, and so connecting those in terms of the design of this program is critical because it's going to serve the local economy in a multitude of ways if we think about the interconnectedness of different food goals.

In terms of building sustainability, there is fundraising capacity in sustainability on the school's component, which we're working on and it's developing and growing, but how do we as a provincial government think about the intersectionality of goals within different departments and think, how do schools become a big market in terms of institutional procurement for our local farmers and food producers? Just having that in our minds as we design this program is critical to the sustainability of it.

BILL HORNE: Just an observation: the few times I've been at the school when they were doing the breakfast programs in Beaver Bank was the fact that the students seemed to be totally common in their talking. They're really getting along well. I don't see anything wrong with that so obviously, the program itself is successful in many other ways. I'm sure there are more than just how the students become so accepting of all the other students. I don't know if you have a comment on that.

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I am going to comment, because I am very familiar with that program and I've known that program for such a long time. I'm always marvelling at the very strong volunteers there - Sheila King and crew, and the support that she has had from her community and how she has gone out and engaged that broader community.

She was one of the first programs I ever witnessed doing non-formal nutrition education as part of the breakfast program. They would do really interesting things. I remember the year that they took the summer and painted the room that they had for the breakfast program in the colours of the food guide. Each food guide was laminated and put on the table, and the kids really enjoyed trying to figure out which foods they had on their plate that actually met the food guide.

They stood behind this buffet table and greeted the children and smiled at the children every morning and helped them with their manners. I always get a very warm and fuzzy feeling when I think about those volunteers - how strong they are and continue to be in so many aspects, and how well they've serviced that community. I put her forward for many awards over the years and she has won every single one of them.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to Mr. Halman of the PC caucus.

TIM HALMAN: When I was a school teacher, and my students were bused in from the Waverley Road in Dartmouth East, I can remember a few of my students telling me, we had a great breakfast before we got on the bus. I was like, that's great, your parents or guardians made that for you? They're like, no, the Port Wallis United Church made the breakfast for us. The school bus stop was right in front of that church, and Pastor Ivan Gregan and the staff would prepare a nutritious breakfast for the kids. It was so amazing. The only way I found out about it was through the students.

To your point of working together as a community - I know all of us, especially as elected officials, we do see those silos and we're always looking for those opportunities to break them down and bring in the various stakeholders.

Obviously, there is an enormous amount of success that we're finding with our breakfast programs in our schools. We know it anecdotally. The data is backing that up. To what extent are we envisioning having this within community centres - perhaps even within faith-based organizations, if they're so inclined to offer that? Are there any plans or analysis to try to bring it into community organizations provincially?

I know there are examples where this is happening throughout the province. Is there sort of a strategic plan to try to achieve that?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I would say no strategic plan, but certainly communities have rallied around programs in various areas. In various communities, the breakfast program is held in a community centre or in a church basement. That's not uncommon. The provincial funding, though, over the years - unless they had a direct connection with a school, they wouldn't be eligible for the breakfast program funding. So things have morphed and changed there.

Some of the community groups and faith-based groups don't care anyway and they continue to run programs. It's interesting - I've also seen elementary schools actually, sometimes a bus stop for high school students in various areas, and oftentimes those students will come in and not only volunteer with the program, but have breakfast themselves there.

There are a lot of different kind of cobbled-together ideas. I think wherever children live, work, and play is a good environment to try to establish good eating habits and try to have healthy programs around them. But no, not to my knowledge is there any strategic plan to broaden that out. Aimee, I don't know if you have any other sense of that.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: No, I don't think there's a structured plan, but I think if we want to set a bold vision across the province, it is about thinking about the multitude of institutions that we come into contact with on a day-to-day basis. There are schools, community centres, our workplaces - how is it that we're creating supportive food environments in all of those spaces?

I don't think the funding mechanism needs to be the same for all of those, but how are we using that frame of thought to design the social spaces that we're interacting with every day? I would say that at the Ecology Action Centre, that is one thing we work on - ensuring that healthy food access is available in our communities, and we do that through all kinds of different ways.

I think it's just thinking in our communities about having that bigger vision and making sure that they're connected. It may be different the way it shows up in schools, but ultimately, we need to be thinking that way for community centres and workplaces and things like that.

TIM HALMAN: Are there statistics or data where the program is most needed in our province? Do we know the area of most need in Nova Scotia?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: Certainly, we have access to the same data that everybody else does in terms of the community health surveys and you see levels of poverty. If you want to kind of frame it around where the highest incidence of poverty exists in the province, go to Eskasoni first and then work our way out. That is absolutely known.

Because we offer a universal program, we know that and we need to know these kinds of things, but programs need to be universal. There is an organization that puts their money out around socio-economic demographics using postal codes. The problem with that is not only do demographics shift long before the survey data catches up and neighborhoods are gentrified, but it continues to add a stigma to a program.

They call it a targeted universal program. So within a school, all students would have access, but their funding would be targeted to certain postal codes. Like I said, the

problem with that is, I'm trying to get the parents now getting rid of the stigma if we only have it for a few, and it doesn't mesh with the data, that we know that the numbers don't equal the amount of kids that live in food-insecure households and the number of kids that access a program on a daily basis.

[11:30 a.m.]

We know that kids come to school hungry for a host of reasons - many which I mentioned earlier. So we just have to level the playing field and make sure they all have healthy foods so that they can focus and learn in the classroom.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'd like to talk a little bit more about the issues around food insecurity. According to an article in the April 2019 edition of *The Walrus*, nearly 20 per cent of the population of Halifax are food insecure. That's the highest rate of food insecurity of any Canadian city. In 2017, a report by *Food Ark* indicates that Nova Scotia has the highest rate of food insecurity of any province in the country.

I'm wondering if we can talk a little bit about that and why you think it is that food insecurity is such a serious and worsening problem in Nova Scotia.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: I think it points to some of the things we were talking about earlier in terms of when families are making choices about food. The food budget is often one of the last ones to be considered after we've paid for housing, after we've paid for transportation, after we've paid for child care and the basic necessities to live in the world today. Then we make decisions around food and the food choices we make.

I would say for a lot of people who are experiencing food insecurity, there are no choices about food. This speaks to why we see people who live with food insecurity every day, why they're making unhealthy choices around food - because they literally have no options.

As to why we have some of the highest rates across Nova Scotia, that does speak to social services, social assistance. It's these fundamental policy issues that allow people to meet their basic needs every day. So again, it goes back to affordable housing policy, it goes back to child care and just the cost of living in this province versus income. It is that simple.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Income inadequacy is at the heart of food insecurity.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: It is. There is a direct correlation.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Absolutely. So when we talk about affordable housing, when we talk about child care, in your view, what would be the effective policies that would enable people to not have to choose one over the other?

I just had folks in my office a couple of weeks ago whose power has been cut off. I was saying at another committee meeting, this is power cut-off season because it's finally warm enough out that Nova Scotia Power will say, I'm sorry, you haven't paid your bill and now we will cut you off.

Several constituents have come in in the last couple of weeks about this issue. So when we were talking about how to figure out how to get their power turned back on again, it's like, what can you pay a month? Well, I could pay this much, but that means I won't be eating. That is it.

What are the policies that would be effective for addressing food insecurity? You've mentioned the categories, but in your view, what are the effective policies?

AIMEE GASPARETTO: They are very good questions and I don't actually feel prepared to answer directly today in the sense that there are people across this country doing a very thorough analysis on things like living wage, on basic income. All of these things are ideas, but I think they require a lot more exploration.

As you may know, the basic income pilot in Ontario was cancelled, and I think that was a very substantial pilot that was telling us things about what it means to have an income floor for residents and how to support that.

I hesitate to name specific policies - we seem to have a very limited vision around these kinds of things. I mean, what if child care centres actually existed in our workplaces and how do we support employers to be part of the child care solution?

I think there's just a wealth of so many ideas that could be applicable to a different context, but I don't have the deep analysis lens to be able to say, I think this, this, and this. It's information we can work with our partners to say, here's what I think would work for Nova Scotia, but we haven't done that analysis specifically at the Ecology Action Centre.

I would say there are others in this province that may have specific policy objectives like Feed Nova Scotia who are working a little bit more directly on hunger and poverty issues, but we would need a bit of time to really pull those direct policy asks together.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over to Ms. DiCostanzo of the Liberal caucus.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I have a very interesting question in regard to the program, especially in Halifax where there is a lot of immigrant population, especially in



my riding. My first question is: How many of the immigrant children are going through this program, if you have any idea?

The second is really the most traumatic thing. I'm sure Ms. Gasparetto had heard it in her household from her in-laws - for the Greeks, for the Italians who came here 50 years ago, and the kids went to school and brought a different kind of sandwich or a different kind of food and how they were looked at. They were mortified to open their lunch and to have a mortadella sandwich or the Lebanese with their - we do not grow up on having sweets or sugary yogurt or all these things are so different, but these cultures actually bring food that's healthier.

Are we absorbing that and how can we maybe introduce a day of - once a week it's a different culture breakfast so that it allows the other children around them to be educated that other food isn't bad or it's actually tastier sometimes and healthier? Sugar is so common in our diet here in North America compared to what these wonderful cultures are bringing.

I grew up having yogurt, bread, and olive oil or an olive with it. That was my breakfast. It's different - much healthier, easier. There is literally no sugar in our diet, compared to what we have here in Canada. How can we work to absorb that as a positive? First, it's less trauma for the kids to feel that the food isn't that horrible and embarrassing. They're literally embarrassed to eat in school in front of their Canadian friends.

It's a really good opportunity to take the positive from the other cultures, as well as make them more welcomed. Is that anything you guys have thought about?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I'm going to say that I was also one of those children. You might not know that by looking at me, but Riebe is my name, and that's a German name, so I took liverwurst on rye bread to school, which was not popular and seldom didn't make it to school, quite frankly, because I was so embarrassed. So I certainly understand that.

In terms of the wonderful diversity of foods that now we have a luxury of having access to is just really providing a lot of opportunity in the schools, and schools do embrace it. I remember in East St. Margarets, they celebrated Chinese New Year many years ago and they had appropriate foods there because there were only two students in a school that looked different from the other students and they wanted to celebrate and embrace, and they've done that.

I'm seeing examples of even kind of more mainstream foods that came from other cultures as part of breakfast program. Hummus is oftentimes a mainstay on a breakfast buffet because it's one of those things that's really great with vegetables. As we're trying to increase the fruit and vegetable consumption, these are positive things that are coming

about. I'm wondering if Heather or Aimee - Heather, have you had any experiences in your school?

HEATHER MORSE: We would often have an international fair where we would have various foods set up. Again, that would only be happening once a year, but from there, students would often jot down something that they thought would be nice - again, student empowerment - that they would add to the list of things. Hummus was one that the children had experienced at home.

I'll go a little bit beyond - growing up in a large family, I was not from another culture, but I probably lived in poverty, and my mother made homemade bread. I would rarely open my lunchbox because all the children would make fun of me because I had this large piece of homemade bread, where a lot of them had store.

THE CHAIR: Sunny Bee bread.

HEATHER MORSE: I think we can learn a lot from our youth, and things like having this international fair was very positive. In the school where I worked, we had a number of international students who came to us for - I actually had one who lived with our family. He came for six weeks and he stayed for six years. We learned a lot from international students coming in and sharing what types of food they had. We had those students building our meals for us and having the children experience it - nothing on a regular basis.

AIMEE GASPARETTO: I would also just say or encourage us to think about the whole school food environment as well. I think the celebration of food and the opportunities to eat together and eat healthy are one entry point. We know that food gardens and the food literacy component that's being introduced when schools get excited about food is another really important component that's building on that.

Nourish Nova Scotia is working to support schools in developing their own food gardens. Those are tremendous opportunities to bring different cultures together, growing different kinds of vegetables, experiencing fresh food in different ways, and then bringing that into the school environment in another way. I think there are multiple opportunities to experience those sorts of multicultural experiences when we think about gardens, school kitchens, and school food programs as a whole.

RAFAH DICOSTAZNO: You brought up my second question very nicely because the second question is about the gardens. I was at Rockingham School and they have a couple of plots and she was showing me. I think about if they plant them, who looks after them in the summer and how many schools have that? I thought it was wonderful, but how does it work with our season being just summer for growing? Who looks after the garden when the school is off? Do the kids come back? How does it work?

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: We did just do a data collection and we counted 103 schools in the province now with school food gardens. Ironically, it's around the same amount of breakfast programs that we're running before the investment in breakfast programs. You see if there is some investment made, how they could possibly really flourish and rise. There's a lot of knowledge and wisdom in those 103 programs.

Speaking to your point of summer care, that is often an identified barrier, but for every gardener that has that barrier, there's another gardener that has the solution. There are schools that have successfully done great things around summer care.

I know, for example, École St. Catherine's in the west end of Halifax has a Wednesday weeders club. I think how they do it at the end of the year is there's a family that's loosely responsible for it and then they'll do a call-out on social media. We're often retweeting that for them or sharing it on our Facebook post as a way to get more people down there to manage the gardens over the summer.

Families come down as families and the kids are picking and eating. It is just so worthwhile. So the summer care, there are a lot of ways to do it. Once again, it's thinking outside the box and thinking about ways that things can be done, but I'm sure my colleagues might have something to add to that as well.

HEATHER MORSE: Just in the community where I live, we have a member of our health board that actually runs the garden club at the local school. In a school of about 275, there are 60 students that belong to the garden club. She coordinates that throughout the summer, so many times there will be students that will contact her, if they can - not everybody can - but she kind of facilitates the whole thing.

It's a very positive thing for the community because, for example, in the school where I was, we had a number of soccer fields, and soccer is huge so the kids would come to play soccer, and that was part of their role before or after that they would look after the gardens.

THE CHAIR: That will wrap up our questioning for today. I'll ask you for closing remarks.

[11:45 a.m.]

MARGO RIEBE-BUTT: I'd like to thank you all for your time and attention and interest in school breakfast programs and potentially a national school food program - and think about each of your roles in making that happen. You have federal counterparts. You have regional counterparts.

I hope your understanding has been broadened a little bit as a result of today's presentation and thinking about some of the ways that we can certainly work together to

the health and benefit of our next generation. My door is always open and my phone is almost always on and I welcome any follow-up conversations you may want to have.

We're certainly on a mission to continue to do our work in Nova Scotia. We take a lot of pride in how we work in a collaborative manner with people, so we are absolutely open to suggestions and ideas and look forward to future dialogue with all of our elected leaders. Thank you again for your time.

THE CHAIR: I'd like to thank all of you - Ms. Gasparetto that you bring your skills from your work life to a volunteer board and Ms. Morse, that you haven't really retired, but it's wonderful to see that you're using your skill set and your connections to help a really wonderful organization - and the health board as well. I thank you all for the people you are and how you are great Nova Scotians.

With that, we just have a little bit of business. You may leave. I'm sure you'll be asked some questions by the media. Thank you again.

I turn your attention to our next meeting date. In the summertime, we do not have the regular two-hour meeting. We go to just the appointments to agencies, boards and commissions. That meeting will be at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, July 30<sup>th</sup>.

With that, I adjourn this meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 11:46 a.m.]