

HANSARD

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STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, April 12, 2007

Committee Room 1

Military Family Resource Centre

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Stephen McNeil (Chair)
Keith Bain
Patrick Dunn
Chuck Porter
Gordon Gosse
David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid)
Percy Paris
Harold Theriault
Wayne Gaudet

[Stephen McNeil was replaced by Leo Glavine.]
[Keith Bain was replaced by Alfie MacLeod.]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Military Family Resource Centre

Colleen Calvert
Executive Director

Myrna Stewart
Staff Member



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 12, 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Chuck Porter

THE CHAIR: I'm going to call the meeting to order, gentlemen. You know how our day lays ahead, so we'll get going.

We welcome Ms. Calvert and Ms. Stewart here this morning. It's a pleasure to have you here. We know that you're very busy in everything that you do, and it was great chatting with you for a few minutes here earlier. We'll get right to your presentation, but just before we do that we'll do some introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

COLLEEN CALVERT: Is it okay if I stand?

THE CHAIR: You may stand if you like. We are expecting a couple others. I'll just check as far as sound goes - he's saying, no, please sit. It has to do with recording and for Hansard.

COLLEEN CALVERT: May I dim the lights?

THE CHAIR: Please do.

COLLEEN CALVERT: That's a little better. Good morning, and thank you very much for this opportunity to come to speak to you today. What I'm going to do is I'm going to give you a very quick overview about some of the programs and services that are offered by the Military Family Resource Centre. I'll give you a tiny little bit of background about the department and military family services, which is right across the country as well.

Our mission is to promote the health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities who share the unique experience of the military lifestyle. Some of our background is that, during the 1990s, Military Family Resource Centres opened right across the bases in Canada, the U.S., and in Europe. We have 32 centres in Canada and we are all provincially incorporated and federally registered charities. We serve the Regular and Reserve Forces and their families in Dartmouth, Cape Breton, northern Nova Scotia, Truro, Pictou, and there is also a centre in Greenwood which is responsible for the Valley and the South Shore of Nova Scotia.

We are governed by a board of directors; 51 per cent of these directors must be spouses of military families. This is to ensure that it's the families telling us what services and programs they need and not the military telling families what they need. So it's very much community based.

THE CHAIR: Excuse me, maybe we'll just take a second, if you don't mind, ladies, and we'll get these three gentlemen to introduce themselves to you as well.

[The NDP members introduced themselves.]

COLLEEN CALVERT: All right, we'll continue, and thank you.

The Military Family Resource Centres work in conjunction with the Department of Military Family Services which is situated in Ottawa in the Department of National Defense. The Military Family Resource Centres were funded by the Department of Military Family Services to deliver a wide variety of programs and services, including second language services, adult, child, youth, volunteer, parenting, deployment, education, and employment services.

The local Canadian Forces also provide us with a small amount of support and funding. We also must fundraise to come up with the additional funds to provide a larger number of the programs and services - that's why we are all registered charities. We work in partnership with National Defense, we do not work for them. We believe that families are the strength behind the uniform and that there is strength through all of these partnerships. Military families, of course, are strong, independent and incredibly resilient. We don't believe they need anything - it's what we do to make the challenges a little bit easier for them.

They must cope, of course, with some of these unique challenges of the military lifestyle and we are incredibly proud that the Canadian Forces have recognized that the families are, in fact, full partners in deployment. The families do play a very significant and positive role in the morale and welfare of the deployed members. Many years ago, of course, the military used to think that if we wanted you to have a family, we would have issued you one and they saw families as a huge drag on the military members' ability to perform. They have certainly changed that opinion in the past number of years and they have recognized that if they keep the families informed and provide them with services and support, the family then plays a huge role in supporting the military and their mission.

Who do we serve? We provide services to all the Regular and Reserve Force members and their families; married and common-law CF members and their spouses; the children and the youth of the serving members; the members who are single parents; of course, reservists and the families before, during, and after deployment; and now the parents of deployed, single regular force members. This is just recently new that was added our mandate - in the past, parents of single members were not supported, but they now are.

MPF employees are the civilian employees that you see going over the Afghanistan right now, providing morale and recreation programs, including Tim Hortons. So they are the non-publically funded employees that are deployed right now. So we provide services to them as well.

Military families - a lot of people say what's the difference between a military family and any other Canadian? Well, many of our families don't come from where they are living. They come from across Canada, so they don't have the same social supports, they don't have the same amount of social safety nets that we would have if we grew up in a local area. They have no extended families, and quite often no close friends. You can imagine what it's like moving from across this country and landing here, in the City of Halifax, or in Greenwood or in Cape Breton and you know nobody. So how do I get connected? That's a huge challenge to some of our families.

There may be language barriers. We get a large number of families, of course, who come from Quebec. They come here, they may not speak English - that's another huge barrier to our families. Many of our family members have had to give up a job to come here; many of them have to give up employment or education opportunities as well. So part of our role is to help them get connected and to build these social safety nets. A lot of them, again, are not aware of the supports and services available to them in their local community, so again we support them in getting connected in the community.

They don't know where to go to get information. Many of them feel very isolated and during deployments, of course, they become a single parent which, in and of itself, is a huge challenge. Parents of the CF may have no understanding of the Canadian Forces. They have no knowledge, they don't know where to get knowledge and they feel incredibly isolated. Many, of course, live in very, very small communities with limited resources.

We have a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week family information services team where families can call 24 hours a day and get basic information. Where do they get connected in the community, if they need a new doctor, if they need to find out where an educational opportunity is - they can call us and we can put them in touch with all the local community resources, the local community agencies, program registration, referrals to all the agencies, et cetera, and we are the link to any of the duty chaplains.

Some of our basic programs and services include welcome and community orientation; adult, family, child, youth programs; second language services; prevention support and intervention; deployment; emergency child care; employment and education

services; volunteer development; and outreach services - and I will speak a little bit more about some of these key services shortly.

Emergency child care is one of the services that is incredibly useful to our military families. In the event of a significant incident, especially during deployment, if the member is deployed, the family member is here - mom is on her way to work, she breaks her ankle, has a car accident, she is on her way to the hospital, she has no secondary family here - what do I do? The children are in school - now what happens? One phone call to us and we can put emergency child care in place for 72 hours, absolutely free to the family. In that 72 hours, of course, the family has the opportunity to either repatriate the member back to Canada, call grandma and grandpa in Saskatchewan to come out and take care of the kids, or other safety nets to come in to support that family. So we take care of the immediate situation by putting in this care for families.

We are very well-connected with all of the social workers in the hospitals. So we get calls at 2:00 a.m. from a social worker saying, I have a military family member here, that the military member is deployed, we've got children, we need your support, we need your services. So we can do this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - this is a service that is available anywhere in Nova Scotia.

Also, we have respite child care. Respite child care is if the member is deployed, the family is home and they are just having a really rough time coping, trying to cope with children, trying to cope with the fact that you have a loved one deployed and you just need a little bit of a break for some time for yourself to take care of yourself. We can put in respite care. We can stretch it out over a six-month period of time so that the parent who is at home with the children gets a break and can take care of themselves. So, again, 72 hours absolutely free and we will run that across the six- month period of time to help that family cope with the stresses of the deployment.

Prevention and intervention - I have three fully qualified social workers. We provide confidential crisis intervention and short-term support. What we normally do is, we will get the family in, we will deal with whatever the immediate situation is, we will develop an action plan with them and then we will refer them to one of the other local agencies downtown - so the other provincial services that are available to us. There is also a Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program that is put on by Health Canada and we can refer our families to those professionals as well to help them.

We also have a number of emergency services that are available to our families. As we know, life happens. We have four emergency apartments, I have emergency funds, food, et cetera. We've had many instances where there's a fire in the house and the family now has no place to go, so I can put them in emergency housing for a short period of time. Sometimes the member's deployed and the pay will not go into the bank for some apparent reason, it's 2:00 a.m. and you need some funds for a prescription for your sick child, et cetera - I can put money in the hands of these families to deal with the immediate needs any time of the day or night.

Some of the deployment services - which I think is probably what you're most interested in - our services are designed to enhance the ability of the member to be ready for duty and to support the well-being of the family before the deployment, during, and after the deployment. We ensure that the families have access to relevant programs and services and that the families are aware and prepared around the challenges of deployment.

We do different events and workshops, and we have all kinds of different family networks to provide information to families. The biggest thing we do is provide families the opportunity to connect with other families. If you can connect with another family who is going through the exact same thing you are, you can draw on their knowledge, their experience, and their strength to support you.

So we are very much developed on the community development model - families supporting families. If we can provide opportunities for families to get to know other families who live in the area, who are experiencing the same thing, then they support each other and they will lean on each other and they'll provide services to each other that we, of course, can't do.

[9:15 a.m.]

Some of our deployment support programs are pre-deployment. We educate and inform the members in the families about what's available to them. We've been currently going all over central, northern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton and we've been partnering up with the local Legions to provide information to our families who are experiencing deployment right now.

As you know, we have many of our Reserve and Regular Force members over there right now. We've been going to the local Legions, we've been having family meetings and we're trying to get the families up there connected with each other and with all the other caring services and supports that are available. We've been to Pictou, New Glasgow, did a number up in Cape Breton, and we were just in Amherst and Springhill, Musquodoboit, Enfield - we've been all over the place, including the reserve units, et cetera, here in the City of Halifax.

We tell them about what services are available to them, we tell them where to get information and we get them, again, connected to other people in the local community. We also get their family contact information so that we can keep them informed about any news or anything we know about.

The departure - they have the big day, they have the big send-off to the people - now what happens? We set up what we call family networks and what these are is once a month we have all the families, we invite them all to come down and to meet with us and we have potlucks, we have family events, we go skating, we go swimming, we do what the families ask us to do. If they say, we just would really like to have an adults-only event, just so I can talk to the other adults about some of their experiences, that's what we'll help

organize. If they say we really want something to take the kids' minds off of what's going on, we'll then plan a family event for the children.

Again, this gives the families an opportunity to get to know the other families much, much better and to have the opportunity for the children to meet other children who are experiencing the same challenges. So, lots of family activities, lots of social stuff.

We also invite some of the professional soldiers to come in to tell us of their experiences in Afghanistan because families want information - that's the number one thing that they tell us; and we invite the padres to come in and explain to families about how families are notified if there's an incident, a death, a serious injury, et cetera. Families just want information, so we provide all those opportunities for families to get the information that they're looking for.

We also provide some workshops for all of our families. One of them we call Dancing Through Deployment and it talks about the emotional cycle of deployment. Deployment has been studied right across this country, in the U.S., and all over the world. There is a predictable cycle of deployment that all of our families are going to experience in some form or other at some point of the deployment, so if we can explain to them about what the challenges are and what that cycle of deployment is, and why you are feeling angry or why you're feeling upset, or why you are anxious. Of course, information is knowledge so we're trying to develop in them this knowledge and then they can also go out and mentor and share this information with other families who are going through the same experience.

Helping children through deployment - as you know, many of our families with young children, the children experience deployment on a whole different level. Their level of anxiety et cetera, of course will go up when we have horrible incidents like we have had in the past number of days. So we help the parents understand some of the challenges that their children are experiencing. We also go into the schools upon invitation and we will explain to the educators what some of the children are seeing, why maybe some of these children are experiencing anxiety, acting out, and some of the other manifestations about why some children are having a hard time.

We also talk to the teachers and the educators about some of the schoolyard bullies and some of the taunts and some of the other stuff that will happen from the other kids because we know kids are kids and sometimes they can be a little bit cruel. So we talk to the educators about what they can do to help support and educate the other children in the school about deployment and about what some of these children and some of their friends may be experiencing.

The other one we talk about is reunion. Everybody thinks that they're coming back, it's going to be nothing but a big, huge party when they come back and life is going to be good. We do experience the honeymoon phase, of course, everything is going to be wonderful for the first number of days, but then there are other things that are going to

occur. We try to explain and educate the families to know and understand that a lot of this is normal.

We educate them about what an occupational stress injury is and what to look for; we educate them about post-traumatic stress and what to look for. We also let them know that the family who has been home, they've been independent, they've been the boss and all of a sudden the member comes back and they're trying to exert themselves back in, and sometimes there's a little bit of a power struggle going on - and this is normal, and we give them tips and techniques about how to cope with some of this.

Some of the other deployment services that we provide are our prevention and education, so we do work in concert with our padres, our social workers and all of the CF leadership to ensure our family members have the necessary resources. There's only so much that we can do and, of course, the military are the experts so we draw upon them and we get them connected.

Our goal is to avoid repatriation of our military members and to resolve some of the issues or needs of our families without bringing the member home. Bringing a member home is incredibly expensive to start with, but it also has a huge domino effect, especially if we have members at sea - to try and get a member repatriated, that means somebody else has to go and take their place. The domino effect and impact on other families is huge, so we try to assist the military in avoiding repatriation. As I said, we have emergency funds, housing, intervention, respite and emergency child care.

I want to give you just a quick overview about some of the things that the other bases that have already been deployed to Afghanistan and have experienced a significant number of death and injuries. What the other bases and family resource centres across Canada right now are seeing is an increase in marital issues and marital breakdowns that are happening. Increases in family violence related issues are happening - and I think you've probably heard about more of the increased need for child and youth needing mental health services because of the impact that this has on the children and youth - increased requests from schools seeking information.

The number of families seeking mental health services for stress, anxiety, trauma and grief - we're seeing a lot more information requests for occupational stress injury information and post-traumatic stress disorder information. The number of children and youth experiencing difficulty is going up, so the parents are having a real challenge dealing with some of this stuff.

We're seeing all kinds of little parent support groups start up across the country, which I believe is really healthy. We're seeing a huge increase in alcohol and drug abuse not just by the deployed member, but also by the families back here - they're using it as a method of coping. Caregiver burnout for the single parent who is here, and it's not just single parents - we also have a large number of family members who are caring for senior and elderly parents, so we're seeing a lot of caregiver burnout because the military member

is gone and, of course, they're a single family member now, a single parent. We're seeing a lot more releases from the Canadian Forces upon return from deployment.

Some of the things I thought would be important for you to know is that the Military Family Resource Centre - and there are 32 of us across the country - can be a resource of information. The respite care, the housing, the funds, we have tremendous meeting spaces across - and also with the links that we now have with a number of the Legions, so an opportunity for families to get together, which I think is absolutely vital. We're a great link to the communities and, of course, we have a lot of information and services for our families and for other members in the province who are looking for information.

I guess the message that we really have is that if we all work together, provincially, locally, in our little communities, that we can all make a difference and make some of the challenges of the military lifestyle a little bit easier for everybody. What I want to do is just end up by showing you a very quick slide presentation.

[A slide presentation was viewed.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for that presentation. I know Mr. Paris has to leave us shortly, and I know that he doesn't want to. Percy, I'm going to go right to you for a question or two, maybe, before you have to leave.

PERCY PARIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman - this is like rush and dash. I really hate to do this, but I wanted to come even though I could only stay for a couple of minutes. I'm not even going to stick around for the answer to my questions - I will leave it to my colleagues to relay the information to me.

I heard what you said about the growing demand for the things that you do. Are you having a problem meeting the increased demand? I know that a lot of your work - from what I have read and from what I have heard the short time I was here - is around volunteerism. I would be interested to hear more about your financial package and if you are short of money - and the money that you do get, where does it come from? How much of it is federal money? Do you get any provincial contributions from across the province? I know you must get some corporate donations.

Also, I didn't hear mentioned - and maybe it was in there somewhere - about these are hard times. When we have a country that is at war, we have casualties. So I guess I was concerned about the aftermath for the family who is back home, for the surviving family. What is in place for them? How long does that support last - is it six months, a year, or is it forever? I know I probably have a ton of other questions, but I really do have to dash. Again, my apologies.

COLLEEN CALVERT: Thank you.

LEO GLAVINE: I think the next hour is looked after. (Laughter)

COLLEEN CALVERT: I think so. Excellent questions. I'm going to try to remember them all - you have some notes there, do you?

Are we meeting the demand? Financially, we don't have any challenges or difficulty here in our area, the Halifax and region and everything that we are responsible for. About 65 per cent of my funding comes from the Department of Military Family Services. I get approximately 11 per cent from the local commander, from the admiral here, and then the rest, we get user fees. I have two huge daycares, about 150 children in full-time daycare, the military families, so our daycares are totally self-sufficient. We do get some provincial grants and support for our daycares and for our child care, which is phenomenal. The rest of it, we do get donations, and we do actively fundraise. So financially, we are in relatively good shape. I can't say that's the same for all the other ones across the country, but Halifax is doing exceptionally well.

[9:30 a.m.]

The next one, I believe, was around volunteer support. We have approximately 450 volunteers who work with us. We cannot provide all these programs and services without the dedication of volunteers. Many of our volunteers are military family members, serving members, and a lot of people from the local community who just want to support and just show that they care. We had over 20,000 volunteer hours donated to us in the past year, which is absolutely exceptional. Our volunteers do everything from referee floor hockey for one of our youth programs to providing some of our workshops, some of the deployment workshops. They serve coffee to the families, they hold their hands, they wave the flag and they sell our T-shirts for us - one of our fundraisers. Our volunteers are involved in all aspects of our programs.

The aftermath - how long are they taken care of? The individuals who are injured, of course they are taken care of right from the minute that the injuries occur with the exceptional services that are in place for the medical services. They are then met, at the airport, of course with a member of the military, the medical community, who is the case manager. They are assigned a case manager, the family is immediately assigned an assisting officer, and they have padre support. They have the unit support so the member in the family, the medical side and the military is taking care of the member. The family is given an assisting officer and the padre and any other support service or resource that they require, so they are very well taken care of.

We are also hooked up with the families of the injured members to make sure that all of the other things are taken care of, such as we have other family coming from across Canada and the military won't pay for their hotels - well I can put them in emergency housing. I can do some of those things. We have children who are coming with us; we can make sure that the children are taken of. So those other programs and services and support that the military may be able to provide for the immediate family, we can also offer some of that to some of the extended family. But the Canadian Forces, working in conjunction with Veterans Affairs, I think are doing a really good job of making sure that the member and the family is cared for for an extended period of time - and I have been told that they

will be cared for and provided services and support for as long as it's required. I have not been told by anybody that after so many days it's cut off. That's my understanding.

Did I hit them all?

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Glavine, we'll go right to you.

LEO GLAVINE: Thank you very much and we're certainly pleased to have you come in today and share with us about what is I know, first-hand, a tremendous service. I'm in a military community, the Kingston/Greenwood area, so I get to actually be invited to things with the Greenwood Military Family Centre and I know the people who work there.

One of the things I was wondering is do you get together to share some of the successes and the new things that you will try to do with families during deployment because, for example, out at Greenwood, right now, there's at least 100-plus - because 108 went at one time - so I know there's certainly 100-plus, and , I'm just wondering if you do share with one another, across the country and certainly across the province?

COLLEEN CALVERT: Absolutely, we just had a national deployment conference out in Edmonton - we had representatives from every MFRC across Canada - the 26th and 27th of April. I've got resource centres from all over Atlantic Canada, as well as Edmonton and Esquimalt, coming here and as a matter of fact going to Greenwood MFRC is part of our tour. We're learning so much, so quickly, that it is absolutely vital for us to be successful to ensure that we're all not reinventing the wheel, and we're taking everybody else's great ideas and sharing them with our families - that's an excellent question.

LEO GLAVINE: I asked that because just about three weeks ago, myself and the member for Kings South, David Morse, we were invited to an event where families from any part of the province who had personnel at Greenwood and were deployed could come together just for a Sunday afternoon social and sharing with one another, and it was a phenomenal event, from the presence of the base commander to a 4-day-old child. It was just a marvelous time of families coming together, and so it really does clearly demonstrate the work that you are doing, in action. So that's why I was asking the question: Do you share these good things with one another when they happen?

COLLEEN CALVERT: Absolutely, and we don't care where families get the information or the support of the service, as long as they're getting it. So I applaud initiatives like that that Greenwood has been doing, and we will steal some of their great ideas as well. Thank you.

LEO GLAVINE: Are the funding kind of percentage that you gave us, is that probably what is happening across the province, or are some having perhaps a little bit more of a challenge meeting the needs of the resource centres?

COLLEEN CALVERT: That's a really good question and I can't specifically answer that. Our funding is based upon a funding application process where we have to clearly demonstrate what the need is and we have to justify what we're asking for, et cetera, et cetera, and perhaps if you don't have some of the statistics or some of the right wording that our funders are looking for, you may not be funded to the same level. It's also partially based on population and the number of people who you provide services to. Halifax, because we have Cape Breton and most of northern and central Nova Scotia, we have a huge funding base, so we may be a little bit better off than some of the other centres, absolutely. We also have the corporate base here that, of course, Greenwood in the Valley,

I know they get tremendous corporate support and community support, but again they may not have as much opportunity as we do.

LEO GLAVINE: We're just a small group here this morning - and we actually go in session at 10:00 o'clock this morning, so it's a challenge for everybody to get everything in - but there's one other educator here and I was just wanted to share this because it demonstrates clearly what you've been talking about in your presentation.

I was a vice-principal at West Kings High School when the very first deployment to Afghanistan took place, and primarily Forces from Greenwood went to Camp Mirage. I was really amazed at the impact that it had on the children. I thought, well, families join the military - and I have a son in the military, and you have a certain set of wonderment all the time perhaps and you're prepared, but I know that impacted on the adolescents and on teenagers, the children who never gave us one iota of problem. All of a sudden, there were behavioural issues, there were attendance issues, and there were calls from home to the school.

I was really amazed, you know, how this changed the whole dynamic of the family when mother or father went off to the theatre of war - we had to develop a very strong relationship with the Family Resource Centre. So it's one of the areas where I think much has been learned and things are no longer taken for granted. I think that's a marvelous part of the work that the resource centres are doing - so I just wanted to share that with you.

COLLEEN CALVERT: Thank you, and you can't say enough about the impact on the children and the adolescents and how they cope - it's not easy.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for your presentation to inform us a little more on the programs available to Forces' members and their families. I know first-hand the importance of having kind of a community or support - I grew up in a military family and my father served for 35 years.

Listening to your presentation actually took me back to many of the steps - and I think trials - that we went through as a family, my brothers and sisters. I kind of laughed a little bit around one of the workshops you talked about - the Waltzing Together Again. I

don't know if the "waltzing" was taken from *Waltzing Matilda*, which was a song I think about an Australian soldier who had come back who was injured, and the power struggle, because I know for a fact, for six or more months a year, or when my mother was trying to keep the household together, it was different to have someone around who butted heads.

So it's kind of amusing now I guess, but I know back then in the 1970s it was more difficult for the families. We did have good support in the community, and friends, so it helped out. So it's nice to see now that the members, especially with some of the deployments that we have now, and especially in Afghanistan, that we have these programs here. So I want to thank you for that because I know it's probably doing wonders for the families and especially the kids who are here and trying to go through this.

One of the questions I had, and I know you kind of answered it with Mr. Paris' question around the funding - you had stated that provincially, you get provincial grants. Now, is that a yearly based type of grant where you have to apply every year or could you just give me a little bit of information on that specifically?

COLLEEN CALVERT: The provincial grants that we receive are for the daycare. So they came out through the Department of Community Services and, yes, we have to apply for them and we have to have a certain number of children. It applies the same for all of the daycares in the Province of Nova Scotia and we've had no difficulty receiving those grants. We qualify for them.

DAVID WILSON: That's good to hear. So do you have any other funding provincially? I know you said 65 per cent comes from, I guess the federal...

COLLEEN CALVERT: Very little of our funding. We do apply for student employment grants during the summer, but to take advantage of some of the other provincial programs that are going on, but other than that we don't receive any direct provincial funding.

DAVID WILSON: You were saying you're in a good financial situation so you don't go after that right now - is that the case? My question, especially as a provincial, or a committee, you know my hope is that the provincial government is behind you - it's there if you need it. So have you been turned down for grants maybe that you applied for?

COLLEEN CALVERT: We haven't had any difficulty with grants in the past and we haven't actively sought out other provincial grants partly because we don't need to at this point in time. Where the provincial government can be incredibly supportive and help our families is in educating all of the people who are providing all of the provincial services, all the mental health, all the health care, all of the educators, people in Community Services. I mean those are the people who really, really need to know and understand some of the challenges around the military lifestyle. So any education that we can do to provide that to the people who are delivering the services, I think, would be incredibly beneficial.

DAVID WILSON: I'm glad to hear that and if there is a time when that becomes difficult, please get hold of our committee and we will see what we can do to help you.

COLLEEN CALVERT: I have your number now.

DAVID WILSON: I just want to thank you again for showing us your presentation, especially the slide program afterwards.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacLeod.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for coming. More importantly, thank you for what you do because the services you provide I'm sure are very important to a great number of people - and I guess that would be my first question. In the last six months, how many people do you think you have served and touched?

COLLEEN CALVERT: A lot - thousands. Absolutely thousands and it's sometimes just as simple as a phone call or an e-mail. We provide e-mail information to our families almost on a daily basis. There are 3,000 families on the e-mail list - our newsletters, our information that we get out to them, our 24-hour line that they can call if they're having a bad day, so I would suggest that we've probably impacted and touched thousands.

ALFIE MACLEOD: How many Nova Scotians would you say are deployed in Afghanistan?

COLLEEN CALVERT: How many Nova Scotians?

ALFIE MACLEOD: Yes.

COLLEEN CALVERT: I can tell you the official numbers of military members who are over there, but the number of Nova Scotians, I think, is a huge amount.

ALFIE MACLEOD: People stationed in Nova Scotia.

COLLEEN CALVERT: People stationed in Nova Scotia right now. I have about 400 reservists, we probably have about 100 or so out of Greenwood, we probably also have another 150 who are in some of the support trades - we have cooks, medics, that aren't necessarily with the RCRs coming out of Gagetown right now, but we have all these other support people there. We probably have 650 to 700 people over there at any one time.

ALFIE MACLEOD: I understand from your answer that a large number of them are reservists?

COLLEEN CALVERT: Currently. We have a couple hundred reservists over there right now.

ALFIE MACLEOD: A large number of them are from Cape Breton?

COLLEEN CALVERT: Absolutely they are, that is why we are spending so much time in Cape Breton trying to get those families connected. Cape Breton actually has the advantage in some instances because they have such close community - our reserve families have lived and grown up in those communities so they can go to the neighbours and have a cup of tea, so we're very thankful for that, because of how close the communities are. If we need to get information out, usually we just have to pass it off to one and it spreads very quickly, so I'm thankful for how close the families are in Cape Breton.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Cape Breton has a long history of military involvement, back to the days of the Fortress of Louisbourg . . .

COLLEEN CALVERT: Absolutely.

[9:45 a.m.]

ALFIE MACLEOD: One of the campaigns that I think is run by your centre is the "red shirts." I don't imagine they make you much money, but they certainly send a great message, that is what I see anyway. The other one that I take a lot of notice of is the Yellow Ribbon campaign and the large, yellow Coroplastic ribbons that you have. I actually have one in my office window and you would not believe the number of people who stop in and ask, how do I get them? I've been trying to get more so I can pass them around.

The reason I bring that to your attention is there have been a number of people maybe in disagreement with what's going on in Afghanistan, but there is nobody who doesn't support the people who are involved in that. You people already know that, but I think it's a message that has to be out there for a lot of people to hear. Again, I really want to thank you for the work that you're doing because I know it is important to the families.

Everybody here, I'm sure, has somebody in the military. I have a brother-in-law who has been in Afghanistan and is getting ready to go back, and knowing there are services provided by people like yourself is a real comfort to our family. Thank you all for your help.

COLLEEN CALVERT: Thank you. You can get the ribbons at Canex. They don't benefit us directly, but indirectly they do benefit the families, absolutely - but we have teddy bears.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Do you mean that I look like a teddy bear? (Laughter)

COLLEEN CALVERT: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Theriault.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for your presentation, it was great. I've been to a lot of committee meetings in this room and this is the first time that I believe somebody has been in here who doesn't

really want anything - they just want to let us know how great things are - and it is the first time a tear has come in my eye in here, too, and not from sadness, but from happiness and that beautiful music that was playing with the slides.

So I want to thank you very much and I think you are doing something real great here, that this word needs to get out because this word is not out and I believe it is a good move to come here this morning to do this.

I really have no questions, I just want to congratulate you and I am amazed that you are sitting there saying you have significant funding - we never, ever hear that in here.

One little question, though, before I go. Would you every consider running the Department of Community Services for Nova Scotia? (Laughter)

COLLEEN CALVERT: No. (Laughter) Our funding isn't significant, our funding is absolutely adequate. I do want to comment on just one thing that you did say, though, and that's our biggest challenge, getting the word out. There are still too many families out there who don't know about us and if we can inform and educate one more person that they don't have to go through this alone and there is a place to reach out to, then we've made good value of our time today.

Our families need to know, the people in the communities need to know, the local padre needs to know, and the local physician needs to know, so that when a military family is hurting or struggling they know there is a place they can get education or resources. Thank you very much.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I think just on Junior's comment - I know most of us all have Web sites and certainly the provincial government has one and you should contact somebody in Communications Nova Scotia, I would think, and see if you can't get that out. I can't imagine anyone would not be supporting you in that, and I know that I'll be happy to put whatever contact information on my site that I can and I'm sure other members will as well for that educational purpose and that opportunity.

Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and again thank you for coming here this morning.

I'm quite familiar with the Military Family Resource Centre in Victoria Park, being from Cape Breton, and I have been there - I just recently went over. Something that I wanted to tell everybody here that you didn't mention was that I send packages sometimes over, so I take them to the Military Family Resource Centre in Victoria Park and they send them over. Just last week I sent over three Cape Breton flags, because Cape Bretoners want their own flag, not the Nova Scotia flag. I don't know what it is - and that's not a movement

of separation, that's just the way of life in Cape Breton - it's just that you know that they are such a close group at home and they tend to support each other in the community, outside the community, every which way - and the Commanding Officer, Ken Butterworth, is absolutely great.

It is interesting because I saw a story yesterday - and I was kind of disturbed by the story about a lady who had sent a letter to a nephew in Afghanistan and it was returned for lack of postage, because she was short six cents. I thought to myself, well gee, they don't know about the Military

Family Resource Centre because I can take packages there and they send them free of charge. The story was in the news last night, and I was even thinking about a resolution today in the Legislature demanding that Canada Post pay for free postage to Afghanistan because I know you guys do. I don't think people are quite familiar with that, so there are things that are going on with this deployment that actually everybody doesn't know.

I'm very fortunate in that I have a constituency assistant who is retired military personnel, has been in Cyprus, has been a peacekeeper, so he is updated on everything. So I'm well-informed on those things and I just think that the Military Family Resource Centre - it is such a stressful time for all the deployment people over there - the job that you do is top-notch and first class and it couldn't happen at a better time.

I did look at one of your comments there, too, more releases from the Forces when they return from deployment. I find that some people are getting out, I guess, afterwards for some reasons that we would never understand unless we were there ourselves, but to understand it. I do know most of the kids who are there from the Cape Breton Highlander Second Nova Scotia Battalion and the history of that battalion back to 1861 so I do know all of that stuff. I just think that the job you're doing - and I can't say enough about how proud I am to be a Nova Scotian and a Cape Bretoner and being involved with the commanding officer in Victoria Park in Sydney and making sure that our guys are taken care of over there as the best that we can. Again, I say thank you very much for the job that you are doing and keep up the good work. If you ever need any support from the committee, we are always here, for whatever reason you may need support. Again, thank you very much.

COLLEEN CALVERT: I just need to make one comment about the postage. We can't let our big secret out because Canada Post would absolutely have a fit.

GORDON GOSSE: Can I get that erased off the record? (Laughter)

COLLEEN CALVERT: The service is provided for the family of the members over there, not for the public in general.

GORDON GOSSE: In Cape Breton, we have lots of cousins and first cousins.

COLLEEN CALVERT: Absolutely, and we don't question who you are related to. Just on another note, a lot of the people in Nova Scotia want to know what they can do to help and they all want to send something over there. The military members are very well taken care of. If they want to do anything to support anybody, mow their lawn, shovel their sidewalk, buy them a cup of tea. That's what they need to do to take care of our military members, is they need to just connect with the families and do those simple things because those simple things are the things that are going to make the difference.

GORDON GOSSE: And the odd box of Kraft Dinner.

COLLEEN CALVERT: Well, the odd box of Kraft Dinner.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Gosse.

Mr. Dunn.

PATRICK DUNN: Thank you for coming. It was very informative. It's just a wonderful service that the resource centre is providing. It's essential. The families couldn't continue without those types of services in so many different areas. Perhaps one question I have, you mentioned about trying to educate society with regard to what is going on and everything. Have you ever used the schools? You mentioned going to the Legions and so on throughout the province but what about the schools?

COLLEEN CALVERT: We are trying. We go to the schools upon invitation right now. We are trying to make some inroads and get into some of the - I would like to educate the teachers. I would like to get into the teachers' professional development opportunities. Unfortunately, sometimes we are just not able to crack in but we are looking for those.

PATRICK DUNN: I'm sure they would be very receptive. There are times throughout the year that perhaps, again, I'm sure it is limited what you can do with time and so on and responsibilities. You mentioned Legions - I know back home, at least, there seems to be a resurgence of youth joining the Legion. In particular, I think of the Town of Stellarton branch. They are finding more youth becoming interested in the Legion and joining and so on, which is encouraging.

COLLEEN CALVERT: Very encouraging.

PATRICK DUNN: Anyway, once again I just want to thank you for what is happening. It is just absolutely marvelous.

THE CHAIR: I just have a couple of questions. I, as well, want to thank you for being here today. I think it's great, very informative. However we can help get that message out, I think we are happy to do.

I'm just kind of curious, how many people are involved in your group? I know you are here in Halifax, but in this province?

COLLEEN CALVERT: How many people do I have?

THE CHAIR: Yes, how many people are you?

COLLEEN CALVERT: How many people are we? The Halifax and Region MFRC, we have about 75 staff members but a significant portion of those are my daycare and early childhood educators taking care of our children. I have approximately 25 coordinating and facilitating staff who are actually working with the families, providing all these different programs and services. In Greenwood, I think they have probably eight or nine. I'm not 100 per cent on their staff members.

THE CHAIR: These are paid people?

COLLEEN CALVERT: These are paid staff and then in addition, we have all of the volunteers who support us.

THE CHAIR: The emergency child care is simply quite a phenomenal program. I'm sure that is very much appreciated. Having children, I can only imagine what it must be like being in the military and being in that situation. I know both with a brother and two brothers-in-law, it is a difficult time. I don't know anyone who isn't touched in some way in this province or other by the military. So thank you for that.

You mentioned partnering with the local Legions with regard to the deployment program. Have you hit every Legion? Your goal, I assume, is to hit every Legion in this province and how are you doing that?

COLLEEN CALVERT: We are not hitting every Legion in the province. We were trying to hit the Legions that we knew had reservists or an armory unit or a reserve unit. We were trying to get the communities that we knew would have a significant number of people who would be being deployed or affected by the deployment. I just don't have the resources to hit all the Legions.

THE CHAIR: I know in my local Legion in Windsor, of which I have been a member for many years, they have, like every Legion I assume, everything on sale that you could possibly buy - the ribbons, the hats, in trying to provide support. I guess you're not hitting them physically, but are you sending information such as these packages with regard to phone numbers and providing that to all local communities?

COLLEEN CALVERT: We haven't, but I think that's an exceptional idea. We've really been concentrating on the Legions where we've been doing the briefings. We were in the Windsor Legion - we did do a family briefing presentation there and it is a phenomenal supporter.

THE CHAIR: And they have a phenomenal way of networking. It's surprising who you'll see at the Legion on a Friday night.

COLLEEN CALVERT: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: No matter where you go (Interruptions) Yes, you will see me there on the odd Friday night, yes, you will.

COLLEEN CALVERT: The Legions are a great resource to us.

THE CHAIR: Yes, they're a great networking place, so thank you for that. A lot of the questions have been asked already and again I want to just say thank you very much for all that you do for the people in this province and across this country. We would welcome you back any time. As the other members have said, if there's anything we could ever do to assist you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact this committee. We would be pleased to do so.

Any closing comments?

COLLEEN CALVERT: I would just like to say that you already have assisted us by providing us this opportunity to let people know about the programs and services. Now when your constituents are speaking to you, we can be a resource and if we don't have the answers, we can certainly find the answers and support the families as best we can. So, thank you for this tremendous opportunity, we do really appreciate it.

GORDON GOSSE: And, we're all sworn to secrecy on the mailing part.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much ladies. Just before we adjourn, gentlemen, there are a couple of things - one would be next meeting date we would have at this point in time is September, which would be normal, we would adjourn for the summer.

The other would be - as other committees have gone down this road in the past week - meeting during the sitting of the Legislature. With the exception of the call of the Chair, if we need to do it, we will do it, there's no question. I'm wondering if the interest is here again? From what I understand, there was a time, having done a little research this week, committees did not sit during the Legislature at one point - I don't know how many years ago that was, but is it something we want to consider? Either way, I'm throwing it out there for discussion.

PATRICK DUNN: Two other committees I'm a member of, we discussed the fact that when the House is sitting, perhaps we shouldn't be meeting due to the increased demands on our time.

THE CHAIR: One of the issues seems to be the extended hours are always affecting us - today is a prime example of that. Not that - in my opinion, the committees are all very important, I don't . . .

DAVID WILSON: I don't think there's a need to make that motion here. I think the Chair can address that at the time if it's needed. It worked out good today, I think, so I don't

feel we need a motion, we'll leave it up to the Chair and the committee can make a decision prior to the next session, if that's what the committee wants.

THE CHAIR: And, certainly, as the acting Chair today, I'm fine with that, I think this is one of those committees that, at the call of the Chair, or any committee for that matter, can meet anyway or not. It's something I guess we'll just consider for the next sitting of the Legislature.

GORDON GOSSE: I'd just like to ask the other member here, in those other committees that you sit on, what was the agreement in those committees?

PATRICK DUNN: They felt that perhaps during that particular time that we wouldn't meet.

GORDON GOSSE: So, did they make it a statement saying that they weren't going to meet?

THE CHAIR: In HR, we did make the motion to only do appointments, so we would come together to do the ABCs, but as far as bringing witnesses in - it's really one meeting is what it is, for the most part, as we know, four to five weeks that we sit nowadays. We did make a motion in that one, I do know, and I think the second one perhaps may have been and a third one has been talked about, that is going to come back. I don't know where it's going to end up, Gordie.

GORDON GOSSE: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: We'll leave it at that for now. Thank you very much and as for the next meeting we'll say September, at this point.

[The committee adjourned at 10:01 a.m.]