

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, May 20, 2010

Committee Room 1

Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre

Lauren Copeland
Childcare Service Coordinator

Emily Hatcher
Resource Development



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2010

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Clarrie MacKinnon

THE CHAIR: Good morning. We'll give you a couple of moments to get organized and settled there. It's great having you here this morning.

If I could have your attention again, please. We certainly welcome Ms. Copeland and Ms. Hatcher here today. I think for their purposes we should go around the table again with introductions.

[The members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we could call on our guests for their introductions to us.

LAUREN COPELAND: My name is Lauren Copeland and I work at the Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre. I'm part of the management team there and my official title is Child Care Services Coordinator.

EMILY HATCHER: My name is Emily Hatcher and I work at the Halifax site of the Military Family Resource Centre and my title is Resource Development.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much and we are looking forward to your presentation.

LAUREN COPELAND: Well good morning and thank you very much for having us here this morning. We really do appreciate it and if at any time during the presentation you do have questions, please feel free to stop me. I tend to speak very quickly so I will try and not do that this morning, but I understand that there's an opportunity to do a question and answer period after the presentation is done.

As we said, Emily and I are part of a very diverse team at the Military Family Resource Centre. We do have three locations: We're located in Windsor Park right here in Halifax, over on the base in Shearwater and we do have an office up in Cape Breton at the Garrison in Sydney. The mission that we work under at the Military Family Resource Centre is really to provide programming to address what we call the unique lifestyle that military families live because, although they come from many walks of life, there are uniquenesses to their lifestyle, so we do programming to address some of those needs.

I just want to give you a little bit of background to how MFRC sort of came to be. There are 32 provincially incorporated Military Family Resource Centres right across the country. Back in the 1990s, they became provincially incorporated and were stopped as military-run institutions; I believe Halifax was the last one to become provincially incorporated. When I joined the team in 1998, it was in transition from a military governance over to non-military people.

We're governed by a board of directors so, because we're a provincially incorporated not-for-profit with charitable status organization, we are governed by a board of directors, but we have a mandate at our organization that our board of directors will have at least 51 per cent military spouses. It's the military families that we're responsive to that we do programming for, so if we don't have a large portion of our constituency on our board of directors, then really we're developing programs that may not meet the needs of military families. It's extremely important to us to make sure that we have at least 51 per cent spouses on the board.

We are not a military organization, however we do work in partnership with the local chain of command, so the Admiral and the Base Commander and the General and the Wing Commander who are here, are all partners in the programming and the services that we do provide. Although we're not directly in the chain of command, it really is in our best interest to make sure that we have a fabulous working relationship with all of those parties because although we are responsive to military families, we do recognize that the military member is one-half of that family, so it doesn't make any sense for us not to have a general understanding and work in partnership with our military partners.

We do receive funding from a variety of sources. We receive funding from Ottawa through the Director of Military Family Services. We do a funding application every year to receive funding. Because we have that wonderful relationship with our military partners, we do receive some funding through MARLANT for what we call site-specific services. Because we are a charitable organization, we have a very active fundraising campaign so we have several pots of money that we get to choose from in order to be

reactive to what our community is looking for.

We have a very broad definition of what we call military families. The military itself has a definition of what they consider family and the dictionary has a definition of what they consider family. We decided to broaden that definition and we believe that your family is you and those that care about you, whether that be your mother, your father, your spouse, your uncle, maybe your aunt raised you from a child and that's your closest family. We don't believe that it's our duty to tell military members who their families are and who is important to them. Even if they don't really have parents in the local area and they have their best friend who lives next door and they're the person who takes care of things for them while they're away, we believe that person becomes part of the military family, so we do have a very broad definition.

We do have a mandate to serve military families, regular and reserve force. We also have a mandate to serve the parents of military families, especially for the reservists who live outside of the general HRM area, who find themselves on deployment over to the Sudan and Afghanistan. Oftentimes they are young, they're not married, and they're leaving home at 21, 22, 23 years old and it's their parents who are their most immediate family.

Their parents don't really have any understanding, or limited understanding, as to what military lifestyle is really like. So we do provide programming, and invite parents to actually come down to our centre and get involved in some of the programs, so that we can keep them connected because they worry about their sons and daughters no matter what they're doing or where they're going. It's nice for them to be able to share in some of the common experiences that spouses experience when their husband or wife is deployed. It keeps the parents connected to what's going on so they feel a little less stressed during the deployment.

We also have a large number of Canadian Forces members who are single parents or single members, themselves. We do recognize that we do different programming for that group of people as well.

I talked in the very beginning of the presentation about the fact that our mission addresses the uniqueness of military lifestyle, but what is it that make military families unique? Well, military families tend to move from base to base, they tend not to stay in one location for a prolonged period of time, or at least, definitely not for their entire career. You have a career service person and they're in the service for up to 20 years - the chances are they haven't spent all 20 in the same location. They don't necessarily have any social supports on the base they're living so if they grew up here but they get posted to Manitoba, well they've left their high school friends, they've left their cousins, they've left their parents and their siblings, and they've left their spouse's family and social supports as well. So they're moving to a new community and then constantly having to reinvent themselves in a social setting, so that definitely makes their lifestyle unique.

There are also language and cultural barriers that can happen. There is a large component of francophone service members and their spouses who find themselves here, especially in the Halifax area, and French is not the first language of the HRM. There aren't a lot of services necessarily offered in both official languages, so oftentimes the member who may be bilingual deploys, and the spouse who may be unilingual finds themselves left here. Simple things like how do I go to the grocery store, and how do I get a doctor in my own language, can become unique challenges.

[10:15 a.m.]

Oftentimes a spouse has to give up a job. It's great that the member knows exactly where he or she is going when they move from base to base, but the spouse finds themselves doing that resume all over again, maybe for the 10th time. We all know how stressful it can be to sit down in front of an interview team and try to get a job once in life, but it sometimes can be more challenging when you're moving from base to base. People will sometimes see them as non-committed because they move around. We try to turn that around and suggest that perhaps they're an asset to your organization because of all the experience that they bring to the table. We try to take things from the positive approach.

Children also are party to those unique challenges because they also have to move. It's hard enough to be 13 in life - it's harder to be 13 at your third high school in three years. Sometimes that can pose challenges for children as well, because while the member is deployed, and Mom's busy trying to find her third job, the child is also trying to find a new group of friends, so those are some of the unique challenges. They also may not know where to go for supports. We all live here and we've learned how to navigate the intricate systems of the HRM - well, now up and move yourself to Ontario and you have to learn how to navigate the intricate systems of Ontario, or even Victoria, or Ottawa, anywhere.

Also, parents become single parents on a temporary basis. When their husband or wife is deployed and you have young children, now all of a sudden you're that parent 24/7, but you're living in a community where your extended family doesn't live. If you're a single parent and you're living on your own and you're feeling a little bit isolated, you don't tend to have a lot of those social supports.

Those are some of the unique lifestyle challenges - we like to call them - that military families do face on a day-to-day basis. Because of that, we do offer a variety of programs and services to address some of those needs - everything from a welcome into the community, to programs for children, youth, adults. We have an employment and education component just to simply address the fact that I've had to change jobs three times in the last five years. We do also have a large deployment services department that deals strictly with the fact that members are here and away, and there is what we call a cycle of deployment that can and does impact all families. The member is getting ready for deployment, they go on deployment, they get ready to come home from deployment,

and there is a very emotional cycle that happens for families as they're getting ready to say goodbye and hello on a constant rotational basis.

Sometimes members are deployed for six to eight months. That cycle becomes, believe it or not, a little easier to take because you have a long period of time to live through each cycle. There are also deployments that are: gone for five weeks, home for three weeks; gone for five days, home for two weeks; gone for five weeks, home for three days. This is a constant lifestyle that these military families live. So just as they're getting ready to say hello, they're prepping to say goodbye. So that becomes quite an emotional cycle not only for the spouses, for the parents, but also for the children as well.

I highlighted deployment services. Really everything that we do in our organization stems from the fact that military families, at some point in their life together, experience deployment and posting. We wouldn't need to have educational and employment services, we wouldn't need to necessarily have services specifically for children and youth that address those lifestyle needs if military members didn't deploy. So we have quite a team that's there to make sure that families stay connected, informed, that we know who they are and that we provide them with opportunities to come in and just socialize. To maybe receive a little bit of information and feel that they're not alone through the deployment and that they have a family. We become their extended family for the length of that deployment.

We also recognize that life sometimes happens. It happens for all of us on a regular basis where you weren't expecting something to happen, it can happen and it does happen for military families. Nine times out of 10, as soon as that ship pulls out of the harbour something goes wrong. Life throws you a curve ball but it's a little more difficult to handle when you're the 24/7 parent of three young children and now you have to figure out how to replace the furnace because you weren't planning on doing that.

So we do have a whole area of our organization that deals with emergency services. We have emergency funds that we fundraise for that we provide to families. So if something happened in this wonderful age of electronics and the pay did not go in the bank for the military member because somebody forgot to hit send on the computer that day, we can make sure that they can buy groceries for the weekend. We also have emergency housing. There are some times when perhaps a fire has occurred in the family's home, they don't have grandma down the street whom they can move in with temporarily - it becomes a financial burden for families to put themselves up in a hotel. So we have emergency housing that we fundraise for, to maintain right on our base. We can put families up in that housing and offer them, because it's right near our building, all of the wonderful programs and services that we have to support them through the emergency.

We have links to the duty chaplaincy organization that's on the base and we actually have a chaplain who works right with us in the building to help address some of these needs. We also have emergency child care so that in these unforeseen situations -

sometimes you're trying to deal with the situation and now you're trying to deal with your children - we recognize that that's not always a good thing or a possibility at the time so we will put child care services in so that they know their children are well taken care of and then they can deal with the emergency at hand and then get life back to where it's supposed to be.

The last thing I wanted to sort of highlight this morning, we call it "Concerns for CF families", and that might be some of the things that spark questions at the end of the presentation. I alluded to some of them as I was going through the presentation but especially for families, because they are moving around from pillar to post right across this country and everywhere in between, between both coasts.

Child care is a big concern for families. It's not just military families in this province but military families are the people that we care the most about through our organization. They get posted into this province and they have a heck of a time trying to find licenced, regulated child care. We have two daycare centres that we run through our organization but we have a very small number of spaces. We have about 200 spaces that we can offer but currently we have 400 children on our wait list and we only take military children. So we have 200 of them enrolled and we have 400 of them on a wait list and some of them who don't even bother because it takes up to two years to sometimes get a spot. So that is definitely a concern.

Employment and education - as I mentioned before, big concerns for spouses and 16-year-old and 17-year-old students whose parents want them out there, joining the economy and becoming an active member in the employment world. That sometimes can become a challenge when you're moving around - mental health services and just health care in general and wait times for provincial health cards. We sometimes have families that are only posted to a location for 12 months if they're going on a course. They have a three-month wait time just to get a provincial health card; by the time you get it, you're getting ready to post again. Then you have a three-month wait period in the next province that you're in.

Yes, families can get reimbursed, but you also have a heck of a time trying to find a family doctor if you've just gotten posted in. Sometimes you find yourselves at those after-hours clinics and you're paying out of pocket and you're waiting to get reimbursed. That, for our families, has become a challenge. If you're a military family that has a child who sees a specialist, whether that is speech and language pathology or your child has been diagnosed with autism or ADD or has physical limitations and you're trying to get in to see a specialist, well, good luck to you. It's hard enough to do that when you live here and we have six to 18 month wait lists - well, if you're only posted here for 12 months, why are you going to bother? You'll never get in to see anybody and it puts you that much further behind and then the only person that suffers at the end of the day is the child. That's unfortunate.

That's true, I would say, probably right across this country. However, it is a

concern for military families and we often hear that they are very disheartened at the fact that it really is very difficult. Parents are willing to put aside their own needs, but when it comes to the needs of their child and they can't get in to see a specialist, or they do so and then they get that notice that they're being posted again, it's very disheartening for families.

Access to services in French - simple things, like finding a doctor, talking to your child's teacher, going to the grocery store, trying to get a prescription at the local pharmacy. All the things that we take for granted become challenges for our families, and the military member gets trained in both official languages because that's part of their training but the spouse does not. We do provide second-language training through our organization for spouses so that they can build up life skills. However, that takes time, and unfortunately, because this is not a bilingual province, sometimes - and government services are not the problem. It's your local grocery store, or I want to go buy a pair of shoes for my child because they need to start school on Tuesday and they can't communicate with the salesperson. That sometimes becomes an issue as well.

So those are their concerns, the things we tend to focus on in our organization and are always striving to find ways to meet their needs. I just thought that I would bring them to your attention today for discussion. We do believe that families are - our motto is that families are the strength behind the uniform. They are often the unsung heroes, and while they don't wear the uniform that we readily identify, they do wear a uniform as such, and really they are the glue that keeps those families together while their loved one is deployed. It's important that we not forget who they are. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for a presentation that was so good. You have outlined the challenges that military families face and also the challenges your family resource centre is facing as well. We certainly realize some of them, but you've done a great job in outlining so many problems that do exist. We will begin with Ms. Raymond.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you very, very much. I really appreciate your coming in to talk about this, because as you say, so many of these members really have only this family that sort of moves with them. It's an historic problem, of course. This has been a problem for the military and for armies and so on for centuries. These are displaced families; there's a cultural history.

A couple of questions, if I may. You mentioned the difficulty of access to specialists and to medical care and so on when you're constantly moving. Are you able to get any sense or do your members have any sense of when they're going to be going where or are you able to sort of have a hold on certain places with specialists? Is there anything the province could do in terms of ensuring that there is a pool of medical care available to whoever may need it at a given time?

LAUREN COPELAND: As far as notification for postings, from a personal perspective, my husband just this past summer retired after 22 years in the military. So the mantra is, hurry up and wait. They tell you in January that you probably will be facing a posting and then, if you're lucky, by the first of April you have the piece of paper. You're not allowed to do anything until you have that piece of paper - well, you can, but then you're out on your own hook if you spent any money to put your house on the market or anything like that.

Because it is not just one person - we have 7,000 military members here alone and there are tens of thousands of them across the country. So you can just imagine the logistical nightmare of trying to put that jigsaw puzzle together to figure out who is going where, who is doing what, what rank this person is at, because certain ranks indicate the jobs. Sometimes, families do get three to four months notice and sometimes families get only two weeks notice, because the person who was going to be posted into a position is now no longer able to be there so they have to backfill. It is like substituting teaching at a school, so sometimes you don't get a lot of notice.

[10:30 a.m.]

I do believe that family doctors will advocate for families to the extent that they are able. I am hoping that they have colleagues across the country and will help families to locate specialists across the country. I think the problems tend to happen when families are posted here for limited periods of time, or if a child is just diagnosed with something prior to them leaving, or if the wait time at the province you're going to is worse than the wait time here. You have spent six months waiting here and you're just making it up to the top of the list, and I don't know if other provinces recognize that it is time already served; that I am not sure of.

I like to hope that maybe there is some compromise that can be made province to province, but I think it would depend on where you're moving to. I think if you're lucky enough to be posted to Ottawa, you probably have a variety of doctors you could choose from, but if you're posted to Cold Lake, then perhaps the doctors aren't quite so plentiful, perhaps there is only one specialist of his or her kind in the local area - can they honour that time served? That I don't know.

I think it is a systemic problem. I don't believe it is a problem that is just unique to the Halifax area, however, it is something that military families would face - and probably a small percentage of them, not everybody has a child who needs to see a specialist. It is just one more thing that they have to face.

What can be done about it? I think, perhaps, if inter-provincially, conversations can occur and generate discussions about whether wait times can be listed as time served and children don't have to start all over again, and just to bring knowledge to other provinces that maybe it is not as much of an issue in their province, but if you're posting somebody to here, it could be an issue. Just so it is a general awareness at the

provincial level that doctors are aware as well.

MICHELE RAYMOND: That maybe something that the federal government would need to co-ordinate, I don't know, but there hasn't been any.

LAUREN COPELAND: I don't know.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Do the families have access to the base hospital, for instance?

LAUREN COPELAND: No, that is for members of the fleet only. Families have been told that they access to psycho-social services through the base hospital, but the issue has to be directly related to the member's deployment and the member must be with them. That is because, basically, we have 7,000 military members here. That base hospital is a going concern all the time and they deploy, so over in Afghanistan we have doctors and nurses who are on deployment and some of them come from the base hospitals. So, unfortunately, families do not have access to the base hospitals.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I will wait for a second round if you want.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacMaster and then we will come back.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you for all of the work that you're doing to help those who are serving our country. I have three questions. Have you any satellites programs that are offered to Canadian Forces members who would be living, when they come back from services, in more rural areas of the province?

LAUREN COPELAND: We do and I didn't highlight that, and that is my mistake. We have three people - we have staff who is in Cape Breton, as I indicated, and we have two people in our office dedicated to what we call outreach services. Except for Greenwood and the Valley, we are responsible for the entire rest of the province, so we are often out and on the road up in Pictou, Guysborough and Antigonish Counties and we're at the Legions.

We do what we call a road show. We take our information and briefings, much like this, and we take it out and we speak to military families that live in those areas and that is predominantly where we run into the parents of the serving members, because they are often young reservists from the outlying areas who, obviously, are not coming into Halifax to access our services. So we put as much information as we can on our Web site and we'll send out information through e-mail, but there's nothing like a little bit of face time. So we pack up our van, we hit the road, we buy coffee and donuts, and we show up at a local Legion with lots of advertising and we hope we get families to come out and ask us questions.

Our staff member who is up in Cape Breton works right in the garrison three days

a week and often finds himself in Glace Bay meeting with local families down there as well. We certainly try to do the best that we can to address the fact that we have military family members right across the province. We're in Amherst, Springhill, we're all over the place and we definitely encourage families to come out and meet with us, and if they want us out there more, we will be there.

We also have volunteers in some of those areas who, when there are local community events - Pictou has the lobster festival every year, and we were there last year and we're going again this year. Probably my colleague, Emily, will be up there with the van and with some promotional material and we take volunteers with us, and we have volunteers in those communities who know actually the families who are up there and we do our best to get them connected.

ALLAN MACMASTER: That's great to hear.

You've mentioned a number of issues that are facing families - what would be the top three in your mind that would be affecting military families right now?

LAUREN COPELAND: I would say child care is one of the big ones, because there is such a wait list and there is such a wait time. Spouses often can't go out and get employment and contribute to the local economy, contribute to the financial success of their family if they don't have child care. It's what comes first, the chicken or the egg - I have my resume out there and I got called for the interview, but I don't have child care so do I want to take the job, do I interview for the job? They don't know what to do first. So I would say child care; I would definitely say the health care concerns are there; and a third one - I don't know. I would say those are definitely the two big ones.

I would say the second language is one, would you agree?

EMILY HATCHER: I would say second language is or the posting, having the local support when you move to a new area and then getting to know people, connecting with new people. Spouses whose husband or wife may be deployed and then you're in a new area and trying to connect - you know, realizing, all of a sudden, my parents aren't here to support me, and I guess that kind of stems back to the child care, too - that falls as another aspect of having that extra support that can often be a challenge.

ALLAN MACMASTER: That's good to know. It's nice to have an idea of what the main ones are, it's easier to remember if there are a couple that really stand out.

I just have one last question, if I may?

THE CHAIR: Okay, then we'll bounce back to Ms. Raymond, because I think she had another question as well.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Sure. I just wanted to ask, your funding sources to run

the operations - could you just give a quick breakdown of who provides funding for you?

LAUREN COPELAND: Sure. The Director of Military Family Services is our - well I don't know if they're the primary funder. We probably get somewhere between 35 and 40 per cent of our funding from them to provide what they call mandated services. So because they are our funder, we submit a funding application to them every year, they give us a framework under which we have to operate and they list mandated services. So deployment, welcome to the community, the emergency child care - those are mandated services that we have to provide, and all Military Family Resource Centres right across the country are mandated to provide to families.

We probably get 5 to 10 per cent of our funding from the local chain of command to provide site-specific services. The outreach services that we provide, we're not directly funded through - because not all MFRCs have the challenges that we have with members right across the province, so we take a lot of the local command to provide a lot of the programming and the travel expenses that we use to travel up to some of those outlying areas.

We offer a lot of different programs for youth and children that aren't necessarily mandated, that we will put in because the local base has sort of said we think this is a good idea, we'll help provide some funding. We also are not mandated to provide daycare, that's not a mandated service for us. The base, 10 to 12 years ago, started a very small day care on the base in the chapel, believe it or not. We serviced 22 children at the time and the base decided that although they don't directly fund us for that, they don't charge us overhead for the space. Our daycare is now located in our building in Windsor Park and in our building in Shearwater but they don't charge us rent and they don't charge us lights and heat and they send in cleaning staff - it's the overhead that we don't pay so indirectly they are helping to support that.

The rest of the money comes from fundraising and from user fees. We do charge, obviously - our parents user fees and those daycare centres are completely self-sufficient. We are not allowed, because of Treasury Board guidelines, to use any of the monies we receive from the federal government to support that program at all. All of the monies that come into that daycare centre are used to pay the staff and are used to provide all the programming supplies and the toys and the field trips and all of that kind of stuff.

We actively engage in fundraising all the time. We have a lot of corporate sponsors that believe strongly in military families so they will sometimes make very generous donations with stipulations that it be used for x-number of things. Last year we were the recipients of the Telus Community Board Award and received monies to help support our emergency apartments that I had spoken of earlier. We did some renovations in the apartments, we were able to go out and buy new curtains and new bedding. While that may not sound like a big thing, when you have six of them it's quite costly so we were able to do that and then use our other fundraising dollars to support the programming that we do.

We're under-funded federally, as everybody is, so most of our money goes to support - it doesn't cover all of the expenses for all of the programming so we fund-raise to sort of offset what we don't get through our funders.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Theriault.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Wonderful presentation, beautiful. I believe you were in before in the committee, maybe not you but . . .

LAUREN COPELAND: Colleen Calvert, our executive director, and I were supposed to be here together today. She's unfortunately in Ottawa so I often try to fill her shoes but she and I have done other presentations together so you may have met me at some other time.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Yes and it's a wonderful organization. I know when you were in here a year or so ago, I said it's a shame this couldn't expand across the whole province for everyone, this system that you have in place. We hear a lot about the post-traumatic situation and we all believe that comes from directly being in the war, but man, you've got traumatic things going on here with the family that people don't really know about. This is not known around as we're hearing here today. We hear about the people that are directly involved in the war effort and we hear there's post-traumatic distress, but we don't hear about the distress that's here at home and how you people are handling it.

I just have one question. Are there many families who separate permanently because of the problems of - I mean, I've fished all my life and we'd go out on the banks for a few days or a week or something at a time and that's hard on the family. But being deployed for six or eight months and your family at home going through this traumatic experience - are there many permanent separations in the military because of this?

LAUREN COPELAND: I don't know if I could sit here and give you statistics that the military lifestyle is something that causes family breakdown. I have my own beliefs that if the chain had a weak link in it already, chances are the marriage wouldn't have survived no matter your partner did for a living. Certainly deployments and stressful deployments can cause stress and strain on families, but I don't believe that the statistics for a separation and divorce are any higher in the military community than they are out in the civilian world. Can deployments cause undue stress on families? Absolutely, I clearly outlined that today but I don't think that you can directly link a deployment, or the stress of a deployment, to the breakdown of a marriage. I think if the marriage were going to break down, it would break down anyway.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I believe that without this organization you're running, it would be higher.

LAUREN COPELAND: Potentially. We do have social workers in our building

that work directly with families and kudos to families that are out there to get - if you ask a military family, even when I was one, we don't really think we live a stressful life. We just think we live a normal life because this becomes our normal, so you just learn to deal with your abnormal normal life and really that's what it is. What seems abnormal to everybody else is just normal to us and that's just sort of what you do. It is nice to know that there are services out there so that when you're feeling like your abnormal is a little more abnormal than usual, you can come in and at least ask some questions and get some resources.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms. Raymond, we cut you off earlier there.

MICHELE RAYMOND: No, it is really very interesting on how you deal with this. I was just wondering, if you have a minute, I would be interested to know a little bit more about any special programming that you do for the children of military families. I know, almost by definition there are a lot of young people involved because these are young parents, and these are very formative years for these children. They're dealing with often unexpected absences, stressful absences, a distracted parent at home, and so on. Is there any special programming, are there books, or orientations, are there things that are being done?

LAUREN COPELAND: We certainly do try and do that. Through that cycle of deployment I mentioned to you earlier, we do develop programming that addresses what the children are going through, through that cycle of deployment. So in some of our programs that we run, we often will do dual programming, so the adults will be in having their social time and maybe, you know, educational pieces for adults is hard. You have to throw in a potluck every once in awhile so that they don't think that they're being lectured to, because you want to give them information, but you don't want them to feel like they're just here to get some information because, really, that's just not what it's all about.

We do have a program - we call it Deployment Zone - where when we have a large number of families experiencing deployment, we bring them in and we have a children's component that addresses some of the things that children are going through, but we do it in a very non-threatening way. We don't sit down there and say, so now, Billy and Susie, Daddy's on deployment this month so how are you feeling? We might develop activities because children learn through play. So we develop activities and we allow them to experience different things through their play, which might later on give them pause for thought. We also try to do a pretty good job making all of our staff - who work with our young up and comings - well aware of what's happening and where the deployments are and we make sure that everybody is aware of what that cycle of deployment is.

Certainly if families are recognizing as a large group, and there's a needs assessment done that says, well, a bunch of us are noticing this, we will do programming to address some of those needs as well, but we do recognize that we do have things out

there. In our youth programming, we have a very active youth centre over in Shearwater that sometimes it's just a place to hang out. Sometimes it's a place to meet other kids who are going through the same thing you're going through, but sometimes it's a way they didn't realize we slipped it in, to give them a little bit of information as to, you know, you might be unique in your lifestyle but you're not unlike any other 8, 9, 10, 11, 12-year-old who's out there because this is how you're feeling and you're growing up.

[10:45 a.m.]

We do have programs that run on the weekends that children can come out to, to sort of hang out with other kids who might have a mom or dad who's away, and through that we do try to address maybe some of those challenges that they have, absolutely.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I know there's a conference coming up here, there's an international conference on the development of psychological resiliency. A lot of the people who are coming to this conference are coming from war-torn areas and so on. The great challenge is, obviously, how do you make people resilient in the face of this, particularly children? I don't know if there is a general curriculum that's available everywhere?

LAUREN COPELAND: That I don't know, and you know, again, if you ask those children, if you asked my children if they were different from everybody else, they would tell you no, they would, because they don't see themselves as different. They just know that their daddy went away and other people's daddies didn't and that was their normal because it is interesting. So you can overtry sometimes, I think.

MICHELE RAYMOND: And overdramatize, yes.

LAUREN COPELAND: And sometimes when you do too much, they sit back and they say, oh, I didn't know I was different and now all of a sudden they have the panic look like, oh, my goodness, I have to go look this up, I guess I'm just different from everybody else. Now my girls, who are seven and 10, are very glad that their daddy doesn't go away any more, but they never saw themselves as different. I think that's - and I'm not unique, other military families do the same thing, it's because you don't raise them to believe that they are. You raise them to believe that they're just like everybody else, and that your mommy or your daddy goes away. I used to say to them, you don't have to like it, we just have to deal with it. I don't ever want you to like it, because then we've got other problems, but there are other things out there that parents can take advantage of.

We do parenting programs just like other family resource centres would - kids have stress too, and how to talk so kids will listen. Those are pretty standard things that we offer to all parents to give them skills. We do focus at it from the military perspective and answer questions for them from that perspective, but parents are dealing with the same issues with military children that they are with non-military children.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Do you think most children are actually aware that their parent is potentially going into danger when they leave or is that sort of an individual, familial decision?

LAUREN COPELAND: I think it's an individual thing. I think it depends on the age of the child. I think it depends on their interest in the news, and I think it depends on how much parents talk about that at home or how much parents allow their own children to watch or to read. The news is everywhere, but I think that is an individual family choice, and I think all children deal with things very differently.

Are there some children who are aware? Absolutely. Are there some children who react to it differently than other children? Absolutely. But just like if there is a traumatic event that happens at a school in the HRM that doesn't necessarily affect just military children, those children have to deal with that traumatic experience as well. I think parents make their own choices as to how they filter, if you will, information for their children.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: I appreciate hearing you speak about the pressures on the adults and kids - not so much to do with deployments, but just with a transient lifestyle of any sort. There is all sorts of evidence about how this impacts family stability, the propensity to addiction, mental health problems, and so on. It does seem to me, just anecdotally, that over the last 20 years, postings, particularly for families with young children - it has seemed to me that people are being posted in places longer. It has seemed to me, then, perhaps the military is getting this, but I haven't really known if this were so. Is this, in fact, so?

LAUREN COPELAND: It depends on what the person's rank level is, and certainly for the Navy, they have what they call a home port. Depending on what your rank is, you can find yourself here, in Halifax, for example, for up to 10 years. However, once you get promoted to a different rank, you get promoted out of the job that you're in and if there isn't another job for you here after you've done your training - because the whole idea is that you get trained, you get promoted, and you move up in your career. That's how the military tends to work. Sometimes postings are an inevitability if you want to progress in your career.

It also depends on what your trade is, so if you are in a specialized field and there are only a few of you throughout the country, to keep moving forward in your career postings is an inevitability. At some point in time, all of the officer corps ends up in Ottawa. It's just an inevitability because that's where headquarters is, and if you are progressing through your career you have to do your time in Ottawa to understand how it

works from that end. So that becomes an inevitability.

Absolutely, there are families who end up in locations for long periods of time, which is why I said earlier that it's not all families who have the issues with medical and the specialists. It's a small percentage of families compared to the large number of people who are in the military. However, there are families who do find themselves posted on a regular basis. If the member is coming here to Halifax to do a course and the course is 18 months long and he or she brings their family with them, well, when you're done there's no guarantee you're staying here. You have to then take what you've learned and be posted back to a unit at which you can use it, so you get posted back. That is where the constant postings happen.

We have members who live in the HRM, who are posted to Greenwood, and their family just stays here because that's obviously more convenient for them. The military also offers what they call imposed restriction, so the member can choose to post and the family can choose to stay. For example, if the spouse had a job and you have three children and they're all in high school, are you uprooting your family? Some families choose not to do that. It's a choice, so they call it imposed restriction because the family imposed it upon themselves; the member goes to the posting and the family stays behind.

The military has recognized that families can now have choices in what they're doing, and that is nice because then families have a little more control over an uncontrolled situation, so to speak, absolutely.

THE CHAIR: Are there further questions?

JIM BOUDREAU: Just a quick question to follow up from Mr. MacMaster's question with regard to funding. You indicated that fundraising is a key component - just out of curiosity, what percentage of your needs are met through your fundraising?

LAUREN COPELAND: I'd say that fluctuates from year to year. It really depends upon how much other funding and how many programs we need to do. It's possible that it's up to somewhere, 20 per cent on average but it tends to - in fundraising, it's not just us out there at the bake sale. That includes corporate donations and corporate sponsorships. We also get in-kind donations as all charitable organizations will get. The local grocery store may opt to donate the hamburgers and hotdogs for the barbeque that we're having for the program that we're running next Tuesday. Therefore, we don't have to go spend the \$400 to \$500 that it would cost us to go buy the product. I don't have that number, I apologize, I don't have that percentage but it really does fluctuate. Our fundraising is supposed to be reactive to the amount of funding that we need for any particular space and time and any particular year to address the needs that we have in the organization.

JIM BOUDREAU: Just as a follow-up as well - with regard to your funding for mandated services, has that been frozen, has that decreased?

LAUREN COPELAND: It has pretty much been the same funding for the last three years. What happens is the cost of living increases so the cost of program supplies increases and the cost of keeping staff that we've invested time, effort and energy into training and we like to keep our staff. We don't like to have a constant turnover. Turnover happens in any organization, however it is in the best interest of our community to keep staff for as long as we possibly can, so cost-of-living certainly increases and funding - there's a limited supply of money that happens at the federal level and it has to be divided up amongst the 32 centres and it is part of Department of National Defense funding. When there's not enough funding to go around, we get x-number of dollars and we find that out at the end of January and then we do up our budget to decide what programs we are going to run based on the funding that we receive.

JIM BOUDREAU: At present, there's no mechanism in place to keep in pace with the cost of living?

LAUREN COPELAND: Our organization addresses that itself but not from the federal monies that we get, no.

JIM BOUDREAU: Thank you very much.

LAUREN COPELAND: You're welcome.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in. This has been most informative. It's been a real insight into what your organization is doing and also the challenges that are faced by our military. As Mr. MacMaster said earlier, we appreciate what our military is doing and what our military families are receiving in service from you, so we thank you very much. Do you have any closing remarks?

LAUREN COPELAND: Only to say, thank you very much for allowing us to be here today and I'm sure you learned a little bit from our presentation today. I would invite any of you at any time to come down and visit our centre. We'd be more than happy to host you and to take you around and to show you what our buildings look like and to talk more in depth about any of the programming that we offer there in the building. We do have several locations and so we would open the doors and would be more than happy to host you at any given time. Please feel that you are always welcome, thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much and, in fact, between groups of witnesses we talked about getting out of this office and visiting sites and I think we will be doing that. We looked after our other business in between our groups of witnesses and I think that pretty well does it for today so for good behaviour, you're getting out about 2.5 minutes early.

Do we have a motion to adjourn?

AN. HON. MEMBER: So moved.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:57 a.m.]