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COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, February 12, 2015

Legislative Committees Office

Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ms. Pam Eyking (Chair)
Mr. Ben Jessome (Vice-Chair)
Ms. Patricia Arab
Mr. Stephen Gough
Mr. Keith Irving
Hon. Pat Dunn
Mr. Larry Harrison
Hon. Dave Wilson
Hon. Gordie Gosse

[Hon. Pat Dunn was replaced by Hon. Chris d'Entremont.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Cathleen O'Grady
Legislative Counsel Office

WITNESSES

Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre

Ms. Barbara Corbett,
Chair of the Board of Directors

Ms. Colleen Calvert,
Executive Director



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2015

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Pam Eyking

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to call this meeting to order. It's the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and I am the Chair - Pam Eyking, MLA for Victoria-The Lakes, Cape Breton.

The committee will be receiving a presentation regarding the Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre today. Welcome ladies.

I'm going to ask all the committee members to introduce themselves for the record, by stating their name and their constituency and I'll start with Mr. Harrison.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm just going to ask that everyone have their phones set to vibrate during the meeting, please. I'm going to ask everyone to be identified before they speak, for the purpose of Hansard.

We do have committee business later on and we're going to try and wrap up around 10:40 a.m., if that's possible. We will start the presentation, if you ladies wouldn't mind introducing yourselves, please.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Welcome. We have a new committee member just joining us and if she wouldn't mind introducing herself, please.

MS. PATRICIA ARAB: My name is Patricia Arab, I am the MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park and I apologize. It was insane traffic trying to get in here this morning.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I'm just going to ask the ladies if they would like to start their presentation, please.

MS. COLLEEN CALVERT: Excellent, thank you. First of all, let me say how much I appreciate the opportunity to come and speak with you. Anything we can do to educate anybody about military families and some of the challenges is greatly appreciated.

I'll also start by saying that I spent 21 years in the Air Force so I definitely know what it's like to be a military family member and some of the challenges that that brings. Barbara as well is a retired member and is now the parent of a serving military member so she certainly understands what it's like.

Let me start by blowing a myth out of the water right at the very beginning. A lot of people don't know and understand that the Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre is a registered charity. We are not federal or provincial employees - we are a registered charity and we work in partnership with the Canadian Forces and with several other partners. I'll try to talk not really fast but I do all the time, sorry.

Our mission is pretty simple: we're there to promote and support military families with the unique challenges of the military lifestyle. We are governed by a board of directors, 51 per cent of which must be military family members so it's very much by military families, for military families. Canadian Forces families have absolutely no control over most of their lives and the one thing military families have told us over and over again is families want to be able to decide and determine what programs and services they require. They don't want somebody in uniform saying this is what you need, dear.

Military families were the ones from the grassroots that started this organization right across Canada and they are the ones who continue to govern and direct and lead these organizations. There are 32 centres right across Canada; wherever you find a large Canadian Forces base, you'll find a Military Family Resource Centre. As I said, we work in partnership with Military Family Services and the Canadian Forces. It's a tripartite partnership so we all kind of work well together and we play nice together.

A lot of people think that we're fully funded by the Department of National Defence. Unfortunately we're only partly funded by the Department of National Defence and Military Family Services and we are mandated to deliver a wide variety of different services and programs. What we offer is a unique approach to work with military families. We understand the lifestyle, we listen to the families and we adapt to the needs of the families as life changes. So all of a sudden several years ago Operation Apollo hit and we suddenly had a huge deployment of ships going out of the harbour, so we adapted all of

our programming to work with the families who were experiencing the change in their life - the deployment and absence of a loved one.

We help the military achieve operational missions. The whole premise of that is that if the military family is taken care of, then the member can go and do their job, they don't have to worry about what's going on at home. Today, as you know, with all these wonderful communication devices that we have, if a member is 3,000 miles away and concentrating on a mission, he suddenly gets an email from home saying Johnny is not doing well in school, the member now is not focused on the mission. The member needs to stay focused on the mission so we can take care and we'll support that family with what's going on here. If there's a challenge with what's going on with one of the children, with any of the family members, families have a place where they can go and they can get support for whatever the issue is.

We're a safe place for military families. We operate in a very confidential workplace, we don't report to the chain of command. The old myth was that if any military family member went to get assistance, that would go and impact the member's ability to do their job or their career would be impacted so it would have career implications. We don't report to the chain of command; there are no career implications. If a family member wants to seek services or support in any way, it's confidential - nobody even knows they are there. We are a safe place to go, we are actually a fun place to go.

What we are: we are the only constant, we are the only ones that don't get posted. All the military families will move, all the chain of command will move, the senior leadership will move. The Military Family Resource Centre, we don't move. We stay so we know the community, we're engaged in the community and we have lots of great community partnerships. We are the only constant here in an ever-changing evolution with military members and their families. We have professional volunteers and staff; I have about 65 staff members and about 150 volunteers who work with us.

The strength of the Military Family Resource Centre - we are incredibly agile and able to adapt creatively to situations. We're not bureaucracy and red tape, so when something happens we don't have to say, well, we have to jump through all these hoops. We can respond immediately to a family's needs.

We have roots in the community, we have connections with many, many different community agencies, other charities, other provincial services that are available, so because we know the community and the community knows us, we can refer families very quickly. We do not duplicate services. If there's a service that's already available in the community, we're going to work with that agency to make sure that our families are getting the support and that that agency also understands the challenges of the military lifestyle because a lot of people don't know.

We know and understand the challenges as they relate to the community and we are a tremendous resource to all our communities and our schools. I have a number of my staff who will go into the school, they'll work with the educators and actually work with the children of military families to help them know and understand what the challenges are and how actually the educators can help our children who are in the schools. We are a professional, independent organization that uses our heart and our brains to support families.

We in Halifax are actually responsible for three-quarters of the province. There's another Military Family Resource Centre and it's in Greenwood, Nova Scotia. The Greenwood Family Resource Centre takes care of the South Shore and the Valley and then our mandate is for the rest of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. I have a service site in Halifax in Windsor Park, a service site over in Shearwater and I have an office up in the garrison in Sydney as well. We have a travelling road show so we go up into the armouries in Truro, Pictou, New Glasgow and we do presentations and mental health showcases up in those areas as well and we work with all the reserve units that are spread right across that area as well.

Our demographics: we've got Army, Navy and Air Force here, of course. A lot of people think we're just Navy but we actually have quite an Air Force and Army contingent across the province. We provide services to 6,800 regular force members, 2,100 reserve force members and, of course, their spouses, children and family members. A lot of people don't think that mom and dad of a serving member is a family member but they certainly are. My board of directors has been very clear to me that the Canadian Forces' definition of family is still the nuclear family, it's mom and dad and 2.5 children, but my board of directors has made it very clear to us that we are to provide services for anybody who the member says is important to them - if it's grandma, grandpa, uncle, whoever, so we have extended our services. The member could be posted to Edmonton but the family is here, we will provide service to the family here.

Our funding: I get about 46 per cent of my funding from fundraising and program user fees; 39 per cent comes from the Military Family Services, that's the Department of National Defence; I get about 9 per cent funding from the provincial government and that is mostly going to my two daycares. I have two daycares, one in Halifax and one in Shearwater so the incredible opportunities we get from the provincial government to support our early childhood educators is greatly appreciated. In addition, I get provincial support for my summer camp staff. We apply for the summer grants, the student grants as well so we're usually pretty lucky there and appreciate that greatly. I get about 6 per cent from the local command here in Halifax at both Shearwater and the base.

Some of the programs we offer include Welcome and Community Orientation. The purpose of that one is pretty simple - our families are constantly being moved in and out of this area. We experience about 750 families being posted in every year and approximately the same amount leaving the area every year.

We provide adult programming, family, child and youth programs that deal specifically with the unique challenges of the lifestyle and I will talk a little bit more about that shortly.

Second Language Services: we have a lot of francophone families that come here from Quebec. The Canadian Forces member is provided the opportunity to learn English through the military; many times their families are not. What we do is try to incorporate all the incredible services that already exist in Halifax and connect our francophone families with the services that exist. We will also give them second language training in English so they can get established here and hopefully gain employment, et cetera.

Prevention, Support and Intervention: they are all my social workers. I have four social workers who work with our families. They will do crisis work and they will do information referral, get people connected into the community. We don't do therapy.

Deployment Services: that's services to the families when members are deployed. They could be gone for six months or it could be that they are just in the harbour, but if they're in the harbour they're not coming home. Members could be in other parts of Canada on a course or they could be anywhere, so we support the families whenever the member is away.

Emergency Child Care Services: that one is pretty simple. When the member is away, somebody has just become a single parent and when somebody is a single parent they could be walking out the door on a day like today, slip and fall and they have a broken ankle. Their family is not from here, they have no social safety net. So mom is on the way to the hospital, mom gives us a call, we can put emergency child care into their home within three hours and we'll do it for 72 hours at no cost to the family. That gives us an opportunity to then bring services. We can either get the member home or maybe we can fly grandma from Alberta to come out and support that family, so we can put something in place so that that family can continue and be supported.

Employment and Education Services: I'm going to talk a little bit more about that, but of course whenever a member is posted here to Halifax, somebody has lost a job. Employment is a big issue and I am going to talk a little bit more. We help military families brush off that résumé, get connected in the local job market and hopefully help them find employment.

Volunteer Development: of course we can't do everything that we do without the support and help of our volunteers. Our volunteers give us well over 7,000 hours a year and they are engaged in all areas of our organization. Our volunteers are not all just military family members or military members - we have many come from the community who just want to support military families and give back.

Outreach Services: I spoke a tiny bit about. That's when we go out to all the different local communities and we go to all the different places in the province to help educate the communities, the other agencies about the services that we provide.

Military families are the strength behind the uniform. We believe that military members won't be successful unless they've got a very strong, resilient military family behind them. So we work to enhance their resiliency and to make sure that they've got the supports that they need. As I said, they play a significant role in the positive morale and welfare of members.

Families are unique so geographic location, operational deployments, and the relentless upheaval of military life are the major causes of disruption and strain for military families. It's quite interesting when there is a deployment. HMCS Fredericton just left after Christmas and we have military families sitting there going - I didn't know they were going to leave for six, seven or eight months and they're just not prepared for that. We will work with those families to help them get established in the community and figure things out for themselves.

In 2013, the Canadian Forces Ombudsman wrote a report: *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*. He put it very clearly into words what everybody knew about military families in that the challenges that they face - all military families experience the same challenge. It's mobility. The families don't decide where they're going to live. They're posted from all over this country back and forth many times.

The Navy isn't as bad as the Air Force and the Army. The Air Force and the Army will move every three to five years. The Navy only has two coasts so most of our Navy will spend most of their career here, in Esquimalt, Victoria or in Ottawa - so Navy families don't move as much.

Separation: that's the whole issue of deployment. Deployments don't have to be six, seven or eight months. Right now there are a bunch of ships in and out of the harbour every couple of weeks or five days. They're out for five days, back for two - they're out for four - and the disruption that puts on a family is absolutely huge. You know how everybody has a routine? Try it when one of the members is coming in and out of that family all the time.

Of course the other challenge of military lifestyle is the risk. Not everybody has unlimited liability, right? When the Canadian Forces members sign on the dotted line, they sign that they will put their life on the line for the rest of us, which I think is pretty significant. So that also has an impact on military families when they're worried about that and thinking about that.

It's not always just about going into a war zone. Many of our military members work in very dangerous environments. The flight lines, working on a ship - these are very hazardous and dangerous environments, so every day our members go to work there is an element of risk.

Of course, because military families are not from here, they have very few social supports. Some of them are well-established in the community; some of them are from Nova Scotia - some of them are from here - but many of them are not. So coming to a brand new community, you have no social support - you have to try to establish that social support, so that's one of the things we try to help our families with.

They have no extended families or close friends nearby; so if something was to happen to me, I would be able to call my mom or sister to come help me out with the kids or with whatever. Military families can't do that. Mom is 3,000 miles away. So that is a challenge for military families.

As I talked about earlier, language and culture barriers - the language barrier used to be mostly just our francophone families coming here, so helping our francophone families get established in the community and being able to maintain their cultural identity and help them be able to connect with other francophone families is really important to us. With many of our military members we're seeing a lot more immigrants and we're seeing a lot of people that have other - we've got Filipinos now who are working and are learning English as a second language with us, as well, because our military members travel all over the world and, of course, have partners who come from all over the world.

Military families always have somebody who has to give up a job, so if you have to start your job and career every three to five years, that's a huge problem and, of course, all of the different professional associations from all the different provinces. If I graduated as a teacher in Alberta and get posted in Nova Scotia, there's a barrier to employment so that's a big deal. It's not just a big deal here in Nova Scotia, it's a big deal across the country.

These are the things, of course, that the Canadian Forces Ombudsman has reiterated in his report. They're not familiar with the community, they don't know where the schools are, they don't know where the recreation things are, they don't know anything in their community when they first get here, and that can be pretty daunting to some people trying to get established in a new community. Again, that's one of the things that we do is help them get established in their new community, meet new people, get associated with some of the great resources and services that are out there.

Some of the information that we give them is a welcome package that says hey, here are all the neat things you can do in Halifax or in Nova Scotia. The Doers & Dreamers Guide is one of the first things we give all of our new families when they come here because we want them to explore this incredible province of ours.

During deployments, our military family member becomes a single parent and not everybody signs up to be a single parent. You're struggling with a job yourself and then you're juggling the children's activities and all the other things that children do, doing that for an extended period of time with the additional stress and pressure of perhaps the military member is in a war zone or far away, they're gone for six or eight months. That's a real challenge for our families, and many of them are also unsure about where to get information, they don't know where to go. It's pretty daunting, so that's one of the things we also do is try to connect them with the information that's available and out there.

Health care - that's another big challenge and that health care issue comes because people are posted here. They haven't been established so they may come here and they don't have a family doctor. Finding a family doctor in the City of Halifax is not such a big deal, but it is a big deal in other parts of this province, as you all know and I'm not telling you anything new. But if you're a military family member and you get posted and can't find health care, that is a challenge.

One of the very exciting things that happened in the past two years is the Province of Nova Scotia waived the 90-day wait period for military families, and that was greatly appreciated. All the provinces in Canada have now done that. A lot of people didn't know that our military families had to wait 90 days before they could get the provincial health card. Because there wasn't reciprocal agreements with every one of the provinces, it was out-of-pocket expenses for some of our military families. We had a pregnant spouse come from Quebec and she had to pay up front for all of the costs associated with her birth and then because there wasn't a reciprocal arrangement with the Province of Quebec, she had to wait two years to get reimbursed. So waiving that 90-day wait period for our families is huge and greatly appreciated.

The other problem with accessing health care is many of our doctors believe that Canadian Forces families can go to the Canadian Forces health care - they cannot. Military families cannot access any Canadian Forces health care doctors, systems, or processes. Military families have to access all of the provincial services. So if they have been on a wait list to get into a specialist in the province they were in and they're suddenly posted, they're at the bottom of the list here so getting in and seeing some of the specialists, especially with continuity of care, is really a challenge. Finding a doctor is sometimes a challenge. Anything that we can do to educate physicians in this province about accepting military families into their practice is appreciated.

I've met with Doctors Nova Scotia and I've asked them to help educate their doctors, and they're doing that with us. Anything we can do or anybody can do to blow out some of the myths is really important. I will guarantee right now most doctors in this province probably have military families in their practice so when that military family leaves because they're posted, keep the space open for another military family. We're not asking for anything special for our families - just the awareness that if you lose one, take one in.

Accessing medical care for francophone families who are limited in finding a doctor who speaks French is a challenge. If we can do anything to get more francophone doctors who will accept military francophone families it's really important.

We do get some support from the province when we get medical records; their medical records will come here and they are all in French but they have an anglophone doctor, we can get some support from one of the provincial programs where we can get their medical records translated. Those are some good relationships and partnerships that we have right now.

There's one of the challenges that came out of the ombudsman's report, is speaking in fractured English or French often makes discussing and comprehending medical issues and concerns very difficult so it's important that hopefully we can help our families get access to the service in the language they are comfortable with.

Employment: it's really difficult for CF spouses to find and sustain reasonable and gainful continuous employment. A lot of employers will not hire a military family member, period, because oh you are going to leave in a couple of years, why should I invest in you? If we can blow away the myth that military families are always posted - they are not always posted. Some of our Navy families will be here for 20 years.

The other really neat thing about our military family members is they are so resilient and resourceful and they bring so much ingenuity and creativity that they actually will bring really good things to an employer. Anything we can do to educate employers about hiring a military family member and opportunities that exist I think is a really good thing. Again, it's about educating the employers in the Province of Nova Scotia to hire military family members. A lot of them will come from Alberta where they've been making significant salaries, they come here and they wind up with a McJob, making minimum wage. Then, of course, the whole family is impacted by that loss of income.

Then, of course, you've got all the confidence issues that come with that - I can't contribute any more to my family, I can't get gainful employment, or I spent how many years in university and I have these great credentials and degrees and I can't get a job. So if we can educate anybody in this province and the employers about hiring military families, it's all good.

My question always has been why do these big banks and big employers like Sears and Walmart and all these big employers - why aren't they transferring military families as well, so if a military family member is leaving a bank in B.C. and getting posted here, why don't they just transfer them? They are losing all that experience and knowledge and expertise, it's like why would they do that? I think the challenge is that they aren't aware of the challenges of the military lifestyle and they haven't recognized military families as being important and significant.

Education: military children are constantly adapting to new curriculum, sometimes struggling to catch up on content lost in the gap between one school system and another - they are coming from Ontario, they are coming here, there's different school systems. Our children are suffering because of that and it's a challenge for them. Some military children are pushed back a year to compensate for moving from one location to one that has a less advanced curriculum. If we can again educate our educators about the challenges that military youth and children face, then maybe we can help those children be successful and children won't have so much stress.

Can you imagine, it's tough enough being a teenager and all of a sudden you are posted to a brand new province and you don't know anybody. Now you realize that the class they are in is way ahead of them or way behind them and now they're going to repeat a year or they're going to have to start over so it's a challenge. If all our educators know that these are the challenges, I know they would help our children and youth be successful in school.

Military children in schools populated by military and civilian or mostly civilian can often feel very isolated and ostracized because kids are kids and they don't understand that this new kid in town is because his mom or dad just got posted here. Again, educating them about some of those things is really important.

The other challenges our military families face are special needs wait lists and access. More and more of our families right across - all of us, civilians and military families, of course this is an issue and a challenge. It's more of a challenge when families are being posted, so they could be on the wait list and just getting in and then they get posted some place and they are starting all over, at the bottom. So just a recognition of that and an awareness of that is important.

Full-time daycare: you will find daycare in this province now. The province has really done a great job, especially in the Halifax-Dartmouth area, about addressing daycare spaces so you'll find a daycare space in Halifax and Dartmouth now - you're not going to find infant care. So if you're brand new posted in here and you just found out 90 days ago that you're being posted and you can't find infant care, that's an issue. That's a big problem for our military families.

The other problem with our daycares is we can get our children into daycare, but the hours aren't conducive to the work hours of military members, so that's an issue. So if we got our daycares to open up 30 minutes earlier, that issue would go away.

Mental health services - I think everybody is probably aware that can be a challenge and it can be significant wait times for mental health services, especially in the area of youth. If we have a youth that is struggling because of just being posted in and he's being bullied at school and he has all the education or the curriculum challenges, we need to get

our youth in and get them seen quickly so that we can help that family cope with the challenges.

The other challenge is deployments and work-related separations. If we can educate every Nova Scotian to look around and recognize that they're probably working with somebody who is a military family member and if they then just become a good neighbour. Whenever anything happens in the world and our ships are sailing or there are people going off to war, I am always asked - what can we do to help? I will always tell everybody, be a good neighbour. I'll bet you don't know that the person you're working with right beside you, her husband is at sea and he's gone for eight months. Why don't you just say hi, and say how are you doing? I'm going for a coffee, do you want to go? Do you want to talk about some of the challenges?

So if we just become good neighbours - you see that somebody across the street is struggling and can't get their sidewalk clear; did you notice that her husband is wearing a uniform and he hasn't been around for a while? Go over and offer to be a good neighbour and help shovel that walk if the husband is gone or the spouse is gone or the military member is gone. Go over and see, if you're going for groceries and if they need a hand. If you're struggling as a single parent, be a good neighbour and just help your neighbour out. That's the message that I would love every Nova Scotian to know and hear.

One of the other neat things that we're able to offer - because life happens and it doesn't always happen Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. - is we have 24-hour service. So if a military family is having any challenges, issues happening anywhere, then we are a one-stop shop. It's one phone call, 24/7, and we will connect that military family or that military member with the appropriate service 24 hours a day. So if that emergency child care situation comes up at two o'clock on Saturday morning, not a problem - we'll help that military family.

Some of the other services that we're able to offer - we have six emergency apartments. Those emergency apartments are not necessarily used by military families here in Halifax. Those apartments are quite often used by military families from right across Canada because of the IWK here being such a state-of-the-art children's hospital. We have a lot of military families coming from Gagetown and Oromocto because they have a very ill child, so they'll be coming here for treatment for their ill child. We will put that family into this emergency apartment so now they don't have to worry about all the additional costs of accommodations and those things. We will also give them social work support, chaplain support - whatever support they need so that they can focus on making sure that their child is doing okay.

A military member could be posted here, he has a car accident and his family comes from B.C. - we will then support that family, put them in the accommodation so that they can work with that family. We do have issues, of course - a military family has a fire in

their house - we can then put them in accommodations until they sort out all of their insurance.

So we have emergency apartments, we have emergency funds, we have emergency child care - so we can kind of put the Band-Aid on and then figure out what to do to resolve the issue that they're faced with after.

This is at the end of it. So if we all work together to educate health care professionals, employers and everybody in the Province of Nova Scotia, military families won't have as much challenge and we can help address some of the stuff that happens for them. If we're a little bit more of a welcoming community and saying, hey military family member, I get it - it's pretty simple stuff. Canadian Forces families count on all of us as members of this incredible province. Thank you - that's it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Calvert, that was so interesting, certainly enlightening us to the challenges that family members of the military face must be overwhelming sometimes. I was really impressed that you rarely had to look at your notes so you really know your stuff, and you speak with passion. It's good to know that the family members are in such good hands.

I'm just wondering if Ms. Corbett has anything to add. Do you have anything you would like to add before we open the floor to questions?

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: One thing for me, in the Navy 35 years but I moved 13 times. I'm one of the anomalies of the Navy, I moved a lot. My son was in four different schools, I think, while he was in elementary school. There are a few of us who do move several times and some who don't. You're right, Colleen, in that regard.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Dispelling the myth a little bit, yes.

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: Yes, exactly.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We're just going to open the floor to questions. I'll take a few names here - we'll start with Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Ms. Calvert, you talked about the challenges with respect to spouses finding employment. I appreciate that there's much that you do outside of the activity I'm about to ask you about. Have you or has your organization approached corporations that are multi-province - interprovincial - with respect to transferring military spouses from one location to another?

MS. CALVERT: We've attempted to do that. We just don't seem to be situated in the appropriate place to be able to darken the doorstep of a president of a big, multinational

corporation. We can deal with the local person but we just don't have the clout. We need somebody at a much higher level.

To be honest with you, I would love to get to a First Ministers' Conference so I could talk to all the Premiers, so that then the Premiers could maybe be better positioned to do that.

MR. JESSOME: Okay, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: First of all, thank you for coming in. As a brother to a Master Corporal in the Royal Canadian Dragoons in Petawawa, Ontario, I want to thank you for the services that you have offered me on a couple of occasions on his deployments to Afghanistan because not only do I get the package as being his representative here in Nova Scotia when he's away - you know the "just in case" package? - you also get services: by the way, here's where we are, here are the kinds of services we offer.

I want to thank you for that because I wouldn't think, as a brother, that I'm part of that family, even though I talk to him on a regular occasion, I worry about him but quite honestly, as a brother, I didn't expect to get a package from you. But I do and I thank you so much for that.

You are a little bit everywhere, how do you interact with the other MFRCs? If he's in Petawawa and all of a sudden I'm getting something from you here in Halifax, how does that network work? Maybe a little explanation around that one and then I've got one more question that I want to follow up on.

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: All the MFRCs, we get together a few times a year for conferences, like board chairs and EDs. All the executive directors do have their own network, they do talk to each other. Most of them have been around for a while and they share their best practices and they keep connected fairly - well, I'd say daily, through emails and phone calls. Board chairs as well, we have a group email that we stay in contact with each other across the country in case there's something happening in some centre that the rest of us need to be aware of. We do have our own internal networks amongst all the MFRCs.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: So pretty much all the MFRCs offer the same services, or is it sort of up to your local board to - now listen, we know we can do this but we're not too sure if we can do that?

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: There are mandated services from the Military Family Services that we have to provide. Then we have a lot of latitude to do site-specific

services as well. From my board perspective, we've always been very open. The Canadian Forces struggles with a definition of family for legal and compensation issues, but for us, it has always been you and those who care about you, and we don't care however you're related. As you say, they're brother or grandmother or it could be just a really close friend who is more important to you than some of your siblings, because that happens. Families are not always totally connected - all loving and hugs - and we have to face that reality. Your family is who is important to you or who thinks that you're important to them. We don't care how it's done.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I'll talk about the job thing, but maybe I'll do that on a subsequent question. How do you find you're getting into the families because I can only use the experience of the one that I know, which is my brother? His first wife - not that you haven't heard that there are multiple wives sometimes, divorces along the way because of whatever reasons, but his first wife, you couldn't have made her darken the doors of a resource centre. She didn't want to have anything to do with it, even though she complained all the time there was nothing to do in Petawawa and she didn't know where to access services and you just couldn't convince her this is where you had to go. His new wife - by the way, they got married yesterday in the Dominican, and I'm stuck here so I love you guys (Laughter) - she has access and has volunteered with it. How do you find your interaction with the families, because some do want it and some don't?

MS. CALVERT: That is a challenge, and that's a really good question and it's something that we struggle with. The military member is usually the gatekeeper of information and sometimes you get the information into his or her hands and that information may not go any further. We have many different ways and processes to do that. We do radio advertising, we do bus advertising, and we find all the social media opportunities and all the PSAs, so we really try to get our message out to a big and broad area so that military families who may not know about us will hear about us.

We also have a clearing in process so that when the member is posted to a new unit, we'll give the member all the information and then we ask for his partner, spouse or whatever family member will ask for an email address and then we start sending them emails so that they at least, hopefully, will get some information from us as well.

It is a challenge, like everything is. That's one of the things we want to stop. We want military families to know that there is a service for them wherever they go in this country.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I need to change something here - Master Corporal, that's a while ago; a Master Warrant Officer. I've got to remember my ranks and I can't remember the darn ranks - Master Warrant Officer. There you go - he'd kill me if I told him he was a Master Corporal. (Laughter)

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: That's a significant pay cut. (Laughter)

MR. D'ENTREMONT: He'd kill me.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We're going to ask Mr. Harrison to ask his question now.

MR. LARRY HARRISON: If you give these services the way you present them, wow! That's incredible - I mean, really incredible. I'd like to think that all of us around the table are very concerned about what happens, how people get indoctrinated into society when they're making all those moves. Is there one particular area that stands out more than another, that needs a little bit more care or takes a lot of your energy and time? Is there one particular area?

MS. CALVERT: I think the spousal employment piece - that's the one that is the big challenge, and it winds up having such impacts on military families because of the financial piece. If all of a sudden their standard of living has changed dramatically because the spouse can't find a job, then that has, of course, marital implications and all of the other implications that come from that financial security. That is definitely one that is huge.

One of the programs that we started - and we're actually working with Dalhousie University and a group called Enactus and it's a bunch of their graduate students. We have an entrepreneurs club. So a lot of our military families now are starting small businesses because they've discovered that they can transport that small business anywhere in the country. So wherever they go, wherever they're posted, they will take their business with them. We have this group at Dalhousie that is working with our families who are small business owners or entrepreneurs, to help them - how do I write a business plan, how do I do marketing, how do I network? We've got a great partnership and a relationship going there.

The other part of that whole entrepreneur club thing is we're trying to visually show the people in Nova Scotia, support a military family's small business and it's just a visual demonstration that hey, this is a military family's small business and they've had a lot of success with it because Nova Scotians will just come and say cool, I didn't know you are a military family, I'm going to buy my jams and jellies from you instead of from them because I want to support you. It's kind of neat, some of the things that families are doing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for coming in, sorry about being a little bit late but I always complain about traffic coming from Sackville into Halifax. Coming in from Sackville right to Halifax is good, it's the Halifax traffic with the roads.

Thank you for what you do. Definitely it touches my upbringing, both my parents were in the Navy. Unfortunately my mother had to get out because they wouldn't allow spouses to marry - it was a long time ago. She continued to work, being bilingual, in the federal Civil Service. I think things have changed quite a bit since the 1970s when I was

young, with some of the support, even though I do remember my mother advising me that there was some support at times. I think it has grown significantly over the last number of years and decades so thank you for that.

I want to just touch on the funding and I'll try to look back. I don't think you mentioned what your budget per year is and I'm just trying to put a figure to some of the percentages. Since we are a provincial committee, you indicated that 9 per cent comes from provincial funding. Could you give me maybe a dollar figure on that? Are you able to provide that, or could you get that for me later?

MS. CALVERT: I can get that for you, absolutely. Our overall budget is about \$4.5 million but a lot of that is from the two daycares. I have one of the larger daycares in the city, I have 142 spaces over in Shearwater and I have 62 spaces in Halifax, that's where most of the provincial support comes from but I will get you that figure.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Are they just for military families, those spaces?

MS. CALVERT: Yes, they are, just for military families.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I have to ask this because we're going into a budget soon - has there been an ask or a request for maybe an increase to that budget or has there been discussion that potentially there'll be a decrease? Or are you just hopeful that the budget will continue on and you can continue to provide the daycare spaces?

MS. CALVERT: I'm hoping that the province will continue supporting early childhood education in the way they have in the past, for all Nova Scotians.

MR. DAVID WILSON: We'll keep an eye open when the budget comes in; just a warning to the committee members.

One of the things I want to kind of piggy-back on Mr. Jessome's comment. Yesterday I know some of us in the room attended - and I know Mr. Gough has his pin on from the luncheon - the State of the Province Address from the Premier to the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. Have you had any interaction with the Chamber? I mean, what they try to do to their own members is promote new businesses and young entrepreneurs. The way you have given your presentation today, there's no way I don't think any of the Chamber members could not reflect and say that we could do a better job.

So a suggestion and a question - or a question and a suggestion. The question is, have you approached the chamber, and I know there are many chambers across the province but Halifax being the largest, have you approached them? If not, you should approach them and I think they would be more than willing to sit down at one of their future meetings and have a presentation from your organization because I think you enlighten us. I knew you did a lot of work but I didn't realize - I made some notes - some

of the housing issues that you support, so I'll leave that with you. Have you asked? If not, will you ask? If we can help with that, we'd be more than happy to do that.

MS. CALVERT: We haven't asked and what a brilliant idea, thank you very much, I will follow that up, thank you.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I'll leave that for now.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson. Mr. Irving.

MR. KEITH IRVING: Thank you for your presentation, I certainly learned a lot, having not really thought about this issue, to be honest, you have shone some very strong light on it so I thank you for that and for all your work.

How long has the organization existed? I can't find that in the documents.

MS. CALVERT: We stood up in 1986 and this organization stood up, but it functioned differently. The Canadian Navy recognized a long time ago that especially during deployments, military families needed some services and support, so in 1986 the Admiral of the Day, Admiral Crickard told the chaplains and told a couple other members of his to open up something and start supporting military families. They only supported military families during deployments and it was done by the Navy and it was all run by military members.

In 1990, the Department of National Defence, the Military Family Services department was stood up. This all came about because a bunch of renegade spouses. Way back in the mid-1980s, we had a group of renegade spouses in Penhold, Alberta - and you can actually google it, you can find the information, and it's quite interesting.

MR. IRVING: I think you should use the word "leaders". (Laughter)

MS. CALVERT: These leaders, visionaries, they wanted to have a meeting on the base in the military housing - PMQs is what they were called at the time - and one of them was the spouse of a senior officer and the seniors officer, of course, worked for the base commander. The base commander went to the senior officer and said, you get the little missus under control now, you're not having a meeting talking with other spouses on my base. That didn't sit well with the little missus and this group - we called them the "Penhold Five" - started writing letters, making waves and getting into the media. The Government of Canada of the day started to sit up and pay attention.

In the meantime there was a group in Petawawa and there were groups all across this country who had already informally started. These groups started being heard by the government. In 1990, the Department of National Defence stood up Military Family

Services, and Associate Minister Mary Collins was the one who really spearheaded that whole process.

Halifax then moved to the national model of being a charity run by military family members in 1999. Shearwater and all of the other ones in the country opened their doors as charities in 1991-92, so that's how long we've existed. In 2007, Halifax and Shearwater amalgamated into one Military Family Resource Centre from two separate ones.

MR. IRVING: That leads me to my main question - and it was very helpful. Have you seen the needs change over the last number of years in terms of the pressures on families with the Afghanistan mission, PTSD - in your roles have you seen the needs of military families change significantly, and in what way over the last decade or two?

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: I don't really think the needs have changed much. Maybe the emphasis has shifted from health care to employment or mental health issues or whatever, but I think they've been fairly constant because the military lifestyle has been constant regardless of where we're deployed. We're deployed regardless of whatever is going on in the world.

I don't know that there has been a big change. I don't even know if I want to say that it's cyclical. Really, it just happens to be whatever the flavour of the month is sort of thing, where there might be a little more of an emphasis on one service or requirement than there would be on another and that might change in six months, it might be something different.

Generally speaking, the needs of a military family have been fairly consistent. It's employment, its child care, it's dealing with the separation of a spouse and things like that, so those have been fairly constant. Unless there's anything you have to add, Colleen, to that?

MS. CALVERT: I believe exactly what Barb says - the needs haven't changed, but the emphasis perhaps has. There is a lot of emphasis right now on mental health and mental wellness and making sure that everybody is aware of the services and the resources that are available to them. There is a huge menu of services that members and families can access and it's sometimes just making sure that they know about them. Of course, the piece about our post-Afghanistan families and the families that are dealing with some of the members who are severely ill or injured, making sure that they're supported and they know what's available to them. Sometimes it's just a matter of getting the information into their hands.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Two quick questions - a question and an idea. The federal government announced \$16.7 million back in November. Have you found out how much you're getting or how is that going to be disbursed to resource centres across the country?

MS. CALVERT: There has been absolutely no information forthcoming. There are going to be seven or eight pilot sites - military family resource centres that are going to be pilot sites, that are going to have their mandate changed from working just with serving members and their families to supporting the families of the ill and injured who are released medically. So there is a going to be a shift in our mandate, but we have no information yet.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Going to the issue of employment - as a committee, we have the opportunity to have the chairman write some letters to, let's say, the vice presidents of the local banks. So maybe you can put a motion on the floor and we can discuss it later, but I'd like to move that the Committee on Veterans Affairs write the Atlantic VPs of Canadian major banks to urge them to work with the MFRCs to ensure employment transfers when Canadian Forces spouses are assigned to Nova Scotia. We can just get a few letters. I mean, there are only a number of banks.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think we'll defer that to business after.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: The motion is on and we can talk about it later.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. JESSOME: I'd like to start by making a second motion that we can discuss later to express to the chamber of commerce that they might benefit from receiving the same presentation that we got today. Again, we can discuss that later, but I'd like to . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll stick with questions for now.

MR. JESSOME: I'm curious - as a registered charity, I'm wondering if community groups external to your group have ever approached you about receiving donations from the public with respect to an initiative outside of your mandate and what the protocol would be for something like that if it exists.

MS. CALVERT: We have had in the past, over the past years, there have been outside agencies that come and say, we'd like to raise some funds for you. We're more than happy to listen and work with anybody. Happy Harry's - absolutely, they do an annual fundraiser for us where they take a 10-day period in November and they will give us 10 per cent of their profit. Happy Harry's has been absolutely brilliant in that way.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll go on to Mr. Wilson.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Just a quick question. Your daycare, is there a cost to members? What is the daily rate - or is it weekly or monthly? Does it compare to what other residents are paying for daycares?

MS. CALVERT: We are not allowed to subsidize a daycare. We cannot spend any of our funds on the daycare. It has to be totally self-sufficient. That's why the grants are so important - because it does help us meet some of those costs. We also can't undercut the local economy, so our prices have to be on a par. As a matter of fact, in our budget - when we're discussing our budgets in April, we're going to have to raise our daycare costs because we have crept a little bit below the average costs in the province. I think \$700 to \$800 per month, I think - I'm not exactly 100 per cent sure what the cost is because it has been a very long time since I had to worry about it. We do have to stay relevant and reflect costs in the society, and we can't spend any of our own money so we have to be self-sufficient as well.

MR. DAVID WILSON: You had mentioned the support for families of serving military personnel. Is there a time as soon as that member retires, is there a grace period for the families? If they're not a member, they're not a member and is there another organization that you maybe send them to as a veteran that families can get support from?

MS. CALVERT: That's a really good question and right now, the minute you get out of the military, your family and the member are finished with our organization. We will not cut them off cold turkey, but certainly our mandate right now is strictly serving members and their families.

One of the things with the announcement of that new funding, they are blocking it in so that it's only for the members who are ill and injured, so somebody who is already working with Veterans Affairs they will be able to access our services but any other Canadian Forces member, and their family who has served our nation, I believe should have access to the same service and should be extended the same opportunity to have a two-year period of time, perhaps to access all Military Family Resource Centre services.

We don't ask for people's ID, we don't ask did you just get out or what, because most of the services we provide it doesn't make a difference, one more person or two more people or whatever so we're happy to help them.

MR. DAVID WILSON: One last question, Madam Chairman. You mentioned you have - I believe you said three social workers, four social workers. An area that is near and dear to my heart that unfortunately we are seeing more and more awareness around is PTSD. Are you dealing with that as a resource for family members and for I'm sure military personnel? I know they would go through the health services as an active member but PTSD could affect the whole family. Have you seen an increase maybe or are you dealing with supporting family members who have PTSD because it can be the case, or dealing with a service person who has PTSD?

MS. CALVERT: There's a whole bunch of services out there for families that have a member who has been traumatized by an occupational stress injury or post-traumatic stress disorder. There's the stress injury social support, peer support. We've got people who work in one of our partner agencies who are there specifically to work with families of a member who has an occupational stress injury or post-traumatic stress so there are all kinds of resources for those families. We don't necessarily work directly with them in a therapeutic way but definitely in a way of supporting.

Is there more? I can't honestly tell you, I don't have the statistics right away. A lot of our families are still dealing with issues from Swissair and that's a lot of the stuff that we're still seeing, families and members still working with Swissair. I can't speak to the other pieces, sorry.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I appreciate that, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson and Ms. Calvert. Our next question is going to Mr. Irving.

MR. IRVING: Just picking up on the idea of the Chamber, I just want to highlight the Annapolis Valley Chamber in the Greenwood area. It's for the whole region, that would be good to make a presentation to as well.

I noticed, and sort of on this line, I notice in your strategic plan goal, your second goal is communication and stakeholder relations. It seems to me that obviously there's lots of work and lots of focus going into supporting the families and that's probably endless and you have limited resources. Do you have specific work going on or resources going into public awareness?

You've highlighted that it would be great to get into the Premier's First Ministers' meeting, et cetera, do you have specific resources targeted at that? I think what has come out here is that there is more work to do, we all have a responsibility to do that but have you the resources to do that outreach work in terms of educating the Canadian public?

MS. CALVERT: As a matter of fact, my board of directors is very forward-thinking and has just provided us with some human resources and some other resources so we can do that community engagement piece and community education piece a lot more. The focus has really changed because of the Ombudsman's Report that just came out in 2013, Military Family Services in Ottawa, our funder, and their focus has changed and that is now part of their whole operational plan and that is one of the reasons that we are now getting the support. You are going to see a whole lot more education and community engagement right from the national level and right across this country, so absolutely.

MR. IRVING: Great, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Our next question will go to Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: You talked about the health issues so more specifically specialist use. You're in Ontario, you're in Alberta, whatever the issue might be for a specialist for either you or your children, you move here and you're back on the bottom of that list. Have you had a talk with the Department of Health and Wellness or any of those officials to see if there's a way to manage that one? In short of that, maybe that's another motion that we can do later on, just to ask the minister if he could look into the issue.

MS. CALVERT: We have not talked to anybody in the Department of Health and Wellness. We've only talked to Doctors Nova Scotia and we've talked to the head of the College of Physicians and Surgeons - those are the only people we've talked to.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: How are those discussions?

MS. CALVERT: The discussion with Doctors Nova Scotia was very positive. The discussion with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, not so positive.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: It's reminding me that it's something we can do later on as well, we can talk about that one in our letter-writing campaign that we might be starting.

You fund-raise an awful lot. Can you explain what type of fundraisers that you do and maybe how we can help you out with that too?

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: Our main fundraisers are our Vacation Lottery Extravaganza, we sell a limited number of tickets, 1,500 tickets and they're drawn every month and they're for vacations, \$3,000 to \$5,000 prizes. Then there are a couple subsidiary prizes, some monetary ones that come along with that and we sell out, that's a huge fundraiser for us. There are corporate donations that come in, True Patriot Love gives us money when we ask nicely, and we also get some grants from the province. You have businesses like Happy Harry's who do some fundraising for us so we get it from a variety of sources.

Our main source is probably the Vacation Lottery Extravaganza. That's huge - it's \$60,000 or \$70,000.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Are there any other questions? I'm just going to ask the ladies if they'd like to finish up with any closing remarks. Ms. Corbett.

MS. BARBARA CORBETT: The board, the executive director and the senior staff at MFRC met this past weekend, on Saturday and Sunday, and revised our mission vision and our strategic goals because that was due to be renewed. One of the things we talked about - we know we're potentially one of the sites that's going to get hit with the care for

the veterans, the released members. Geographically it makes sense. It's a huge centre, there are lots of retirees here, that sort of thing.

Looking at our mission statement, we took out the health and social aspects and just said to promote well-being of those who share the unique experience of military life. We took out families, communities, and individuals and just made it those so it's a little more open, because they may be past-serving members, they may be current-serving members and some people think that as a single person they don't need to come to the centre or we don't have any services for them because they don't have 2.5 kids and a dog sort of situation - the nuclear family idea.

We've broadened that a lot because we're trying to get away from the concept of it's not just family - it's you and those who care about you. Whether you're married, single, divorced, separated or whatever, it doesn't make any difference. I just wanted to let you know our mission has been revised slightly and so have our strategic goals, but stakeholders and collaboration still remains one of them.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Corbett. Ms. Calvert.

MS. CALVERT: I would just like to thank the committee for this opportunity. Any chance I have to talk about something that I'm incredibly passionate about I really appreciate. Anything that you can do to help our families fit into Nova Scotia a little better is greatly appreciated. Thank you for this opportunity.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, ladies. I'm going to ask that we recess now and then we'll continue on with committee business.

[10:09 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:19 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to call this meeting back to order. I think we'll start with just getting the motions out of the way, right off the top. Mr. d'Entremont, you had one you wanted to put forward.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: This one sort of goes to the issue of - especially if you're working for a major bank. Banks are banks, whether you're in Vancouver or you're in Halifax.

I move that the Committee on Veterans Affairs write to the Atlantic VPs of the Canadian major banks to urge them to work with the MFRCs - Military Family Resource Centres - to ensure employment transfers when Canadian Forces spouses are assigned to Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we have a motion on the floor. Is there any discussion around that motion?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: It's straightforward?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll go right to a vote then. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Jessome.

MR. JESSOME: I have a couple of motions. The first motion: that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs write a letter to the Chamber of Commerce requesting an opportunity for the Military Family Resource Centre to make a presentation discussing today's topics.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont, did you want to expand on that?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Could we do two in one - do the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce?

MR. JESSOME: When I said Chamber of Commerce, I didn't limit it to Halifax. Province-wide makes sense to me.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Would you like to reframe that motion, Mr. Jessome?

MR. JESSOME: I'm not certain what I should reframe it to.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just clarify it.

MR. JESSOME: Chambers of Commerce - with an "s" on Chambers of Commerce.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion around that? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Jessome, you have one more.

MR. JESSOME: The second motion, same sentiment: that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs write a letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness requesting an opportunity for the Military Family Resource Centre to make a presentation discussing today's topics.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion around that? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Are there any further motions? Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Did we forgot about the Minister of Health and Wellness?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: He just did it.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I wasn't paying attention, sorry. (Laughter)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll move on to committee business. On the schedule here, the committee is to decide if they're going to meet when the House is in session. Mr. Irving.

MR. IRVING: I think we've discussed this. I think this is just to confirm that our intentions are not to meet when the House is sitting. That is my understanding of how we've done things.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we'll move on. I'll just read this part here - that the Veterans Ombudsman did not come to Halifax as planned on January 27th due to bad weather, therefore the planned meeting was cancelled. His office advised that they were rescheduling their trip to Nova Scotia on February 3rd. However, as there were two caucuses at out-of-town meetings at that time, it had to be rescheduled. So his office will contact the clerk when they're next planning to be in Nova Scotia with hopes of arranging a meeting at that time.

We're going to talk about our next meeting date. It's on the schedule here for March 12th. We're going to be witnessing the Veterans Emergency Transition Services Canada.

The meeting is adjourned. Thank you, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 10:24 a.m.]