

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Tuesday, May 16, 2023

COMMITTEE ROOM

Overview of The War Amps

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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Hon. Tony Ince
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[Chris Palmer was replaced by Melissa Sheehy-Richard.]
[Larry Harrison was replaced by Kent Smith.]
[Hon. Ben Jessome was replaced by Hon. Kelly Regan.]

In Attendance:

Tamer Nusseibeh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Karen Kinley
Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

The War Amps

Tim Verney, Local Organization Representative



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MAY 16, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

2:00 P.M.

CHAIR
Chris Palmer

Vice Chair
Danielle Barkhouse

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I'm Danielle Barkhouse, MLA for Chester-St. Margaret's and Acting Chair of this committee. Today we will hear from presenters regarding the organization overview of The War Amps.

Please turn off your cell phones or put them on silent. In case of emergency, please use the Granville Street exit and walk up to the Grand Parade. I will now ask the committee members to introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and constituency. I will start with MLA Sheehy-Richard.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'd also like to note the presence of Legislative Counsel Karen Kinley and Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh.

Today our topic is The War Amps. I'd like to welcome the witness, and ask if you'd like to introduce yourself and if you have any opening remarks.

TIM VERNEY: Thank you for the opportunity to come and speak with you today. My name is Tim Verney. I am the regional representative for The War Amps. I'm a graduate member of their Child Amputee (CHAMP) Program. I have been enrolled with the organization for about 40 years when I first joined as a Champ. I have stayed involved ever since then because it is such a fantastic organization, and has done so much for amputees like me. I'm very thrilled to be able to continue to contribute.

THE CHAIR: We will open the floor to questions, but beforehand, our approximate wrap-up time is 3:40 p.m. Raise your hand for questions. I will keep a list and pay attention to who raises their hand. I ask everyone to wait until their name is called before they start to speak - for Hansard. We already have one hand up.

MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: This is a great witness. I look forward to hearing you talk about this important program. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about the Key Tag Service your organization provides.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Verney.

TIM VERNEY: The Key Tag Service was started as a means of providing a number of services. It is a workshop - a super sheltered workshop is what it has been referred to in the past. It was designed to help World War II amputees who come back who had significant disabilities be able to find work and contribute. It is also the main source of funding for The War Amps. It is a service we offer. We're not just a charity.

All our funding comes from donations from the public and from corporate organizations. We receive no government funding. We are non-partisan. One of the best things about the Key Tag Service is that it is a service. If people wish to enroll, they can certainly contact us or register at waramps.ca. We have returned about 1.5 million keys since this started over 50 years ago. More than that - I think it's closer to 60 or 70. I apologize - I forget the exact date.

It can be used for anything. We have returned a lot of very expensive key fobs for modern cars - which when you lose, if you've ever lost one, you understand it can be several hundred dollars - USB drives, that sort of thing, anything that it can be attached to. We have streamlined that process where we send a courier, pick it up, and then take it right to the recipient. Donations are received through that.

Then our Address Label Service campaign, which happens around Christmas time each year, we send out address labels partly as a thank you to donors, and also as a means of keeping the workshop going all year long.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I will allow follow-ups.

MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: You really piqued my interest. The Address Label Service campaign - if I wanted to order a bunch of address labels for my constituency office, is that possible? Is that something that I - or other MLAs - could do? Just wondering. It's a great little way to support.

TIM VERNEY: I'm honestly not aware if that's a possibility or not, but all you have to do is contact our folks at the toll-free number or online, and they can certainly tell you that. I don't know if we do things as a custom, or if it's just on an individual basis. They could certainly tell you that or I could find out as well, and let you know.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about your role working with Veterans Affairs Canada - in particular your War Amps role, co-chairing advisory committees?

TIM VERNEY: The War Amps has been involved right from the start with advocacy. Part of the reason we formed in 1918 was because war amps were coming back from World War I with very little services, very poor pensions, and really no voice to speak of in the stigma of disability. That is part of the reason they banded together to form this organization - to provide support to each other, to lobby government, and try to influence the path that's available for veterans. That is certainly something that's continued over the years. Advocacy is a big portion of what we do.

I'm sorry, I misplaced the question again.

NOLAN YOUNG: A bit about your role working with Veterans Affairs Canada, and then if you could elaborate on The War Amps role, co-chairing advisory committees.

TIM VERNEY: We have been involved with Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence in a number of areas when requested or when needed. We have been working for years with the National Council of Veterans Associations - the NCVA. Our executive chairperson, Brian Forbes, is also Chair of the NCVA, so he has very much the ear of people inside the halls of power that hopefully direct the services for veterans. We have often been a conduit for information, for trying to get needs met for veterans, for current serving members, that sort of thing. I'm a little more arms-length from that range of stuff because that is more centralized with Ottawa.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: I'm just going to go with one question right now to start. In our briefings on this, we learned that you folks do some good work with the Canadian Armed

Forces, with the Department of National Defence, as well as with the Legions. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on that, and share with the group some of the work that you do with those organizations?

TIM VERNEY: I think the organizations in the distant past had perhaps come at loggerheads occasionally for certain activities. There was a bit of turf going on. From my perspective, that has certainly disappeared, recognizing that we get further working together than separately. Part of the work with the NCVA too is being a clearinghouse of information, and the information that comes from the grassroots up to the policy makers.

KENT SMITH: I'm wondering if I can propose a two-minute recess.

THE CHAIR: I would like to have a two-minute recess, please. Thank you.

[2:09 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:12 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We're back from recess. MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Verney, I'd like to find out how the pandemic affected your operations. Are there still effects that you're still feeling today?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Verney.

TIM VERNEY: Certainly, it has made a lot of changes. I'm involved more with the service and public awareness aspect of the organization, so I work a lot with the CHAMP Program. One of the foundations of the CHAMP Program has been regional seminars where we get together some Champs - new Champs' families, and some older Champs on a yearly basis in different parts of the country. It's a chance to go over opportunities for what's new in prosthetics, maybe opportunities for families when kids are going to school or learning to drive, that sort of thing.

The biggest part of those seminars is the peer support and the informal networking that goes on from the parents and from the kids. The kids get a chance to play, the parents to have a talk over a cup of coffee. Those have been cancelled for the last three years, and that has definitely made a change. But the pandemic has forced us to adapt, which is not a bad thing, in that we have learned to do some online services. We are continuing to progress with that and reach out to families on an individual basis for new Champs.

One of my roles is to reach out when we hear that someone's been enrolled. There may have been an accident - a child had an accident, or maybe a birth defect or something like that comes into play. When a new family is enrolled, then one of us will reach out to

give an introduction, welcome to the organization, and hopefully answer some initial questions that they have. We will continue to use the online resources.

[2:15 p.m.]

I don't know that it has as much of an impact on our advocacy and our service bureau - which is the veterans' side of things - as much because the gatherings used to be more so for The War Amps themselves but, of course, those members are few and far between now, sadly. I think that has been able to continue quite well and evolve quite successfully with the pandemic.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just want to go back to my colleague MLA Young when he asked about your relationship working with Veterans Affairs Canada. I was wondering if you could provide a bit more information on what your organization's efforts are to effect governmental change within the Canadian government and other provincial governments around the country.

TIM VERNEY: We have worked very hard to advocate on behalf of all disabled veterans. We have in the past been approached by organizations like the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association and working towards helping to develop the new Veterans Charter with the NCVA, and putting forward recommendations and proposals to National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada to assist in guiding, hopefully, the services to the new generation of veterans that are around.

THE CHAIR: MLA Regan.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I have to say that my family has been one of the ones assisted by the lost key program. I think my daughter was probably 12, 13 when she took the key fob and placed it on the bumper of one of our vehicles and shut it. We drove away, we didn't know she had them - and then they arrived at our house. She thought it was the best program ever, and as far as I know, she is still signed up for that now that she's an adult. Thank you for that because those key fobs are expensive, aren't they?

How many people would you say that The War Amps would have assisted in the past year in the various programs? Do you have a breakdown for the various programs?

TIM VERNEY: I'm afraid I do not, but I will certainly get that. I'm more familiar with the CHAMP Program, as I say, but even lately, I have not been involved in that aspect of things, so I will find out.

KELLY REGAN: That leads me to the question: Who does qualify for your programs? For example, one of my brothers was involved in a motorcycle accident in 2017,

and he lost his leg. He hit a deer. He lost his leg above the knee. Is it veterans, people hurt on the job, young people? Who qualifies for the various programs?

TIM VERNEY: That is a very good question. The simple fact is any amputee, whether it's a civilian or a service member, qualifies for assistance with The War Amps. The CHAMP Program has been for children missing one or more limbs for any cause up to the age of 18, and sometimes afterward for their post-secondary studies, there's some involvement. There has been and continues to be an adult service program, which helps to provide information and financial assistance for the purchase of limbs if it's not covered by provincial benefits.

I'm very pleased to say that Nova Scotia does have good coverage for basic prosthetics as opposed to other provinces, which only pay for a percentage, or some pay almost none at all. They can be very costly, especially for children when they grow up. They change limbs every six to eight or twelve months - and when they're thousands of dollars at a time, it's a very costly venture. When people don't have other resources or insurance, even civilian amputees like your brother could be assisted with getting fitted - and also hopefully the right resources too.

Part of our advocacy program is also to assist folks in everyday life, and that comes down to individual cases of discrimination or information requests. I'll give you an example. We had a young Champ who was participating in a soccer game, and the referee took issue with the artificial arm, thinking that it could be dangerous to other players, and so had requested the person remove the arm. The War Amps was able to quite quickly get involved in that tournament and outline the issues and the players, and educate the coaching staff and referees on what is reasonable and appropriate. Things were able to continue on.

We do provide services for anybody who is an amputee in Canada for sure.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Verney, I am apologetic, because quite frankly, The War Amps program has been out of my mind for a long while, honestly. I can remember vividly, actually - it must have been keys returned home when I was a child. I don't remember, but my parents were religious in always supporting. I haven't done so.

With respect to the key service, I used to see your key tags all over my community, but in recent years I have less visualization of this service locally. Do you have any suggestions on how we as MLAs can raise more awareness of your programs with our local veterans and our constituents? Anything you'd like to see us do there, sir?

TIM VERNEY: I think there are things that we can do. We certainly do have public service announcements around our key tag drives and our address label campaigns. I don't have any with me today, but we have initiated a program where a person can pick up a set

of key tags, and then go online and register themselves. We could even have some of those sent to your office, if you wish, so that if a member of the public comes in and says: Oh, I don't have that - maybe I should. Many people do have experience with the organization in some way, shape, or form, but it's definitely a possibility.

One of the things that I think is most appropriate about the organization - we are a charitable organization, but they have maintained the role of giving back. The key tag is a service. Regardless of whether you've donated or not, if you have a key tag and your keys show up in the mail, they don't look to see if you've donated or not. They will return your keys to you regardless - because we feel it's important to not just be a charity on the receiving end of things, but giving back. That's part of what the CHAMP Program is about, as well - to give back to the community, to amputees in general.

I was very much benefited from the experience that the war amps had when they came back. I was born with partial feet, and I was fortunate enough that my Uncle Bill was a war amp; he lost one leg above and one below the knee in 1944. So he was the other guy in the family who took his legs off at night. He was a fantastic role model for me because he had a very positive attitude - realistic, but positive - and of course, back then the limbs were not great. They were hardwood, they were belts, they were held on with straps - so by the end of the day, he was uncomfortable, and he would take them off. That usually meant losing his pants, and if you had a problem, that was your problem to deal with.

In 1965, when H. Clifford Chadderton, our former CEO, took over the organization, he realized that we've got First World War, Second World War, Korean War, and other veterans from peacekeeping, that sort of thing, but there are fewer and fewer. Why don't we take this and move it to the next generation? So they created the CHAMP Program to do that, to carry on the legacy of amputees helping amputees.

I can only say good things about that. There was certainly a bond I felt with many war amps I've worked with over the years. One of them said to me once that we are getting kind of thin on the ground, referencing themselves. I said: Don't worry because we have your back - like, we're coming up. Part of what we do is trying to carry on the good work that they did for us and for Canadians, and continue to look forward. It is definitely still very much an active organization. If anybody has any interest in finding out more about it, waramps.ca is the best place to start.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just picking up on MLA Taggart's comment too, if there's anything I could do - social media share, or any way - I'd welcome that information, thoughts, or ideas.

When you mentioned 1.5 million keys, that's like everybody in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, every person with a set of keys, they lost them, they came

back. That's huge, right? What do you see as a long-term vision for growth of this organization, provincially and nationally?

TIM VERNEY: Well, the opportunities for growth are immense just because of the world we've lived in for the last number of years with a number of veterans coming back from Afghanistan, from peacekeeping missions. We are committed to continuing to serve those folks very well - as well as we can.

Fortunately, in many ways, things have improved greatly. Their access to prosthetics and to treatment is much better. Our role has declined in that sense, but the advocacy role, the clearinghouse of information, and supporting best practices within the prosthetics community, within rehabilitation, and the peer-support aspect will definitely continue to grow, regardless of what the makeup of the population is - whether it's civilians or service members.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

TONY INCE: Mr. Verney, I was just wondering if you could give me an idea of how many donations you received last year.

TIM VERNEY: I will have to look that up and get back to you. I am not aware. I know that Canadians have been very generous with our organization. We try to run a tight ship. We make it very clear what we're doing - that we're not palming the money to make a backup fund, if you will. We spend the money Canadians give us on supporting Champs, supporting amputees, veterans - very much aboveboard.

TONY INCE: My follow-up - probably you may not have the answer, but have you seen a change in donations since the pandemic?

TIM VERNEY: My understanding is that there certainly was - because of the disruption to the economy - there were certainly fewer dollars to go around for a lot of charitable organizations. I don't know, honestly, how it's affected us overall. We continue to adapt, as everyone has had to, with the pandemic.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just wanted to talk a little bit more about the CHAMP Program. There is a young girl in my constituency who was on the TV advertisement, Chloe. She's an elite athlete. She's a cheerleader. She's been to Florida. She just blows my mind with the stuff that she's capable of doing, and all because of the work that your great organization does.

I was wondering if you could maybe elaborate and expand a bit more on the scope of the work. I just want to hear more about it with the child amputees within that program. Can you elaborate and share a little more detail?

TIM VERNEY: Absolutely I can. The CHAMP Program was created with the intent to promote the positive aspects of being an amputee, which is not something most people think of. CHAMP has the Winner's Circle philosophy, which encourages Champs to try to do things that might be outside their comfort zone. Sometimes it involves recreational things. Recreational limbs are not covered in Canada, but we do cover them for Champs. Chloe probably has a sport limb of some sort, or some adaptive technology, to permit playing or doing things that every kid wants to do - whether it's an adaptive hand for a bicycle or a leg for skiing. A good portion of our donations go to support artificial limbs so that the kids can do those things and take them on.

Really, the support is positive role models. They use older Champs who have come up through the program - teenagers as junior counsellors. We say "counsellor," but it's very informal. It's the peer-support model, basically. CHAMP is there to provide support for families. Children might be having trouble at school or fitting in, going to other activities, that sort of thing. It's really a case of we look for what opportunities are there and then how we can assist in that regard.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Verney, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about Operation Legacy and maybe tie that into how that helps the next generation - the newest generation - get involved with national remembrance ceremonies.

TIM VERNEY: I'm glad you brought up Operation Legacy. This was a program that was started somewhere in the 1980s when The War Amps realized they were getting a little thinner on the ground. They had this organization established, they had the CHAMP Program established and wanted to make sure the organization continued, and that what they had learned from their experience was carried forth. Essentially, many of them would give us very honest detail about their own experience - whether it was what caused their limbs to be lost or their experience in war - and why if at all possible, they don't want to see anybody go through that again. We can't just eliminate all military options, because there are times when that is necessary, and we recognize that.

As I said, it was my generation of Champs who have taken over to support the organization. Where war amps themselves would normally go and present a wreath at the cenotaph on Remembrance Day or down at the naval memorial at Point Pleasant Park, that sort of thing, we have taken that on now in various forms. Champs and parents from all over the organization and all over the country get involved to do that because we benefited from their wisdom, from their kindness, and we have the similarities of being amputees.

[2:30 p.m.]

Originally - I was fortunate enough to grow up with a lot of war amps still around - I felt like they had their bond, which I presumed was from being in combat. In fact, one of my colleagues corrected me. He said, actually no - I've been doing this a little longer, and it is because they are amputees. When they came home and didn't have a lot to occupy themselves or jobs to do - things that they really had to fight to get back - they bonded on the fact that they're amputees and they had the shared experience, regardless of the level of their amputation or anything like that. We have that as well. There was that common bond, which was really amazing to see from little children up to senior citizens and everything in between.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

TONY INCE: I was wondering if you could highlight or point out some of the new issues you've been pushing for for your advocacy, if there are any.

TIM VERNEY: The advocacy has definitely taken on a more important role. Generally, I think our advocacy program works on more of the individual level. Like I say, it may come to do with sports, it may come to do with discrimination issues - not in the formal human rights sense that we're carrying something forward to a complaint level, but simply trying to intervene, and provide education and support for amputees in various situations. That has certainly taken on a broader scope now, I think, since there are fewer war amps around. That used to be the primary population that we advocated for.

Even now for adults who have lost limbs - they might be struggling with insurance providers or funding for artificial limbs or a certain specific type of component that doesn't fit the provincial categories very well perhaps - then they will get involved and try to assist in any way possible. It really depends on the needs that come from the callers.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: Perhaps my question will somewhat relate to the question that my colleague, MLA Young, just asked about the relationship with national committees. There's a National Council of Veteran Associations. I'm wondering if you can share with the group, and expand on what your role is with that organization - what The War Amps' role is with that organization.

TIM VERNEY: The War Amps is a member of the NCVA. Coincidentally, our chairperson is also Chair of the NCVA, and he's a solicitor, Brian Forbes. He is a key figure in advocating on behalf of the National Council of Veteran Associations. We take on the issues that they bring forward. There are dozens of organizations they represent from the different campaigns, different eras, and that sort of thing. They take on the big picture advocacy for veterans.

They also try to provide input on reforms that might be helpful to the New Veterans Charter or to services available - because of course, with any program, there are issues with service and timeliness of service, and that sort of thing. So they have been instrumental in trying to support changes to that that make it more appropriate, more accessible for veterans, and faster.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Thinking more about the advocacy work, I'm wondering, if there is any dimension of policy advocacy work. I mean, there's a lot going on now in the world of disability advocacy, particularly related to the question of incomes. We know that there's the federal initiative, which is in the Senate - almost become law, on disability incomes. Income support for persons with various kinds of disabilities has been a very live issue in Nova Scotia the last number of years. Is that any dimension at all - that kind of policy advocacy, especially income policy advocacy - of The War Amps, or do you leave that to your parallel organizations?

TIM VERNEY: I will actually have to check on that because I'm not sure. I know we certainly are involved with advocacy as a policy issue for veterans. I'm not sure about the other things, as income, basic income assistance, that sort of thing. I'll have to check on that and get back to you.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just wanted to go back to the CHAMP Program again. Earlier, it was heartbreaking to hear and talk a little bit more about children who do have to deal with the bullying. I'm just wondering if you could talk about - is it peer based, the support that you would use? Maybe elaborate a little bit more on the type of care you might provide those children who are suffering from the bullying.

TIM VERNEY: Certainly, we take a varied approach to bullying. It's not new. I experienced it myself growing up, and it's certainly changed now with the social media world. We have a session at our CHAMP seminars called What Bugs Me, and it's a chance for the kids to bring up anything that bugs them about being an amputee. It might be something very, very specific. It might be that the kids at school pick on them. If that is the case, we will often share, in those group settings, what things that we've tried. Sometimes the staff will get involved and help guide the parents toward things to approach the school about.

We sometimes will do presentations to classes to educate the students and teachers about what it means to be an amputee. Those have been very successful in terms of not only providing a lot of information, but also, the Champs love it because they have become good centre of attention because they're special because they're an amputee and this is what it means. It just means that they do things differently - that they can't wear high heels,

or something like that, or they handle a ball differently when they're playing. It promotes a very positive response to that. Certainly, it's something we do get into fairly often - either on the small level or on the big level. It usually does provide kids with some opportunities to counteract that, and deal with it and move on.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I hope I'm not repeating a question - because I was kind of taking a look around on your website. You mentioned in the beginning - I think you referred to them initially as very sheltered workshops where the tags are produced. Could you share a bit about the workshops? I'm particularly interested in how you recruit, or how you determine people for those workshops.

TIM VERNEY: I'm not familiar with all the ins and outs of the operations. I have toured the key tag facility, and like I said initially, I believe it was primarily to employ amputees - probably multiple amputees who would have a great deal of difficulty fitting in elsewhere - but it's not exclusive to amputees anymore. The sheltered workshop has a certain connotation attached to it. Cliff, our late CEO, used to refer to it as a super sheltered workshop - trying to move it above the stereotype, I guess you could say, and just indicate that it was a workplace. It's just a workplace where people with disabilities can contribute. It's evolved in that regard.

In terms of who's available, I'm not sure of the process, but we could certainly find that out through our head office. It does operate out of Ontario, so things are centralized there for the national campaigns - I can tell you that.

TOM TAGGART: I never put it together with the sheltered piece of that, but I respect - and I'm very cognisant of the adult workshops around locally. I just think that it's a great project for those folks.

THE CHAIR: So that was more of a comment than a question.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'm wondering if you could expand a bit on your organization's peer support program - how it allows for families of amputees to learn more about how to support their family members?

TIM VERNEY: We know families are impacted regardless of the cause of an amputation. Primarily it's the parents and the Champ. When it's a new family that's enrolled in CHAMP, we try to get both parents out to at least the first seminar or two. Especially if they have a young child who may have been born missing a limb, the baby will need a lot of extra attention. It's a lot of information to take in. It's a bit of a challenge from that perspective, and both parents will have reams of questions and different concerns

too. We do that, and then as things evolve - the kids grow up in the program - then it's usually one parent who comes. It's up to the individual families who comes.

My example: My parents would alternate, one year to the other. My mother would go one year, my father would go another year if I was participating. They also provide support to other parents. One of the programs we have is called Matching Mothers, which is a little misnomer because it is really matching parents. My parents were involved in some of the earliest matches in the 1980s, when a child was born outside the city and a similar amputation - limb deficiency - to mine. This couple was approached, was registered with The War Amps who said, we might be able to hook you up with somebody who can show you a little bit, talk to you, and answer any questions you have.

So my mom and dad got on a plane, took the baby album, and sat for those folks for a few days. They answered any questions, showed them pictures to say, okay, here's Tim with his first pair of artificial legs, and here's Tim playing soccer as he grew up, and here's Tim riding a bike - all the things that children normally do. The peer support at the parent level is just as important.

When certain activities allow, we also try to include the whole family because, of course, siblings often might feel a little neglected perhaps. The Champ might have a lot of medical appointments, they might have a lot of activities that require some assistance. We try to make sure that everybody is involved and feels supported in that whole process.

THE CHAIR: MLA Regan.

KELLY REGAN: Is there anything that the provincial government could do to help support the important work that you do? We do have an Accessibility Directorate, there's a variety of different programs that support various people. I'm just wondering, is there something that you feel we could be doing that would help make either your job or the lives of amputees better and easier?

TIM VERNEY: Certainly, the accessibility legislation is a key thing. I know it's still fairly new, but I think that in itself is a big step toward assisting all people with disabilities for inclusion. If the directorate can assist with referral if people have questions - we get referrals from all kinds of places. We used to have a CHAMP mother who was an RN at the IWK Grace Children's Hospital, so if a child was born, we had an immediate in with them saying: There's been a child born missing a hand, and we can do that reach-out.

It comes from any number of places. People can reach out directly themselves. I was actually registered by my aunt. My late uncle's widow asked if I was involved with CHAMP, and we asked: What's that? She made the referral to get me involved, and I thank her every day for that - for the gift that it's given me.

It's really whatever's possible. People just being aware that we are there is probably the biggest thing that could be helpful. Like I said, there's always room to improve, I'm sure, but the prosthetic coverage for Nova Scotians is pretty good - definitely compared to other places where it's only 75 per cent or 85 per cent. Prosthetics can be extremely expensive, and Nova Scotia's done a pretty good job of maintaining that. Sometimes the slightly more high-tech items could be very helpful - especially for a young amputee - but those aren't necessarily within reach, and budgets don't always allow that kind of thing.

[2:45 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: As we sort of come to the end of our questions - there's just the one witness here today, so it's been a very intimate conversation. I really thank you for coming. One of the main reasons that we wanted to have this topic here was to highlight the legacy of Aubrey McLean, a Nova Scotia veteran, and his role in developing the association's Child Amputee Program. Can you just talk a bit about that legacy and that important work?

TIM VERNEY: Absolutely I can. I was very honoured to know Aubrey McLean. He was kind of an iconic war amp in a lot of ways. I'm from away, but I moved here in 1993 to finish my education. I first met him when I was doing a stint at a nursing home as a social work student. I had an amputee client who was a little difficult - late in life amputation. So I reached out to national headquarters and asked: Is there anybody who might be his age? They said: Well, Aubrey's the man. Aubrey didn't know me from a hole in the wall, but he came, and we sat and had a lovely chat with this gentleman. The gentleman didn't say a whole lot, but I don't think he said a lot anyway. I thought, at least there's the benefit of him seeing someone else from his generation who is getting around on artificial limbs.

Aubrey was tireless in his gifts to the organization - of his time, of his spirit. He was involved with The War Amps branch, he was involved with CHAMP, with placing our floats in parades. He was always just sort of a fixture. I had the great privilege of working with him for a number of years. In fact, when I referenced earlier that someone had said we're pretty thin on the ground, it was actually Aubrey I was talking to at a CHAMP seminar once. I felt good that I could reassure him that we would continue what they had started. I'm very privileged to have worked with Aubrey, and known Aubrey over the years, and I do miss him.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Not necessarily a follow-up - I just wanted the opportunity to say that's a beautiful story. I'm really happy that I did bring that, and want to highlight that. Thank you for sharing.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

TONY INCE: A very simple question here, I hope, and it's the programs that you offer. Which ones are more popular, if there is such a thing?

TIM VERNEY: You know, I think it depends on who you ask. Part of what we do are - I haven't touched on this - the PLAYSAFE and DRIVESAFE programs. We recognized that a lot of Champs were coming in because of accidents - around the home or on the farm or wherever - that could have been prevented. PLAYSAFE was created as a means of showing other children, look, this can happen to you. I didn't think it would happen to me, but it did. That has continued and morphed into DRIVESAFE, again for the same reason - that some people were coming into the program because of automobile accidents. The notion of trying to highlight the importance of paying attention when driving, driving safely and appropriately. Those programs get a lot of response.

We have done parades in the past. Some people might even be familiar with one of our mascots, Astar, who was a robot. This was an incredibly well done commercial for its time - or public service announcement, rather. I can tell you the countless times I heard kids on the parade route saying, "I'm Astar. I'm a robot. I can take my arm off, but you can't, so play safe." It was perfect. It was absolutely perfect. In fact, you can still hear the references to him now and then. That was the whole premise. That has certainly been one of our more popular programs.

The access to recreational limbs is very big, especially for the kids. At the seminars, we have sessions on upper and lower limbs, and also a chance to show off their everyday limb, but also their recreational limbs. The kids get very creative with them, and will often have cartoon characters or their favourite team or something painted on them, so it's not just a plain artificial limb. It's quite creative, and quite interesting to watch. They're very proud to be able to show these things and what they can do with them.

TONY INCE: No follow-up, just thank you. Thank you for all the work that you do, and greatly appreciate it.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: Thank you for bringing up Astar. That was certainly a memory from a lot of our childhoods - our youth.

I didn't hear you talk about this, but there was a question earlier from MLA Regan about what we can do as government. In our research for this, we learned about the Crusade for Reform program. I may have missed it. Did you mention that when you were answering that question? If not, can you share what that program is and how it helps government and other organizations become more aware?

TIM VERNEY: I'm not as familiar with that level of the program because that's kind of at the higher level than where I am. But definitely, The War Amps work very

closely with other veterans' organizations and with Veterans Affairs Canada to try to advocate for better service, better pensions, more appropriate benefits when necessary - regardless of which generation we're talking about here. There are different generations of amputees who from their service will have different access to services.

Being on the ground with the people who experience this, we are then a conduit to them, to Veterans Affairs Canada, and to DND to try to bring some change, hopefully, to the New Veterans Charter that is more responsive to individual needs and also better, timely service for veterans.

KENT SMITH: I'm going to follow the theme of not really asking a follow-up, but just offering my thanks for the information that we've learned here today. It's not every day we get to learn about this topic, so thank you for the education.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Verney, I think at least for our side, we're done with questions. I really want to thank you for taking the time to come and appear before the Veterans Affairs Committee today. You are an excellent representative of the organization.

This was a topic the PC caucus was happy to bring here before the committee as a way to inform our committee, but also as an opportunity to raise awareness of your organization and the programs that they are offering. Certainly, I will be sharing on my social media and other platforms that I have, and supporting. As I said before, I personally had sort of lost track - and it's just a great organization. I will be sharing, and I'm sure that all our colleagues will do everything we can do promote this very worthwhile cause. Again, I thank you very much for everything you do to represent The War Amps.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Just to add to what my colleagues have said, I'm sure you sense this unanimous feeling amongst us that it's a wonderful program. We're very appreciative to hear about the work. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Verney, would you have any closing remarks?

TIM VERNEY: I would just like to thank you for asking me to attend. This was rather unexpected. I have often fielded media requests or presentation requests for organizations, but this was a lovely opportunity to come and speak about something I'm very passionate about. I feel very strongly about the work that we do for all amputees. I appreciate any support you may give, and I would be happy to help if I can. Thank you very much for your time.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Verney. It was absolutely fantastic and very thorough. You can leave, if you'd like, and we are going to take a five-minute recess as well.

[2:57 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:02 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting back to order. We are now on to committee business.

Deputy Minister Joanne Munro has responded to the committee's request for information regarding collaboration with the Last Post Fund. Is there any discussion over that? I see none, so I'll move on.

Veterans Affairs Canada Minister MacAulay has responded to the committee's request for information regarding the Veterans Affairs Canada Funeral and Burial Program, as well as Fort Massey Cemetery. Is there any discussion over that? I see none, so I will carry on.

The committee requested that the clerk prepare a list of Veterans Affairs Committee mandates in various jurisdictions. The compiled list was shared. Is there any discussion over that?

TONY INCE: We're the only jurisdiction, so . . . (Laughs)

THE CHAIR: A fair statement, MLA Ince. With that, our committee business is over. Our next meeting will be June 20, 2023. Its topic is Update on Seamless Canada Agreement. Our witnesses are Intergovernmental Affairs Nova Scotia.

This meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:03 p.m.]