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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 38 of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, October 3, 2022, the committee is resuming its study on the national strategy for veterans employment after service.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Some witnesses and committee members are participating online.

To ensure an orderly meeting, please wait for me to recognize you by name. If you are participating by videoconference and you are not talking, please keep your microphone on mute.

I think that the clerk mentioned that you have the choice of listening to the deliberations in French or in English.

I would remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

In accordance with our routine motion, I wish to inform the committee that the witnesses completed the required connection testing prior to the meeting.

Before we begin, allow me to acknowledge a few colleagues who are here with us substituting others.

[*English*]

I'd like to welcome Ms. Tracy Gray to the committee. We have Mr. Yasir Naqvi online, and Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk is with us.

[*Translation*]

You have surely noticed that we have among us Ms. Vanessa Davies, who is replacing the clerk of the committee this evening.

Before I give the floor to the witnesses, I want to inform you, honourable members of the committee, that I will be shortening your intervention time a bit to give us 10 minutes to discuss upcoming meetings we are having after spending two weeks in our constituencies.

On that, allow me to welcome the witnesses.

Joining us in person we have Mrs. Tara Jones, contract manager at Agilec.

Joining us by videoconference we have Mr. Marc-André Dufour, regional manager of March of Dimes Canada.

[*English*]

From ReTrain Canada Incorporated is Ms. Jeannine Adams, chief executive officer. She is here by video conference.

Witnesses, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Let's start with Agilec right now.

I invite you, Ms. Jones, to make your opening remarks in five minutes or less. Please go ahead.

Ms. Tara Jones (Contract Manager, Agilec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Tara Jones. I'm the contract manager at Agilec, overseeing the career transition services on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada. Agilec has been delivering career transition services since 2018. The services are available to eligible veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members and reservists, as well as their spouses, common-law partners and survivors.

The focus of career transition services is to help individuals from these groups explore, plan for and achieve their employment and/or educational goals as they transition from military to civilian life. Services are delivered virtually in both official languages across Canada and internationally for those still serving. Since 2018 more than 5,200 individuals have accessed career transition services, with roughly 700 individuals participating at any given time.

Participants engage with us at various points in their transition journey and with various needs. Some come to us with very clear goals already established, while others are not sure where to start. Some transitioning participants seek entry-level work, while others seek executive-level positions. Serving members may have their release already planned, or they may just want to explore the possibilities. The service is flexible and designed to identify and address every participant's individual needs.

When someone enters transition services, their journey begins with an assessment of their career transition needs. The continuum of services ranges from exploration—of self, of employment possibilities, of training or education requirements—through career and education decision-making to transition planning. Plans that focus on employment may include such supports as job search skills training, resumé writing, interview preparation and job development. Plans that focus on training or education may include assistance with training and institution selection and support for accessing available funding, including the education and training benefit.

Our employment coaches collaborate one-on-one with each candidate, providing support that matches each person's needs and comfort. We strive to empower by providing the knowledge and skills that people require to take charge of their own transition journey. We offer guidance to help the plan move forward successfully. Of the participants who have engaged career transition services, 60% have set goals focused on employment and 40% have set goals focused on education or training. As well, 24% of plans include both employment and education and/or training goals.

The veterans we serve speak about the invaluable support of a partner in the transition process. The voice of veterans is a critical component in our ongoing assessment of the service's effectiveness and impact. To date, of participants who have completed our satisfaction survey, 91% report being satisfied with the support they receive from their employment coach.

I would like to close with some feedback received directly from one of our veteran participants, who secured employment in a civilian occupation through a successful job development match. These are the veteran's own words:

Looking back, this whole process...the transition out of the military...combined with the uncertainty of not knowing when a next opportunity will be lined up, and whether or not my military experience would be good enough...especially after applying to so many positions...would have been extremely draining and disheartening, but thanks to you all, it was such a fulfilling experience.

It is this type of impact that drives our team forward. We are honoured to deliver career transition services and are thankful for the contributions and sacrifices that veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members and their families have made for our country and our freedoms.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1835)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Jones.

[*Translation*]

We will now hear from Mr. Marc-André Dufour, from March of Dimes Canada.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Marc-André Dufour (Regional Manager, March of Dimes Canada): Thank you, Chair,

Thank you members of the committee for inviting March of Dimes Canada to take part in this consultation process.

Allow me to introduce myself. I worked as a manager at Canadian Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation Services from 2011 to 2022. My organization provided vocational rehabilitation services for the

duration of the contract awarded to the Canadian Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation Services (CVVRS) and the VAC Rehabilitation and Vocational Assistance Program from 2009 to 2022.

Over the past 12 years, March of Dimes Canada has worked diligently to support more than 12,000 veterans and their family as they transition from military life to civilian life. Currently, as I am sure you are aware, the services provided by the rehabilitation program are delivered by a new consortium that we do not belong to. We therefore no longer provide these services on behalf of the government.

I would remind committee members that our role was to serve veterans who have left the Canadian Forces for medical reasons. Our mandates were to assess veterans' functional capacity, provide recommendations for a possible vocational rehabilitation path or a possible diminished earning capacity status and, when appropriate to do so, support veterans throughout the entire process as they reintegrate into the workforce, which can take several years in some cases.

Having been a manager throughout my entire time with these two consortiums to provide services under the federal program, I have specific expertise in some areas, but I am not an expert in every aspect or issue affecting the professional reintegration of Canadian veterans.

When I was writing this speech, I reflected on what our contribution to this consultation process might be. Now that we no longer deliver official services under the program, we believe we are not in the best position to make recommendations for existing and future services. Unfortunately, we are not familiar with the details of the new measures that have been brought in.

That being said, we believe that we can raise the committee's awareness of issues that we consider to be essential and that directly affect the quality of services provided to Canadian veterans and their families.

My first point is on the importance of taking a holistic approach to rehabilitation services. It is important to combine medical and vocational rehabilitation efforts concurrently. We know that the shorter an individual's period of professional inactivity, the better his or her chances at successfully reintegrating into the workforce.

Originally, both under the VAC Rehabilitation and Vocational Assistance Program and CVVRS, medical rehabilitation was managed by departmental case managers before the client was sent to the vocational rehabilitation program. In practice, it became apparent that the rehabilitation process was generally not a linear process. For example, a veteran taking a course with the aim of returning to the workforce may experience a setback that requires resuming treatment. At the same time, a veteran in treatment might benefit from being assigned to a project quickly as a means of motivation and a launchpad to pursuing his efforts in medical rehabilitation.

My second point is the importance of a common and consistent language by all parties taking part in this service delivery.

We believe it is essential to pay attention to the consistency and quality of communications with veterans at all times. Managing a national rehabilitation program involves the participation of several interdependent entities, for example case managers from Veterans Affairs, service providers such as doctors, psychologists, ergonomists and vocational rehabilitation experts, Veterans Affairs Canada as an institution and partner companies that are in charge of service delivery. There are many entities from various backgrounds that have to work together toward a common objective, the well being of veterans and their family. In order to maximize the quality of services provided to veterans, it is critical to ensure that all the players in this process understand service provision under the program as a whole as well as their respective roles within it.

It is also important for the program to be presented to the veterans and discussed with them in a common and consistent language. This may seem simple, but from an operational point of view, this is very complex. It is a challenge that every entity must meet on a daily basis.

My third and final point is the importance and presence of job developers, in other words ambassadors responsible for representing veterans in Canadian companies. This role was brought in mid-stream within the program run by CVVRS and it had an immediate impact on the placement rate of participating veterans. The role of these ambassadors was to support more directly veterans actively looking for work and especially to create a multitude of connections with Canadians with a view to creating strategic partnerships to encourage the hiring of this skilled labour.

The presence of these job developers, in our opinion, is critical to such a program and suitable within any type of vocational reintegration initiative for Canadian veterans.

• (1840)

I would be pleased to discuss it in further detail with you as you need, and to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dufour. I know that you did everything you could to stay within your time limit. That is great. Now, I would ask you to speak a bit slower to make things easier for the interpreters.

I invite the witnesses not to hesitate to send their briefs or opening speeches to the clerk.

• (1845)

[English]

I'd like to invite Ms. Jeannine Adams, chief executive officer from ReTrain Canada Incorporated, to speak.

You have five minutes or less.

Ms. Jeannine Adams (Chief Executive Officer, ReTrain Canada Incorporated): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm Jeannine Adams, the CEO of ReTrain Canada. ReTrain Canada was founded in 2017. We are a for-profit business, initially created to retrain claimants in the WCB world, or the worker's compensation world. Claimants are rehabilitated physically and psychologically, and then we begin with the career or "voc" rehab. ReTrain has put through over 5,000 students to date, and that number of students each year grows.

We train in technology and helping people negotiate the employment and health processes that they need to go through. We have different types of technology that we train in. We're looking to make sure that people are able to get back to the workforce in a very quick way, so all of our courses are incredibly focused. Again, because we basically started our business working with people who had challenges in terms of psychological or physiological concerns, our staff are able to work with people on dealing with those and how they fit into employment.

Our education program was built entirely online. It is live leader-led. That means we're creating training environments like the one we're in right now. It's also very engaging, which is also like this. The instructors are people who have worked in the industries that they're training on.

The types of training that we offer are ones that are very engaging with employers, so we are always on the leading edge. For things like cybersecurity, we are the leader in Alberta for training cybersecurity people. Each year, we put through over 200 students. We also have a fintech program, which people can barely finish before they're employed. We teach people about things like NFTs and cryptocurrency, and we go into the health and wellness sphere as well.

All of our courses are accredited through us. We have microcredentials and then overarching credentials of those. From an industry perspective, employers are starting to understand and value them. Those credentials give people an opportunity to grow and make sure they're recognized.

In terms of the things that we have dealt with, whether it's somebody who's a veteran or someone who has been injured at work, we have a number of students who are considered "hostile-resistant", because they're in a situation where they do not embrace the changes that have happened to them, so we work with them to move them forward and meet them where they are.

We go through assessment processes with them as well, so that we know from a technology perspective...sometimes it's basic computing that they need to start with, and then we move them through that. We don't want to waste time teaching somebody something they already know, so, as I said, we do assessments. We make sure that they understand the training they're going through and the information they have are very transferable, so we look for those transferable skills.

We've had the opportunity to do some work in the past with re-skilling oil and gas workers, so being able to understand those transferable skills is important. Of course, working with someone from the military, it's being able to have them see what those skills are—lots of leadership skills, for example—and how they transfer into the new world.

• (1850)

In terms of the size of ReTrain, our company has nearly 60 staff now. We have a 22,000 square-foot facility in Calgary. We have a sister company that is s01ve Cyber Solutions. That's relevant, because we take people from our cyber-program and give them internships—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adams. I'm so sorry, but your five minutes is finished already. You will have plenty of time to respond to questions from members.

Right now I'd like to invite Ms. Cathay Wagantall, for six minutes or less, to ask questions.

Please go ahead.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you all for being here this evening. I appreciate the work that you are doing on behalf of our veterans.

Ms. Jones, my concern is especially around those who find it hardest to find work following their service. In some cases they're very young and haven't served for very long. Our women, ground forces and those who are involuntary or medically released seem to struggle the most. Of the 5,200 individuals you have assisted, are those all veterans?

Ms. Tara Jones: No. That would be a mix of veterans, CAF members, members who have started the release process, eligible—

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Oh, I see. But they're all within the forces or the veterans'—

Ms. Tara Jones: It includes eligible spouses, common-law partners and survivors as well. However, those numbers has been on the lower end.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Do you have a sense of how many would fit into these categories that I mentioned?

Ms. Tara Jones: I do have some data: 17% of the population has been female. We do have it broken down further by the eligibility type. The average age is about 58. The youngest is 20, and the oldest we have seen is 79.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's interesting.

How many of those who come to you are in that category of not knowing where to start? Are the majority experienced or...?

Ms. Tara Jones: I'd say they're at both ends of the spectrum. Some have a pretty clear path and want some guidance and support along the way. Some want a sounding board. Others are not sure where to start. We've seen success with those who enter the services early—CAF members who are thinking about maybe considering...in six months, a year, or a few years down the road. They will get access to their online resources through the services.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: They're choosing to plan ahead, whereas the ones who are maybe younger, think they're in there forever, and then all of a sudden they have an injury or something. Do they—

Ms. Tara Jones: I'm not sure I would say they're younger versus older. We had a CAF member who knew that they were going to release in a labour market that was a little tough, and they were looking for a pretty senior position in the education field, in a leadership position. They engaged the services early, and then were deployed to Kuwait. They continued to participate in the services. They were able to participate through video call and our secure portal.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: One of the things that we've been learning is that, of course, when they're in the forces they're always being trained for something. They're going through courses and they develop lots of skills, but those aren't transferable directly into their civilian life. It seems they have to retrain. They don't get the same credit for those programs.

When they come to you, do they have a clear understanding of all the things that they've done and what they have available to them? We've heard that they would like to see those skills recognized immediately as they take the courses. They're often the same as the civilian courses. Do you hear a lot about that side of things?

• (1855)

Ms. Tara Jones: Yes, we do.

It's interesting. There are many participants—or candidates, as we call them—who come to the services looking to do something completely different. It's more like a career change. We're building out the ability to transfer the skills and the training that they've had. Others want to do something similar. For those who have identified gaps, or aren't sure whether there are gaps, we support them, through labour market research, to understand where they fit or what those challenges are. That early access into the services also helps them to plan and take action before they find themselves released.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: You talked about one-on-one communications. When they have that one-on-one at the beginning of their process, is it the same person throughout?

Ms. Tara Jones: Yes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's good to hear.

Ms. Tara Jones: Yes, they have a designated employment coach. We also have some employer liaison resources on our team who work with the participants and the coach in collaboration, as well as our employer facing...so they're out building those relationships.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: We're aware that out of 3,455 full-time equivalents working at VAC, only 4.95% of its employees are actually veterans. Within the full public service, there are only 330 appointments of veterans out of the 64,796 hires in 2021-22. For the entire public service, that's half a per cent.

As an HR company or a service provider with VAC, do you work with VAC in the HR side of the public service in assisting them in hiring veterans? It seems like a very low number who are actually employed.

Ms. Tara Jones: We do have a number of participants who are interested in pursuing the public service. We work very closely with the veterans employment unit to collaborate on public service department events, multi-department events, to raise awareness for the participants on the opportunities—

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Can I ask how many you've actually been able to place within Veterans Affairs or the public service?

Ms. Tara Jones: I don't have that handy, but it's something that I can track down and provide.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That would be wonderful. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'd like to invite MP Wilson Miao to ask questions for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

First, through the chair, I'd like to direct my questions to Ms. Jones.

You mentioned in your opening remarks what kinds of tools there are. Can you elaborate more on what are the tools to support not just the veterans but also their families during the transitional services you offer?

Ms. Tara Jones: Current transition services are really focused on employment and education or training pursuits and on making informed decisions. We have a secure portal, as I mentioned, that has 15 different courses, in both English and French, around that transition job search preparation. There's one on PLAR, prior learning assessment recognition, related to education.

There are also resources for veterans and their families through that transition process that are pointing more to the other programs and services and service providers that are available, so that we're making sure that we're building awareness for each person on what's available to them linked to our program.

They bring their whole self to the program. Our role is not to be duplicating anything else that's out there but is in fact to be helping them to research and find resources, and to also work closely with Veterans Affairs to see what other programs and services they may

be eligible for, and helping them get connected to the right place that way as well.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you for that.

Also, you mentioned in your opening remarks that 60% have set goals and 40% have set goals for education. How is that being achieved through the process? Also, what is the successful employment rate for veterans using your service?

Ms. Tara Jones: I don't have the specific data with me today around the success rates. Again, it is something that I can provide to you.

From an employment perspective, some are remaining in CAF, so again, it's about early access and getting connected to resources and to a coach. They're able to re-engage the services as long as they maintain eligibility. They're able to re-engage the services whenever they need and they can come back directly to us versus having to go through a new application.

In terms of employment at CAF, some people have chosen, through the journey of decision-making, to re-enlist if they're a veteran, while others, again, are pursuing public service employment. We have that broken down. It's just not with me today, but I'm happy to provide it.

• (1900)

Mr. Wilson Miao: It would be great if you could share that with the committee as well.

Also, you mentioned the entry level versus the executive level. Which one tends to be more in terms of numbers for released veterans acquiring your services?

Ms. Tara Jones: Again, I don't have specific numbers here with me. We do see participants who are coming out of the military from a very senior position and are looking to not have that type of role. It does vary by each person.

I don't have any specific data with me today to further that.

Mr. Wilson Miao: No problem.

Thank you very much for that.

Next, I would like, through the chair, to direct my question to Ms. Adams.

You mentioned your organization is a for-profit. How much would it cost for a veteran to take a course in your organization?

Ms. Jeannine Adams: Our courses vary. The beginning courses are about \$1,200 for two weeks of full-time training. Then they can go up to \$5,000 to \$6,000 for 12 weeks.

Mr. Wilson Miao: What are the success rates when a veteran takes a course and looks for employment after?

Ms. Jeannine Adams: Depending on the course, it can be anywhere from 75% to 85%. We work with other placement partners. Manpower, for example, is one that we work with. They do the placement part.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Since your courses are offered virtually, do you offer this service across the country for our veterans?

Ms. Jeannine Adams: We most definitely do across Canada, absolutely. We've been doing that for years, well before the pandemic.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Do you see any challenges that veterans will face depending on their location when it comes to employment and access to the courses?

Ms. Jeannine Adams: They need to have access to computers. That can be a challenge if they don't have one; they might need to get funding for that.

If they are remote, sometimes there can be issues with Internet access, but we've been able to overcome many of those things.

I think probably the biggest challenge people have is that there's an acceptance of these types of training programs and that they can actually be successful with a condensed program, where we're very specific on what it is they are learning and moving them forward in a career that way.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miao.

[Translation]

Mr. Desilets, you have six minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Chair.

I thank our guests for being here to help us in our understanding of this issue.

Mrs. Jones, will your organization provide services under the government's \$500-million contract for rehabilitation services?

Can you hear me?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Did you hear the question?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: I heard the question. No, we're not a—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Okay.

Would you like to do so?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: I'm not sure. That's probably a bigger decision than myself.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: You do not wish to provide these services.

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: Again, I'm not sure I'm familiar enough to be able to say on behalf of the organization that I would like to be a service provider for that.

• (1905)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Okay, no problem.

Do you provide services to RCMP veterans?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: No, it's not for RCMP veterans. They're not eligible within the career transition services program.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Why?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: That would be a policy question, likely best for VAC.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: No problem.

Do you think that the veterans income replacement benefit creates a problem integrating them into the workforce?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: It's an area of focus when we are researching the labour market to see what the labour market is bearing for the types of the positions that they are seeking. Sometimes there is a disconnect with the private sector based on perhaps their earnings within the military. It's not an area that we dive deep into with the participants. They essentially make a decision as to whether they want to pursue a career in that path if the compensation is not what they were targeting.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: For the National Veterans Employment Strategy currently being studied by our committee, was your company consulted by the department?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: I haven't been consulted as part of the study, no.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Do you have an opinion on that?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: I think there are a couple of recommendations that I would suggest for this committee.

I think the small to medium-sized businesses are sometimes missing the opportunity to hire from the veteran talent pool. Part of what our team does is break down those barriers one employer at a time. One challenge is that the small to medium-sized businesses don't have designated recruitment personnel, so it's a hiring manager trying to fill a job as quickly as they can and not necessarily putting in specific efforts to target a particular group. I think that's an opportunity from an educational perspective for the small to medium-sized organizations to have better awareness around the value and benefits of hiring veterans and veteran family members.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: You started to make recommendations. That is something our committee is very interested in.

Do you have any recommendations to share with us?

[English]

Ms. Tara Jones: I want to acknowledge the committee on the diversity of the witnesses who have been engaged through this initiative. I think it's opened my eyes to how many organizations and partners are out there to collaborate with. I think it's a very large ecosystem working towards supporting veterans. I see an opportunity for greater collaboration, awareness and information sharing among the various providers of services to veterans as a way to collaborate and wrap our supports around each person.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: We were quite surprised to see the variety and number of organizations that work with veterans and advocate for their employability. Personally, I was very surprised.

I have no further questions, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Desilets.

To close the first round of questions, I will give the floor to Mrs. Blaney for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of you for being here today.

I will start first with Mr. Dufour.

I heard very clearly that you work mostly with medically released veterans, and that is one of the top concerning populations. Could you talk about the methods you use to connect with those veterans?

You also said in your testimony that it can sometimes take years to get all of the accessibility parts in place. I'm just wondering if you could talk about why it takes so long and what challenges you're facing in the work you do.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Dufour: We contact veterans only when Veterans Affairs case managers direct them to our services.

When I said that this could take several years, there may have been a problem with the interpretation because of the fact that I was speaking too quickly. If that is the case, I apologize. In fact, I was

saying that when veterans used our services, they were assessed and then recommended for participating in a rehabilitation program. That could mean going back to school over a number of years, two or three maybe. Then we would provide them with assistance in actively looking for employment. Sometimes this process could take a year, sometimes up to four years.

• (1910)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that. I'm really fascinated by this. In the work that you do, do you see any barriers in accessing resources from VAC for veterans who are medically released?

I think you mentioned accessible workplaces. I'm curious if you've had any opportunities to work with employers or directly with a veteran who is in the workplace around how to make that space more accessible for them?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Dufour: In my opinion, the the rehabilitation program is very well designed. The department should be proud because it offers a lot of resources, including capacity assessment tools for veterans. It leaves room for consultation with treating doctors, neuro-psychologists and psychologists to get very clear recommendations on the veterans' new functional capacity. This helps in making connections and determining what veterans can do to the maximum of their abilities in the workforce.

As far as obstacles are concerned, of course, after being drawn to the Canadian Armed Forces out of interest and serving our country, a Canadian veteran may face functional limitations and the loss of some abilities. This comes with a grieving period and a redirection process. These are significant personal challenges. That being said, we had the necessary resources in place to guide these veterans through the process and help them find employment adapted to their new abilities and I am sure the new service provider has the same resources.

Workplace coaching was not provided through the Canadian Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the last consortium I worked for. We created a job development position to promote these employees to employers and create relationships with them. However, we did not intervene directly at the workplace to address, with some employers, the possibility of creating accommodations, for example, or raise awareness about a veteran's need for support services because of post-traumatic stress symptoms or other functional limitations. It would be an excellent idea to have the resources to do that work under such a program.

In the majority of cases, veterans are very independent. They are looking for autonomy and have many skills that may be transferable and developed. Not all of them are necessarily looking for that type of support, but for some of them, this could become an extremely important resource.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: This is my last question; I know I only have about a minute left.

I really appreciate what you said about the coaching, but what we've heard from multiple witnesses is that often there is a stigma from employers towards veterans. They think that all veterans come with a lot of trauma and PTSD, but that's not necessarily the case.

In the work that you do, do you ever hear feedback from the veterans you work with that they find stumbling blocks from being perceived in a certain way as they go along their process of looking for employment? I'm wondering if maybe the coaching isn't just for the veterans. It might also be to open doors for veterans with employers.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Dufour: You are all correct. What is more, in my opening remarks, that is what I was alluding to when I was talking about ambassadors that might work with Canadian businesses to promote this labour force and its skills.

That being said, in some cases there may be some anti-veteran bias. However, in many cases there is pro-veteran bias. Over the course of my 11 years of experience in this program, I saw several employers who were very grateful for the veterans' contribution and very open to the idea of incorporating them into their business. That does not mean there is no work to be done, but I have confidence in human nature and I truly believe that something can be done in this respect.

Allow me to reiterate the importance of having ambassadors to promote veterans to businesses because veterans have many skills and so much more to offer.

• (1915)

The Chair: Thank you for answering these questions, Mr. Dufour.

[English]

That was the first round of six minutes.

In order to get the 10 minutes that I talked about at the beginning, I will give two minutes to each group of members.

I would like to start with Mr. Fraser Tolmie.

You have two minutes, please.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Thank you very much.

I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us tonight.

One thought that goes through my head when I sit here thinking about a veteran who is looking to get out of the military is that they're asking themselves how they are going to find a job.

Ms. Adams, how do you cast your net to attract the vets to come to your website? How do you say that you're going to help them get employment?

Ms. Jeannine Adams: We work with partners. We work with health care partners. An example would be The Newly Institute. It works with first responders and the military community, helping them with their struggles in terms of PTSD and pain management, for example. Once they're ready, there's a referral to us. We would work with them in terms of understanding what types of interests they have, and what that actually looks like from a career perspective.

We also go back to the rehab organization, making sure we've got a good understanding, and if there's any insight it can provide us. It's just constant feedback, and making sure that we're meeting the veterans, or first responders, where they are, and moving them forward from there.

We also work with employers. We're always building relationships with employers to make sure they understand these new technologies. Oftentimes, it's not just the students who don't understand the new technology, it's the employers, as well.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tolmie.

We'll now go to MP Darrell Samson, for two minutes, please.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, all, for your presentations. It's very much appreciated, as well as the work you do to support our veterans.

We only have two minutes, so I'm going to move this quickly.

I'll ask the three of you the same questions. What is the relationship between your organization and Veterans Affairs? On recruitment, what strategy do you use to recruit veterans to your organization?

We'll start with Ms. Jones.

Ms. Tara Jones: We're a service provider that delivers career transition services on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada. We went through a procurement process. We don't actually recruit the veterans to the program. VAC is responsible for the communication, education and application approval process. If the veterans are approved, they come to us.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Are 100% of the individuals veterans or family members?

Ms. Tara Jones: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I really like having family members included, because we often see veterans being moved to another region, and the spouses have to quit their jobs.

[Translation]

I will now turn to Mr. Dufour.

If I understood correctly, you work with disabled veterans. How many do you work with?

What are the challenges and successes from your point of view?

• (1920)

Mr. Marc-André Dufour: I will give more or less the same answer I gave to the previous question.

We are a former service provider. We went through a procurement process and together with another company we were responsible for the vocational rehabilitation program from 2009 to 2022.

Only case managers from Veterans Affairs Canada could direct veterans to our services. That was the only possible path for a veteran to have access to our services.

I am sorry, I forgot your last question.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You said you were a former service provider. What do you mean by that? What was different before compared to today?

Mr. Marc-André Dufour: The vocational rehabilitation contract was awarded to a new consortium of businesses. Earlier your colleague made reference to a \$500-million contract. That contract was given to the WCG International and Lifemark Health Group consortium, not to mention any names. That consortium has been responsible for these services since November.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dufour.

Thank you, Mr. Samson. I am sorry, but your two minutes are up.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Desilets for two minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Chair.

My questions are for Mrs. Adams.

This week in committee, witnesses suggested that financial incentives might be interesting for small and medium sized enterprises to encourage them to hire veterans. This could come in the form of tax credits.

Would you agree with a proposal like that?

[English]

Ms. Jeannine Adams: Many of our programs involve subsidies, and they are extremely popular with employers. I would absolutely recommend that.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mrs. Adams, do you get the impression that soldiers, when they leave the armed forces, are properly prepared to face the job market?

I ask because I get the impression that often, or practically all the time, it is organizations like yours that pay the price.

Do you believe that the transition is being handled properly?

[English]

Ms. Jeannine Adams: I would say there's a lot of learning they have to go through, in terms of understanding what their transferable skills are. I feel they do not feel confident in them. They feel everything they've learned, to that point, is of no actual value. They have to go through a process of understanding and recognizing that they do have lots of value.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I have one last question, Mrs. Adams.

Do you have any recommendations for our committee?

[English]

Ms. Jeannine Adams: I would say it's opening people's minds to different ways of learning, and understanding these new technologies are of value. For example, something like cybersecurity is an amazing opportunity, because they already understand public service, and the value and risks associated. I think there's a huge opportunity there.

As well, it's subsidizing and opening funding to organizations like mine, where the training is a lot shorter.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We are now going to close this panel with Ms. Rachel Blaney.

You have two minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Adams, I'm going to ask you one big, long question with four different parts. I'll give you the rest of my time to answer.

I checked your website for veterans programs. I saw that the page you have only focuses on the education and training benefit.

Is any of your training created and tailored specifically for veterans?

Can you take me through the process of a veteran applying to be trained with you? Does the veteran come to you? Do you help them with the process of applying for the education and training benefit?

I would also love to hear your thoughts on the process and timeline.

Have you ever had a situation where you had to turn a veteran away because of a lack of funding?

Thank you.

• (1925)

Ms. Jeannine Adams: Thank you.

Have we created specific programs for veterans? The answer is, no, we have not.

What we have, though, are specific programs for people who have gone through some sort of trauma, whether it's physical, emotional or psychological. Our programs are very much designed to help people through that process.

In terms of the process of helping them with the application, we've built out, on our website, that process. We certainly help people through that. We have administrators who are able to help. That's something we want to do—make sure people are able to access that training, where possible.

Have we ever had to turn down somebody? Absolutely. We've had people who were not able to get funding. I will tell you, though, that, in cases where someone doesn't have funding and we see an opportunity to help, we have a program where we just let people in. We don't charge them, because we want to change their life. We want to make it better. Whether it's someone who's a veteran, or on EI or whatever, we have put them through for free, because it's the right thing to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adams.

That's how we are closing this panel.

On behalf of the members of the committee, I'd like to thank the witnesses for their participation and their work for veterans.

I'd like to thank Ms. Tara Jones, contract manager from Agilec.

[*Translation*]

I also want to thank Mr. Marc-André Dufour, regional manager at March of Dimes Canada.

[*English*]

Thank you, also, to Ms. Jeannine Adams, chief executive officer at ReTrain Canada Incorporated.

I'd like to remind you that, if you have anything to send to us, do not hesitate to send it to the clerk.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

On that, members of the committee, we will now take a break in order to welcome the next panel of witnesses.

The committee will suspend.

• (1925)

(Pause)

• (1930)

[*English*]

The Chair: We can now proceed to the second panel of witnesses.

Thank you for coming. Just as a quick reminder, before speaking, please wait until I recognize you. If you are on video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

I also want to welcome one of our colleagues, Ms. Jenna Sudds, who is on the screen tonight.

Welcome to our witnesses. From Prince's Trust Canada, we have Ms. Kathleen Kilgour, senior program manager, operation entrepreneur; Captain Erin Copeland, retired, program ambassador, by video conference;

[*Translation*]

and Mr. Patrick Lamothe, retired sergeant and program ambassador.

We also welcome Mr. Guy Riel, founding president of The Pendulum Foundation, who is coming to us by videoconference.

• (1935)

[*English*]

Finally, from True Patriot Love Foundation, we have Mr. Nick Booth, chief executive officer, by video conference.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. After that, we will start with a round of six minutes, followed by a round of two minutes.

I will begin with Prince's Trust Canada and invite Ms. Kilgour to take the floor for five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Kathleen Kilgour (Senior Program Manager, Operation Entrepreneur, Prince's Trust Canada): Thank you.

Thank you, everyone, for inviting us here today.

I will be providing an overview and then yielding time to our two program ambassadors who are with us today.

At Prince's Trust Canada, we believe that a sustainable future depends on our social, economic and environmental strength. With the UN SDGs as our guide and the vision of His Majesty King Charles III as our inspiration, we are helping Canadians prepare for and contribute to a better future.

Operation Entrepreneur is Prince's Trust Canada's inaugural program. It was created in 2012 in consultation with military and veteran-serving stakeholders, including the CAF and VAC. This was after a needs assessment revealed an absence of training and support for the approximately 10% of those transitioning and pursuing entrepreneurship or self-employment upon release.

This is where and when Operation Entrepreneur stepped in. We started with one program and 19 participants. Ten years later, we have a full calendar of programming. For example, before COVID, we hosted 120 in-person, one-day introduction to entrepreneurship workshops on bases from Comox to Bagotville and in St. John's. Since COVID, we've hosted over 70 online workshops and will be continuing to deliver in person or online.

In addition to the workshops, we offer weekly online info sessions, speed networking and traditional networking events, intensive business boot camps and mentorship.

We are also the home of BuyVeteran.CA and the Remembrance Week campaign. This national campaign has been incredibly successful, bringing attention to over 700 local, veteran-owned businesses while combatting the damaging stereotypes that negatively impact veterans.

Our annual participation numbers have also grown. Every year, we engage 550 serving members, veterans, reservists, spouses and their families. To date, that's over 5,000 people. Sixty per cent have been or will be medically released. Twenty-five per cent are women, and 10% of those are spouses.

Finally, while not everybody who engages with us starts a business, the learnings and career development skills gained are transferable. In all that we do, we support forward movement towards a new identity created with confidence, agency, purpose and community.

To share their perspectives, we have Captain Erin Copeland, retired, followed by Sergeant Patrick Lamothe, retired.

The Chair: The floor is yours. You still have three more minutes.

Ms. Erin Copeland (Captain (Retired), Program Ambassador, Prince's Trust Canada): Thank you so much.

My name is Erin Copeland. It is my privilege to speak to you all today.

I served for 13 years as a logistics officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Since retiring in 2015, my husband and I are the proud owners and operators of Tall Tree Bakery in Squamish, B.C. It began as just the two of us and has grown to employ seven full-time staff.

Operation Entrepreneur has played a pivotal role in our success. Prior to my release, I attended the business boot camp at the University of Regina and emerged with a more defined plan, valuable tools and the confidence that helped me succeed.

Over the years, I've valued remaining part of the network and community. I've attended and spoken at workshops. Tall Tree Bakery is listed on "BuyVeteran.CA" and now, after seven years of successful business ownership, my role has evolved, and I'm now a new mentor in their six-month mentorship program.

To this day, I find the skills and expertise gained in my military career transferable to business ownership. It is my hope that I can help those transitioning navigate the often scary and daunting journey and realize and be confident in the skills they have. If I can impart one or two lessons or experiences, I'll consider that a success.

Thank you for this opportunity.

● (1940)

The Chair: Thank you.

I think Mr. Lamothe would like to intervene.

You have one minute left.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Lamothe (Sergeant (Retired), Program Ambassador, Prince's Trust Canada): Hello everyone.

I want to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to testify here today.

As you already know, my name is Patrick Lamothe. I am retired now, but I served in the Canadian Armed Forces for 28 years. In the

meantime, I am the founding president of a few companies, including Altitude Gym and other startups. So far we have created around 200 jobs in those businesses.

That being said, I am here to talk about the program. I want to make clear that I am not attached to the program. I am only an ambassador. I want to say that the help we have received from this program has been pivotal to the success of our companies.

Let me share some of my personal background.

I had the luck and privilege of attending training camp in Halifax in 2015. I was able to participate in it despite the fact that I was already at the head of a company.

I have to say that soldiers who return to civilian life, especially infantry soldiers, whose training is mostly in combat arms, are a bit behind compared to others since their skills and aptitudes are not really transferable.

I will now talk about the strengths of the program.

The program helped us to understand several concepts such as the words marketing, operations and human resources. It also helped us to understand their legal implications. These are words that everyone knows, but as entrepreneurs, sometimes we get their implications wrong. There were impartial intermediaries who put us on the right track.

I owe the success of our businesses to this program.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lamothe. I get the impression that there are many other things you would have liked to say. You may provide us with more information during the rounds of questions.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Guy Riel, founding president of The Pendulum Foundation.

Mr. Guy Riel (Founding President, The Pendulum Foundation): Good evening, Mr. Chair

Good evening also to the vice-chairs of the committee, to the members of Parliament, and to all invited guests.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that the Fondation Le Balancier, which I founded, is active in the greater Quebec City area, on the traditional territory of the great Huron-Wendat Nation of Wendake. The region is recognized as an important meeting place for other First Nations, including the Innu. Le Balancier aims to be a welcoming and inclusive place.

Two corrections need to be made in the brief I submitted to you. My staff noticed the errors after sending it. I will therefore send a new version to the clerk.

My name is Guy Riel and I am a veteran. I took part in a mission to Cyprus and two missions to Bosnia in 1993 and 1995. My assessment from Veterans Affairs Canada is that I am at 175%, given my physical and mental health and neurodegenerative disease from my military service.

We set up the Fondation Le Balancier in response to a request from some of my sponsors in the system who felt that front line services were lacking in Quebec. We worked with existing partners to develop a support network for veterans. We also created a webcast to disseminate information from the department to the veteran community. We obtained funding four days ago for the English program, which is called *Some Vets at Night*. In French, it's *Deux vets le soir*.

The Foundation focuses on the quality of its members. There are about 100 of us professionals working together. We are all veterans of the RCMP or the military. Our mission is to reshape the image of the labour market, the image of the veteran community and the image that civilians have of veterans.

In fact, 48% of Canadian veterans feel underestimated by the Canadian public. I have experienced this myself. Often our skills are not recognized because they are so out of the ordinary. So I am really glad to hear that some managers are trying to work on these issues.

I worked in the federal public service, including for the Treasury Board, where I implemented the parking policy. I had the opportunity to put my skills to good use and to excel. That is also what I wanted to do with The Pendulum Foundation.

I have been around for a while. I made my first career transition in the 1990s, and then another in the 2000s, and I have seen a huge improvement in services. As Canadian veterans, we have excellent services. My community has no reason to complain. There are issues, but they can be foreseen and corrected.

The transition to civilian life is when military members lose their sense of purpose, and that is where The Pendulum Foundation can help.

We signed an agreement with three research chairs, in the areas of chronic pain, mental health and cannabis. We have a human resources researcher working within that organization trying to understand the psychological and physical issues associated with wanting to move on to a new career.

The discourse needs to change. In our community, there is not enough emphasis on the merits of working and re-engaging. The Pendulum works a lot on this aspect.

Thank you. I am ready to answer all your questions.

- (1945)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Riel.

[English]

Now I'd like to invite Nick Booth, chief executive officer from the True Patriot Love Foundation, to speak.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Nick Booth (Chief Executive Officer, True Patriot Love Foundation): Thank you to the chair and the committee for the opportunity to contribute to this important piece of work.

True Patriot Love is Canada's national foundation for the military and veteran community. We work closely as a trusted partner with Veterans Affairs, the Canadian Armed Forces and the federal and provincial governments, including our partnership in Ontario on veterans employment.

It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to thank the government for its tremendous support of the 2025 Invictus Games. True Patriot Love was honoured to be able to coordinate the successful bid on behalf of Canada. We look forward to welcoming the world to Vancouver and Whistler for the first-ever winter edition of this inspiring event. The committee may also like to know that we have made promoting veteran employment and transition one of the legacy strands of the games.

As the national foundation, True Patriot Love works across the spectrum of issues facing our military members and veterans. We support our military families and children, especially as they navigate the issues of multiple deployments on location, away from their home supports. We fund a range of programs to assist the health and well-being of both serving members and veterans, including mental health, homelessness, employment and transition.

For those who may have become injured or ill, we contribute to their recovery and rehabilitation through sport, expeditions and the creative arts. We help with reintroduction into local communities post uniform, especially with programs focusing on volunteering and service opportunities to maintain a sense of purpose, which we believe is key to a good transition.

True Patriot Love welcomes the committee's focus on this important subject. It believes there is much that can be done to help our veterans secure productive and satisfying employment post service and, in doing so, contribute to the postpandemic economy and vibrant communities across Canada.

In January 2013, recognizing that many releasing members struggle in making the transition to civilian employment, the then-minister of veterans affairs requested that True Patriot Love develop a report to identify the hurdles that may be impeding a successful transition. In response, we formed the veterans transition advisory council, which brought together representation across the charitable sector and the government. This report, entitled “Supporting Veterans through their transition to civilian employment in Canada”, produced a series of recommendations. Many of those issues remain the same today.

I believe the challenges can be grouped into two elements, cultural and structural. From a cultural perspective, we need to ensure that businesses understand the opportunities arising from hiring veterans and are ready to receive new veteran employees who may have had a very different work experience in the military. They bring extraordinary skills and talents, but may also struggle to adapt to the new civilian work environment.

This is also a communication challenge, understanding that veterans are not a homogenous group and, worse, that they are not all broken or unwell. Businesses that embrace this through initiatives such as veteran employee resource groups or buddy systems will do a better job at attracting and retaining veteran talent.

The culture of transition also needs to be strengthened within the Canadian Armed Forces. There is an inevitable tension between reconstitution and the need to maintain full operational capability, and embracing transition and supporting those whose time is up or who choose to leave. I was speaking to a veteran only this week who explained that when they announced they were leaving after 20 years of service, the response they received made them feel that they were in some way letting the side down.

Improving transition and creating positive veteran champions in industry will support reserve recruitment, connection with the military and many other benefits downstream. Providing volunteering and service opportunities, so that veterans can maintain an identity and sense of purpose, has also been shown to be an extremely effective way of supporting successful transition and long-term well-being.

From a structural perspective, there are a number of players in this space, including the CAF transition group, MTEP, Veterans Affairs' own employment team and, of course, charitable and non-profit organizations.

There is much we can do to make this system more efficient. We need to make sure that the educational qualifications achieved during military service are accepted and understood in the private or academic sectors and start earlier to prepare our military members for their transition. Having an easy way to connect veterans to community programs and information about employment through an online hub would also help.

Finally, we can learn from other nations, too. The United States has done an excellent job of creating links to the private sector through the Hiring Our Heroes program, Veterans on Wall Street, The Mission Continues and other initiatives. We can take the best of these and adapt them to a Canadian context.

• (1950)

In summary, True Patriot Love welcomes the chance to contribute to the development and implementation of a new veterans employment strategy and looks forward to today's discussion.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Booth. I'd like to thank all witnesses for their opening remarks.

Also on behalf of the committee—I know there are a few veterans here—thank you for your service. The committee is pleased to welcome you to this committee.

Now we're going to start the first round of questions of six minutes, and members can split time with their colleagues.

I will invite Mr. Fraser Tolmie, for six minutes or less.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to extend my gratitude to our witnesses tonight, and also to those who have served our great nation.

We're very proud of you. Thank you very much for your service.

Mr. Booth, veterans seeking employment are very important to us. It's been very important to this committee.

An issue that we're hearing about as a committee is on retention of veteran employees. What can be done to get veterans to stay in their civilian jobs, and what kind of follow-up would you believe is necessary to help veterans go from being in a military environment to a civilian life—that cultural shift? You touched briefly on that, about “letting the side down”.

Mr. Nick Booth: I would group my answer into two areas: one is preparing for the arrival and retention of veterans within the private sector. I think there's a lot that businesses, government and not-for-profit organizations that are hiring veterans can do to make that experience much easier. We often hear how difficult it is coming out of a military career that they may have been in for some time—you've either done your time or it has been taken away through injury—and how difficult that transition can be.

Often people will land in a job and then bump.... What we hear from employers is that they feel they're veteran friendly.

However, as you rightly say, veterans don't stick around. They don't stay in those jobs. It's often because they're worried about finding that first job post service to feed their family—to give themselves some economic security—but it isn't a job that gives them the same well-being and fulfillment psychologically that they had when they were in service.

That culture piece is really important. I mentioned things like veteran employee resource groups and buddy systems that make veterans feel welcome and get other veterans in the businesses to help support them.

Often, if veterans have that sense of purpose and service they so proudly displayed while they were in uniform, we believe those other community supports around veterans will give them those psychological benefits.

I mentioned the importance of volunteering and service. Something that True Patriot Love is very focused on is funding a range of those programs that give people other ways of contributing to the community, as well as the work they do to provide for themselves and their families.

I would say that some of it's within the business, and then some of it's within the community around the vet that supports them as they make that transition.

• (1955)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you. That's a very good segue for the next question I have.

There is a program in the U.S. called The Mission Continues, which provides meaningful volunteer opportunities for veterans adjusting to civilian life.

Are you familiar with this program? If so, what could you share with this committee about that?

Mr. Nick Booth: Certainly, I am familiar.

For the committee's background, I used to work in the United States on this subject. I was involved some time ago with that. The origin of that—it's a piece of information that the committee might like to consider, and I would be pleased to forward a link afterwards if helpful—came from a report, I think it was in 2009. It was called the "All Volunteer Force" report, by Civic Enterprises. It identified that volunteering and service opportunities can be one of the most successful ways of supporting veterans transition.

The Americans embraced that and built out The Mission Continues, which became a campaign—as well as a not-for-profit organization at the centre of it—to help provide volunteering and service opportunities for American veterans and their families. Across the seven domains of well-being, it was a way of making sure that those different ecological and psychological benefits to the veteran were being met.

It's a conversation that we've been endeavouring to push forward with Veterans Affairs and others in Canada. I think that a focus on volunteering and service will help not only the long-term mental health of our veterans, but also their willingness to remain in different corporate roles that may not give them that same sense of purpose but do give them economic security.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I wanted to point out that I thought you had a very unique American accent. That's my Scottish humour. I apologize.

Mr. Nick Booth: I apologize, but I try to hide it.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I'm know I'm bringing a bit of a levity to this questioning.

Ms. Copeland, at your bakery out in Squamish, B.C., do you have Nanaimo bars? If so, how do we get some out to this committee?

Ms. Erin Copeland: We don't, but we'll work on it.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you so much.

Going back to you, Mr. Booth, it's important to measure the progress. I've brought this question up before about how we are keeping people employed.

How do you think we could do a better job of measuring the results of those who are not being employed after their military service and those who are employed?

Mr. Nick Booth: That's a great question. Often, when I'm talking to businesses about this—and we've been working with a number of private sector partners on building veteran employed resource groups, for example—the first question I ask them is, "How many veterans do you have?" I'm always shocked by how few of them actually count.

I point out that what you measure is what you get, and creating a baseline of how many veterans you have in your organization and then tracking that, both from an absolute percentage point and a retention rate as you write the survey, is the first point. We'll then begin to get some measurement of that.

The other issue, which was identified in the veteran transition report that I mentioned earlier, from 2013 through to 2015, was underemployment. That's a harder one to track, but that report identified that it often took veterans up to 10 years to get back to the earning potential that they had when they left the service. They were required to take the first job that they felt they could get, and they didn't understand necessarily how their skills would be applicable in the private sector.

• (2000)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Booth. Your time is over.

Now let's go to Mr. Churence Rogers for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today. To our guests, welcome. Thank you for your service.

I will turn my attention to Operation Entrepreneur and Ms. Kilgour.

As a result of the work that you and your organization have been doing, have you seen an interest from veterans in developing their own businesses and going the entrepreneur route after they've finished their military career?

Ms. Kathleen Kilgour: Absolutely. This is why we exist. There was a great need in 2012.

We put about 550 people through every year. That number is based on a number that VAC shared earlier on January 30, which is that of the 8,500 people transitioning, 4,500 are interested in pursuing a second career option. The other 4,000 are doing something else.

Of those 4,500 people, we want to have at least 10% of them, because we know that 10% of people who are looking for something new in their life are going to explore entrepreneurship or self-employment, especially with the rise of the gig economy and all of the change that's been going on.

Mr. Churence Rogers: I think that's absolutely great.

What are the typical questions? When a veteran contacts you, what are the typical questions they would ask about having their own business and becoming an entrepreneur?

Ms. Kathleen Kilgour: "Hello, I'm a current member of the Canadian Armed Forces and I want to start my own business in my hometown. I was directed to your website and I'm looking for some information to start a plan and help me move forward. I want to know what you guys can offer." That's it.

Mr. Churence Rogers: They're basic questions.

Ms. Copeland, you've done well, or you seem to be doing very well. What skill sets do you think veterans typically have through their military service that you view as an asset to become an entrepreneur or to develop their own business?

Ms. Erin Copeland: Personally speaking, some of the skills that I took that were directly transferable to the civilian and entrepreneurship world are organization and leadership. We're very well-equipped in the military, especially as officers. That, coupled with my trade as a logistics officer... I took a lot of directly relevant skills, such as accounting and human resources.

For me, personally, a lot of my job skills in the military directly correlated to entrepreneurship. However, I think the leadership piece and the community piece are the pinpoint of the skill set that military people can offer entrepreneurship.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you for that.

Mr. Riel, from your own experience as a veteran, and through helping other veterans, what kinds of changes do you think would help the transition back to civilian life? What are some of the changes they would need to be aware of?

Mr. Guy Riel: There's a lot of work to be done. We've taken care of our people, physically and mentally, with our systems, and all of the programs we have. There are sufficient elements there to be

able to work freely, and engage a veteran from his active life back to the working life.

The Pendulum actually works with the service centre and transition unit in Valcartier. Basically, that's where we link up with the veterans.

We're trying to basically change the narrative that's out there. "If you're broken, you can't work." That's not true. Our programs are adaptable. Our programs can ensure that our veterans can go back to work. For us, mental health is one of our biggest issues. Basically, sending back our kids to work... I'm 52, I can't go back to work, but I'm still giving back to the community. Physically, I cannot sit in an office, or work in an office. I have to sleep every afternoon.

Also, we're working with entrepreneurs and companies here in the province of Quebec to make sure that they are truly veteran friendly. We have many rendezvous with doctors, with all of our programs—

● (2005)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Could I interrupt for a second?

From your perspective, what should we as a committee absolutely include when it comes to a national strategy for veteran employment?

Mr. Guy Riel: We need research and data on the programs. We need to know if our programs are truly working. Many programs are working, but we need to understand the ones that are broken, and those that are actually not really adapted to the new reality that our veterans are living right now. It's a brand new reality. My reality is not the same as that of a modern veteran. I'm from the 1990s. It's truly different.

It was simpler back in the 1990s to transfer our capabilities to civilian life. There's a knowledge base that is lost on who we are, and our worth in a working environment. It deals with the leadership we have, the structure we have, the organization skills we have, the management skills we have, and even the combat structure. I'm a combat guy, and I've managed many people.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your intervention, Mr. Riel.

I would now give the floor to Mr. Luc Desilets for the next six minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank our guests for their presence and, if applicable, for their military service.

Mr. Riel, you alluded to something that I think is essential. You said that businesses should collect figures and compile statistics. I think that is essential, and it should be said more often. Things should be recorded. Self-criticism and self-assessment are important for businesses to get better. But above all that is how we can assess their relevance and effectiveness. So I thank you very much for mentioning this.

That was simply a comment, and not the preamble to a question.

Here is now my first question for you, Mr. Riel.

You have a site that contains a lot of information. It talks about training for peer helpers and mutual assistance officers. I find it very interesting. In this training, you talk about the five stages of recovery, in order to support peer helpers in creating their tool box.

Could you tell me a little bit more about this initiative?

Mr. Guy Riel: Yes, sure.

We realized that in the transition process it was very important to have a specialized peer helper. So we improved the programme. The five steps include the initial contact. These are the steps to create a future life plan. We help our members come up with a plan for their future lives and find new passions.

It is important to understand that throughout their career, say for 20 or 30 years, a soldier is told what to do. By the time he retires from military life and returns to civilian life, he no longer has his usual reference points, and this is what causes problems. For example, it is the Joint Personnel Support Unit that deals with the medical and administrative aspects. Everyone is managing the veterans and everything they do.

Our peer helpers receive training from us in mental health first aid, but we also have accountants, social workers, several officers and non-commissioned members working with us. These people have various expertise and had good careers in civil society. They come and work with us to help young veterans reintegrate into society and try to introduce them to new passions.

This is also what we do through our web show *Some Vets at Night*. We talk a lot about overall health, meet the community and talk about our inspiring entrepreneurs to give veterans a more exciting view of the labour market.

• (2010)

Mr. Luc Desilets: You look passionate.

Mr. Guy Riel: I am.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That is something we can see and feel.

Did you find your transition from military to civilian life difficult?

Mr. Guy Riel: I found it very difficult, Mr. Desilets.

I came out of the military system and went into a hybrid system. I had major injuries. You could say that there is not comparison between the services offered in the 1990s today's services. The conflict in Afghanistan has done a lot of good within the structure of Veterans Affairs Canada. Based on our expertise and our tactical analysis of the reality on the ground, my team and I can tell you that young veterans today have many assets to make a successful

transition to civilian life. The main challenge at this time is to change society's attitude and portrayal of veterans.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Is the transition better? Are the military better equipped to deal with civilian life?

Mr. Guy Riel: Yes, but there will always be exceptions.

We have the transition unit and the military family resource centres, or MFRCs, at the local level. For our part, we work a lot with the Valcartier, Saint-Jean and Bagotville MFRCs. The MFRCs have excellent programs, but they are underfunded. I would like to take this opportunity to point out that MFRCs should be better funded. We should make sure we have a financial entity that really cares about us. We can give a lot on a volunteer basis. Our front line structure is made of volunteers, but that fades over time. Recruitment is more difficult, our community is aging and our young people are less inclined to volunteer. So we need a more structured framework within which our volunteers can work.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Booth.

The Taliban took control of Afghanistan over a year ago, and Canada had to quickly evacuate many people from the country, including women, opponents of the regime, and interpreters who supported the Canadian military while they were in Afghanistan.

I believe you were involved in the adaptation of the Afghan interpreters. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

[English]

Mr. Nick Booth: I don't have translation, so forgive me.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Booth, but you have to choose the language at the bottom of your screen to be able to have translation.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Can you hear me, Mr. Booth?

Does he hear the interpretation?

The Chair: Can you hear the English interpretation now?

[English]

Mr. Nick Booth: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm going to ask the member to repeat the question.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: It will be a pleasure.

Mr. Booth, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan a year and a half ago, and we know all the misery that Afghans have gone through on a daily basis since then. A lot of work has been done to get women and opponents of the system out of the country. There was also a major operation with Afghan interpreters, whom we wanted to help and get out of Afghanistan.

If I am not mistaken, you were involved in these efforts. Can you tell me about that?

[English]

Mr. Nick Booth: We were involved. We acted quickly to establish the Afghan resettlement fund. We recognized that once those interpreters and their families and others who'd supported the Canadian mission arrived in Canada, it was very important that they were helped to resettle here. We focused our efforts on the arrival post touching down in Canada. We've been looking at the role of veterans to support those Afghan families and veterans, because many of the veterans we spoke to felt disempowered in many ways, disengaged by what was going on in Afghanistan. To give them some agency back in the process, we mobilized veteran volunteers in support of the Afghan families.

We've been focusing our efforts on in-Canada support but very much using veterans to help reach out to either those they served alongside or others who supported the Canadian mission.

• (2015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'd like to invite Ms. Rachel Blaney for six minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Chair.

I thank all of the witnesses today, and of course a special thank you to those who gave such important service to our country.

I'm going to start with Ms. Kilgour.

First of all, I just want to say how much I enjoyed getting to know some of your colleagues when I had a meeting with them last year and I'm really impressed by the work that's done. I was also very happy to see that you were at Comox, at 19 Wing. That's the area I represent and I'm a big fan of all the folks who serve us there. That led me to think about the process you go through. Of course, if you were doing it at 19 Wing, I'm assuming people were in the time of transition but not all the way transitioned.

I'm just trying to get a clearer picture about when you start to work with people. Is it just wherever they are? Is there that pre-transition work?

Ms. Kathleen Kilgour: Thank you.

That's a really important question because peer-reviewed research and also our own personal experience say that we need to engage people before they release. It is too late after. The horse has left the barn for some people. Veterans Affairs has a hard time keeping track of people, which is fine because veterans don't have to check in, obviously. But people also need time before they release to get excited about the future, get comfortable with the idea, start building a new community, and all that happens in the year or two years beforehand.

That's why we do most of our work on bases, because we want to get them there.

That is really, I would say, the number one most important thing that you could do. Start transition training or any sort of career training earlier and give people something to look forward to and be excited and positive about.

Also, there's one other thing that is so important to me. Veterans are often unaware of the supports that are available to them and they don't believe that people are willing to help them. There's a real attitude of, "why would somebody want to help me?" There are millions of Canadians out there who desperately would love to volunteer and help a veteran, and they need to know that.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think that's important as well.

I want to thank you for mentioning that 25% of the people you're working with are women. It's awesome to see such a good number, especially considering the fact that we don't have 25% of women serving in this country.

I am curious about something. You talked about speed networking and networking events. I'm wondering what that looks like and how people become involved.

Ms. Kathleen Kilgour: Our program model takes an ecosystem approach. Nothing we do is linear. Nothing we do is...you can take just once, because starting a business really is holistic.

We also engage hundreds of volunteers. One of the ways we do that is through networking events and speed networking events that pair mentors, business professionals and experienced entrepreneurs for one-on-one round robin mentoring. We started the online mentoring after COVID took away the in-person networking events that we used to do.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Awesome.

I'll turn to you, Ms. Copeland. You talked about participating in a six-month mentorship program. Could you just talk to us about what that looked like and why that was so helpful?

Ms. Erin Copeland: I'll be honest that this was my first opportunity to participate in the mentorship program, but I was recently matched. I am the mentor, and I've recently been matched with a mentee who has transitioned from the military to the world of entrepreneurship. We were just matched actually about a month ago, so it's quite a new process for us both.

What it looks like, I think, is a six-month, semi-guided mentorship program where we set up a timeline, set up goals. My job is to help and mentor my mentee with his transition and the business he is hoping to start. That's my role, and I'm very excited to impart any of my skills and experiences I have learned through Operation Entrepreneur, and my experience owning my own business.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

Perhaps I can come to you, Mr. Lamothe. You talked also about participating in the training boot camp, I think you said, in Halifax. You also mentioned in your testimony having an honest broker. I'm just wondering if you could talk about what that means and also what the benefit was of the boot camp.

• (2020)

Mr. Patrick Lamothe: First of all, I would say that veterans have lots of strengths. Many times we see our skills and management skills. There are also our attributes. We are mission-driven and also we have that will to fight at every cost. But we're missing something. When we look at veterans, we see many people who have spent their life in the public sector. It's not a weakness, but I can say one thing for me and for the 20 people seated with me. Where we benefited was with the management of finances. When you are born and raised in a system where finance is in the public sector, you have to raise your awareness, your understanding, so that's why it takes on another dimension.

At the seminars we had mentors who were prolific in business, people with success, and you could see they just caught our attention. We listened to them, and we gained from that. I went back to my drawing board so many times. I said, "This was my belief, but now with what I've just learned, I'm going to modify my approach." All 20 of us said, "That networking that just happened was great." That's one of the benefits from that boot camp.

Also, like I said in an earlier statement, they're small words, but when you start wearing the hat, the scope is different, because some people also have to balance life and work. There's a danger to people who are mission-driven. Many times if they're not under control, they don't understand the dangers and they're going to lose balance in their personal life. Those mentors are there to support you and say, "Even if success is there, don't drop your guard. You still have a life, a family and people around you." These are people who are experienced with life.

That's why I would say that when we look at veterans, people who have many skills and attributes have a higher chance of success, but they need that little push.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you for your answer, Mr. Lamothe.

Members of the committee, I had promised each party two minutes to ask questions, but in the end I am only going to allow one. So I suggest you ask the question that you think is most important.

First I give the floor to Mr. Terry Dowdall for one minute.

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a quick question for Mr. Booth.

I understand your organization has a strong relationship with my home province of Ontario. I'm just wondering if you'd let us know how the provinces or territories could perhaps partner with these veterans employment programs.

Mr. Nick Booth: Yes, we are delighted with the partnership we have. It falls into two strands, firstly around mental health and supporting programs specifically looking at veterans' mental health and that of their families, but specifically for this discussion this evening, there is a second program, through the Ministry of Labour, Training, Immigration and Skills Development, that is looking at supporting veteran transition employment. It's categorized into three layers and is working with 10 major companies on developing

best practices and case studies that we can then share, both in Ontario and across Canada.

Secondly, on small to medium-sized enterprises, many of which of course will not have the big HR departments that the larger firms have, it's about how we make hiring veterans easy for them by creating tool kits and other partnerships with terms-of-commerce examples to focus on that sector.

Thirdly, a new initiative is focusing on rebuilding the health sector. The United Kingdom has a very big program on hiring veterans into the National Health Service. We are looking at piloting in Ontario a program called "Step into Health", which recruits transitioning members and veterans into health to help us rebuild postpandemic. We're hoping through that partnership to create some best practices, which we would be then delighted to work out across other provinces.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have Mr. Wilson Miao for one minute, please.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Booth, I'm very excited and looking forward to the Invictus Games that are coming to Vancouver and Whistler in 2025. Do you see this as an opportunity to also employ veterans? If so, what is the plan to recruit?

• (2025)

Mr. Nick Booth: I'm delighted that you're looking forward to the games. We welcome everybody to be with us.

We certainly do see it as an opportunity. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we've created seven legacy programs for the games, one of which is employment and transition. In addition to hiring veterans into the games organizing team, we're asking all of our sponsors and our corporate partners through the games to consider veteran hiring.

For example, we're soon to announce who the title sponsor will be, which is a major Canadian employer. They don't currently have a veteran hiring program or an employee resource group. Part of that new sponsorship arrangement with the games will be also looking at their own internal practices around hiring.

We hope to use the lens of the games to then bring a focus on the importance of hiring veterans in the sport industry, in the communications world and into a range of partner and supplier businesses into the games.

I hope that's a brief answer to what will be an exciting journey in the couple of years ahead.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, you have the floor for one minute.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Riel.

What is the biggest challenge facing your organization?

Mr. Guy Riel: The Pendulum Foundation has signed an agreement with Veterans House Canada to create a multi-service centre in the greater Quebec City area, in the Chaudière-Appalaches region.

We have the partners we need to be able to open the centre in September 2023. We want all services to be offered to veterans from this house. We do need to coordinate our efforts, because a lot of work is done in isolation and that creates a lot of confusion in the process.

A lieutenant colonel has been selected to work with us on this project. I am working with the Canadian Forces Surgeon General and the Veterans Affairs Canada Surgeon General to put this project together, which is really focused on the family and the member. The goal is to equip the family with the tools they need and really work towards the member having a new passion, whether it is volunteering or paid work.

Some members will never be able to return to the labour market, we realize that, but these members can still make a contribution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Riel.

[*English*]

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours for one minute, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My last question is going to come back to you, Ms. Kilgour.

I'm really curious to know if you could talk to us about the website that hosts all the veterans' businesses. How do veterans connect with that? How do people in Canada who want to support veterans connect with that?

Ms. Kathleen Kilgour: It's called BuyVeteran.CA. It is a listing of hundreds of veteran-owned businesses. The magic of the directory is that it does come alive during Remembrance Week, when we have the Buy Veteran campaign, which we use to change the narrative and provide an alternate way to talk about veterans. They're not victims. They're not all suffering from PTSD. They're phenomenally interesting individuals who have had phenomenally interesting careers.

It's also a place for veterans to find each other. A big part of our work is talking to veterans. We would go to the directory, for example, using Erin's business or Altitude Gym here in Ottawa, and say, "Hey, you want to open a gym? Let's go and look at the directory and see who we can find." Then we make an introduction. They have a little coffee chat and their community starts growing and their network starts building.

Also, you all and all the veterans we work with are so eager to make the road easier for those people who are coming behind them. This directory is a wonderful resource for them.

The Chair: Thank you so much. That's the end of our panel.

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses on behalf of members of the committee. Thank you for your input on this study.

From Prince's Trust Canada, we had Ms. Kathleen Kilgour, senior program manager, operation entrepreneur; Ms. Erin Copeland, captain (retired), program ambassador; and Mr. Patrick Lamothe, sergeant (retired), program ambassador.

From the Pendulum Foundation, we had Mr. Guy Riel, founding president.

From the True Patriot Love Foundation, we had Mr. Nick Booth, chief executive officer.

Once again, thank you so much.

Members, please stay online. We have six minutes left.

We have two break weeks, and we're going back to work in our constituencies. I'd like to know what we're going to do next.

We've already had six meetings on that study, but we still have other witnesses. There are about 12 witnesses, if you want to continue to work on that.

When we're back, we can give instructions to our analysts to prepare a report on that study. We also have the rehabilitation report. It's ready, so we can discuss that in committee business. We also have to discuss the supplementary estimates and the main estimates.

I know we don't have a lot of time, but in six minutes, I'm proposing that when we come back on Monday, we have committee business for one hour, so we can discuss all of those things. We also have some motions we can discuss. In the second hour, we would start the report on rehabilitation contracts.

Is there any discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Tolmie.

● (2030)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I apologize that Mr. Richards couldn't be with us tonight. I'm filling in.

We're probably paralleling your idea here. We would like to meet in the first hour on Monday with the subcommittee to discuss the schedule, and then the second hour could be for drafting instructions.

With the supplementary (C)'s being out, we would also like to meet with the minister at the Thursday meeting, and have him present to the panel.

The Chair: Perfect.

You said the subcommittee for the first hour, but you have to know that in the next hour the committee has to adopt the report of the subcommittee.

Next, we have Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

If I heard that correctly, the first hour of the Monday meeting would be for the subcommittee and the second hour would be in camera, but back to the whole committee to review what the subcommittee proposed. We can then identify which studies we're doing next.

For the next one, if we can get the minister... The minister's pretty good to us, let's be honest. That's on the public record, so there you go. If we can get him to come in on that Thursday, that would be fantastic. If he can't, my recommendation would be to do a first overview of the report in camera, so that it gives the clerk enough time to contact witnesses for the next study.

From my perspective, we've done enough on this current study. I'm ready to be done with it, but interested to hear what other people have to say.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Desilets, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I totally agree with Mrs. Blaney.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Samson, would you like to say something?

Mr. Darrell Samson: We're good with your suggestion.

The Chair: That's perfect.

First of all, for Thursday, as you said, the minister is always there with us, but we have to have something else in case.

Also, just before I give you the floor, Ms. Blaney, if we start with a subcommittee, then we have to have the report translated before we can discuss it in the second hour, so it won't be possible. If you want to have a full committee on committee business, in private, we can do that too, but if we have the second hour with the subcommittee, then we have to wait for the translation to come back on Thursday or the week after.

• (2035)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm open to having the whole committee discuss committee business for two hours. What I am hoping to see

is a plan up until the end of June. Of course, nothing will stay completely.... We always hope, and life happens.

I would say that if the minister can't come on the Thursday, then I think we should look at the rehabilitation report. Then for both we don't have to hope that witnesses show up. We either have the minister show up or we do the other. That's my thought.

The Chair: Mr. Tolmie.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I'm glad you agree with me.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I agree with Mr. Tolmie, on the record.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: And Mr. Desilets agrees with you, and Mr. Samson agrees with Mr. Desilets.

The Chair: We all agree.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I think we have consensus, and I think we're good to go. We have direction.

The Chair: That's a great suggestion, team.

I have one last thing.

[*Translation*]

This is the service contract. When the committee received it, I made it a confidential document. Now, the analyst will certainly use it to write the report, so I would like to have the agreement of the committee members to make the service contract public.

Is there consent?

Members: Agreed.

The Chair: I would like to thank the witnesses again for their participation. It has been great.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the interpreters, the technicians, the analyst, and also Ms. Davies, who has helped us tonight.

The meeting is adjourned.

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