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—
Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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• (1535)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, could we call the meeting to order, please?

Welcome, and a special welcome to our guests today.

Committee members, you have in front of you the agenda, and you have a briefing note from Carmela Hutchison, acting president, and Bonnie Brayton, executive director of the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada. You also have briefs from witnesses from SPHERE-Québec in front of you. This is the package that should be in front of you right now.

I want to welcome every one of you. We're going to start with seven minutes for questions and answers. I have to tell the committee that today we are probably going to have only one round, so make very good use of your time.

I would like to start the presentations, perhaps, with Carmela, if you would. Thank you.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton (National Executive Director, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada): Good afternoon. We thank the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for inviting us today to present in this dialogue about the effects on our economic security of being a woman with a disability. It is vital that you hear from the women who are directly affected by disability and poverty, in order to make decisions that will be good for us and for our country.

It is vital to give us meaningful ways to participate in the decisions at the policy tables that affect our lives. We are grateful for this opportunity to open what we hope is an ongoing dialogue.

As visitors to the lands of the Six Nations people, we thank the Haudenosaunee people for the use of their lands for us to come together today. We ask for guidance and wisdom from our Creator for the words that will allow us to come to an understanding and meaningful change in our society so we may all have lives of economic security and freedom from want and fear.

Our president, Carmela Hutchison.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison (President, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada): Thank you.

We offer the expertise of our lived experience as the basis for input and collaboration to increase our opportunity for inclusive attitudes and practices for Canadian women with disabilities in their economic security.

I would like to start by pointing out that women with disabilities are a good investment, and that investment has been very much overlooked.

Women with disabilities are major economic drivers of the economy of this country. Virtually 100% of their income is turned back into the economy to purchase the goods and services required to live with a disability. Health services, disability supports, child care, and transportation that they require are major sources of employment, industry, and retail business. Failure to invest in women with disabilities is a missed economic opportunity and creates barriers for our full participation in advantaged Canada.

People with disabilities are major income earners of their families. Workplace participation is vital for people with disabilities to be fully included in Canadian society and to ensure economic viability of their families.

I ask you to consider these important statistics. Working-age women and men with disabilities find themselves as the only adult providing income to their households a surprisingly high proportion of the time, whether they live in a household of one, as a lone parent, or with other adults. Almost one person in three with disabilities is responsible for 100% of the family income; fewer than one in five women and men without disabilities are in this situation.

The vast majority of female lone parents with and without disabilities bear most of the financial load for their children. About two-thirds of female lone parents over the age of 25 with disabilities are responsible for 100% of their family's income, and that means they do most of the decision-making about what purchases are made. For female lone parents without disabilities, the figure is similar, at 65%. Almost nine out of ten female lone parents with and without disabilities over the age of 25 are responsible for over three-quarters of their family income.

You can imagine the magnitude of the effects on young people living in the resulting poverty. Those effects are well documented in the studies on the CCSD website.

Yet in spite of profound economic challenge, women with disabilities have the majority of purchasing power for their families and make significant contributions to the Canadian economy. It would make great sense that investment in bolstering their economic power would be of great benefit to Canada's economy, both through enhanced purchasing power and through enhanced contribution to the tax base. It would make sense if they got value for their money.

Investing in people with disabilities is one potential solution to Canada's labour shortage. It is time to truly consider the potential of all Canada's people as contributors to Advantage Canada.

I ask each of you to hold this vision while I describe what our reality is really like from a montage of experience I've just had this week. I will conclude with some brief recommendations as to how we might work together to change these circumstances.

We all know the gaps between the vision we hold for Canadians and the hard realities women with disabilities are left to cope with. I'm here to tell you that I'm also directly affected by some of these realities, even as I walk with my sisters and my brothers, for we women also care for the human family and try to help them without resources.

I not only have my own fear; I also have the fear of how it could be worse, and how each day we try to keep from sliding to that edge. There are some gains and some hopeful things. These allow me another day to face the new situations.

The only thing typical is pain—physical, emotional, and spiritual. I ask you to ease this burden on our women. I ask you to use the principles of full cost accounting, which includes the fiscal bottom line, or the financial reality, the environmental reality, and also the full human cost.

First, I'm a woman who's had every human right stripped away. As a survivor of profound abuse, I now suffer from a mental disorder that has no real publicly funded access to treatment and requires special skills to treat, skills that exist more in the arena of a select few private therapists. This mental illness is not treated with medication. My first thousand dollars that I saved for my first RRSP was handed over to my therapist.

Without therapy I would have descended into madness that would have left me homeless and divorced. At least I've been able to achieve a level of stability and a reasonable life, but managing is becoming harder, due to the multiple barriers I face and the lack of access for even simple help.

I cannot access brain injury rehabilitation because I have a mental illness. My doctor and I had a little case conference and thought it might be a good idea to ask the OT department of the hospital for a functional assessment. I was told that I was too sick for the service, and that because of the physical and mental issues, I would require every area of their department. I wrote briefs to my government, briefs demonstrating that treating people with my illness would save \$250,000 per patient.

• (1540)

I am still essentially without treatment and without service. I'm denied home care because I have a husband. In my desperation, I approached organizations for help and ended up in the leadership of every one of them.

While I'm humbled by the trust placed in me, will my turn for wellness ever come? As my disabilities worsen, what will happen to me? Will there be money to pay for services? There is no rehabilitation for me.

Then I look at what happened to a woman who is as ill as I am, but had no education, no disability insurance, and two children. Her mother, brother, father, and both her children's fathers ended their lives. She descended into illness and resorted to men for shelter as the rents went up, and when those men abused her and her children, she lost them to care and was homeless for two years.

The last year she spent in my home. Unable to find doctors for her, she eventually moved to another town and was hospitalized for two months. However, she now has a new home with another man. One of her children had a child by a man who was supposed to be caring for her, along with his wife. That child was surrendered for adoption and her sister was adopted by another family.

All of this was precipitated when her physical disabilities made it impossible to live in the types of low-cost housing units they give people on low incomes, with three flights of stairs. When the health unit came—and I was there—they told her that her girls, 8 and 10 at the time, could empty her commode chair in the living room. I spent last summer trying to dry her tears.

Another woman who worked as a cook in the restaurant industry developed the sudden onset of COPD and right-sided heart failure after working a 29-day stretch. She's on welfare awaiting AISH. She had no employment or private benefits. She phoned crying a few months ago, begging me for her to come and live in my home. There isn't any room left in my home. I had to turn her away.

She is paying \$600 a month, plus groceries, to live in a basement that has sheets for walls. She is expected by her roommate to care for two young children a disproportionate amount of time in order to cover off the amount of rent she cannot pay.

A Middle Eastern Muslim woman who was working in a bank is now on welfare after being exploited by the Canadian she married, who beat her, raped her, and took her money. She feels that she's not able to approach people in her culture for help. She's too traumatized and ashamed to work, and she still thinks she must forgive her ex-husband, who still repeatedly steals from her.

There is a language barrier. She is always afraid of money issues and is often too poor to buy food. There is a language and culture barrier, and she is afraid on both sides of the cultural divide. I give her what support I can.

Last night, I took a call from a woman who had resources and has been ground down physically and mentally over long years of abuse and litigation. She's been living off her RRSPs and she's afraid she will lose income when she goes off CPPD into disability—and I should say there, on pension, CPP. She has to sell her home because she can't live there and manage financially.

She would like two things: a way to try to build a home business and maintain the nutritional approaches that help her health, and find something she can do in the community, even now, to give to others so she does not lose herself in her problems and become isolated and unhealthy. Her family is unable to help her, and her daughter is estranged from her, as her own issues led to her losing her own child.

I have also, in my role in many organizations, become an employer of women with disabilities who are seeking a return to the workforce. One of them has skills that would, in our Alberta, see her receiving a \$100,000 salary, but we can only pay \$32,000 in our organization. The benefits will also be similarly limited. This woman, who had worked very hard to earn this education and has years of relevant experience, has been denied work due to the gap in her resumé during her illness.

Some women with disabilities will take work in NGOs to the level of their income support limit, but then are working hours far in excess of that. I have a friend who was fired from her job in the health industry. As an administrative professional—

• (1545)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): If I could interrupt, Carmela, your time is up. Could you wrap up the last part? I would encourage you during the question period to finish your presentation, some of the things you wanted to say.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Okay.

We have women in our organizations who hold degrees but are unable to access the workforce because of lack of disability supports, and even sometimes the lack of opportunities because employers discriminate against them. Life without economic security places women at greater risk for abuse from everyone, from family members to caregivers to employers, because women with disabilities have additional barriers.

To alleviate this situation, we have a list of items. The first is that income protection is the—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): You can go through that list of items when questions are asked, so that you get all your points in.

Both Bonnie and Carmela, thank you so much for your presentation this afternoon.

Now I'd like to go to SPHERE-Québec, Nancy and Lyne. Who would like to begin?

Go ahead, Nancy.

[Translation]

Ms. Nancy Moreau (Director General, SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec)): Good afternoon, committee members. Thank you for having us.

SPHERE-Québec, Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec, is a provincially-incorporated, non-profit organization created by its partners out of their concern for employment and training of persons with disabilities.

The goal of SPHERE-Québec is to encourage active participation in economic and social life by a greater number of persons with disabilities who are out of the work force. To achieve this goal, since

1997, SPHERE-Québec has received funding from the Department of Human Resources and Social Development in order to implement employment activities for individuals within the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities.

Thus, to assist in the integration and reintegration and maintenance in the work force of all persons with functional limitations, SPHERE-Québec encourages and provides financial and other forms of support for the introduction of high-quality adapted jobs. It also participates in and contributes to the network of experts for the transfer of knowledge and practices.

SPHERE-Québec provides its services from four offices, centrally located in the main regions across the province. SPHERE-Québec's board of directors brings together representatives of employers, unions, and leading organizations that work to ensure the well-being of disabled persons across the province. At the national level, SPHERE-Québec representatives participate in the efforts of the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work.

Now I'm going to present some characteristics of the employment profile of women in Quebec. According to the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 63% of women with disabilities in Quebec live on annual personal incomes under \$15,000, 39% of Quebec women with disabilities had no high school diploma, and 36% had a high school diploma as their highest academic level. This means that 75% of women with disabilities in Quebec had little or no formal schooling. In addition, 31% of women with disabilities in Quebec were employed and 64% had left the work force, which means that they had abandoned any attempt to find a job.

Now I'm going to outline some characteristics of SPHERE-Québec's clientele. We serve persons with all types of disabilities who need assistance in their efforts to find employment. They are out of the work force because they have little or no training and little or no work experience. We can cross-reference our female clientele with the aid of the PALS statistics previously cited. In particular, women represent 45% of our clientele, and 79% of that number have little or no schooling. In addition, 36% of the female clientele had never worked before receiving assistance from us.

Based on this overall analysis, we see that women with disabilities must overcome numerous obstacles to entering the labour force. Even with an assistance measure, they have difficulty staying employed. Some even make the decision to withdraw from the work force. Since 1997, the SPHERE-Québec team has developed solid expertise in managing programs and in employability for persons with disabilities in Quebec. Together with community partners, SPHERE-Québec takes part in the implementation of projects designed to develop new action models that address clientele needs.

Now I'm going to turn the floor over to Ms. Vincent, who will give you a few concrete examples.

• (1550)

Ms. Lyne Vincent (Project Officer, SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec)): Good afternoon.

I'm going to present three examples of innovative projects that have enabled a number of persons with disabilities to find a job.

The first project is horticultural training. Five groups in Montréal took part in this training for horticultural assistants, which enables persons with disabilities to occupy positions in this sector. The training portion was provided by the school boards of the regions concerned, and SPHERE-Québec sponsored the adjustment component.

The second project is training to become warehouse display designers. Three groups in the Eastern Townships have already taken part in this project, which enables persons with disabilities to occupy positions in department store businesses. The training portion is provided by the school board of the region concerned, and SPHERE-Québec sponsored the adjustment component.

The third project is on-the-job training in the restaurants of Les Rôtisseries St-Hubert. This training enables persons with disabilities to occupy various positions in St-Hubert restaurants. The training is provided by St-Hubert staff, and SPHERE-Québec sponsored the adjustment component.

These projects have four major elements in common, that is to say that they meet the needs of persons with disabilities looking for employment and the needs of the work force of the businesses in those three sectors. They are supported by regional players and provide the necessary supervision to promote the success of participants by providing them with adequate support. This supervision is often provided by an assistant. In the three projects I told you about, SPHERE-Québec provided the assistance portion.

For a number of persons with disabilities, adjustment is often synonymous with assistance. But what is an assistant? The assistant's role consists in supporting the person with disabilities in solving various problems that may compromise his or her entry into the labour market, or act on behaviour that may jeopardize that entry.

In concrete terms, depending on the person's disability, an assistant may help that person in looking for housing, for example, or in solving transportation, child care or living expense problems while that person is in training. The assistant may also help the instructor solve problems or the supervisor on the job. He or she may also work, as necessary, with the families, foster families, or rehabilitation centres, on all kinds of problems that may emerge and undermine entry into the labour force.

As Nancy said, 43% of women who use the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities do not keep their jobs at the end of our intervention. We can't identify the causes of that. However, we can say that action taken through adequate assistance guarantees success. The success rate of women and men who have taken part in these three projects is excellent. We think that success is directly related to the quality of follow-up of the participants.

Ms. Nancy Moreau: As you can see from these concrete examples, we at SPHERE-Québec firmly believe that employability and development are the main lever for getting women with disabilities out of insecurity.

Today, we would like to recommend that additional funding be allocated to the programs. As an example, I would cite dedicated budgets, such as the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, which make it possible to experiment with new intervention models for improving the employment of women with

disabilities and thus providing the means to make them self-sufficient.

In conclusion, we very much hope to be able to take part in the evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities currently underway and to give you the benefit of our expertise.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so very much for your very insightful presentation and for the handouts that you've given to the committee to look at later.

We do have seven minutes for questions and answers.

Ms. Neville, could you start first?

• (1555)

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let me say welcome to all of you.

I'm going to try to share my time with my colleagues because I understand we only have one round. Let me just say to the DisAbleD Women's Network, I had the opportunity last month to attend in Winnipeg a round table of probably about 30 or 35 members of your organization. I found it very informative and I learned a lot. I don't know whether I contributed to it, but I certainly learned there.

Because I want to keep the questions short and give others a chance to ask, my question to both groups is, what would be your primary recommendation for us as policy-makers to include in our report that would best affect or support the economic security of women with disabilities?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: One of the very first things is that income security is the best preventative medicine. But that income security has to come right at the onset of disability and not be attached to people's assets so that people don't fall so far down there's no way back up.

In terms of AISH in Alberta, there should be similar programs all across the country, but they have to be attached to the cost of living. In Alberta right now, even after all the great strides made during the low-income review, again the costs are not keeping pace.

So there's that and there's the range of disability supports that are not linked to income. Those disability supports need to be personal care as well as home support. If all of the energy is taken up on those things, then there's no energy left for work. You cannot have work when you're not managing your home or your personal care.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Anything else, Ms. Neville?

Hon. Anita Neville: I was going to ask the others to comment, but if my colleague Raymonde wants to go ahead, that's fine too.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Would anyone else like to comment on Ms. Neville's question?

Okay, Madame Folco, go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): With your permission, I'm going to ask a question.

First, I also want to welcome you. Even though I'm not a permanent member of this committee, everything concerning problems of women is obviously of enormous interest to me.

A number of you talked about the federal government fund for helping you. As they say, money is the name of the game. When you have money, you can always do more than when you have none.

What could an improved and expanded fund do for you? I ask my question in French, but it's intended for both groups. What could you improve in your organizations, if we put more money into the fund? Apart from the fund, which simply gives you a grant, are there other ways for the federal government to be of use to you?

Ms. Nancy Moreau: When we talk about additional funding, we're proposing that envelopes be dedicated to a specific clientele to avoid confusing them with a lot of people who have different needs.

So if we added funding to a dedicated program such as the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, that would make it possible to clearly target the needs of persons with disabilities. That would also enable us to work at setting up various action models with experts, among others, who have good knowledge of the problems of women, persons with disabilities and all disabilities, in order to set up new models to promote job entry and employability enhancement. We're talking about women who are out of the work force. We're working hard to enable them to enter it because, as I mentioned, the goal is to use work as a lever.

[English]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Merci.

I'd also like to hear from the DisAbled Women's Network, Madam Chair, if we have time.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Transportation is definitely also an issue. In our province, in Alberta, I know there's money per capita for disabled transit, but it's not dedicated funding. The funding gets absorbed into the general operating of the municipal districts.

Affordable transportation is necessary, absolutely crucial, if people are going to get to work. If a caregiver doesn't show up, or if there is no transportation, that's the end of work for the day.

So that's one thing that will also really bolster and empower women.

• (1600)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Madame Folco, you have one more minute. Any other questions?

Hon. Anita Neville: We were trying to maximize our round.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): I have a question for Ms. Hutchison.

You mentioned in your speech that one person was hoping to start a home business. Is that correct?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: One issue that comes up quite a bit in my riding—for young women with families or those with disabilities—has to do with EI eligibility for someone with their own business. In other words, when it comes to some of the benefits of EI—as an

example, in the case of parental leave—do you think that would go a long way for young entrepreneurs?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Absolutely. I think any measure like that, with the provincial income support program that allows people to have the flexibility to earn their way up, is good. I think also the expansion of EI to entrepreneurs for people with disabilities is a very forward and positive step.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): You only have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much.

Ms. Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today. It's very important to be able to learn how to better respond to your needs.

Ms. Moreau, you talked about projects that you have tried out. I think they're very important for the entire community because you enable people to re-enter the labour market, and thus to develop a sense of self-worth, to have greater self-esteem, and to earn money in order to take part in the economy and buy services.

I believe that an assistant is essential to successful integration. You are subsidized by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Do you receive an amount of money annually? Is it for three years, five years, 10 years? Do you always have to reapply? Is it hard to obtain grants? How much money do you need in order to continue?

A success rate like yours is impressive. If 43% of persons do not succeed, that means that 57% succeed. That's impressive.

Can you give me more details?

Ms. Nancy Moreau: Our funding comes from the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, a program of Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

On average, our annual budget is about \$3.5 million or \$4 million, for Quebec. We maximize that envelope in order to serve as many people as possible. In fact, some 600 individuals take advantage of it.

We do have to renegotiate our funding every year. Nothing is ever taken for granted. Every year, we have to file a new application with the department, and renegotiate conditions and targets. That's entirely normal in the case of our accountability. What is difficult, however, is that we are never assured in advance that we will have recurring funding. It's extremely disturbing for our clientele and the partners who work very hard to set up projects that work well. There is always a certain moment in the year when we have to give them a reality check, which means that it is possible that we won't be able to guarantee them our support, since we aren't sure of getting funding.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Have you requested recurring funding? If so, did you get an answer?

Ms. Nancy Moreau: We have taken steps to get recurring funding. The program as such is permanent. However, our agreements with the department are annual. A short time ago, we submitted applications for longer term funding, but we haven't received any response.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I'm giving Ms. Deschamps my remaining time.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Ms. Deschamps.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): I'll continue in the same vein. It seems to me that, at the end of your remarks, you said that the program was currently under review, re-evaluation.

Ms. Nancy Moreau: Yes.

• (1605)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Were you informed of that fact? Are there reasons why that evaluation is being conducted?

Ms. Nancy Moreau: In fact, the evaluation was to be completed in 2005, from what we were told. It still isn't completed, for all kinds of reasons, as a result of which the program has been extended as it is until March 2009, pending completion. That's in the normal wake of the program's evaluation. We are supposed to be able to take part in that evaluation. Obviously, we expressed our interest in sharing our expertise and experience concerning the model we're putting in place in Quebec. Currently, no one has contacted us to invite us to take part in the evaluation. We are still open, and we hope to be able to give decision-makers the benefit of our expertise.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: That would be good.

You said that 600 people currently receive support and services from your organization. Is there a list? Are there any people waiting? Could more people take advantage of your program and of everything you've put in place?

Ms. Nancy Moreau: In fact, to avoid raising expectations that we can't meet, we try to promote our services based on the budget we receive. So, with more money, we could indeed do more promotion, seek more partners in order to set up more extensive projects. We can't turn on the machine if we don't have the means to meet expectations; that would mean disappointing persons with disabilities who are waiting.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: As regards the three projects you told us about, do they involve more seasonal or ad hoc jobs?

Ms. Lyne Vincent: In the case of horticultural training, that's a job that can be considered seasonal. But if you calculate the number of hours worked during the year, that corresponds more or less to 35 hours a week over 52 weeks, because there can be quite a lot of hours of work during the production period, which entirely suits the clientele interested in this kind of training because that enables them to have a break between two periods of work. People are also selected on the basis of those criteria. The other two types of training lead to work that is available year-round.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I know that you may have a brief history—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): You have 50 seconds left.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: —but is it possible for you to determine whether the people who drop out live in the regions or in an urban area? Is it because they have less support? Have you been able to conduct that analysis, without necessarily touching on specific targets, such as, for example, transportation, child care services, and so on?

Ms. Nancy Moreau: In rural areas, there are indeed transportation problems, but it's a holistic problem. In any case, people are far away from the labour market. So they often have a lot of needs. It's therefore difficult to target their reasons for dropping out. We have to do more exhaustive research.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: If you had more funding.

Ms. Nancy Moreau: Of course!

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much.

We'll start with Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you. I'm going to be sharing my time with Mr. Stanton.

I too would like to thank you for coming and sharing your story with us today. It certainly brings home and emphasizes the fact that it's such a huge problem we're facing here and are trying to come to grips with.

One of the things I hear from constituents who are disabled is that they may be getting a disability pension, but when they try to better themselves or make any other kind of income that is going to help them make ends meet, there are clawbacks involved.

Have you people found that? And could both groups comment on that?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Absolutely. The clawback issue has been an absolute barrier. The low-income review in Alberta succeeded in removing many of those barriers, allowing people to have greater participation in the workforce. That happened also because of AISH, which is equivalent to ODSP and DB2 in British Columbia. Those programs are actually below the low-income cut-off. Basically, one of the recommendations in the low-income review was to get those, so that people could work without deductions until they got to the level of LICO. That has been a tremendous benefit.

The problem is that the economy in Alberta is not keeping pace: the cost of living is now another barrier.

• (1610)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I don't mean to interrupt, but is it only in Alberta that they have tried to do this? That's not common across the country, is it?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: I don't believe so.

The other concern is for people who are too ill to work. There still isn't a lot of benefit for them.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: And do you find that in Quebec as well?

[Translation]

Ms. Nancy Moreau: I would find it hard to tell you about the administrative workings of income benefits for persons with disabilities in Quebec. However, we try to help our clientele emerge from insecurity, that is to lead people toward jobs that will pay more than their income security benefits. From the moment people choose to work, it must be stimulating and rewarding and accompanied by wages that enable them to improve their financial situation.

[English]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Ms. Davidson and Madam Chair.

To Ms. Hutchison first, in your opening remarks you said you would have some recommendations at the end, and then we ran out of time. You did get a couple out here regarding income security and one on transportation. Was there anything else you wanted to take a minute to add to some of the things, so we can get them on the record?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Absolutely. Thank you.

Basically, it's to ensure that women with disabilities are empowered to protect themselves from abuse and discrimination, and that public policy matches the stated value through legislation with impact and regulatory powers.

The recommendations I listed came from the report, "Bringing Down the Barriers: The Labour Market and Women with Disabilities in Ontario". I think they are very good and apply pretty much across Canada.

One recommendation is to separate income programs from disability-related supports and services. Often, one of the greatest barriers to work is that if we don't have access to our medication or if we don't have access to our home care, we don't have access to those supports that are linked to income. When the income becomes too high, the supports are gone, and then the person can't participate in the workforce. That's kind of shooting ourselves in the foot all the way around.

Creating a stable environment in which persons can be moved between paid employment and income support programs with ease is another recommendation. Those refer to things like rapid reinstatement from CPP disability. Age has that same component.

Next is improving opportunities for better-paying jobs for women with disabilities, and also women all across the workforce. This is an issue for both disabled and non-disabled women.

Another recommendation is extending the definition of employment supports and accommodations to the domestic sphere, so that we're not doing only personal care but home support as well, because without adequate home support a person cannot have the necessary energy to participate in the workforce.

Forums for information exchange and support groups provide a valuable resource for women with disabilities trying to enter the labour market, as your colleagues across the table have said.

Social attitudes I think are very important as well. We can't legislate those, but we can certainly raise awareness and we can certainly check ourselves at the policy table about what our social attitudes are.

Ensure an intersectionality lens is used to ensure that women with disabilities as a diverse group are given relevant support for their situation. I mentioned the cultural and some of the cross-barrier disabilities. Even when I made a commitment that I would go to the OT department around each place like a clock, that I would do that, they still wouldn't accept me.

Basically, the other thing I did want to say about social attitudes is the fact that while Anita said she didn't feel she made a contribution, she did so by her presence. Even by going and spending the time with those women, you give them hope. Even if you did nothing else, the fact that you sat and listened to them at least gave them hope. And I hope that will also translate into legislative action, and I encourage all the colleagues around the table to avail themselves of those opportunities when they arise.

Thank you.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you very much.

Is there any more time?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): A minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Great. Thank you.

Thank you very much for giving us that. I was fascinated by your presentation in terms of creating opportunity for disabled people, particularly the experience in Quebec. It makes me wonder whether you had any comparative data with how those programs are working in Quebec, compared with other provinces.

•(1615)

[Translation]

Ms. Nancy Moreau: In fact, in Quebec, we operate differently from the other provinces. Our model is based on expertise with partners. So it's very difficult to use comparative bases, since the offer of services is extremely different.

The program we are working with is indeed the same, as a result of which, ultimately, the result may be equivalent, since we work with a clientele that is very far removed from the labour market.

I think that working with community partners is an advantage. Over the long term, the results show that people stay longer, since the projects are rooted in the community and really meet labour needs in a given administrative region in Quebec.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you very much.

[English]

Do I have a second?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): I think your time is up, Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I can't simply lob one out there and let somebody...?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you very much.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much, and welcome to Parliament Hill.

It's very important that you bring to us the perspective you have in regard to disabled women. We're very clearly concerned about the economic security of women.

This morning the National Association of Women and the Law were on the Hill. They've been advocating for proactive pay equity. The current system is complaints-based and women literally have to go through litigation that can take years and years and years in order to get their rights in terms of equal pay for work of equal value.

I wonder if you could comment. Do we need proactive pay equity? Is NAWL on the mark in terms of their actions?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Absolutely, we do. Absolutely. One of the women I mentioned with chronic obstructive lung disease was a co-worker of my husband, and her salary was probably about \$3 or \$4 an hour less than his.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: For the same kind of job?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Exactly the same job.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Right. And in keeping with this, we've heard from other women's groups that for women to be able to manage and have the economic security they need, we need a national child care program so that we have affordable, regulated child care. Would you support those groups? Would you support a child care program?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Child care is one of the most crucial issues, absolutely.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: And finally, you made reference to the fact that your friend was living in a substandard situation and couldn't afford the rent, couldn't afford to manage.

In Ontario, I was a member of a government that put in place an affordable housing policy, and we managed to build 50,000 units of affordable housing: co-ops, non-profits, supportive housing, and there was always—always—an accessibility element attached. There had to be so many units that were designed for people with disabilities, with accessibility problems.

Is that something we should be looking at in terms of a national strategy? Do we need a national affordable housing program?

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Absolutely, and with dedicated funding, but it has to be dedicated for that purpose because otherwise it will get absorbed into other pots, and it's really tempting to do that.

Also, even the legislation for private homeowners.... I was fortunate enough to have a mortgage. I have a kitchen that's accessible, except that the appraiser told me if the counters were even one inch different in height, it would change the value of the house. I didn't have the money to come up with more of a downpayment, so I have beautiful accessible cupboards that are at 32 inches when they should be at 29 inches. So those are the kinds of impacts.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay, thank you.

In 2001, the forum for federal-provincial-territorial ministers created a report. These were ministers responsible for Status of

Women. The report identified factors that influence women's autonomy and their economic security. Among those were education and training, wages, balancing work and family responsibilities, unpaid work, and violence against women—and that included workplace harassment and sexual harassment.

Could you comment on these factors? They affect all women, but how do they affect disabled women in particular?

• (1620)

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: First, when you are disabled, if you are in a work site where you book transportation and you don't have a lot of money and you've been sexually harassed, how do you leave the workplace if your transportation isn't due for another two hours?

In terms of getting a job and keeping a job, the choice is ending the employment or continuing to face the harassment for the economic benefit. So that's certainly where violence against women definitely comes into play.

Education and training is so important as well. Again, I mentioned a quadriplegic lady who's taking English at a community college. She wants to try to get social work. She goes down to the disability resource centre, and they do not have the software program that allows her to write her exam. So that is a barrier right there.

Wages are certainly a factor because many things are not provided for economically. So without the economic provision of disability supports for aids, medication, or if you need a speaking program to go on your computer...all those things are barriers. So provision of those things and the absence of wages would also go a long way. But we really need the wages. They're not keeping pace with the cost of living.

The clawbacks that were mentioned are very important as well. Unpaid work certainly is something that needs to be recorded. Even in our own organization—I am involved with a mental health organization in Alberta—we exceeded the value of our grant just on the volunteer labour, but the really sad thing is, the volunteer labour is valued at Stats Canada for that particular industry at about \$25 an hour, and we can only pay our executive director \$15. Happily, that's not the case with DAWN Canada. We're able to do much better there, and we thank you for that, but that is the reality in other areas of the country.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I'm wondering whether there's a difference in the experiences of urban and rural women in regard to managing and achieving some semblance of economic security.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: I would be happy to answer that. I am a rural woman, and incidentally, I have a disability plan through my employer and CPP disability, so I am also still a taxpayer and the main income earner of my family, even though my husband is employed. He is a cook and doesn't make enough that it would support us.

I've been very fortunate. I often say that I'm sort of like a princess of the disability community because I have these resources—a vehicle, a husband, and a home—and so many people would give anything to have those things.

For rural women, access to care and support is absolutely crucial. My quadriplegic friend lives 20 minutes down the road from me, and she has had to resort to having a live-in caregiver. The live-in caregiver, under one program, is allowed to do home support chores, but under the funding for another program is not.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much, Carmela.

You've given such insightful presentations today, and I thank you for that so very much. I would like to ask each of you, Lyne and Nancy and Bonnie and Carmela, to take two minutes to have a wrap-up of things you want to say to the committee.

Could we start with Lyne—or Nancy; that's fine.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nancy Moreau: Our message is that the emphasis should be placed on employability programs. That's our niche, but it's also because we firmly believe that employability enhancement will enable women to become more financially self-sufficient. In that case, they'll be less dependent on government benefits and in a better position to make their own decisions. They'll also be able to have a little more power and control over all other aspects of their lives.

In our view, this is a real triggering factor in getting out of insecurity, that is to say in having access to a job that corresponds to their aspirations, interests, abilities and takes into account needs, having regard to their limitations. That's the message we've come to give you today.

•(1625)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much.

Lyne, would you like to make comments as well?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lyne Vincent: I agree with Nancy: the table is set in Quebec to foster the promotion, the introduction of innovative projects. There are specialized employment services that welcome persons with disabilities in all regions of Quebec, and we are working in cooperation with them on a daily basis. There are employers that are currently coming knocking on our door in order to put innovative projects in place. People from Les Rôtisseries St-Hubert restaurant chain came knocking on our door to put an innovative project in place. It was a structured project to enable them to hire persons with disabilities.

So we're ready to develop projects. However, as Nancy said earlier, before promoting them excessively, we have to have means equal to our ambitions.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I will defer I think to my colleague Carmela. I have been in my position exactly two days. I'm here more as an observer than anything else. I'm honoured to be here and to be representing DAWN, but I think I'll give the floor to Carmela. She's very eloquent and she'll finish well for all of us. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Thank you—no pressure there.

Basically, to sum up, we've talked a lot about the need for economic security of women. Women are basically the caregivers and nurturers, even now, of families.

There are many anecdotes. One that struck me in particular was a Photovoices project, which I will include in a later brief. It shows a woman and her home. There aren't even doors on her cupboards, she's in low-rental housing, trying to care for a schizophrenic son, and she herself has no legs.

These are the kinds of things that are happening. Even in my household, I have my husband, who lives with ADHD and depression. We also had another roommate whom we took in, a man who was living in the only accommodation he could afford, which was a basement suite in an apartment. It was in an actual apartment building, but the sewer kept backing up in it. It took us five years to convince him to come up out of that and live in light and decent surroundings.

Those are the kinds of supports that disabled women need: housing, child care, transportation—think of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Those basic investments will lead people to explore and will empower them to try to make something different happen.

I think there's no better investment than the investment in the Canadian people, and that includes the disabled women of this country.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much. It has been of great benefit to our status of women committee to have you all here today. We are the ones who are honoured to have you here. Thank you.

I will suspend the meeting for three minutes, and then we'll go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

•(1625)

(Pause)

•(1715)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathyssen): We will resume the meeting now.

We have just a couple of quick items. Madame Demers has delayed her motion.

There are two things, actually. If anyone here has questions for HRDC and the finance officials, please make sure they are sent to the clerk no later than Wednesday, May 9.

Yes.

•(1720)

Hon. Anita Neville: For clarification, if we don't submit written questions, will we still have the opportunity to ask questions coming out of the discussion? This is unprecedented that we've had to submit requests for written questions.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Michelle Tittley): Perhaps I could clarify. The witnesses, the officials from the departments, are scheduled to appear before the committee.

Just in light of the broad scope of the subject, they're seeking to be able to provide as thorough responses as possible. So if the questions aren't specific....

They're just looking to have information ready for the members. It's not conditional on their appearance. They're just looking to be prepared. So if you have specific questions to submit, I will relay that to the department. If not, at least if you have perhaps some topics that you would be interested in having more information on, that would help them to prepare for their appearance.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Thank you.

On the second item, with regard to Minister Oda and her appearance here, the Canadian Heritage votes have been referred to the committee of the whole; therefore, we no longer have the mandate to study the estimates.

Would the committee like to call Minister Oda and/or officials from Status of Women Canada to speak to the reports on plans and priorities? The minister previously indicated that she would be available on Wednesday, May 30, from 3:30 to 4:30. However, that, apparently, is no longer possible, and the clerk previously requested May 17. So I am in your hands in terms of a further request.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have just a question for clarification.

I assume this means the minister is doing the estimates in the House and the estimates will include both the Status of Women and the heritage department, not just Heritage. Is that understood?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Yes, that's my understanding.

Is there any further discussion?

Would the committee like to invite the minister to come in regard to talking about reports on plans and priorities?

Hon. Anita Neville: Yes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Madam Chair, if she's doing the estimates before the committee of the whole, going back to your question, do we want to have somebody from Status of Women Canada come and do a presentation here before those estimates?

I understood there is no way the minister can make it before May 31, so our option really is, do we want officials from the department to come and do it here, in addition to that? I would assume members of this committee will probably participate in the committee of the whole presentation when that occurs, presumably in the last week of May.

Is that the question, then? Are we asking about the department or the minister?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): I'm in your hands. There was an indication that the committee still desired to have the minister, and there was an indication that every effort would be made in terms of having her come here to speak with the committee. So my question is, shall we continue to press the minister to come and speak in regard to reports on plans and priorities, or, as Mr. Stanton has indicated, would we like to see officials from Status of Women Canada?

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Usually when the minister comes she brings officials with her. I would like to have them all come and talk about the planning and priorities and the way forward for Status of Women Canada. There seems to be—maybe it's me, but I think it goes beyond me—a lot of misunderstanding of quite how the department is moving forward, and I think it would be useful to have a discussion and some clarification.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Okay.

Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Did you say, Madam Chair, that on May 17 that would happen?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): That was a previous request.

I'm sorry, that was for the officials.

• (1725)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Okay, because that was going to be my question: how are we going to be able to accommodate that? I thought that date was out.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To follow this up, the minister has been in front of this committee twice in the last year. We have a committee of the whole presentation coming up, presumably before the 31st, before estimates are due. We could put the request in, but it's going to come after the estimates. Presumably, it would be at this stage, considering there's really only going to be one full week after that last week of May. We're going to be looking at the fall before—

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you know something we don't know?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: No, certainly not, but our session only goes until the 9th of June, so we have one week in June.

Considering that we have a committee of the whole coming up, I would certainly speak in favour of not putting a request out. We're going to have the minister and her officials in the House, in committee of the whole, in that last week of May. I assume we'll all be participating in that, and perhaps other honourable members will be joining us for that discussion. That should more than suffice, going forward.

I think we have other business in front of us. We have this report to finish up, and hopefully we'll be moving on to more engaging work on behalf of women's issues in Canada. Let's move on with that and use the committee of the whole to our full advantage.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Perhaps this discussion could continue in the next meeting. I see a number of people are missing, and it would seem that this is something the committee would like to resolve, perhaps, in the future.

Madam Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, in the Health Committee, the Minister of Health usually came and answered our questions concerning votes, even though we could subsequently put questions to him during consideration of the Estimates in the House.

If we have a lot of questions, we would obviously like to hear from the minister here. If we already know what questions we want to ask, and if committee members know they will have the opportunity to ask him all those questions during that evening—I assume it will be in evening—then he'll be accompanied by the deputy ministers concerned who are responsible for various matters. I don't know whether that will be enough. We should review that next week and make a decision on the matter. We definitely have a number of questions to ask him and we can get answers concerning a number of votes.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Certainly, I'm in your hands, but if that's agreed by the committee, then we can indeed continue this discussion at the next meeting.

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I'd like to speak, with your permission, before you adjourn the meeting.

With regard to the evidence of a person who appeared here this afternoon, the working conditions of these individuals certainly may not be our responsibility. However, I would like to bring it to your attention that, if we didn't previously know their working conditions, we do know them now. So it is becoming our responsibility to ensure that that is at least reported to the committee responsible for those questions so that it can consider this situation. We have to do everything in our power to make those conditions change.

Earlier Mr. Maloney was talking about having positions in order to top up hours. It's being done in other sectors. In the cafeterias on Parliament Hill, employees are transferred to other locations, vacant positions are filled, and employees have regular working hours. Why does this situation exist only at the parliamentary restaurant? It's very disturbing. It isn't just women; there are men as well. These are people whom we must respect.

What can we do? Who can we appeal to? I don't know, Madam Chair, but we can't think about improving the working conditions, the living conditions and the economic security of all the women in Canada and Quebec and not improving the living conditions and economic security of women who work with us here on Parliament Hill. We can't do that. That would be very hypocritical, and I would be ashamed.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Thank you, Madame Demers.

Perhaps I'm overstepping, but it would seem to me we all have the opportunity to raise this in our caucus and speak to our House leader. Of course, the House leader does interact with the Board of Internal Economy, and decisions are made there. A beginning would be a discussion within each caucus.

Mr. Stanton.

• (1730)

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I support that direction.

By the way, I was going to mention that I don't disagree with what Nicole has said, but the difficulty I would have in doing anything formal on this is that—and I can't remember her name offhand—she came to us on a confidential basis, and it would not be appropriate to put her in a position.... These are personnel matters. I think when we start treading on those kinds of questions, there are many unanswered questions, and it's not good to presuppose. At the caucus level, yes, because a confidence is upheld there, and this would be the proper approach.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Irene Mathysen): Thank you.

Certainly the witness came here in confidence that we would respond. I think to respect her, it is most appropriate that we do respond.

It looks as if we're finished.

I adjourn this meeting.

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