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Mr. Rob Anders

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• (1535)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.)): Good afternoon, colleagues. *Bonjour, tout le monde.*

I'd like to call to order this March 11 meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

We'd like to welcome to our Ottawa meeting, Colleen Calvert and Wendy Purcell, from the Military Family Resource Centre for Halifax and region. We met both of you, I believe, when we were in Shearwater. Thank you for allowing us a greater opportunity to hear from you.

I believe the clerk may have explained that between both of you, you have a total of maybe 20 minutes, divided as you see fit. Following your presentation we will have questions from members.

I understand, Betty, that you have a point of order.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): No, it's not a point of order.

I apologize for the delay in getting started on this, but at the last meeting, members of the committee asked for copies of the research projects that Veterans Affairs Canada had participated in and about events that are going to happen in Canada and overseas regarding the 55th anniversary of the ceasefire in Korea. I have those reports, which I would be pleased to give to the clerk for distribution.

Thank you for your indulgence.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Brent St. Denis): We'll give them to the clerk for passing on. Thank you, Betty.

Wendy and Colleen, we'll have you start. Thank you.

Ms. Colleen Calvert (Executive Director, Military Family Resource Centre, Halifax and Region): Hello. *Bonjour.*

First of all, I want to thank you very much for this incredible honour. I'm feeling pretty special.

I'm the executive director of the Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre. It's the largest military family resource centre in all of Canada. We're responsible for three-quarters of the province of Nova Scotia and all the families and military members who live in Nova Scotia. It's the whole province, except for the valley. I have three locations: one in Shearwater, one in Cape Breton, and of course the large one in Halifax.

We're also unique in that we work with the army, the navy, and the air force. There is no other military family resource centre in the country that works with all three elements. As you know, we have the east coast fleet, we have Land Force Atlantic Area, and of course we have 12 Wing Shearwater there as well. So we have quite a diverse operation there.

First of all, I'm going to be speaking from some notes, and the French translation starts at about page 6, if anybody wishes to follow along.

One of the things we believe is that military families are the strength behind the uniform. If you take care of the military family as well as you take care of the military member, then you're going to have much better Canadian Forces in general.

Our mission, of course, is to promote the health and social well-being of the military families and the individuals who share the unique experiences of military life.

I'm going to give you a tiny bit of the history of where military family resource centres come from. Back in the mid-eighties, there was a group of military family members who were meeting in Penhold. Right across the country there were small groups of women who would get together and form social safety nets, because most of them weren't from where they were living. They would get together, they would welcome new people to the community, they would share experiences, they would show people where to get a doctor and a dentist, and they would share child care services, etc.

The base commander in Penhold didn't think that was right and believed he should have control over military families, so he essentially shut them down and kicked them out and said, you can't be meeting on my base. That was the military's attitude back then: if we had wanted you to have a family, we would have issued you one. Of course, this is slowly changing. There's still some of that attitude out there, but we're slowly getting better. The military is now recognizing that families are incredibly important.

In the mid-eighties there was a lot of rumbling going on. Mary Collins, I think, was quite prominent at that time, and she was meeting with military families. In 1991 the director of military family services stood up—and that's when military family resources stood up as well.

There are 32 of us in Canada. There are also family resource centres in the U.S. and Europe, but they operate slightly differently than we do. The 32 centres in Canada are all charitable, provincially incorporated not-for-profits. We do not work directly in the chain of command; we work for a board of directors, and 51% of that board must be made up of military spouses. So it's very much a grassroots organization; it's very much a case of military families saying what military families need and want, etc., based upon their experiences and the unique challenges they face.

Since the inception of military family resource centres, we've gone through a tremendous amount of growth, scrutiny, and audit. We've been audited by the Department of National Defence on numerous occasions, because they just can't quite grasp the concept that military families can actually do something for military families. Being outside of the chain of command...they get a little bit nervous because they have no control. That's something that always makes me giggle, because the army especially loves to control things.

Anyway, it was during SCNDVA's time back in the late 1990s that we saw huge growth in family resource centres and a recognition by the Government of Canada that these are an incredibly valuable and vital services for our families. It was during the last SCNDVA committee, which toured the country in the late nineties, that we got employment services for our family members, and French and English as a second language services for our families, as well as emergency and respite child care.

A lot of people say, why do military families need anything? What's so different about a military family? Well, I suspect that many of you have experienced some of the things our families have. When you get posted, you have absolutely no control over where you're going. You wind up in a city or a province that you've never been to. You have absolutely no social supports. You've left your families behind, you've left your friends behind, you've left everything you know behind, so you have no extended family or close friends. There may be language or cultural barriers, of course, when you get to your new city or base. Many of our families, of course, have to give up a job, so somebody is sacrificing a career. Many, of course, have to give up or change educational opportunities because they're not available in the city, the base, or the station they're now being posted to.

Many families, when they arrive in a brand-new community, have no idea where to go for information. They don't know where to sign up for schools. They don't know where to go to get a doctor. They don't know where anything is. Many, of course, become quite isolated.

● (1540)

During deployments they become single parents, and that's something they certainly didn't think about or sign up for. The parents and spouses of CF members may have little understanding of the Canadian Forces, and they would be absolutely unsure about where to get information.

I don't know if you've ever spoken to some of our young military members, but when they find out they're being deployed, they're over-the-moon excited and want to go. The information they get about family services and supports and the information about the mission, etc., traditionally doesn't go home to the family.

I spent 21 years in the air force. When I joined and I got to go on a phenomenal posting, the last thing I did was run home or pick up the phone and call my mum out in Alberta and say, "Oh, and if you need this, you phone here". That was the last thing on my mind. That still happens today. Information doesn't get back to the families.

As I said, we are provincially incorporated charitable organizations. We get about 55% of our funding from the Directorate of Military Family Services. I'm talking about Halifax in particular. This is not the same across Canada. In Halifax in particular I get an additional 10% from Maritime Forces Atlantic. And then we must fundraise the remaining funds or get them through user fees, charging fees for some of our programs and services. So we're not 100% funded by the Directorate of Military Family Services.

Who do we serve? Just two years ago we finally received the mandate to provide services for single members and their parents. That was a big change, and that was one change we had to fight for. Currently we provide services for all the regular forces and reserve forces and their families before, during, and after deployments: married and common-law CF members and their spouses, the children and youth of serving CF members, CF members who are single parents, reservists and their families, and now, as I said, the parents of deployed single regular force members.

We do not have a mandate for released or retired members of the Canadian Forces.

As I said, military families are the strength behind the uniform, and this is what we truly believe. They're strong, they're independent, and they're resilient. Our military families have to make huge sacrifices on behalf of this country and it is totally unrecognized.

They must cope, as I said, with the many unique challenges of military lifestyle. The Canadian Forces, by putting in military family resource centres, has recognized that families are full partners. They play a significant and positive role in the morale and welfare of the deployed members. If the member is in Afghanistan or Sudan or on board a ship and he has to worry about what's going on at home, he can't do his job and he doesn't concentrate on what he's doing. So having the reassurance that families have a place to go for a service or a resource back home is tremendously helpful for the military member.

Family resource centres and the Canadian Forces working in partnership ensure that families have information, that they have the resources and the services to keep them connected, supported, and informed. We provide a huge gamut of programs and services. For welcome services and community orientation when military families are posted to wherever they are posted to, there is an MFRC there to welcome them and help them get oriented to their community. We provide adult, family, child, and youth programs, because the military family is not just a husband and wife; it's everybody who is in that family. We provide language services, English services as well as French services, for any of our families who may be posted to Quebec or posted from Quebec to Halifax.

Our prevention and support and intervention services are crisis intervention services. These represent all the referrals to other agencies in the province: medical services, health services, etc. We provide deployment services, emergency child care, employment and education services, recognizing that many of our families had to give up careers.

• (1545)

We can't do it without volunteers. Last year, Halifax had over 10,000 hours donated by our volunteers. One of the things we're doing that's quite different is our outreach services.

I have a group of staff members who travel all over the province. They will use the local armouries or the local legions and they will invite the families, the reserve family, the reservists, local employers, and members of the community, who perhaps are the padres or the social workers or the people in the health industry in that part of the province. They'll invite them and they'll help educate everybody about the unique challenges of the military and all the different resources that are available to our families and to our members.

One of the things I'm going to talk a little more about is deployment services. Whenever a member is deployed...and when I talk about deployed, I'm not just talking about Afghanistan. We have members in Sudan currently. We've got submarines; we've got three or four ships out, and they've been gone for six months. So we're talking about a lot of people when we talk about deployed.

Our services enhance the ability of the member to be ready for duty and they support the well-being of the family before, during, and after deployment. We ensure families have access to relevant programs and services, that they are aware and prepared for changes and the challenges associated with the deployment, and that families have the opportunity to connect and support each other.

This is one of the key things about how our whole program works. If you get a group of families together, they will mentor each other, they will befriend each other, and they'll become their own social safety net, so they don't have to phone us at two o'clock in the morning when there's a family emergency and they need to get hold of the military member or they need emergency child care or something. They will start developing their own friends and their own social safety net. That's why it's so absolutely vital that families direct and control everything we do.

So during a deployment, every month we get all the families together. They decide what they want to do, if they want to have some kind of a social event or they want to have some kind of an

educational event. The commanding officer from the unit or the ship that's deployed will come in. He'll meet with them. He'll tell them exactly where the unit is, what the ship's doing. We have the ships' COs call in and talk to the family members so the families feel they're valued and vital members of that whole deployment team. It's incredibly effective, and the families feel they're heard and they have an opportunity to provide feedback to the CO if they're having any challenges.

We, of course, help families deal with crisis and the challenges associated with deployment. Some of the challenges.... Life happens to all of us. When life happens and all of a sudden there's a severe illness in the family—and that family member could be on the other side of Canada—we can put in emergency services. We can help repatriate the military member or work with the padres or work with the chain of command to bring the military member back and to get the supports for the family so we can deal with the immediate challenges of the emergency. Then we'll help the family member resolve that situation until the member is back.

Some of the other things we do are prevention and education. Our families want information. They want to know what an OSI is. They want to know what PTSD is. They want to know if the money is not in the bank, where they should go, what they should do. They want to know where they find a doctor, where they find this or that or the other thing. If we just continue to educate our families and get this information into their hands, then our military families will carry on and be just fine.

Of course, we do have a number of emergency services. We have emergency funds, emergency housing, crisis intervention, respite, and emergency child care. So when life happens, we're there for them.

I'm going to speak very briefly now about some of the challenges we've seen. These are our experiences. This isn't anything we've gleaned from anybody in National Defence. I've been talking to all my colleagues, and what we experience on a day-to-day basis is that we cannot support or provide information to families if we don't have their information.

Half the time we have no idea who's being deployed or where their family is. A member could be deploying out of Edmonton, but their family could be sitting in downtown Halifax, and if we don't know they're going, we can't put information in their hands. So in the event of a family emergency, they don't know to come to us, and we can't get information to educate them on that. The Vice Chief of Defence Staff has sent out numerous messages to say that the Canadian Forces must provide us with that information and still it's not forthcoming all the time. Some units are very good about it; others are not.

• (1550)

In the event of an injury or the death of a military member, the assisting officers provided to the families are not always educated and trained in all the resources available to them, which in turn means that the families are not educated about all the resources available to them.

The Canadian Forces ombudsman did a study a number of years ago. It's the Wheeler report, *When a Soldier Falls: Reviewing the Response to MCpl Rick Wheeler's Accidental Death*. The ombudsman at the time made some tremendous recommendations about how the assisting officers should be trained and educated. But it's still very inconsistent across the country. It's hit or miss whether an assisting officer has any education or training about the resources that are available to them, especially from the family resource centre. So it's quite frustrating, six months after the fact, when the assisting officer has gone and the family is still trying to cope with the death or the injury and has no idea where to turn, because they haven't been told about all the resources that are available to them.

We still have a tremendous number of fragmented services. The occupational stress injury support service, OSISS, family support, and many of the other services, are still not linked to military family resource centres. The military family resource centres may not be fully included in the full network of care.

A lot of our health service providers who are working with our families, especially around OSISS and PTSD, are working in silos, and they do not recognize the family resource centres as being partners. They could be working with a released member or a released member's family, and there's so much we could do to help connect and treat the family as a whole. But the families just don't know about it, because we're not being included in the whole network of care. They just haven't recognized the incredible resource they have at their fingertips. It's quite frustrating, especially when we see families and military members suffering because they don't have the whole network of care.

The result of some of this fragmented service is of course that there's a duplication of service and there's a lack of clearly defined lines of responsibility. Quite often, our family members are kind of lost or they just don't know about services that are available.

There is another complaint we're hearing a tremendous amount about, and it's something we're really struggling with in Nova Scotia. Because so many of our military members in the Canadian Forces are originally from Nova Scotia, their families are in Nova Scotia. So they may have been injured or killed, and six months after the fact we get phone calls from brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers saying they're really grieving and they want access to some grief counselling. As a family resource centre, we do not do therapy; we do not do counselling. We have to refer them out, and we refer them to the Canadian Forces member assistance program, which has no mandate to assist secondary next of kin. If you're the primary next of kin, like the spouse, you have access to that service, but if you're a sister, a brother, or a parent and you're the secondary next of kin, you have no access.

So we utilize the Canadian Forces padres, we utilize all the provincial resources available to us, and we work very closely with the provincial medical services to ensure that these families can get access to services, especially grief counselling. Hopefully, we help cut through some of the lines.

Of course, we have funding challenges. We're currently competing with the Military Families Fund for charitable giving, and we have DFMS funding shortfalls. When you're trying to sell a lottery ticket or you're having a bake sale, a lot of people say, "You're military.

You're a military family resource centre. You must be fully funded." So it's a bit of a challenge sometimes.

One of the other big challenges our families are recognizing and have seen for the last number of years is the total lack of full-time day care. There are a number of military families who cannot and will not be posted to Halifax because there's a waiting list of two and a half to three years for full-time day care. It's a huge challenge. Our N1, which is a captain in the navy, has made it his number one priority to see what he can do to enhance day care.

Military family resource centres have absolutely no mandate to provide full-time day care, but in response to the needs of the military community, 21 of the 32 centres across Canada have now had to go into the day care business, because our families cannot get day care.

You usually get about 90 days to move your family, sell your house, find a new home, and find all the resources and everything you need. And when you phone and find out that in the city you're going to, or wherever it is you're posted, there's an 18-month to three-year wait to get full-time day care, it's a huge challenge for our families. It's incredibly difficult to do that in 90 days, and you don't have a mum or a grandmother or a sister to take care of the children for you while you go to work. So it's a huge challenge for our families.

● (1555)

Another big challenge for our families right now, of course, is finding a physician.

I just got an e-mail two days ago from 8 Wing CFB Trenton saying that if you had a posting message in your hand, your family could apply for the lottery to maybe get a family physician. We're penalizing military families, who are already making a huge sacrifice for this country. We're penalizing them because they have to now be posted someplace, they're giving up a family physician, and they're going to a place where they cannot find medical care for their family. Some of the military family resource centres have had to start their own clinics and contract their own physicians so that they can find medical care for their military families.

Of course, one of the biggest challenges is the outreach. It's getting information into the hands of our families, especially our reservists. We try to go up and visit all of our reserve units, no matter where they are in the province. But they have such a small amount of time to do their training, or when they come back, a lot of them release and get out. We just want to speak to them and tell them about the services that are available in case they are suffering from an OSI or have a health care challenge, etc. When they have so few hours to train and the money is so tight, their CO is not going to give up time so we can speak to them about what we can do to support them and their family during the deployment or when they return. So it's a huge challenge to get that information out to all of our families.

Just to sum up, it's not all doom and gloom, of course. We've had tremendous success. We are serving a large number of military families. We are getting much better at it. Every day something new happens. One of the things, though, that I can pass on is that in serving the military member—whether he is released, retired, or a veteran of the Canadian Forces—we need to recognize that it's not just that person who needs to be treated, it's the whole family, especially when it comes to health services and health care and issues of OSI and PTSD. Because it's the whole family that suffers, it's the whole family that's going to heal, and it's the whole family that needs those resources and that support. So treat the member, but treat the family. Treat the vet; treat the family. Take care of everybody, because that's going to be a lot more successful for all of us.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)): Thank you very much.

First off, I'd just like to say thank you to Mr. St. Denis for taking over the chairmanship. I apologize; I had a banking issue. There was an NSF cheque that was written to me, and it causes a chain reaction, so you have to stem it before it causes greater damage. I just wanted to let everybody know that was the nature of it.

That being said, I would also like to carry on and say I want to thank our presenters today.

Before we start off with our list of questions, I do want committee members to be somewhat mindful that we've had tremendous success with regard to moving from the old days, when we had a Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs. It was all rolled into one, and often the urgent, sexier issues, for lack of a better term, of national defence meant the veterans affairs issues got a back burner. Now, of course, we've set up a separate committee to deal with veterans affairs.

Our witnesses are here today because a number of parties wanted to have them here based on the trips we had done and everything else. So we should try to keep our questions and commentary focused on veterans as best as we can.

That being said, we're on to our predetermined rotation, so it's the Liberal Party of Canada, Mr. Russell, for seven minutes.

• (1600)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon.

That was a very engaging and a very detailed presentation, and very energetic. I can understand why your resource centre and many others are very successful across Canada. It's because we have such dedicated people committed to our military in some way, shape, or form.

I note that you say military families are the strength behind the uniform; I would say that military families are also going to be the strength once they're out of uniform. While you say your mandate does not deal with those people who are out of uniform, so to speak, we know there's a continuum from those who are trained and serve and are deployed through to when they come out.

Those serving military people and families you're dealing with now are going to be virtually the same group of people—maybe a little older, maybe with more life experience and different life experiences—that Veterans Affairs is going to have to deal with at some point, so we have to move now. What lessons can we take from you and the experience you have with various military personnel and military families that will help us prepare VA for what's to come?

You mentioned that even within your own context, one part of the Canadian Forces doesn't talk to the other part of the Canadian Forces, or one organization that deals with these particular issues may not share information. We don't want to make that mistake and somehow not understand what's coming to us in Veterans Affairs. This leads me to a couple of a questions.

First, how much interaction do you have directly with a military person, whether man or woman? I know you deal with families in the unit, so sometimes it's maybe not the military personnel, but maybe the wife, the spouse, the partner, or the kids. Is there a lot of use of the military family resource centres by those serving in uniform?

I also wanted to ask what your experience has been over the last two or three years. Have you noticed any differences? Because of the Afghanistan situation, there seems to be extra stress on our troops. Rotation is an issue. We understand, although there haven't been a lot of studies conducted, that more people are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. Are you seeing that?

If there's a marked change in terms of what you're observing and dealing with, I'm going to make a bit of a leap and say there's going to be a bit of change in what Veterans Affairs is going to have to deal with and the types of support and services that we're going to have to provide in terms of health care and maybe even support for families.

Those are my questions.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: We deal with a huge number of military members. A large number of military members use their military family resource centre every day.

It's a safe place for them to go; it's not in the chain of command. If they're just having a family issue, they would rather come and talk to us and access our services than go through the chain of command, because it could adversely impact their military career. So if it's a family issue that doesn't affect their ability to deploy or do their job, they come and access our services. They also make up the bulk of our volunteers, so they are actively engaged in providing education, resources, and services to our families—because who knows better?

I also want to mention that I am a retired member. I spent 21 years in uniform. I've certainly seen the changes, and I've seen the change in recognizing how vital and important the family is—but it's the whole family, the member and everybody. To say we only serve families means that when I say families, I mean everybody in that unit, not just the person in uniform.

One of the things we've seen, of course, is a lot of fatigue in the families around deployment, and frustration. We're seeing a lot more challenges with children dealing with the absence of a loved one. The navy is getting smaller and the navy is deploying more. The navy was gone for a couple of years during Operation Apollo, so I can really speak a lot about that.

We've had a tremendous number of our army and our supportive trades go to Afghanistan, and I'm seeing the challenges they're facing. The biggest thing is that I'm getting this huge sense of deployment fatigue, the feeling that they just don't want to have to go through the absence of the military member again. Of course, that leads to all kinds of other challenges. With the children, of course, during the absence of a loved one, all kinds of issues occur.

We're seeing more and more things happening with the children around deployment, and we're seeing this real sense of fatigue in the member and the family.

• (1605)

Mr. Todd Russell: You said deployment fatigue was something that came up. I'm from 5 Wing Goose Bay—I live in that town—and 444 Squadron, which is being deployed to Afghanistan, is going to do a wonderful job. I'm sure of that. But their deployment fatigue starts when they start training, because they have to go outside for so much of it. They're six months outside before they even start the actual deployment.

If you were where we're at right now and you say, "Okay, get prepared, Veterans Affairs, because this is coming down the pipe, and when these people leave the military, this is what you're going to face"...if you could put your finger on one or two things, what would it be? Would it be that we're going to have to deal with more emotional stress, more psychological issues? Have you observed that at all in terms of the change?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I don't know if I could speak to that and say this is what you really need to watch for. Leaving the Canadian Forces, even as a family member, is incredibly difficult. It has been your life for 20, 30, 35 years, or whatever it is. You've been told where you're going and what you're going to do and all the rest of it, and all of a sudden you feel like you're absolutely, totally abandoned. Not just the military member feels that, but the family feels that as well.

So whatever you do, whatever Veterans Affairs does in the future, treat the family as a unit, and whatever you give to the member, if you're giving them information or education, or a service or a resource, include the family in that so that the family feels they still have a place to turn to as well.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Well done.

[Translation]

I am now going to hand over to the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Perron, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Colleen and Wendy—and I apologize for using your first names, but this is our second meeting. You said that you were in the Canadian Forces for 21 years. I take it that you were five years old when you enlisted!

Joking aside, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that you are quick learners. Last time, I pointed out that we have two official languages—English and French, nothing else—and you respected that today, which is great. I thank you for that.

If you are here to talk about the army, I am afraid that is only of partial interest to me. The reason I say that is because our committee deals with veterans' affairs. That being said, even if the mission of your organization is not to serve veterans, I recognize that you have huge responsibilities. Your mission is to look after the social well-being of service men and women and their families: you help prepare our young men and women in uniform; you provide them with information; you visit veterans; you liaise with the department and with different associations; and you warn young people of the problems they may experience. In short, your mission is to prepare them.

I certainly do not claim to know everything, but I do have a particular interest in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in young people. I have read some dozen weighty tomes on the matter. This week, I was sent a booklet summarizing all of the remarkable material available on the subject. I do not know whether you are familiar with it. It would be worth your while to read it yourselves and to send copies of it to all military families and to all young people who enlist in the army and get sent on mission. You have to tell them about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. You do not want to frighten them, but they have to be able to recognize it. I really think that this document is a masterpiece. I would even be willing to give you my own copy. You could also order copies from the Department of Veterans Affairs and distribute them to the people for whom you do so much. I have every confidence that you will do an excellent job. I thank you for the work you do for our young men and women in uniform, which is your area of responsibility, as opposed to recruitment or veterans' affairs.

Thank you very much.

• (1610)

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: *Merci, monsieur.*

I want to point out one thing. We work very closely with Veterans Affairs when we go out on the road and we go to all the communities, because we think it's absolutely vital that all the families have all the information. Veterans Affairs has done a phenomenal job.

Absolutely, that is a tremendous resource.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: This document should be given to everybody in the army.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: But there's a huge hesitation by the Canadian Forces, in some places, to educate families. They're afraid that if they tell a family member what an OSI is, all of a sudden everybody is going to have one, or some silly thing. But it's the education piece.

That document is absolutely brilliant, and if the rest of the country and the chain of command in the rest of the country would ensure that families got this information....

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: That is one of the reasons why, as a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I accepted the opportunity to visit a military base. Indeed, it was at Shearwater that we first met. We have to stop keeping young people in the dark. It is almost as if the military were blindfolding them. As people on the inside, you have to change this culture. The army provides its young soldiers with information on sexual assault, the risks associated with alcohol and drugs, etc., before they begin a mission; however, nothing is done to prepare them to cope with the psychological problems they may experience. This excellent book tells us that such preparation is every bit as important as providing them with information on sexual harassment and drug and alcohol abuse. It is just as important.

Convincing the powers that be—the chain of command, as you put it—that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder exists is going to be an uphill struggle.

It sickens me that young soldiers are only given two and a half hours' training on the subject before being sent to Afghanistan. I have nothing against spending millions of dollars on sending our soldiers to Arizona for training because of its topographical similarity to Afghanistan. Our soldiers need to be trained. However, building up muscle strength is not enough, you have to train their grey matter too! I know that it will be difficult to persuade the top brass, but Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is real and must be recognized.

I would be interested in hearing your comments on the matter.

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: In Halifax we have that opportunity. It's other locations across the country; they can't get access to the family, so they can't educate the family. That's the hard part.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: It has to be changed.

Merci.

The Chair: I just want to point out that Mr. Perron was a minute and 12 seconds early on his time.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Bravo! You're good. You know I'm not always late.

The Chair: That's right. That is impressive.

Now over to the New Democratic Party, Mr. Stoffer, for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I do thank Colleen and Wendy for propping this up. I really appreciate your intervention in this, because we're dealing with the issue of operational stress injuries and also post-traumatic stress disorder on veterans and their families in the defence world, to see whether if this were corrected it would mitigate some of the concerns when they get out of the military. You are right. When they leave the military, after retiring, if they have something else to go to, another job or something, the transfer is not bad. But if they're medically released out of the military, or, as they said in today's article in the *The London Free Press*, if you are abandoned, as some members feel, that hurts, and it also hurts the family.

Wendy, you deal with a lot of adult situations. I met a lady up in Comox a while back. She had just finished a divorce from her husband who was in the service, and she said that one of the things she feared was no longer having access to the military family resource centre, because while it wasn't a crutch for her, it was her sole support system when her buddy was off for a long time. In my understanding, he is now getting out of the military, and because of those issues she figures he's going to have some concerns regarding the family, which will put additional stress on him, let alone the stress on her.

You said earlier that you don't look after people released or no longer associated, but what about divorced families?

• (1615)

Ms. Colleen Calvert: We have no mandate.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: You have no mandate. I know you do sneak in some help now and then, but you have no mandate. What could be done to assist those folks? The military, like any other aspect of society, goes through a 35% or 40% divorce rate. They're no different from the rest of us. What happens in that case?

Mrs. Wendy Purcell (Adult and Family Services Coordinator, Military Family Resource Centre, Halifax and Region): As Colleen suggested, we do not have a mandate to offer services to those people, but again, as Colleen has said, we do consider family as family, and we do treat as many people as we can in that regard. If they are divorced and the member is out, my understanding is that we will help the family, particularly if there is a child involved, because the child, of course, is part of that whole chain that started as a military family. That is my take on that. We would certainly look at the ways we could help and support that family, and certainly if it were something that was out of our control, that we couldn't do, then we would certainly refer them to the different areas that could give them the supports they really need.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Also in the *London Free Press* today there is an article by a woman named Jane Sims of Sun Media that states:

Veterans Affairs Canada has warned of a looming crisis in mental-health programs for soldiers. Its statistics — that show a dramatic rise in the number of clients with the condition, rising from 1,802 to 6,504 — represents service personnel no longer in uniform.

It goes on to say:

The Defence Department is also experiencing a dramatic increase in the number of soldiers with a mental illness.

And they're talking about a particular individual who's had quite a concern.

When you see people of this nature, as you said, like the soldier who goes home and says, "Guess what, honey, I'm doing this and this, so I'll see you, goodbye", and doesn't really tell her what's available at the time, he just goes off.... When they're suffering, sometimes they don't want to bring that suffering home. They'll try to hide or mask it. When you witness this, are you mandated or are you able to contact your superiors, either at Veterans Affairs or DND, to let them know there's a possible problem down the road? Or is that the padre's role?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: It's the family that suffers, of course. It's the family that will see it first and they'll recognize it. If the member is being helped or treated, the family may not know about it. But the family will come in and speak to us. Then we will encourage and educate that family member to hopefully help the member get some treatment or service.

We're still working with a lot of the families from HMCS *Chicoutimi*. As you know, that was a dreadful situation. We have a lot of families who are no longer in the military, but because we are a safe place where they spent a lot of time during the *Chicoutimi* incident, they spend a lot of time with us; they know us and we're safe. They know they can come and access our services and that we'll be able to help them get resources. So they work with us, and we still work with them, whether they're still in or whether they're out, which a lot of them are, and then we'll ensure that we can work with them and get them to the resources, especially through Veterans Affairs, etc., to make sure everybody is connected. But we can't go to the chain of command and say so-and-so has a problem.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Okay.

I'll get you next time.

The Chair: All right. I much appreciate it.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I only have five minutes.

The Chair: But he has many opportunities later on.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No, I don't. I get one more and that's the end of it. By the time 5:15 rolls around, I'm done.

The Chair: Now we're on to the Conservative Party of Canada and Mrs. Hinton, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I'd like to begin by welcoming you to the committee. I would also like to make it very clear that I thank you for what you do for serving members. I think your service is a wonderful resource for serving members.

You've said several times today yourself in your presentation that you don't have the mandate for this or you don't have the mandate for that. Unfortunately, this committee doesn't have the mandate to deal with defence issues, and what you've brought to the committee today are strictly defence issues.

I have a deep-seated need to support all military, whether they're veterans or not, but I also have the responsibility to focus on veterans issues. I'm not sure whether there's anything at all that you could relay to us regarding veterans today, because you made it very clear in your presentation that you only deal with today's serving members.

The other issue I heard you raise is day care, which is a provincial issue that we have no jurisdiction over either.

So is there anything you're aware of from your experiences that you could shed some light on for this committee regarding veterans issues?

• (1620)

Ms. Colleen Calvert: There is a total lack of services for families of veterans and released and retired members. Families and the retired member, the veteran, have to be included in everything you do. That's why we've been so successful. That's why, with our

experience, working with the family as a whole needs to continue in transition, when the member is released or retires and becomes a veteran. That's the key thing we've learned: don't just serve the member or the retired member or the veteran.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: We're in total agreement there.

Maybe this will help. Does the new Veterans Charter not cover what you're talking about? It is taking care of not just the veteran but the family, and that's the current serving members, the younger generation, not the traditional veteran but the modern-day veteran. In parts of that charter we're making it very clear that educational opportunities are there either for the serving member, if he's capable, or for the spouse, if he's not—those kinds of services.

Is there something that you think might need to be added? As far as I'm concerned, that charter is a living document. Is there something that you think you'd like to see added for veterans who are modern-day veterans?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I think the new Veterans Charter is a huge step forward. The family does not know what resources are available to them. The member, when retiring, releasing, or working with Veterans Affairs and accessing a service, may not know that there are things available to his family. The family definitely doesn't know that things are available to them. And the family is who is suffering, especially when you're working with OSIs and PTSDs.

That veteran is working, perhaps, with a peer support group through VA or accessing different services through VA. The family doesn't know this information. The family is sitting there in isolation and suffering. They don't know where to turn for help, for resources, or for support. The more you can do to educate that veteran's family, the better.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: You were very positive about the booklet that Mr. Perron held up. Does it contain enough information, if it were to go to every veteran now being discharged, or would you like to see Veterans Affairs put out a single sheet, perhaps, to family members of the veterans being discharged? Would that be helpful?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: It may provide access to information to a few more people. But we have found, throughout our many years, that when information is mailed to somebody's house, people don't sit down and read it. When you have an education session or when the member is releasing, invite the family in and say, "Here's all the stuff available to the family through Veterans Affairs". If they're included as part of the whole thing and educated at the same time, they may use the information. But unfortunately, when we get something in the mail, you know what we usually do with it.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: If I'm hearing you correctly, you're suggesting that when the modern-day veteran is discharged it might be a good idea for Veterans Affairs to insist that the wife come along to hear it all first-hand.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I would encourage it tremendously.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I'm going to go out on a limb here. Having been married for 38 years, I can tell you that sometimes communication between husband and wife.... It's not only the military that has problems getting the message back and forth; it happens a lot in every other household.

All right. That's a positive. We can certainly pass that information along and see where we go with it.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: There's one other point I want to make. I say that I have no mandate. I am not funded to provide services to veterans or to released or retired members. We provide a tremendous amount of support and services to them, including education. But we do it because there are so many gaps in the services that are out there. So when I say that I have no mandate, I have no funding to do that. We simply do it because we believe in it.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I think you're doing a fine job serving members. I said that at the beginning and I confirm that.

This committee has heard from a lot of groups. I can't think of five we've heard from that weren't looking for funding to continue their good work. So it's not that you're not appreciated; you are. But there is literally no limit to the number of groups that could be funded by government. Thank you for the good work, though.

• (1625)

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I absolutely agree.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. St. Denis.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Colleen and Wendy, for being here. Colleen, your time with us at Shearwater was extremely beneficial, and we felt it was important to follow up.

I appreciate the comments the chair made at the beginning and that Ms. Hinton just made about the silos that divide, which is the world of the serving member and then the world he or she find themselves in when they are no longer serving. They may have voluntarily retired or voluntarily moved on to civilian life if they're younger. They may have been pushed out or were injured and had to leave.

I think it's difficult for us—and I'll speak for myself—to say that is a very strict line because one day you could be a client of DND and the next day you're a client of Veterans Affairs. What happened to you the day before affects you the day after.

As the chair rightfully points out, there was a time two parliaments ago when the veterans affairs and defence committees were one committee. And I think it's very appropriate that there be two committees.

When they were combined I think veterans issues were on the back burner, as has been pointed out. And certainly they're not back-burner issues for us; they are our mandate. But at the same time, that shouldn't prevent us from trying to look through the window into DND's area to see what's happening as these people come over the line to civilian life in some form.

Obviously there are issues that are strictly for serving members, but do you see a role for yourselves—we'll leave aside the issue of resources—dealing with veterans families as well as military families? There is a continuum. They're still the same people even if they're injured.

I'm wondering if you could speak about that transition, this passing of the baton from when the service person is in the military to when they become a veteran.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I think the military family resource centres could play a significant role, because we're already connected with all those families when they're in uniform and as they transition out of uniform.

It's a continuum of education. It's mostly just education and ensuring they are aware of the resources. If they're up against bureaucratic red tape or they don't know where to turn, we can help them cut through some of the tape and get them into the places they need to be, in whatever program or service Veterans Affairs offers. I think we can play a significant role, very simply and very easily.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: I think you would agree, based on your comments, that it would be a way to amplify the effectiveness and outreach of Veterans Affairs, using an institution that's already in place, well practised, a well-oiled machine, so to speak. And as you say, they are your clients before they leave anyway.

I'm thinking particularly of those who suffer a mental injury, PTSD, as it's most commonly known, which I think among the various injuries—not to in any way minimize the impact of a physical injury on somebody, but it's the mental injuries that are compounded by the lack of community awareness. If you're missing a leg, that's a pretty obvious injury and you're going to have a very positive response from the community around you, but if it's a mental injury, that's not usually the case.

Because you see these families affected by it while they're serving, could you expand on how you could see post-service...if there was a mandate for the resource centres to help after service ends, particularly with those suffering a mental injury?

•(1630)

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I believe our only role would be to be a resource to the family to make sure they're connected to the right place. Because we do family peer support and group support, that's about the only role we could continue to play. It's mostly helping people wade through the myriad of services and making sure they know where to go and how to do it.

Don't give us the mandate; encourage all the Veterans Affairs offices right across the country to partner with their family resource centre, so that when they're educating the families, there is somebody from the VA right there, educating the families right alongside—a partnership. Education about what's out there, what services and resources are there, is going to be huge for our families, and that's really what they want to know—what's out there, where do they turn, and where do they go?

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Continuing that line of thinking, our legions, for historical reasons, tend to be focused on our older veterans from the past—now mostly from the Second World War, Korea, and maybe peacekeeping. Is there a more aggressive or assertive role for our legions in a post-service period, along with Veterans Affairs, along with our family resource centres? In other words, could we better utilize all that corporate knowledge, to use that term, all that knowledge that is extant?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I absolutely think so. We've partnered with all the legions in the province, and they have become our source of information. If we need to get something out to the families, we send it to the legions. The legions are posting it and promoting it, and making sure that their community...because they're the ones who know their community best—where people are and how to connect in that community. They are a wealth of knowledge and information, and I think any good partnership would include them.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Thank you, Colleen. I hope we have a chance to pursue this further.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm confident you will, sir.

Now over to *Monsieur Gaudet, avec le Bloc Québécois, pour cinq minutes.*

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon to our witnesses. If I understood you correctly, you are not paid for the work that you do. You do not get any government funding.

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Yes, we do. About 55% of our funding comes from the department's military family services. That's just my centre. It's different across the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: How many sailors suffered Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder following the fire on board HMCS Chicoutimi?

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I'm very aware of the events around the *Chicoutimi*.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: How many sailors suffered Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: No, the Canadian Forces health services can't even tell you that, because they haven't tracked the sub crew as a whole. They've gone off; they've been posted; they've broken up; they've gone all over the place. And the Canadian Forces, I don't believe, even knows how many people have PTSD out of the *Chicoutimi*.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I listened carefully both to your presentation and to the answers you gave my colleagues. Nowadays, our young men and women are prepared before going on a mission. Why is it that we do not prepare service men and women for retirement? As my colleague asked, why do we not inform our service men and women about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

As you said earlier, there are no childcare facilities. Members of the Canadian Forces on mission abroad obviously think about their families and children back here in Canada. Why is nothing done to prepare them? Nowadays, we prepare children for starting school: we are attentive to their needs and we give them advice. Why is it that the army is incapable of doing the same? Why can it not prepare our service men and women for retirement?

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I think the Canadian Forces is doing a good job in preparing the member. They're not doing a good job of educating the family. I think the serving member is getting the information. I don't think the families are.

•(1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I agree that service men and women are married to their country, but they also have spouses and families of their own. Listening to you this afternoon, I get the impression that families are overlooked by the army, although perhaps that is just my imagination getting away with me.

I would like to hear your view on the matter.

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I certainly do have an opinion.

The navy and the air force are incredibly good at engaging the families, educating, and making sure the families get all the information. The army hasn't come quite as far, and they still believe they need to control all the information a family receives. They're getting a little bit better at it, but it's not there yet. A lot of the army units haven't engaged their military family resource centres and accessed the services and resources that are available to support them in their leadership role—support them, support the families. We need our senior army to start engaging and promoting the services and resources that are available to the family, so that the family is educated for when the member retires or releases.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: And you, Ms. Purcell, what is your opinion?

[English]

Mrs. Wendy Purcell: I think the Canadian Forces themselves have to take a stand in educating the whole family. We can do only what we can do. But I think because the members are going to get the information first-hand, they have to be educated to pass it along to their family, or somehow, as Colleen has suggested, bring the family along into certain things, so that they can be more aware of it, because absolutely we're not getting that information.

I am the spouse of a member of the military for 25 years, and there have been many instances of things going on that I don't know anything about, only because, maybe, it's information the member doesn't think is that important to share. But it really does affect the whole family, and it's important that everybody be involved and treated holistically, as Colleen said—as a family, as a whole—because it's not just the one person going through it; it's the whole family.

I think it's a responsibility for all of these pieces to be involved to educate the families and the general public. It really needs to be put out there, I think.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we go to Mr. Shipley, with the Conservative Party, for five minutes.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you very much for coming out again. I think all of us want to thank you always—for the past, present, and future—who are serving our country and who make us proud of the services we have.

You made a comment about the total lack of services for family. I'm assuming you're talking about the Canadian Forces, and particularly, you just now clarified, maybe the army.

Do you have the same comments about VAC?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: When I said total lack of services, I meant total lack of education on the services that are available. There is a huge array of programs and services available through VAC, through the Canadian Forces—all through the Government of Canada—for our families. It's just the lack of education.

Mr. Bev Shipley: So it isn't a lack of services; it's the lack of education itself.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Nobody knows they're there, and if I don't know it's there.... I don't know what I don't know, so I don't know to ask for it.

Mr. Bev Shipley: We've heard that likely 50 times, from every group that's been here. You're part of the solution. What are you doing to help us with veterans? I want to pull back to veterans.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Yes.

Mr. Bev Shipley: What can you do to help us in the veterans area to solve that problem?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: The initiative we have taken is that for the past two and a half years we've invited somebody from Veterans Affairs to come with us every time. We travel every month, and four times a year we do big travelling road shows across the province. We invite somebody from Veterans Affairs all the time. We are connected right in with the social workers in VA, so that we have a direct referral, if a veteran's family or a veteran comes in looking at accessing services. We have gone out of our way to educate ourselves in what services and resources are there.

My staff work hand in hand with anybody we can get our hands on, and we take them out on the road. If I'm doing a deployment briefing for 350 family members, I invite VA to come in and set up a display and hand out those brochures and all that information.

• (1640)

Mr. Bev Shipley: How is it working?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: It's tremendous. We've had great response.

Mr. Bev Shipley: And there is great acceptability by Veterans Affairs to be there?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Bev Shipley: You talked earlier about duplication of services. One of the things I think we always want in terms of that transitional part is to know how we avoid...or what is the duplication of services that you see we should be focusing on, to get rid of it?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I don't know that I can speak to that one, but it's a good question.

Mr. Bev Shipley: But you mentioned duplication of services. When somebody mentions that we have a duplication of services, I like to know what they are so that we can actually....

I think you were talking about Canadian Forces at the time. I don't want to necessarily talk about Canadian Forces, but I want your opinion of what duplication of services there might be, as a transition to Veterans Affairs.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: No, I can't.... I'm really thinking about some of the duplication of services I've seen within the Canadian Forces. I'm still very unclear. I heard that in Halifax, VA was hiring a family peer support person for occupational stress injury. National Defence has a family peer support person for OSI. The family peer support person and the peer support person—the retired military member—are all working with retired and released families. Nobody's working with any current families, because they don't have any.

There's a duplication of services right there. These families should, in fact, be working with VA.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I think those are the things that we would be interested in hearing about. So if we could get something from you, not today but if some of those things come to mind that you're finding in your research and in your discussions and tours and as you continually meet.... What are some of those duplications, so that actually we can coordinate?

It's more about coordinating to get rid of the duplication, because whether it's operational stress or whatever, they're on both sides of the border here, in terms of the border being the transition between CF and veterans. So we're very much interested in learning, to get rid of duplication, because duplication does not always have a consistent message, and I think that's the biggest issue, quite honestly, for it.

You mentioned a shortage of doctors. How do you work with communities to get the shared services of medical professions that are needed? You have shortages in the Canadian Forces, I suspect. We have it in serving our veterans in particular hospitals and clinics, and we obviously have it in the general public. Do you have any ideas on how we can work with the general public to share the best we can and take advantage of those professional services?

We have to be innovative somehow, because we can't snap our fingers and get a doctor or some of the professional services.

Mrs. Wendy Purcell: Absolutely.

I guess it would be making yourself knowledgeable enough of what is out there so that you can actually source out some of the physicians who are readily available and taking new patients or serving families. We know in calling a hospital that they have a big list of all the doctors who are currently taking new patients. You can contact your local physician and he or she should be able to give you a number of places that you can contact as well.

In our situation, if we're being posted around, we can't just say, because we're Canadian Forces, now we're here and we need a doctor. It doesn't happen that quickly. It doesn't happen just because we are that.... We're in the whole pot with the general public.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: But Canadian Forces families shouldn't be in the whole pot with the general public. They've already made huge sacrifices.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Bring that back. You said—

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I said Canadian Forces families shouldn't be the same as the general public. The general public isn't making sacrifices on behalf of this nation.

Mr. Bev Shipley: But veterans tend to be in, once they come through. We're talking about veterans here. So when they come out, we have to somehow work with the general public in terms of those services.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Absolutely, but when it comes to medical... the comment was made that day care is a provincial issue. Well, it's the Government of Canada and the Canadian Forces saying you're moving to Lower Pumphandle, Saskatchewan, and too bad, so sad, there's no day care. So that military member, or whoever, is going to get out, and you've just lost a whole bunch of money.

● (1645)

Mr. Bev Shipley: Thank you.

The Chair: It's these nasty time constraints. When their turn is up, they all want to speak longer, but then everybody else wants to get a turn. It's a real conundrum.

We'll go now to the Liberal Party of Canada and Mr. Russell for five minutes.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you once again.

I want to return to the theme I started. I'm not much of a one for too many silos, believe me, or these jurisdictional debates. I sometimes think that even we make comments here saying, listen, we only want to ask questions that have a direct impact on our mandate. We run the risk, too, of running some interference in terms of what services are provided to various individuals.

I think about the most extreme case, where a life does get lost over jurisdictional disputes. We passed a motion in the House of Commons, called Jordan's principle, over a very similar situation, where you had a provincial and federal government or a first nations government arguing over who the hell was going to pay for care, and somebody's life got lost because of it.

But I want to come back to transition. We have somebody active in the service, and they can go to you. They leave; I don't know where they go. They become a veteran, or at some point they may access VA. What happens to them? They're with CF, and they have a counsellor or maybe a physician at CF. If they're out, I would say that the CF is not paying, or they may not pay, particularly if it's a CF physician or psychologist. So they have nobody in that interim period, and they may or may not know what the hell is out there under VA. What happens in that transition?

Colleen, you were in for 21 years.

I'm not sure about you, Wendy. Were you a civilian?

Mrs. Wendy Purcell: I was a civilian, yes.

Mr. Todd Russell: So, Colleen, maybe you can relate to this a little bit. Again, maybe there's something here we can suggest.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I was not educated about anything available to me when I was released from the Canadian Forces, and that's what's still happening today.

We have a number of military members who have been injured who are working directly with us, and they provide my 24-hour, 7-day-a-week family information referral services. These guys are with me for a year or two until they get their medical release. I'm talking to them every day, and they say that when they're being released, they feel like the proverbial arm in a bucket of water: when they pull it out, there's no hole there and they feel as if they've been totally abandoned. Half the time, they're not educated about anything that's available to them, especially through VA. It's a case of, sign here, sign here, sign here, then bye-bye.

There needs to be some kind of a transition; there needs to be some kind of an education, and it needs to be inclusive of that family.

Mr. Todd Russell: Do you guys provide information about Veterans Affairs programming?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: No, we invite VA to come in and provide that.

Mr. Todd Russell: So there is some overlap.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: But we only do it around deployment times, when we have a unit or members deploying, or a unit or a number of members from a unit have just come back. So it's strictly around the time of deployment and about educating them, especially reservists and their families, about what's available to them through all the different avenues.

So we don't normally go out to talk to them about release of members, or when a member is moving on from the military and becoming a veteran.

Mr. Todd Russell: Would you say there is a gap, whether we move back to fill the gap or the CF moves forward to fill that gap, in terms of transition?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I think there's a gap. I think there needs to be more work on educating everybody.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Now to the Conservative Party of Canada, and Mr. Cannan, for five minutes.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, ladies. Halifax and the region are very fortunate to have two dedicated and passionate individuals such as you in the military family resource centre, and I appreciate the information you've shared with our committee.

I just have a couple of quick questions on your budget.

You said 55% of your funding. What is your overall budget, then?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: My overall budget is \$3.5 million. I get \$1.25 million from the department for military family services.

• (1650)

Mr. Ron Cannan: Okay, and the other 35%, you said, is made up of user fees and fundraisers, etc.

You're saying you need more money, ultimately. Have you looked at a projection from where you're at today? If you had more funding, what would you be doing differently?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I wouldn't have to go out and beg everybody to buy a lottery ticket.

That's the hardest part. People say, if you're a military family resource centre, you're fully funded by National Defence, and you must be a federal employee. No, we're independently incorporated, provincially incorporated. We are not federal, we are not provincial; we are a not-for-profit charity, and the Canadian public has a really difficult time understanding that. The Canadian Forces members even have a difficult time understanding that we are not fully funded. So they have a hard time pulling out and giving us a buck to buy that lottery ticket.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Is your budget similar to those of other centres across the country?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: We go through a funding application process, so I would say that my budget is very similar. It's just the scale of it. Because I'm the largest and run two massive day cares, that's why my budget is so large. I had a \$220,000 shortfall. I am paying through fundraised dollars and dollars raised through user fees for staff who are providing the mandated programs and services that I have to provide. So you get creative.

Mr. Ron Cannan: So the province is helping with funding those day care spaces?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Yes, we do get some subsidies from the province, absolutely.

Mr. Ron Cannan: You mentioned specifically that your mandate is not to deal with Veterans Affairs, but you are working with some retired members.

Are they newly released members, or are they members who have been absent from the forces for the long term or many years, or are they in between those?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: We have a combination of both. We have a lot of people who of course were associated with us, and we're a safe place, so they have kept coming. And then we have people who have been away and they want to start giving back, or they want to get back and be involved and engaged, so they'll come back to the centre.

It's a combination of everything.

Mr. Ron Cannan: That's what I was going to ask. Do quite a few come back and volunteer?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Absolutely.

Mr. Ron Cannan: And 51% of your board is comprised of active members' families. Is that correct?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: That's correct.

Mr. Ron Cannan: What's the composition of the other 49%?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Most of the other 49% are serving military members. We have a couple of community members, but, traditionally, 49% are serving members.

Mr. Ron Cannan: One last aspect, as far as the role of this committee is concerned, is that we've heard from other members that the role of this committee is to look after the veterans affairs...of members who are leaving in uniform.

I heard one member ask if there's something we can do to plan. From your 21 years of experience as a member and.... How many years have you been the executive director now?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Ten years.

Mr. Ron Cannan: So you started in the military when you were eight?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ron Cannan: So what do you see regarding putting the resources into the forces today? Where do you see us having the biggest challenges in five, ten, fifteen years? Can you use your crystal ball from experience, even looking to the next couple of years?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: The issue of occupational stress injuries is going to be the hardest part, you are absolutely correct. If I could tell you to do anything, it would be not to just give therapy and counselling to the veteran, but to work with the family, so that the family knows what to do and understands the whole aspect, because it's the family that's taking a beating.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Are you utilizing the services of occupational therapists?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I suspect there may be some value there.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Very good. Thank you very much for your dedication.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Stoffer with the NDP for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you once again.

Quite simply, you reiterated on several occasions that you need to look at the family with a holistic view and not just at the individual serving member. You talked about secondary next of kin. As you know, a lot of these people in the service are young men and young women who may not be married yet, but they have a mother and father kicking around. I am sure all of us have gotten the calls. What happens to those individuals? What about parental advisement? The last thing a 19-year-old is going to tell mom and dad is what services are available and everything else. Would you include moms and dads in that as well, especially for single members, or grandparents or anything of that nature? You must get a lot of calls from people of that nature looking for information, assistance, etc.

• (1655)

Ms. Colleen Calvert: The stories I could tell you about the phone calls we've received from grandparents and parents from across the

country saying they haven't heard from their son or daughter who is over in Afghanistan and they're afraid....

I believe we need to educate the Canadian public, because everybody knows somebody in the military or somebody who is a veteran. So the more we can educate the Canadian public, the more all our families—the moms, dads, brothers, sisters, everybody—will know about what is available through our resources.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'm going to ask this question to both of you, because one is a veteran and the other is the spouse of someone who is soon to be a veteran—whenever he leaves.

Mrs. Wendy Purcell: He's due in a couple of months.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: A couple of months. So there's another one; you're going to be the spouse of a veteran. The Auditor General has stated, and I remember saying this to you before in a report, that the Government of Canada does not have a legal obligation to look after the families, but it has a moral obligation. I asked her if they should have a legal obligation. She didn't say yes or no; she said that is something the government should look at.

In your view, as a veteran and working here, should the government have a legal obligation to the family? I'd like both of you to respond, please.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I think it absolutely should. You're asking the family to make a tremendous amount of sacrifice. They're not the ones who signed up to serve Queen and country; it was the member. The family suffers by default. I think that needs to be recognized legally.

Mrs. Wendy Purcell: I'd have to echo that as well, being a family member. Absolutely, it needs to be supported through that way.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Well, in conclusion, I want to thank you for the tremendous work you do, and your husband as well for the service, and you for your service. I like to brag that Shearwater is the number one base in Canada. I can only see, if you read the paper about the *Chicoutimi* issue and everything else, that your services are going to be required more and more and more.

Betty is right that more people are coming to us looking for funding. Possibly one of the issues for us, although we can't poke our head into DND, is to see what can be done to assist you to make sure the financial and human resources are there to assist you as you assist them in their transition to becoming veterans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Parent is showing me a number two on his fingers, and I don't know what it is referring to.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Could you give me two minutes, please.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Perron, you're coming up just after Mr. Sweet, if you can wait.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Very well.

[English]

Age before beauty.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'm not touching that.

Mr. Sweet for five minutes.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you very much, and not only for what you do today, but I also understand you were a serving member of the force. So thank you very much for your dedication to this country and for putting your life on the line, and now, of course, for making sure you serve people who put their lives on the line. I can't say too much about that.

Have you heard of an organization called the Centre? It's a departmental initiative. Have you done any work with the Centre? Have you been in contact with them at all? Have they been in contact with you?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: We've done a bit of work at the local level together. That's one of the silos I'm speaking of.

Mr. David Sweet: All right, but you have done some work together, I guess—small projects?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: We have invited them on the road with us when we're going out to the communities and the families, to educate our families. We're doing our best to encourage them so that they can educate everybody.

Mr. David Sweet: Well, that's one of the questions I wanted to ask. You've invited them. You've invited Veterans Affairs on the road. That's great.

The other question is, do they come?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Absolutely, and they see the benefit in it.

Mr. David Sweet: Of course, you repeatedly said one of the major problems is that people don't know what they don't know, and there are services out there. Are you suggesting that maybe one of the things that could be done is direct outreach, in other words, a phone call to the home to say, "Hey, by the way, you have this available, you can go to this website, you can do this", that kind of thing?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: That would be absolutely wonderful. As I said, one of the problems we have right now, and we've been.... The Vice Chief of the Defence Staff has written a message to everybody saying he will provide the MFRC with information on the family when a member is deploying. Half the time we can't even get that information. To get additional information about...well, we're supposed to get information when somebody is injured or killed. We don't even get that information, so we can't make that connection to the family.

It would be phenomenal for somebody to phone these families and say, "By the way, you have this service."

● (1700)

Mr. David Sweet: Are some of the issues you're running into just administrative bottlenecks, or are there some around the privacy legislation?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: It's not around privacy. National Defence has come down with a ruling. We have our own privacy codes. So it's not a privacy issue; it's already been ruled on. I really believe it's an issue of will. As I said, the navy and the air force have wholly engaged, and that's not always the case—sometimes it is—with the army.

Mr. David Sweet: You've shown enough energy here that I'd certainly want to make sure you're always on my side, that there isn't some issue that has to be dealt with that I'm holding back on.

How many families do you actually assist per year? Do you have an idea?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I can tell you last year we had over 62,000 contacts with family members just in Halifax, within the area that I serve.

Mr. David Sweet: You have three centres.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I have three centres. My office in Cape Breton is quite small, but as you know, we had Task Force 107. We had a large number of people who deployed out of there.

There were about 62,000 contacts with families last year.

Mr. David Sweet: Wow.

Regarding your road shows, and this is strictly for my interest, do you have an equal amount of outreach—I'm certain you try—to all three branches of the service, or do you find some more difficult?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Actually, no, we've been really lucky in Nova Scotia that we have a commitment right from the top of the chain of command of the army, the navy, and the air force. They've been incredibly supportive, so we've had just tremendous success by all elements in doing this.

Mr. David Sweet: You said you've been communicating quite profusely with the legions, and they've been posting your information, etc. Are you finding that generates inquiries from veterans you'd never had any dealings with when they were in the regular service?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Absolutely, because they have a son, daughter, niece, or nephew, and they want to know what's out there. It could be a simple thing; they may want to send somebody a care package, so they make the connection. It's information they never would have had before. They can now connect.

Many of our vets are the fathers and grandfathers of many of our serving members now, so it's been tremendously beneficial.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

Monsieur Perron, you were up before, and now is your time.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Earlier, you raised my hackles when you said that members of the Canadian Forces ought to receive special treatment from the provincial healthcare services because they put their lives on the line for Canada. I could not disagree more and I am going to explain why this is so.

I have a good example to share with you, although I appreciate that you probably see many good examples of your own on a daily basis. My father died in 1999. He worked underground in the Noranda mine in Abitibi for fifty-five years, mining copper for electric wires, electric conduits and everything else that is made from copper. He risked his life on a daily basis. When he began working at the Noranda mine almost one miner died every week, although safety standards did improve over time. My mother cried every morning when her husband—or her old man, as she called him—went to work as she feared for his life. Are you trying to tell me that he did nothing for Canada?

He did not get any special treatment from the Canadian or Quebec healthcare systems. He died of asbestosis, a disease he contracted as a result of working in the Noranda mine. It rendered him unable to breathe. Do not try to tell me that he did not contribute as much, if not more, to the Canadian economy and the wellbeing of Canadians as those in the Canadian Forces. You should not ask for special treatment for service men and women. Let us not forget that there are also many people who lose their lives in jobs that are every bit as dangerous—if not more so—as the jobs of those in uniform.

That was just a comment that I wanted to make. Feel free to respond, although I will understand if you chose not to do so. It was something I needed to get off my chest.

• (1705)

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: First of all, Monsieur, I'm sorry for the loss of your father.

It's the Department of National Defence that moves the military member. The family, by default, is forced to move as well. The point I was trying to make is that these military families should have some assistance from the federal government to ensure they're not giving up a family physician and going to a place where they cannot get one. They're being asked to make an additional sacrifice. They are moved through the will of the government essentially. Provide them with access to a family physician is all I am saying. Get them a doctor. Don't make them give up what they already have in the province they are in. Get them access to a doctor. That's it.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: This is something that happens on a daily basis. If a miner from Abitibi goes to work in the Elliot Lake uranium mine, his new job will be just as dangerous as his old one. When he starts work at Elliot Lake, nobody will offer him a special doctor or any other special treatment. He will just have to get by as best he can and so too will his family.

[English]

Ms. Colleen Calvert: He has the choice to live there. He has a choice to move. Canadian Forces families have no choice in the matter.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Don't join the army.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: The military family doesn't.

The Chair: So that committee members are aware, we only have two more speakers on our list: Mr. St. Denis and Ms. Hinton.

The bells for votes will be coming up shortly.

Go ahead.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: I have a very short question, Mr. Chair, to follow up on the discussion. It's something Colleen mentioned in her initial presentation about access to doctors. We heard in Shearwater from Dr. MacKinnon, who retired as a military doctor, but her private practice involves veterans. Leaving aside the issue of resources for the moment, she made the compelling point that there should be a transition period when someone leaves the military so they still have access to the military medical facilities. Do you have any comment on that?

I took it for granted, obviously incorrectly, that the military family does have access to military doctors, but on the issue of post-service access, at least by the service person, for a period of six months, a year, two years or whatever, your comment would be appreciated.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I don't know what all the legal liabilities are, but I do know that, as civilians, military families cannot access military physicians. I suspect that once a military member is retired or released from the Canadian Forces he wouldn't be able to see a military doctor. I imagine it has to do with liabilities, etc., around accessing military physicians. I know that our military members getting out for medical reasons are all of a sudden left doctorless. So you have all these people releasing and they can't get a physician. It is a problem.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: It's a catch-22.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: It's a complete catch-22.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: In response to one of my colleagues earlier, you said you don't know when there's been an accident, so you're not able to contact the family, and the family is left not knowing. DND contacts families of soldiers who are harmed, do they not? That's the first question.

The second question is about the budget for your wonderful organization. You said it was something over \$3 million per year. Could you give me an idea of how much of that \$3 million or so goes to salaries? From listening to what you've been saying, some of your positions are voluntary and some are paid. I'd like to get a handle on the percentage.

• (1710)

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I would say about 85% is salary, and it's because of my day cares. I have 175-space day cares. This is something we're not mandated to provide, but because of the needs of the community, we've been forced to put it in place. So it's almost all towards salaries.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: So 85% is salaries.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: At least, yes.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: And you have 175-space day cares.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Yes.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: For that day care, do you get provincial funding?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Absolutely, we get some support.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: What was the answer to the first question? Doesn't DND contact family members?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Of the injured? Yes, they do.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Okay.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: But what happens is that after the event is over, the family may not have been told about all the resources that are available to them, and then the assisting officer goes away after a number of months and the family is sitting there. The ombudsman's report clearly suggested that the information should be passed on to the family, and that the MFRC should get all the information as well.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: You and I are in agreement. My only concern was that I understood you to say that no one contacts the families.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: Gosh, no! They do a great job there.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, sir.

Mr. David Sweet: You said your budget was \$3.5 million and that you got \$1.25 million from DND?

Ms. Colleen Calvert: We get \$1.18 million from the Director of Military Family Services, and I get about another \$179,000 from the Maritime Forces Atlantic.

Mr. David Sweet: You're underselling yourself, then. You mentioned that you got 55% of your budget funded. But that sounds more like only one-third.

Ms. Colleen Calvert: I'm going on last year's numbers. I'm mixing up last year's numbers with this year's, because I just got my new funding. At the end of the audit last year, 55% of my funding came from the Director of Military Family Services.

Mr. David Sweet: Okay.

The Chair: I see our list of questioners is extinguished. Thank you, witnesses, for your appearance.

I'm going to talk about some other issues since we're here. I want to inform the committee members that we were scheduled to go to Petawawa and Valcartier under the last budget. We're coming up to a wrap of the budget at the end of March, and these trips will take place in April. Those budget requests came up again at the Liaison Committee and were approved, so we're still a go, which is a good thing.

I have some handouts with regard to Korea and whatnot.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: That was at the beginning of this meeting.

The Chair: And you all talked about that and dealt with it.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: We don't need to talk about it.

The Chair: We don't need to? Fine. You have your stuff and you know what it is.

The meeting is adjourned.

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