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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Order, please.

Good afternoon.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming today.

As you know, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're studying violence against aboriginal women. We're looking at the causes, the extent, and the nature of violence against aboriginal women, both on reserve and off reserve. In consultation with aboriginal women, we're seeking to find recommendations and resolutions to deal with the issue.

We have three witnesses today: Michelle Mann, a lawyer and consultant, is here as an individual; Irene Compton is manager of the cultural program of Minwaashin Lodge; and from the National Association of Friendship Centres, we have Conrad Saulis, policy director.

Now, the rule is usually that each of you, because you're from different organizations, will have 10 minutes to present. I'll give you a two-minute warning like this so that you will know that it's going to be time to wrap up. Then we go to a question-and-answer session. When that time comes, I'll explain that to you a little bit differently.

We will start with Ms. Mann.

Ms. Michelle Mann (Lawyer and Consultant, As an Individual): Good afternoon.

As was mentioned, I am a lawyer. I was called to the Ontario bar in 1996. I practised aboriginal law with both the federal Department of Justice and the Indian Claims Commission of Canada. Since 2002, I have been a consultant and writer dedicated to aboriginal legal and policy issues. I have written many published reports, articles, and book chapters on aboriginal issues.

Today I am going to talk about a subject on which I was published this past fall, which is prostitution law reform as it might impact aboriginal women and girls. The premise of the paper was that despite the gross overrepresentation of aboriginal women among street-level sex trade workers and the murdered and disappeared, discussion of prostitution law reform rarely focuses on how to mitigate their sexual exploitation and their exposure to related routine violence.

Prostitution law reforms must address the situation of the most overrepresented and most vulnerable sex trade workers: aboriginal women.

I'm sure you've already heard quite a bit pertaining to aboriginal women's unequal status in Canadian society and about how that facilitates their increased vulnerability to exploitation and violence. Race and gender discrimination, combined with poverty, ill health, involvement in the sex trade, and other factors, compound that unequal status.

In addition to the extreme vulnerability of all women in the sex trade, women who solicit on the streets are particularly vulnerable. In one Vancouver study, one-third of the women reported that they had been attacked while working the streets.

Discrimination and aboriginal women's inequality in society also contribute to a perception that they are easy targets for violence and exploitation.

Social and economic marginalization, combined with addictions and other factors, have led to aboriginal women and girls being highly overrepresented as sex trade workers. I'll give you some statistics. In Winnipeg, between 70% of sexually exploited youth and 50% of adult sex workers are of aboriginal descent, and this is in a city in which aboriginal people make up approximately 10% of the population. Up to 40% of female and male sexually exploited youth and adults in Vancouver are aboriginal. And aboriginal women constitute at least one-third of the women who disappeared from Vancouver's downtown east side.

The increased risk of violence faced by all street sex workers is often particularly acute for aboriginal women, who are more likely to experience extreme poverty and to engage in substance abuse. Street-level sex workers are generally working for survival and are often drug addicted, sick, and likely to be unwanted in indoor venues. They may have mental health diagnoses, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and low education levels.

Colonization, residential schools, general community breakdown, social and economic marginalization, and a history of colonialist government policies—which I'm sure you've been hearing about—are all contributing factors to the overrepresentation of aboriginal women as sex trade workers. It is inextricably interconnected with the systemic and pervasive nature of aboriginal women's inequality in Canadian society.

Moving on to the legal issues, prostitution is technically legal in Canada, but certain Criminal Code prohibitions effectively create barriers. Communicating, operating a bawdy house, procurement, and living off the avails are all illegal. The result is that effectively the sex trade worker, the pimp, and the client are all criminalized. However, the law in Canada has led to unequal application. Essentially, a two-tiered sex trade has emerged. The more expensive off-street prostitutes operate pretty much with impunity, while those already most vulnerable and marginalized—street-level prostitutes, and often aboriginal women—are routinely arrested. Street prostitution makes up only 5% to 20% of all sex trade activities, yet it accounts for more than 90% of all prostitution-related incidents reported by the police.

While aboriginal women are particularly vulnerable, Canadian police have often failed to provide them with an adequate standard of protection. Police have been viewed as uncaring and inactive in the disappearances of both sex workers and aboriginal women. One significant barrier to improved relations between the police and sex trade workers is the ongoing criminalization of sex trade workers, who may be unwilling to turn to police or social services because they are engaging in criminal activity.

On decriminalization and legalization, both of these approaches are generally touted as a route to greater safety for the sex worker, allowing prostitutes to work indoors in protected environments. It would also increase their access to police, health, and social services. However, countries that have decriminalized and legalized prostitution—for example, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, and the Netherlands—have also seen an increase in human trafficking.

In Canada, while the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act have trafficking provisions, the issue of domestic trafficking in aboriginal women and girls is a problem that has barely begun to emerge on the radar. Regardless of the approach taken, some sex workers will continue to be street-based, particularly those who are most disadvantaged. For this reason, New Zealand provides a very interesting example. In 2003, New Zealand decriminalized adult prostitution. In 2007, the Prostitution Law Review Committee carried out a study of the impacts of that 2003 decriminalization. They concluded that impoverished New Zealand aboriginals make up a disproportionate number of prostitutes working the streets. Street-based workers are more likely than indoor-managed or private sex workers to report having been physically assaulted by a client, threatened by a client, held against their will, or raped in the previous 12 months before the study. So this was after decriminalization.

They found that one-tenth of all sex workers worked the street, which was a number comparable to that prior to decriminalization. Of the sample population in the study, one half was New Zealand European, and a third was Maori. The 2007 government evaluation notes that Maori ethnicity among street workers was 64%, despite the fact that they represented only 31% of the total sex trade. They also noted their ongoing exposure to violence and ongoing trepidation in going to police.

So looking at those preliminary results from 2007, we can see that the decriminalization legislation appears to have benefited indoor-managed and private workers, predominantly of New Zealand European descent. I think these results are an important consideration for Canadian prostitution law reform.

Not all women will be marketable for indoor venues. Even under legalization or decriminalization there will be street workers. Given current statistics, we have every reason to believe that aboriginal women would be as vastly overrepresented in this group, as the Maori are.

In comparison, Sweden was the first country to criminalize only the pimps and buyers of sex, rather than sex workers, in 1999. Prostitution is officially seen as sexual abuse and an act of violence against women. Decriminalizing the prostitute facilitates the goal of making it more feasible for women to report bad dates and attacks to police, assuming of course that there is a police will to act and better police-sex worker relationships are forged. In Sweden, some individuals still selling sexual services indicated that they felt more comfortable reporting crimes to the police.

In conclusion, statistics indicate that Canada's prostitution laws and their enforcement may be fostering a sub-class of endangered and criminalized street sex trade workers, and their face is all too often aboriginal. While law alone cannot provide the answer, prostitution law reform discourse in Canada has often been carried out blind to who decriminalization of the trade might benefit and who it might leave behind.

Decriminalization of the prostitute would ostensibly benefit all sex trade workers and be of greatest assistance to the most vulnerable: those working the streets who are most in need of police services and most often convicted. In the end, we must question which legal reforms will service and protect the most disadvantaged in an already marginalized class.

As far as specific recommendations for action, I would clearly recommend decriminalizing the prostitute or sex trade worker; greater emphasis on aboriginal women in the sex trade when discussing law reform; and, although I didn't talk about it too much, police race and cultural sensitization training.

● (1535)

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

Next is Irene Compton, manager of the cultural program at Minwaashin Lodge, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Irene Compton (Manager, Cultural Program, Minwaashin Lodge): Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. It's an honour to be here as a representative of the aboriginal women and children who are served by Minwaashin Lodge and to give a voice to the countless urban first nations, Métis, and Inuit women who are living with the reality of violence in our community.

I'll be using the time allotted to me to address causes, prevalence, and solutions, as outlined in your mandate, with special emphasis on solutions that can be arrived at through collaboration with aboriginal women.

Violence against women in Canada was first reported in 1993, when Statistics Canada conducted the first dedicated survey on violence against women. It has become understood that violence against women is a complex issue that needs to be examined within the context of a woman's reality. In the case of violence against aboriginal women, the reality is one with deep historical roots that span across time.

An issue paper entitled “Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls”, written by the Native Women's Association of Canada, clearly reveals the answer to the questions being asked by this committee. The opening paragraph states, “Systemic violence against Aboriginal women...and girls, their communities and their nations is grounded in colonialism...”. The paper spells out the impact the Indian Act had on aboriginal women and girls. The colonialization and attempt at assimilation through the Indian Act in the residential school system all served to rip apart families, communities, and nations.

The follow-up from these events has been, and continues to be, devastating for all aboriginal people. It is the reason there is such a high incidence of violence perpetrated against aboriginal women.

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Irene, and I'm a first nations Saulteaux woman from the Keeseekoose band in Saskatchewan. I am of the Bear Clan. I'm also an intergenerational survivor of the residential school system. My mother went to residential school from 1926 to 1942. If she had lived a long life, she would be 89. My mother had nine children. Today, there are only two of us left. My youngest sister committed suicide at 20 years old in 1979. Recently two of my sisters died early due to alcoholism and mental illness. Another sibling was murdered on the Yellow Quill highway in Saskatchewan in 1968. How much can a family withstand?

Most of my siblings suffered from alcoholism and depression. My brother and I are the only survivors of our family today. The reason we are still here and healthy is because we were given a chance to go on our healing journeys. For many years I did not speak about my background because it was too painful. It was easier to deny anything ever happened to me. Besides, there was no safe place to share my story and get the help I needed.

I carried that pain until the Creator brought me to Ottawa and I was given the responsibility of co-founding the Aboriginal Women's Support Centre in 1993. It was through working at Minwaashin Lodge that I found my identity and purpose, courage to heal, and ability to give back to my community. All I can say is that it has been a journey of personal and professional growth.

Let's fast forward to today. It has taken 40 years to see that the government is starting to assist organizations like Minwaashin Lodge. I hope to see, in my lifetime, a substantial decrease of unresolved intergenerational trauma in aboriginal women.

My story is a lot like the stories we hear from the women accessing services from Minwaashin Lodge. Most of the women are intergenerational survivors of the residential school system. Some of them don't know their identity and culture because throughout the generations there was shame, so their mothers decided not to teach them their language and ways. Today a lot of those women are reclaiming their heritage and culture through Minwaashin Lodge's culture program.

Many of the women we see are suffering from the impacts of addiction, poverty, unresolved trauma, untreated mental health issues, and low self-esteem. Minwaashin provides programs and services to assist women and their families to determine a life that is free from violence.

We have been operating in Ottawa for 17 years, and we have seen many women go on journeys of healing, taking small steps of bravery and building their confidence to determine good things in their lives. We have a counselling team that supports a lot of women to deal with their unresolved trauma. Additionally, we have a grandmother on staff to help women with traditional support and ceremonies to heal.

● (1540)

We not only assist the women but also their children and teenagers. We have a shelter that took 10 years to achieve sustained funding. It is the only violence against women's shelter in the city of Ottawa that serves first nations, Inuit, and Métis women. We are seeing more women becoming survivors and thrivers. They are doing well. We are also teaching them to be advocates for the prevention of violence and education about it in homes, schools, communities, and workplaces. A lot of them are publicly advocating for change and are speaking out and being heard. We still have a long way to go, though, because there are still a lot of women suffering from the impacts of violence; and the men, especially, are lagging behind in their own healing.

One of the best ways of empowering women is to provide them with healing and cultural identity and then training and education. Many women are sole supporters of their families and need long-term sustainable livelihoods.

Real and lasting solutions to violence against women can and should be provided through aboriginal organizations run by the aboriginal people. Our organization may be a small piece of the puzzle we are trying to solve, but I can tell you that what we do works. That's because all of our work is grounded in the historical understanding of the impacts of colonialization, the Indian Act, and residential schools. We understand the women who come to us for help; we have lived their life experiences and they know and trust us. These women have an internalized shame about their identity and culture that leads them to live lives filled with violence, addiction, and mental illness. They have been lost, disconnected from their spirit, culture, language, family, and community.

When aboriginal women seek out support and ask to learn about themselves, they deserve to be received by women who are like them, who have lived that reality and who understand. It's not enough to send a woman in an airplane to a city far away from her home, to a government office that is foreign and bureaucratic. It is not enough to say, “We are sorry”. Each woman deserves to be welcomed home, and as I said before, I'm hopeful that aboriginal women can be given a chance in life. Aboriginal women need to be respected, loved, and valued in today's society.

We can start in the nation's capital, and here I thank Status of Women Canada for being leaders in the journey towards equality and justice for the grassroots women and their families, and I say *meegwetch*, and thank you for listening.

● (1545)

The Chair: *Meegwetch*.

Now we go to the third witness, the National Association of Friendship Centres, and Conrad Saulis, for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Saulis.

Mr. Conrad Saulis (Policy Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Madam Chairperson and members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, *woliwon*. Thank you for this opportunity to present to you a briefing on behalf of the National Association of Friendship Centres.

Allow me to begin by acknowledging the Algonquin Nation who first inhabited this land that we are on today. *Woliwon*. Thank you for welcoming us to your territory.

My name is Conrad Saulis. I am the policy director with the National Association of Friendship Centres. I am a proud Maliseet First Nation citizen born and raised on the Tobique First Nation community in New Brunswick.

The National Association of Friendship Centres is a national, non-profit aboriginal organization that represents the views and concerns of 120 friendship centres and seven provincial-territorial associations across Canada. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for aboriginal peoples in the urban environment by supporting self-determined activities that encourage equal access to and participation in Canadian society and that respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on aboriginal cultural distinctiveness.

Along with the Department of Canadian Heritage, the National Association of Friendship Centres delivers a cadre of priority federal programs to Canada's urban aboriginal population. From the core funding we receive from Canadian Heritage, our 120 friendship centres, located from coast to coast to coast, generate $114 million in programs and services to urban aboriginal people, in partnership with federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments. I've also provided a map of the locations of our friendship centres across the country.

Annually, we produce a report called “The State of the Friendship Centre Movement”. In our 2009 report we state that friendship centres continue to provide programs to urban aboriginal people in the following areas: culture, family, youth, sports and recreation, language, justice, housing, health, education, employment, economic development, and “other”, which includes services such as food banks. There are a combined total of 1,295 programs offered within friendship centres nationally. As of 2009, the friendship centre movement employs 2,338 people nationally, of which 74% are females. The friendship centre movement takes great pride in its mission to serve urban aboriginal clients, thus the friendship centres keep a record of the number of times this is done. Each time a client accesses a program or a service at a friendship centre, it is referred to as a point of contact. Across Canada, in 2009, there were nearly a million—about 977,000—points of contact.

In 2007, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and the Ontario Native Women's Association sponsored a summit. The summit resulted from the ongoing high rates of violence against aboriginal women and the lack of progress in ending this violence, The Ontario Native Women's Association and the OFIFC convened a strategy meeting in 2007, entitled “A Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women”. The intent of the summit was to bring together community leaders to develop a framework for a strategy to end violence against aboriginal women. The summit was a follow-up to a national policy forum on aboriginal women and violence, which was held in Ottawa in March of 2006, hosted by Status of Women Canada.

I just want to read off some of the things that were noted in the final report of the gathering. They say the experience of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in residential schools meant that large numbers of aboriginal people suffered long-lasting effects of abuse and were denied the opportunity to be exposed to the examples of positive parenting, which was reported in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996. This may contribute to higher rates of violence in aboriginal communities across generations.

A study by the Ontario Native Women's Association, entitled “Breaking Free”, found that eight out of ten aboriginal women in Ontario had personally experienced family violence. It is important to note that while not all violence directed at aboriginal women comes from the aboriginal community, violence against aboriginal women must stop, regardless of the type of violence or the origin of the offence. Participants concluded that in order to achieve this, a comprehensive strategy must be developed, supported, advanced, and resourced immediately. Action on this issue is long overdue by all organizations, governments, and society as a whole.

● (1550)

The framework is proposed on a medicine wheel design to provide a continuum of approaches to address the issue, and it will require strategies at many different levels and around different issues to successfully deal with violence. Each aspect may be developed separately but must be integrated and consistent with the overall approach. In order to be successful in this initiative, a community-based, cultural, and holistic healing approach focused on ending violence will have to be established. This cannot be done if all levels of government do not provide supportive policies, legislation, resources, and approaches for it to occur.

The recently released report by the Native Women's Association of Canada, entitled, “What Their Stories Tell Us”, states that not only did aboriginal women report the highest rates of spousal violence in 2004, but they were also significantly more likely than non-aboriginal women to report the most severe and potentially life-threatening forms of violence, including being beaten or choked, having had a gun or a knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted. This happened to 54% of aboriginal women, as compared to 37% of non-aboriginal women.

The percentages for aboriginal women remain unchanged since 1999, as reported in the general social survey of 2004. For non-aboriginal women, at the same time, the percentage who experienced the most serious forms of violence declined from 43% in 1999 to 37% in 2004.

The Native Women's Association report also states that it has been found that mobility among aboriginal women, particularly as they move from small communities to large urban centres, makes them vulnerable to violence. Many young people from the rural communities relocate to urban centres to attend school. Family and community members, as well as other key informants, have shared stories that women and girls raised in rural and isolated communities are often unprepared for the transition to the urban environment.

The evidence collected indicates that the majority of cases occur in urban areas. Of the cases where this information is known, almost 60% of women and girls were murdered in an urban area, 28% of cases occurred in rural areas, and 13% on reserve.

This distribution is even more striking in terms of missing cases. Taking a broad look at the different locations where women and girls have disappeared, it was found that over 70% of women and girls went missing from an urban area, 22% were last seen in a rural area, and 7% disappeared from a reserve.

Going back to the OFIFC, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, and—

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes, Mr. Saulis.

Mr. Conrad Saulis: Okay.

In 2007 the report states that aboriginal communities and organizations, as well as mainstream organizations and service providers, have long asserted that aboriginal women experience significantly greater rates of violence than non-aboriginal women in Ontario, and that many intersecting factors related to these levels of violence are unique for aboriginal women because they are directly related to such ongoing historical factors as colonialism, the impacts of residential schools, discriminatory provisions under the Indian Act, lack of recognition of Métis identity, and the residual effects of related community trauma, such as mental illness and poverty.

I'll skip forward because I have a few more pages. I'll just jump to my conclusions.

While we can continue to exchange data on the alarming statistics of violence against aboriginal women and girls across Canada, at some point in time we need to stop talking and put things into place, get things done, and seriously work to significantly reduce all forms of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

The NAFC fully supports the ongoing work of the Native Women's Association of Canada and in particular the Sisters in Spirit initiative.

I hope that serious attention will be given to the proposed framework that resulted from the 2007 Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and Ontario Native Women's Association summit.

● (1555)

The friendship centre movement remains a willing and competent partner in all efforts to combat, prevent, and reduce violence against Canadian aboriginal women and girls.

Thank you. *Woliwon*.

The Chair: My goodness, that was timed to the second. Thank you very much.

We're now going to begin questions and answers. The first round is a seven-minute round for both questions and answers.

We will begin the round with Michelle Simson for the Liberals.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for taking the time to appear today. Your presentations were extremely interesting and sad.

I'd like to direct my first few questions to Ms. Mann.

I had an opportunity to read the 2005 report that was prepared for the Status of Women Canada, *Aboriginal Women: An Issues Backgrounder*. This isn't specific to the prostitution issue at this point, but I was very interested in your commentary under the "Matrimonial Real Property on Reserve" section. I would tend to agree that when there's family violence, of course, there is no option. If a marriage breaks down or a relationship breaks down, in a lot of cases, there's no provision for the sharing of the matrimonial home. In a lot of cases, this is an issue that leaves women in very violent situations because of a lack of any alternate housing.

I hope you can shed some light on this. The matrimonial property rights bill, Bill S-4, is working its way through the Senate. On the surface, while it's rather lengthy, it would appear to address this issue. But interestingly, when speaking with colleagues and some aboriginal people, it doesn't seem to enjoy the level of support from the aboriginal community, or at least not all of them, that I would have assumed it would.

Have you had any feedback or is there any information or insight you can offer the committee on what this particular bill lacks? Why does it not do what the aboriginal communities would perhaps like it to do?

Ms. Michelle Mann: I have looked at the bill. I would be hazarding a guess, but if I recall correctly, as an interim measure, the bill basically provides for provincial legislation in that area to now apply on reserve pending the determination of laws by communities. I think the case is that some communities would probably prefer not to have the provincial laws apply and would rather have time to move to governing that area for themselves. They look at it as a governance issue.

● (1600)

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Okay. If that's the case, is ongoing work being done in the communities on the reserves to address this issue in terms of self-government and putting something forward, or is it something that's been lying dormant?

Ms. Michelle Mann: I don't know about that. In a previous incarnation, I was a "table" lawyer for self-government negotiations. I did administration of justice, aboriginal courts, etc. It's certainly a long process, whether you're looking at a broad self-government agreement or a type of sectoral agreement that deals with certain areas. I don't know where various communities across the country might be in that process.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Is it possible that on some of the reserves, because the governance is primarily male, there could be some resistance to bringing this issue forward to work on in terms of self-governance, as opposed to the government getting involved? Do you think that could be an issue?

Ms. Michelle Mann: Obviously, I'm aware of it because I work in the field, but it's not really an area in which I've specifically worked. I would say there are probably things in a lot of communities that are pending in terms of urgency and that need to be dealt with. Those things could be prioritized.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Okay. With respect to your actual presentation on decriminalizing prostitution, I was curious about this. In the same 2005 report, you wrote that both on and off the reserve, aboriginal women remain fearful of reporting violence to the police because there's a perception that complaints may not be taken seriously. Based on the testimony of witnesses we've had thus far, I would take it that's still the case.

Ms. Michelle Mann: As I understand, that's definitely still the case. There are a few projects that I cited in my article on prostitution law reform. There are a few initiatives that have been undertaken by police forces. I think there's Project KARE. I think that's in Edmonton, but I'd have to check. So there are some promising initiatives on the part of police forces, but I think overall it's still the case that a lack of trust exists.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: If, for instance, prostitution were decriminalized, you mentioned in your presentation they'd be more likely to make contact with health care workers, live a healthier lifestyle, and they would have increased police protection. But if that fear is there, will decriminalizing prostitution address that fear in any way? So while strides are being made, it isn't there yet.

Ms. Michelle Mann: First of all, what I'm advocating is decriminalizing the prostitute, not decriminalizing prostitution.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Okay, right. Sorry.

Ms. Michelle Mann: But definitely, if you think about a woman, say, having a bad date or a bad experience with someone who should be reported as potentially dangerous, it's hard to go to the police when you're committing a criminal act. You're basically turning yourself in. If you're going to the police after performing an act of prostitution and you want to report violence that occurred in that act, well, you're committing a criminal act. So that's a real barrier to going and making that report.

Yes, of course, it would have to be accompanied by the kinds of measures that we're seeing by some police forces to open up those lines of communication, and, as I said, we are seeing cultural sensitivity training so they can understand how to interact with the aboriginal women.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Well, I can barely hiccup in 30 seconds, so I'll pass the time on.

The Chair: Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

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

My first question is for Ms. Compton and deals with the Minwaashin Lodge and the Oshki Kizis shelter. We read about this, and when you talk—

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: Sorry, I can't understand that at all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Your organization, the Minwaashin centre, is obviously meant for an urban setting, since you are in Ottawa.

Do those who access your services come from reserves further north, or are they aboriginals from across this country?

● (1605)

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: I would say there are women who come from all regions of the country. I come from Manitoba. Because there's a lot of violence in Winnipeg, a lot of women are migrating to Ottawa, because this is a safe place for them to start their healing journeys. We do find a lot of women coming from the reserves. The demographics of Ottawa are going to change: we are going to see a lot aboriginal families migrating to the big cities, and there should be appropriate services for them in place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: What kind of grants does your centre get? Which organizations is this money coming from? What is the amount you get? Is it enough?

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: We're about a $2 million agency, but we have multiple grants. We must have at least 13 grants in place. They are all program funding grants, so it's hard to keep going all the time. But, yes, we're a multi-funded agency, like most agencies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Why do you say it is difficult to keep going with your operations?

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: Recently the Aboriginal Healing Foundation closed, so we're feeling the impacts of all of those programs and services that were set up after the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. We've had to lay off some people, and programs and services have been scaled down. That's the crux of it right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: How many people were laid off in your organization and how many people did you use to have?

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: We had to lay off two people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: How many employees?

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: At our centre we employ about 40 women.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You are saying there were cuts in many programs. Are they different kinds of programs? Mr. Saulis told us there were 1,295 programs.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: Our two spirit program is one that's going to be ending in a month. So that's one program.

We've modified our programs and have had to get funding from other places to keep them going. But we do need more counsellors; we absolutely need them, because there are a lot women suffering from trauma and they need the psychological help. Counselling is a big issue for us. We have to....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Mr. Saulis, you said there is $114 million for the 120 friendship centres. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Conrad Saulis: The core funding that we receive from the Department of Canadian Heritage is $16 million. That provides the core funding of approximately 116 of the 120 friendship centres. The rest of the money, the $114 million, is generated by the hard work that the people in friendship centres do to raise money from other sources, including provincial and municipal governments. So the $16 million means that we're able to generate an additional—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You are getting $16 million from the federal government. Is that right?

[*English*]

Mr. Conrad Saulis: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You said also that many people were hired and that 2,438 people worked in friendship centres. There are 1,295 programs, which is a lot, and 2,438 people are working in these centres. From all this committee heard, I would say such an organization should do much for women in an urban setting.

But many witnesses told us things did not change much in the last several years. Could you tell us more about your organization and its contribution?

● (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Conrad Saulis: Sure. The people who work in the friendship centres across the country put in a lot of personal time. They work for very low wages. The amount of money involved and the number of programs that we have and the number of people we employ may give the impression that it's a lot. But given that 54% of the aboriginal population in Canada lives in urban centres across the country, meaning 54% of the 1.12 million aboriginal people counted in the 2006 census, it is quite a population.

Friendship centres do as much as they can to augment the kind of work that Minwaashin Lodge does, but we're glad that Minwaashin Lodge is there to help the women, families, and children they provide services to. Friendship centres don't believe or think they can do it alone; they want to support Minwaashin Lodge to continue providing its important services.

Our services are in the areas I spoke about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Ms. Mann, you are suggesting prostitution should be decriminalized. Do you think this could happen in the next 10 years, under this government?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Mann: I'm not proposing decriminalization of prostitution; I'm proposing decriminalization of the prostitute, which is a very different thing.

To be honest, if the political will were there, I see it as a no-brainer, because if one accepts that at least some of these women—avoiding the discussion about choice—are victimized and exploited, criminalizing their conduct just further victimizes them. So I think a very strong case can be made for just decriminalizing the sex trade worker. I could definitely see that being accomplished within the next 10 years, yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Cathy McLeod for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a number of questions for each of you. I hope I have enough time to get them in. I think I'll start with Mr. Saulis.

I have only had contact with two friendship centres. I recognize that they work on a very meagre budget. It seems that there is this continual process of grant writing.

If we were looking across all the friendship centres, if we visited all 123, would we see a whole range of programs, depending on how successful they were, or not, in terms of applications?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: Yes. That is definitely the case.

What we report in *State of the Friendship Centre Movement: 2009* is a compilation of the variety of programs friendship centres have, from St. John's to Port Alberni to Inuvik. Not all friendship centres would provide each one of those programs. They might provide a number of them.

There is definitely a lot of proposal writing. There is a lot of searching out of funding from various sources, whether it is from provincial or municipal governments or even other sources, such as, from time to time, foundations. A lot of work is put into bringing in the extra money that could provide some services within the areas I mentioned in my presentation.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I would presume that the $16 million is sort of evenly distributed. Does anything core come out of that $16 million? Is it basically the skeleton and you go out and find out what you can do?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: That is the core funding. That is the skeleton. We call it a skeleton because it is a skeleton. That $16 million has been frozen since 1996. The friendship centres program has not had an increase in funding since 1996, and we are at 2010. It is putting a major strain on friendship centres, because the dollars are just not as effective. A lot of them are feeling the financial pinch, definitely.

● (1615)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: My next question would be for Ms. Compton. It sounds as if you have a number of different programs. I'm sure that they've all had evaluations in terms of effectiveness.

Can you tell me about the one you're most proud of?

Ms. Irene Compton: I can say that the culture program is the most important, because when women learn about their identity and their purpose, and they do their healing, they can start giving back to their communities.

The basic foundation of our healing is our culture, because everything we need is in our culture. That is the beginning point for most women who walk in our door.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: That's something that's offered to everyone who walks in the door.

Ms. Irene Compton: Yes. Often women come to our centre because they've been shamed into not identifying as aboriginal because of the intergenerational impact of the residential schools. They come in not knowing anything. Their grandmothers never said anything to them about being aboriginal.

They find support from other sisters at the centre, and then they start on their journey of identity, and they really evolve.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Would they come in all day every day, or for a couple of hours once a week? I'm just trying to understand....

Ms. Irene Compton: We have day programming. We have a lot of program calendars. We have a great website, if you ever want to check it out. We start with every stage of life, from the children to the teenagers to the adults to the grandmothers. We offer programs and services for every stage of life. We offer counselling for sexual abuse, trauma, and addictions. We cover the spectrum of the impacts of violence.

We are going into our 18th year now. We have developed a lot of best practices in that time.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: My last question, if I have time, would be for Ms. Mann. You talked about one suggestion in terms of legislation. I know that we have a private member's bill on human trafficking, which I believe is in the Senate now. Are there any other pieces of legislation...? You talked about one that was really important. Are there additional suggestions you would make about a legislative agenda that would beneficial? Are there additional things?

Ms. Michelle Mann: Well, the big picture.... An area of expertise I work in is aboriginal corrections and the justice system. When you talk about violence against aboriginal women, there is the much bigger picture of community breakdown and violence within the community, which then, of course, is showing itself in corrections. Recognizing that aboriginal women are the victims of violence and recognizing the context, it's also important to note that, in terms of corrections, they are highly overrepresented as offenders in the federal system. They're also highly overrepresented in the commission of violent crime, which of course is not to suggest that aboriginal women are inherently more violent, but that there's a bigger picture there. I don't want to say a culture of violence, but there's a community breakdown as a result of the factors that have been talked about: residential schools, colonialism, and some of the Indian Act provisions.

With respect to corrections, I definitely think that offering adequate programming and trying to deal with the root causes and rehabilitating offenders, who are often going back to their communities—because the reality is that most offenders are coming out—is actually an important part of the agenda of dealing with violence in aboriginal communities.

The Chair: Thank you. That's it.

Now for the NDP. Ms. Mathyssen.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for coming here and sharing your expertise. I'm hoping to ask questions of everyone.

Ms. Mann, you were talking about the fact that aboriginal women are overrepresented in correctional institutions, and I'm hoping we're going to hear from the correctional investigator, because I've gone through his report. You've indicated expertise—

● (1620)

Ms. Michelle Mann: I think I did that report myself, actually.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Well, then, I have the right woman.

You talked about the fact that women offenders can be placed in management protocol if involved in an incident that jeopardizes the safety of others and herself. In reading about this protocol, it seemed quite punitive and not delivering the kind of support or help that was needed. Could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Michelle Mann: The management protocol is comparable, I think, to the secure units for men. It's a sort of status within corrections, and it's used as a punitive measure against women who are considered a threat or are consistently acting out. It's a most extreme form of segregation. There's no access to programming and little access to spiritual services when a woman is put on the management protocol. She has to actually work her way off it. I don't carry statistics in my head, but I actually just finished writing a report on aboriginal women in federal corrections. Not a lot of women have been on it, but I think it was in March 2009 that three out of four women on it were aboriginal, or something like that. Not very many women have been able to work themselves off it.

Three out of four women being aboriginal is a shocking number. Aboriginal women, right now, are one in three of federal female offenders, but, still, the three in four statistic, I think, is an indicator of a system not meeting their needs, at the least, if not perhaps systemic discrimination.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: So this whole notion of tough on crime is leaving women more broken than helping them.

Ms. Michelle Mann: Certainly, incarcerating people for longer periods of time, if in fact the programming is not available to rehabilitate them, is definitely counter-productive.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Okay, thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Saulis, you made mention of the fact that the violence that women face includes choking, beating, and the use of guns. I'm wondering how pervasive the use of guns is. Have you any statistics or idea, or anecdotal information, about that? Is this a more urban or rural kind of reality?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: I wish I had some statistics to be able to support it, other than what I've read from the sources I found. Is it something more urban than rural? Again, I really can't provide any more clarification on that. I apologize.

What your questions bring up, though, and what they provide me with is the opportunity to lead into the lack of knowledge and information Canada has about the lives of urban aboriginal people.

I'll bring you back to last summer, when we were all in the midst of the H1N1 crisis. At this point last year, the Public Health Agency of Canada wanted to identify the priority lists of who would be vaccinated first, and we participated in those conference calls with them. We put it to them that they could not make an informed decision about urban aboriginal people because there is no health information or very little urban health information about the lives of urban aboriginal people. There's some here and there, but there really isn't anything that Canada can really say describes it. The majority of it is conjecture from what is known about first nations living on reserve.

We know a lot about first nations living on reserve, but describing the health and life conditions...there are bits and pieces here and there, but nothing consistent. So your question brings me to that lack of information.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you.

Ms. Compton, we've heard from a lot of witnesses, and I think on Monday the Department of Justice and INAC were in. I wanted to touch on the whole issue of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and the responsibility for it being transferred to INAC and Health Canada.

I tried to understand what it was they could do that community services like yours could not do. Have you any concerns about the work that you and others began around the Aboriginal Healing Foundation being lost or falling through the cracks because it's being administered more bureaucratically?

● (1625)

Ms. Irene Compton: Well, since the Aboriginal Healing Foundation closed, there's no recourse for funding to keep these programs going, so a lot of us are left up in the air with that. We're hoping that something's going to come down the tubes, some kind of strategy or something to keep those programs going. There were a lot of healing programs provided. That's what our people need in dealing with trauma and its fallout.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Can you describe those healing programs?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, so if the description can occur in 20 seconds, go ahead.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: If I have another round, perhaps we can get back to it at that time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have a five-minute round, which, again, is the same as the seven-minute round, in that it contains questions and answers.

For the Liberals we have Ms. Anita Neville.

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

My thanks to all of you for coming here.

Ms. Compton, just for my own clarification, and maybe you said it and I didn't hear, is Minwaashin Lodge in an urban setting?

Ms. Irene Compton: Yes, we're right here in Ottawa.

Hon. Anita Neville: You're right here, okay. Then my questions are to you and to Mr. Saulis particularly.

I am wondering if either or both of you can comment, and perhaps you, Ms. Mann, as well, on the impact of the movement back and forth from first nations communities to the urban setting and what impact that does or does not have on violence against aboriginal women. If it does, who picks up the support?

Ms. Irene Compton: Well, a lot of people coming from the reserve experience culture shock. When they come to a big urban city, they're lost and oftentimes there's no safe place for women. So they come to our centre and then they're welcome. They see other women practising their culture and identity, so they feel safe and they start to open up. Basically, it's culture shock.

Hon. Anita Neville: Does the movement back and forth—I'm from Manitoba and have experienced much—from community to the urban setting contribute to exacerbating violence in any way?

Ms. Irene Compton: They don't have stabilized housing when they come here. There are a lot of issues they have to deal with to get settled in. So yes, they are at a high risk of violence. Oftentimes, if they don't connect with the service, they'll connect with another element, and then they can go down that path. We're hoping they'll check in with us first. The friendship centre is another point of entry.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Saulis, can you comment on it?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: There are several things. First of all, coming from a first nations community, a Métis community, or even an Inuit community to an urban setting, whether it's Ottawa, Vancouver, Montreal, or you name it, for a young woman, a teenage girl, maybe with a couple of children, it is, as Irene said, culture shock. They're not prepared. They don't know where to go.

Luckily, in 120 places at least, there's a friendship centre that they're probably aware of and can go to for some help and guidance. However, a lot of times, maybe they don't know about the friendship centre and they end up on the street, which is what Michelle has been talking about. They get involved with the wrong crowd. They get involved with prostitution, drugs, and the whole sex trade. In the end, they become victims.

It is not because of their own wanting or doing. A lot of times, in the first place, they are probably running away from their home community because of similar kinds of violence. They want to get away from that, and they think the city may be a haven. Sadly, they then realize that the city is not necessarily a haven.

Unfortunately or fortunately, whichever way you want to look at it, we know.... We attended the World Urban Forum in March and we learned that, not only in Canada, urbanization is increasing around the world. More people are moving to the urban setting for a number of reasons. For aboriginal people in Canada it's the same thing. The statistics show this from 2001 to 2006. It has gone from 49% in 2001 to 54% in 2006.

I think the other thing is the jurisdictional issue in Canada, between federal and provincial governments. There really needs to be some kind of coming together, because at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues last week, the Canadian government representative reported that Canada spends $10 billion to support aboriginal programming. We can tell you, and you know as well as I do, where the lion's share of that money goes. It's not to support aboriginal people who live in urban centres.

I'm not going to say that it's a them or us kind of thing, but the issues on reserve and in Métis communities are very serious and very important to the people living there. The attention of federal and provincial governments, whether it's the policies, programs, or commitments....

Sorry, I might be going on too long here. I apologize for going on too long.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you. That's it, Ms. Neville.

Ms. Wong for the Conservatives, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you very much for coming over. I came from the Lower Mainland area of Vancouver, so I probably know the challenges out there.

I have a couple of questions.

I applaud Ms. Irene Compton for rising up from the ashes. She came through the same kinds of challenges, and yet here she is, representing that community and doing some very positive things. I really have to applaud her for the effort. She should be a model for anybody who had to leave the reserve for whatever reason to go into an urban city.

You don't have to take the path of being a prostitute. That's my message. There should be some ways of getting these poor women away from that so-called sex trade and then giving them a safe haven to stand up again with dignity. Going into that trade again and giving them whatever facilities they need doesn't solve the problem, because there will still be exploitation, and there will still be violence against women out there.

There should also be initiatives helping those women get away from such an awful environment. Ms. Mann, I don't know whether your study has ever covered that area.

Ms. Michelle Mann: I'm certainly in agreement that prevention is worth a pound of cure, as they say. There should absolutely be prevention programs. But in this case, as we've talked about today, the causes are so far-reaching that prevention isn't like building a new basketball court or something; it's about remedying centuries of the impacts of dehumanizing aboriginal women, impacts on their roles within their communities, and the impacts on aboriginal communities. I agree that prevention is a wonderful thing, but I don't think it will be totally effective, in the sense that you're going to eradicate street sex trade with prevention.

Mrs. Alice Wong: But what I mean is that you give them training and help them go into other areas of work, instead of saying, “Okay, you stay there and swim or survive.”

It's also scary to think about decriminalization of the sex trade or prostitution, because the next step would be legalization and I don't think we should do that. We could get into a whole debate on that issue. But I don't think that's a way to help those poor women who will keep being exploited wherever they are. I think the best way is probably to help them with all the social services, even when they are in that trade, and help them get away from that. Give them real skills and help them.

I want to talk to the two people here who are helping their own people. Is that an area you might be involved in—because it's urban, right?

● (1635)

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Ms. Irene Compton: We have a project here called STORM, to assist sex trade workers. Basically we accept them wherever they are in their journey. It's non-judgmental, so we provide some basic programming and a place to come for coffee. We've partnered with Centre espoir Sophie here in Ottawa. We give them some healthy safe sex information and then kind of slip in that there's culture programming over here at Minwaashin Lodge. That's how we do it.

We go right to where it's happening and offer help. Eventually women start taking an interest and asking questions. Then we escort them over to Minwaashin Lodge and get them involved. Basically, that's our approach to assisting sex trade workers.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Does it mean they prefer to stay in that trade, or do they actually want to get away from it?

Ms. Irene Compton: I think sometimes they feel they don't have a choice. They have a lot of internalized fear and shame. For a lot of them, of course, the big thing is addiction—drug abuse and substance abuse. They're stuck in that cycle. Their pimps are controlling them. There's a whole lot of violence involved with sex trade workers.

We're not here to judge them but to assist them and give them alternatives. We can be successful in that. We have a small program right now, but it certainly could grow into something more.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Compton.

Thank you, Ms. Wong.

Now we'll go to Madame Demers for the Bloc.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here today.

Ms. Compton, your story is both sad and shocking, but you are a symbol of resilience and hope for all women. Thank you for sharing this story with us. I think you should share it with a wider audience to help people understand aboriginal women are just like all other women in Quebec and Canada.

Ms. Mann, we met a few years ago when a subcommittee was examining prostitution. You took part in these proceedings. I can see things did not change a whole lot in the last few years. You want to decriminalize the prostitute and not prostitution. You want to make sure she is not stigmatized, that she is not necessarily put into jail, and that she does not have to go through the same ordeal of going to prison and then come out and do the same thing again. We have seen that in countries where the prostitute was decriminalized and the clients were criminalized, women in this trade had even more serious problems.

I wonder whether it would be possible for women in risky or even very dangerous situations to go to places like friendship centres or the shelter you are running, Ms. Compton. You were getting money from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, but this money has be transferred to the health department. Did you ask for some funds from this department in order to be able to keep the programs you were providing with the money from the foundation? You said the money is now in the health department. You could perhaps access these funds.

I would also like to know what your feather means.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: The feather is to help me to speak. It was given to me from an elder so that I would have courage and confidence and a voice.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Fine.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: Did you want me to answer that question?

From what I understand, there's no recourse for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding. I'm not aware that it was transferred over to Health Canada. If that's the case, we certainly will be applying for funding from them.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: You should do this.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Compton: Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Saulis, what do you think of this situation? It did not change since 1999. There are still 54% of aboriginal women attacked, raped or killed. Why is there no change? What are we doing wrong?

[*English*]

Mr. Conrad Saulis: It's probably a lack of serious attention to the issues that aboriginal women are finding themselves in, in Canada; not enough support from governments—federal, provincial, and municipal—to provide, to continue to support places like Minwaashin Lodge, which are there to provide that kind of support. Friendship centres are out there to provide cultural programming, and support services as well.

Why hasn't it changed? I guess we're all asking the same question ourselves, and when will things change? We know there are bits and pieces and little chunks of money here and there to support this kind of project or that kind of project, but there's no continuity in funding. Project funding is different from program funding. We need program funding that is A-based, that comes every year through whatever federal or provincial department is going to administer it, so that Irene and others across the country—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: So we are talking about a program that will not be a project lasting a couple of years, but that will last for many more years.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Conrad Saulis: Precisely. Continuity is so important. Program funding is important. They need to know that they will be able to provide the services next year, and the next, and so on.

I know Treasury Board does five-year renewals. That's fine.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathyssen for the New Democrats.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Compton, I'd like to give you an opportunity to tell me what kinds of programs you offered when you had access to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding.

Ms. Irene Compton: We're continuing to offer the same programming; we just had to get more creative about doing it.

We have a sacred child program where we encourage moms to instill confidence and culture in their children. When you raise up the children, and especially the women, when their hearts are not on the ground, the nation does better. So we really work on the women and children.

We have a culture program. We also have an employment readiness program where, once women have gone on their healing journey and they're ready to give back, they can start going to work. However, it does take years for them to get the counselling, the traditional support, and the ceremonies to heal first. They don't come to us job-ready. There's a lot of healing going on before that.

We're leaders in our community on the impacts of violence. We are producing leaders, women leaders who are advocates. A lot of women have picked up the sacred tools—the drum; they're putting things into their medicine bundle. They're building confidence and they're speaking out now. Like myself, they're survivors and they're going on to do great things.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: I wanted to pursue this issue of the continuity in funding, the need for that. We keep hearing over and over, particularly from Status of Women Canada, that little projects are being funded for a year or 18 months and that somehow replaces the more substantive funding. I'm glad to hear your statement on that.

In the last budget, the Government of Canada announced $10 million in response to the Sisters in Spirit and the findings of NWAC in that regard. It seems like a lot of money, but it seems to me that the job that needs to be done is far bigger than what $10 million would cover.

We've got this bundle of money, and we keep hearing from INAC and Health Canada about the bits and pieces that are strewn about. Who should be directing this money? If it were put together, who should be directing this money and how it is used? Should it be first nations organizations themselves, rather than the various bureaucracies that seem to be holding the purse strings?

● (1645)

Mr. Conrad Saulis: We have a best practice model already, and that's the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. There were things...the administration and the allocation of funding through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was incredibly effective. It was aboriginal controlled. It wasn't just first nations; it was first nations, Métis, and Inuit. They decided who would receive the programming and who would receive the funding for the programs.

Sadly, after 10 years of funding, it has dried up. I wish the federal government would make a commitment to continue the program, to continue the commitment, like the commitment that was made on residential schools in the 1800s. There was obviously a very long commitment to fund residential schools, so why can't the federal government make a similar kind of commitment to help the healing of aboriginal people?

Who should control the dollars? Of course, the aboriginal people should control the dollars. There is a best practice model with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The commitment has to be there, though, and a continuation of the funding, year after year.

The Chair: We'll now move to Ms. Brown for the Conservatives.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to change the channel a little bit here, if I may.

Mr. Saulis, you told us that 54% of aboriginal people now live in urban centres. Did I hear that correctly?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: According to the 2006 census, that is the number.

Ms. Lois Brown: Presumably, Ms. Compton, you're working with a lot of those women, who are coming into your centre. Many of them have children, I presume. Are those children attending school? Are they getting into educational programs in our urban centres? Are the women then able to develop skill sets that they can take out into the marketplace?

We listened to a number of presentations over the last couple of weeks. Over and over we heard that education was going to be so important in this process of moving on and helping people to become self-sufficient—that was the word we heard. Self-determination was the other phrase we heard.

Are the women getting those skill sets? Perhaps you could tell us what kind of programming is available for that.

Ms. Irene Compton: We had a lot of support from the Ontario Women's Directorate. That was the first ministry to step forward and give us funding to train women to be administrative assistants. It's a pilot project, and we hope to continue with that.

It's starting to happen slowly. We need to see more women going to college and university so that they can get jobs to support their families. Most of them are single-parent families, and the women are the heads of these families.

Ms. Lois Brown: Do you have any statistics on what kinds of educational programs are of interest? Is there a wide variety? Is there any one area that you're finding they are particularly gifted to go forward in?

Ms. Irene Compton: Of course, here in Ottawa the labour market demand is for administrative personnel because we are the capital and a government-run city. Certainly, we need more women trained in college to be counsellors, to be the helpers, the healers, and to do research within the Native Women's Association to help the government make policy and move things forward.

● (1650)

Ms. Lois Brown: So are you finding women going to university and doing psychology degrees?

Ms. Irene Compton: Not at all. It's more upgrading. A big part of it is upgrading for women. The administrative assistant is a college course. There are entry-level positions into these careers.

Ms. Lois Brown: And yet what we see in the public service is that 43% of the upper levels are now women, so there's room for movement.

I guess my next question is to Mr. Saulis, and I know this will have to be very quick. Obviously, when we're talking about violence against aboriginal women, there's a perpetrator, and I have to assume that the perpetrator is male. Are there programs for men to help move them beyond this kind of activity and become free of violence?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: I don't think there are enough. Whatever is out there, again, is piecemeal and project-oriented.

Ms. Lois Brown: But over the last 15 years, have you been providing those programs for men through your centres?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: Friendship centres have been trying to help men and families.

Ms. Lois Brown: And what has been the response? Have we seen a decrease in the violence?

Mr. Conrad Saulis: Unfortunately, no.

Ms. Lois Brown: Why?

The Chair: One minute.

Mr. Conrad Saulis: There are a number of reasons. The first reason is because the urban population is increasing and continues to increase year after year. There are always new people coming into the urban settings. For me, I guess, it always comes back to the lack of continuity in the organization's ability to provide continual programming.

Ms. Lois Brown: But what you're really saying is that violent men are then bringing their violent practices into the urban centres.

Mr. Conrad Saulis: I wouldn't say that. I would say that aboriginal men who are seeking to be healed are coming to the centres to find some help.

Ms. Lois Brown: But over 15 years you're saying we haven't seen a decrease—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Brown. We've ended the session now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Saulis, Ms. Compton, and Ms. Mann, for giving us your time and for answering very many new questions that were asked of you today. You shed a lot of light on this issue. I want to thank you very much.

We will now suspend, because we have 20 minutes in which to finish a lot of business that must be finished today.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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