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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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● (0810)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I will call the meeting to order.

I don't know if Suzanne Chartrand is here. We have Shannon Cormier, Val James, and Leslie Spillett.

Good morning, everyone. I've called the meeting to order. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee, the status of women committee, is an all-party committee. This means that the members of this committee come from the four political parties in the House. It is a non-partisan committee, as parliamentary committees are meant to be, and we are looking at a study of violence against aboriginal women.

You will meet the various members of the committee. When they begin to ask questions, I will introduce them to you. I am Hedy Fry, the member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre, and I chair this committee.

It was a unanimous decision by the committee to undertake this study, following on some of the statistical data that we saw from Sisters in Spirit after they had gone around the country and gathered evidence. What we are looking for specifically, which I hope you will address, is the root causes of what seems to be an extraordinary amount of violence against aboriginal women, and not just the root causes, but the nature of that violence, the extent of that violence, and the types of violence. We hope you will also help us with what you consider to be some of the solutions, either preventative or rehabilitative or dealing with the issue from various points of view. I'm hoping that you can explore that very well.

What we're going to do is what we normally do in committee. We give each of you five minutes to present. There are only three groups who are presenting, so if you will tell me who is presenting from your group, with three people you will then have seven minutes. I will give you a two-minute signal and then a one-minute signal so you can wrap up what you're going to say.

After you present, there will be a question and answer period. There will be questions from the members of Parliament and you can answer. If we do well, we may be able to have two rounds. Sometimes we can get in three rounds of questions.

I'd like to start off, then, and I don't know how to pronounce this, so you can perhaps help me: Ikwe Widdjiitiwin—

Ms. Sharon Morgan (Executive Director, Ikwe Widdjiitiwin, Women's Crisis Shelter): If I may, Madam Chair, my name is Sharon Morgan, and Ikwe Widdjiitiwin means “women helping one another”.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Sharon.

Sharon, will you begin, please?

Ms. Sharon Morgan: It's difficult being the first one to start, because I'm not quite sure what you want to hear.

Ikwe Widdjiitiwin is an aboriginal women's shelter. Most of our clientele are young aboriginal women with children. Our shelter is for women experiencing domestic violence. When they come into our shelter they generally have nothing but the clothes on their backs, with no money and sometimes no ID.

Some of the problems we're facing with some of the women coming in include addiction and mental health issues, which are becoming more visible over time. It becomes very difficult to work with them. There are many other agencies involved, such as child and family, the courts, the justice system, etc.

What we try to do is work with the women—they're there for a minimum of 30 days—and give them programs on domestic violence; advocate for housing; and give them help with legal issues, such as protection orders, and medical, if they have to go to the hospital, for example. For a minimum of 30 days we work with them. That really isn't a lot of time to turn anybody around, but hopefully we pass the seed to them so that in time they will.

Generally we will get quite a lot of repeat clients. They may come in with different partners, perhaps, but they've fallen into a pattern of living in abusive relationships. This becomes, again, more normal for them than it should be. The abnormal becomes normal. They almost look for a relationship that is abusive.

We get quite a few women flying in from reserves, or driving in, or being transferred to our facility. I find that many of them have pretty horrendous stories about what happens on the reserve, such as being under.... Let's say the chief and council are related to the abuser. Well, then, the woman doesn't get any help at all. If anything, she's told to leave the reserve.

So those are some of the stories. When they come into the city, they are really easy pickings for many of the drug dealers and others. We did have our first case of human trafficking, under the new law that passed. Many of our young women are very vulnerable to things like that.

The domestic violence has many effects on the children. They have a lot of difficulty in terms of working out their anger or withdrawing into themselves. You can see a pattern that may be started if it isn't stopped at that time.

We also offer parenting programs for these young women. We offer nutrition programs, etc. Many of them do not know hygiene. We have to teach them how to wash clothes, how to cook nutritious meals for themselves and their children, and how to budget their money, things like that.

We do have many women calling in who are afraid to leave their abusers for fear of retribution. Family members also may force a woman to stay with her abuser, and because those are her only supports, that may be the only thing she can do. But we do encourage them to come in. As I said, we do get a lot of repeat clients who have left several times before. It generally does take them about seven or eight times before they can actually break away.

We have quite a few success stories, thank God. It makes us realize that our job is very important for the ones who we know have broken away from that cycle of violence and are making their own lives with their children. Success stories like those are what keep us going.

We do get some older women into our shelter. Again, it seems that many of them have some sort of addiction to alcohol or prescription pills, which is another big thing. I want to go on to say that many of the doctors our women see just ply them with drugs. I mean, some of the women come in with five or six different types of drugs—anti-psychotics, Valium, all sorts of drugs. They're just overmedicating our women, and these women are becoming addicted. What happens when the doctor stops giving the drugs to them?

● (0815)

These are some of the problems we're facing at this shelter. There are always more things that we wish to do.

Being an aboriginal women's shelter, we also try to organize cultural programs. We request that elders come in and do one-on-one in sharing circles. They're allowed to smudge in our healing room. We also offer counselling 24/7, so there is always somebody there to talk to them.

As I say, 30 days isn't a very long time to work with women, especially when they have all these other things they have to do, like finding housing, get furniture, and just settling down is a time-consuming effort. The staff and the board are all there for one reason, and that is to help these women break away from the cycle of violence and do the best they can.

Thank you.

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

Now we go to the Ka Ni Kanichihk, Leslie Spillett.

Ms. Leslie Spillett (Executive Director, Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.): Thank you.

It's Ka Ni Kanichihk. It's a Cree word that means “those who lead” or “those who go forward”.

I want to welcome all of our members from out of town to Treaty 1 territory this morning and to our beautiful but cold Winnipeg winter. And of course, to the members of Parliament from Manitoba, welcome home. It's the birthplace of our Métis nation as well, and we really need to recognize that.

Ka Ni Kanichihk is a multi-human-service organization located in one of our neighbourhoods, called Central and West Alexander, which has one of the highest populations demographically of indigenous peoples. I believe we are an expression of our right to self-determination and our own sovereignty in addressing both the root causes plus the manifestation of those root causes in a holistic, culturally appropriate, and extremely creative way. It is primarily women-led, but not exclusively, because we acknowledge that we need everyone in our circle to continue on this journey.

We talked about the fact that the committee wants to hear about the root causes of violence and the predominance of the root causes of violence in terms of indigenous peoples in general, and in particular, indigenous women. I believe firmly, and with every fibre of my being, that those are within the colonial history and relationships that continue to exist in our broader culture. The adage that everyone else knows best about what we need to do to proceed in the right direction has been both dehumanizing in terms of our cultural collective, but also has had a profoundly damaging impact on each individual's agency.

We've learned, by the systems we've been engaged in, to be dependent. My sister talked about being medicated when that's not really working out too well. We find our women are experiencing profound and continuous levels of extreme violence. This is not only partner violence, although that certainly is a part of it. It's also a violence of strangers and it's a violence of systems. We try to do our part in some small way to have a correct analysis and then to proceed forward on that basis.

I am not going to use up all of my time. I'm going to ask one of the women who is involved in one of the programs that's being funded by Status of Women Canada through Ka Ni Kanichihk. Her name is Suzanne Chartrand.

Often one doesn't hear from the voices of those people who have lived these experiences. I think it's really important. Moon Voices is all about giving women back their voices and reverse the trend where everybody has believed that they can and do often speak for our women and our collective.

With that, I'll turn it over to Suzanne.

● (0820)

Ms. Suzanne Chartrand (Representative, Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.): Good morning. It's an honour to be here.

I want to first of all thank you for having us, and most of all thank Moon Voices, Ka Ni Kanichihk, for taking the time to take this training that is very important to us aboriginal women.

One thing it's enabled me to do, for all the years I've been in this field, is to have my voice when I sit among other cultures, because that's lacking. Going to Moon Voices has allowed me, as an aboriginal woman, to feel safe. It has allowed me to feel secure, and, most of all, not afraid any more that my voice matters. For many years I did live that life. I had a voice, but not to capacity, because I always felt alone. Moon Voices has enabled us to meet a lot of strong women and has encouraged us to speak about the different things that are happening to us in our everyday lives.

We must continue to educate our aboriginal women and encourage them to seek out the sisters we have in this community. As I said, I've been in Winnipeg for 20 years. I feel that I have a place to go if I feel as though nobody's listening, and I'm honoured to do that.

We learn not only how to speak but also how to find out about our tradition, our spiritual part, which is lacking in our society. The aboriginal women in this country are still at the bottom of the barrel. We have a long stride and we've been jumping through hoops. I see that title is important. We've managed to see all the different agencies and different things happen in my lifetime.

Time is running out for those of us who are already hitting 50. We must educate our young people. We must tell them about the issues of how we are decolonizing, and we must get our voices to be heard. I believe that as mothers and women we must be able to continue to focus on trying to help our whole family circle. We have fathers and we have brothers and uncles and grandpas who as yet really have no part in the healing system. Healing is an everyday thing. It's meeting with people like you to take that message further up. We are the ones on the front line.

It's very scary and we feel we're alone when we hear that another aboriginal woman has died. It's sad, because it could be our daughter or it could be our granddaughter. With all these things, I feel peace when I can go to the sisters and just smudge and pray that even with those types of things, we have hope. It's always been that way for generations, and those of us who are first nations, Métis, and Inuit have been able to start finding our places. I'm honoured to be able to share with other young women, and to go to university.

For strong aboriginal women before me and today who are still helping me, I can say thank you. I would say that to them because I think different cultures need to look at how time is changing, and we must be able to have our voices heard. It's no longer about the way society is doing it; it's about asking us. We can tell you there are too many people who try to say they can be our God-given saviour. It's not that way when you find the creator in the meaning of who you are as a Métis, first nations, or Inuit woman. Again, I'm thankful that I can go to medicines, and I can pray, and I can go to ceremonies and find out, and I can direct those to other women who are hurting.

There is no need, in 2011, for women to die at the hands of whoever.

I just want to thank you now and say it's very important that we provide services that are educational. As for funding, if you want to see change, it must start with the people who are affected by the issues that are on the table: poverty, education, murder. The list goes on and on, and I'm sure you ladies have heard it.

I'd like to say *ekosi* and thank you very much for listening.

● (0825)

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

Now we go to the Native Women's Transition Centre. There are two people here, Ms. Sutherland and Ms. Marin. Who will be the speaker, or will you share it?

Ms. Margaret Marin (Board Member, Native Women's Transition Centre): I think we're going to share it. Good morning.

The Chair: All right. So you have seven minutes, and I will indicate when it is halftime.

Ms. Margaret Marin: That sounds good.

Good morning. I am a board member with the Native Women's Transition Centre. I welcome you to our community.

For the majority of my life, I guess, I've been around the organizations that are around the table today, because it's a passion and an issue that's been ingrained in me by my grandmother, and it's about being able to speak out on women's issues for future generations as well.

To give you a little bit about the Native Women's Transition Centre, they're one of the agencies that has been around for about 30 years. We really have provided an opportunity for aboriginal women to follow their journey with healing. The recovery from family violence is a lot of the work we're doing.

First and foremost is providing an opportunity for them to have a place to talk about their healing, about where they came from, to understand the relationships, both the personal relationships and the relationships in systems, and the places that they've been through the different organizations and within our own communities.

The centre embraces the aboriginal traditional values in order to heal the generational scars of the colonization and the residential schools. I mean, you know...you've heard it around the table. What we try to do is provide an opportunity for them to speak with elders, to talk about who they are as individuals, because that is lost. When you talk about hitting 50, even I, as an aboriginal Métis woman, am still at that place of understanding who I am and where I came from. It's an opportunity to talk with other families, individuals, women, and children about where they fit. It's really a free choice in understanding the values and personal situations for us, to bringing that forth for us.

We provide programs, but I'm not going to get into a lot of the programs, because I can give this information to you about what we've done. One of the things that I think I'd like to talk about is some of the barriers we're faced with and maybe one of the new things that is coming up with us.

Everybody around here has talked about the issues of funding. Funding is an ongoing concern; it seems to gets smaller and smaller and tighter and tighter. With that, we talk about funding issues around what is out there for women and children. There are more standards and there is legislation that comes in; it's harder to get in when policies are developed that sometimes hinder access to services. I think part of that, as Sharon and others have indicated, is around the risk of violence off reserve and on reserve. We talk about the numbers of women who are on reserve and who then come to the city, where there are no resources.

We could talk about housing at 0.5% occupancy; I could be wrong, but we know it's out there. Also, businesses that continue to change housing places into condos make it a lot more difficult for housing for families and children.

We talk about systemic discrimination. There are still youth who have a hard time getting into educational schools or into work because of not having the advantages of support to be able to go to those places. Whether it's discriminatory, whether it's racist, it's out there.

We talk about poverty. On average, nothing has changed in the sense of how living expenses have increased but funding for living has not. We need to talk about that and how that fits in for families who are struggling biweekly or every day to put food on the table.

We're talking about the generational impact of the residential schools. We can talk about this; it's still out there. I don't know how many times in my field I'm asked when we are going to get over this. But the idea is that this is generational. This is historical. I'm sitting in front of you without my language, with having to push myself through mountains and mountains of trying to get where I am today to talk to a standing committee. This is just a small little drop in an ocean, but it still has to be discussed: there are huge impacts for our children because of colonization.

On the lack of safe and affordable housing, again, we're talking about it. You've heard it in the media. We're talking about increasing rents, larger families.... Even bedbugs are out there. That has a huge impact on safe and affordable housing. What do we consider to be safe and affordable? For some, we have families who are living not even in a bedroom, but in a bachelor suite, with five family members.

● (0830)

In aboriginal families we use our extended families as well, so sometimes you also can see aunties and uncles within a one-bedroom apartment. That's how we survive and that's how we support each other. At the same time, I think it has to be opened up and viewed as a major issue that's lacking.

When we fit that into it, we're talking about what else there is for you to do except to maybe get caught up in the gangs and to get caught up in the false image that they're there to support you. You get sexually exploited as young children, and it becomes part of the sex trade, or a way to be able to put food on the table.

If that doesn't work—

The Chair: One minute. Sorry.

Does Jojo want to take over, or do you just want to continue and finish it up?

Ms. Margaret Marin: I'll let Jojo continue, because part of that fits into it.

I just want to quickly indicate that Native Women's Transition Centre is recognizing that. If you look at the percentage of women in jail, it has a huge impact. If you look at the history of why those women are in jail, you realize that they went there maybe for one particular thing, and that was to help support their families.

Following up with that, we're looking at developing a third facility through Native Women's Transition Centre that will work with both provincial and federal women to come back to their homes and be able to create a healing opportunity. We just wanted to announce that.

I'll let Jojo talk a bit about her story.

The Chair: You have one minute, Jojo.

Ms. Jojo Marie Sutherland (Staff Member, Native Women's Transition Centre): All right. I can't talk really fast—I'm not an auctioneer—so bear with me.

To begin with, my name is Jojo Sutherland. I'm going to give you my own experience. I had to leave my reservation because of family violence.

On the reservation in the seventies, family violence was an everyday thing. You married the guy and you had to stick with the guy.

The band house gets given to you. The band house doesn't belong to the female, it belongs to the male. If you decide to leave, you have to leave the house.

That's what happened to me. I left my house with two suitcases, one with clothes and the other with pictures of my children. By that time, my daughter was 16 years old.

I became involved with drugs and alcohol because I had no place to go. I prostituted my body so that I could support myself. And deep down....

The guys stay in the home with everything in it and continue with a different family. This is what we suffer as aboriginal women. I went to Calgary and experienced drugs, alcohol, prostitution. I got beaten up a lot there, just as I got beaten up at home.

Remember, when you're just a woman you're without a voice, and if your husband is a family member of the chief and council, they do not hear you. You have no voice. You cannot report it. In the words of the ex-chief, who I knew and who was friends with my ex-husband, it was my fault that I got beaten up.

I moved on and I lost everything. I lost everything.

So that is a little bit of my story.

I am sorry I can't talk any faster. It must be one minute now.

● (0835)

The Chair: Thank you, Jojo.

What will happen now is that we will go to questions, and then you will be able to speak again and have a chance to add to your story and to say other things. The time you have to present is just for a short little synopsis, and then we get into an interactive mode as we move around the table.

I want to thank all of you for your presentations.

I will now begin our question and answer session. Each member gets seven minutes. The seven minutes includes the questions and the answers. If we want to get a lot of questions and answers in, it means that one would have to be fairly succinct in what one says. That goes for the questioner as well as the answerer; I'm warning my colleagues here.

We will begin with Ms. Anita Neville, who is a Liberal member of the committee.

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

Let me begin by thanking all of you for coming out today. Thank you for your very personal and professional stories.

I have so many questions, but I'm going to keep them brief at the moment and hope that if we don't get the opportunity, I might have an opportunity to meet with you individually at another time. I live here, so we can pick up on it.

Yesterday we were in Prince Albert and we visited an organization. I asked them about their funding, how they stayed alive. The executive director of the organization must have cited 20 different grants that they got to keep afloat. My response to her was "You must spend an awful lot of time writing proposals."

I have a couple of questions I'll put out and then let you answer them.

We represent the federal government. In your mind, what can the federal government do, in concrete terms, to address some of the issues you're facing? I guess I'm focusing on funding in that respect.

My second question is directed to Leslie. Leslie, we've heard a lot about colonization, the impact of the residential schools, and whatever. A number of initiatives have been taken over the past years, and whether it's enough—well, it's not enough. Do you have any concrete suggestions in terms of addressing the issues of colonization?

My third question is also to you, and it's a question that came up yesterday from the chair. We've talked a lot about domestic violence in the hearings across the country. I expect that is going to dominate the discussions because it is so prevalent. You also referenced violence against women of other kinds. I would welcome an expansion of that.

I'll leave it there. If I have more time, I have more questions.

The Chair: Anita directed her questions specifically to Leslie. We'll start with Leslie, but if anybody wants to jump in, just indicate to me, and I will let you answer some of what Ms. Neville asked.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: With respect to the question around funding, it's a crazy, huge issue. I want to ask another one of my partners to address that.

With respect to the historical and contemporary manifestations of colonization, I want to reference a study that was done by Drs. Chandler and Lalonde, two sociology professors from the University of British Columbia. They were puzzled about the incidence of first nation suicide rates in first nation communities in British Columbia. The puzzling question was that some suicide rates in some first nation communities were 800 times the national average. This is shocking. In some communities suicide was virtually unknown.

They carried out a study to find the factors and elements in determining what caused such a gap in the suicide rates. They found what they termed "cultural continuity". Essentially, the control the communities had over themselves was what made the difference. If they were in decision-making powerful positions, and women-led,—and this is another piece of it that I really need to throw out here—communities that recognized women and actualized the leadership of women were those communities that had those protective factors that made a community safe and functioning.

How do you extrapolate that learning from our contemporary situation in Winnipeg? If you were to look at where your dollars are going, I would suggest they are going primarily into non-indigenous communities to help aboriginal people. That's the kind of scenario that we need to start adjusting a little bit to make sure there is a principle in terms of determining where dollars are going, not to non-aboriginal organizations to help aboriginal women. This is because very often I get calls from those very organizations for me to come and help them because they don't know how to implement their programs because women won't go to those programs. I've actually stopped doing that.

It's not that I don't want to help our women, but that scenario is inherent in how the funding goes. Everybody is able to submit proposals for funding. We really need to redistribute in all kinds of ways.

In terms of the federal government, we need to redistribute the funds to indigenous communities. We know there are very large levels of stereotypes that aboriginal people are all rolling in dollars. We know that's not the case. The dollars that are allocated to indigenous people, very few of them actually get to indigenous communities.

In my mind, the first principle of decolonization would be to look at who's being funded. In my mind, it's kind of easy, but maybe I'm being naive here.

In terms of stranger violence, you know and I know that we can find women prostituting themselves on the streets of Winnipeg. I think it's a part of our culture to not look at ourselves and how the culture works to keep these young people on the streets, but to blame the young people for actually being there. If you keep people in profound levels of economic depression, political marginalization, and social isolation, these are causes that will happen in any community.

● (0840)

Finally, we know that as soon as newcomers come to indigenous territories, they see who the most vulnerable people are. Unfortunately, they exploit our children. We know this is happening. There is a cultural normative or something; I'm not articulating it well. We are.... And it's transferred almost in your pores. You know when you set foot in this country who are the people who are most marginalized, and they've exploited that. We've had children.... We just recently lost to suicide another child who was part of a group of men who used them for sex and drugs. Another one of those young women was found dead at the outskirts of Winnipeg last year. Another one of those young women was found dead in a little community outside of Winnipeg last winter.

We don't have value. We are dehumanized by the culture. That reaps...then that causes the violence against us. If you are so dehumanized as a human being that you are “less than”, then that's.... Then the other piece of it is—

● (0845)

The Chair: Leslie, we've gone to nine minutes.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: Okay. Sorry.

The Chair: We've gone quite over time.

I'm sorry, Anita, but we're at nine minutes now.

Hon. Anita Neville: I understand that. Maybe it will come up with other questions on the funding issues. I'd welcome it if you could give us some suggestions on that as well.

I didn't want to interrupt Leslie.

The Chair: I know. I didn't, so I allowed Leslie to go on a bit longer.

Now we're going to go to Madame Demers, who is from the Bloc Québécois.

Go ahead, Nicole.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I would like to thank you for welcoming us and allowing us to meet with you this morning. This is very important for us. I would especially like to thank you for letting me speak my own language. I'm sure you'll understand that I want to keep it and, therefore, it is important for me to continue speaking it.

I am very moved by everything you've said. What we are currently doing in various regions of Canada is very important.

Suzanne, you said earlier that you are 50 years old and that it is absolutely necessary to pass on to the younger generation the courage to carry on, in order to rise above the effects of colonization. I understand, but I wonder how it can be done, since the damage has been ingrained in the human beings that you are for hundreds of years. Money, the courage that you all have and ideas alone cannot fix everything. So, how should we proceed?

Anita touched on this. I met with some people yesterday and realized that there is a lot of ignorance among non-aboriginals about who you are. The people we met with yesterday told us that 54% of the population in Prince Albert is aboriginal and, therefore, that 20% of the population financially supports everyone else. They did not know that aboriginals who live outside aboriginal communities pay taxes like everyone else.

What do we need to do to get people to understand who you are? How can we build bridges between aboriginals and non-aboriginals, break the taboos and eliminate prejudice and racism? Are you also victims of racism here, in Winnipeg, when you do business with social services and the police? What do we need to do to stop this?

I was moved by a woman named Laurie Odjick, the mother of a young girl who went missing in Gatineau. She touched my heart, and we became friends. Since then, I no longer see things the same way. But who do you need to move so that people understand? How do we do that?

The federal government can indeed give money, but it's not enough. Out of every dollar the government provides, how much really ends up in your pocket? How much? Leslie, could you tell me if it's 25¢, for example? When the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs decides to provide funding, how much money is actually given to programs? Do you know?

● (0850)

[*English*]

The Chair: Who would like to tackle this?

Ms. Cormier.

Ms. Shannon Cormier (Project Facilitator, Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.): I would say Leslie or one of the other women would be better to speak to that. I'm not sure exactly how much money administratively gets to the actual organizations.

Ms. Margaret Marin: I'll say a little bit about the funding, and maybe you can follow up with Leslie a little bit about it.

Right now, say you were to give us $50,000. When you talk about $50,000 and how that spreads, everyone around this table knows that we spread that $50,000 over a population that is maybe 40 or 50.... So when we talk about dollars and cents, you're talking—and I'm just being as generous as I can—maybe even 25 cents to 50 cents per dollar. You have to think that we're getting more complicated with our organization. We've lost that ability to really look at the community as a strength in the sense of accessing the funding. What ends up happening is that applying for it becomes more extreme and intense. Everybody around this table is applying for the same funding, which could be a very small pot. Not only that, but the requirements change, and then you have to become more creative rather than looking at something that's been solid and that has been working to continue to provide funding because you know it's working.

The other whole thing about funding has to do with what government sees as a success story. What is that? Is it the percentage of people who are actually moving forward? Is it that one woman who has made a change and is no longer in domestic...or is no longer living in poverty? What is that success? Or is it the numbers that say out of the 100 families you're working with, 100 of them are going to walk out the door and be okay?

We have to realize that aboriginal communities look at oral teachings, which are not part of funding requirements. Or when you bring elders or people from the community in and we talk about complex issues of mental health, addictions, violence, the sex trade, what dollar value can you put on those pieces of it? So even though the money is coming in, we also look outside of that. But we find the challenge at times is whether we have the right person coming in, because it is challenging to hire someone who fits the profile, and to find the person we need to work with those families. Funding really has an impact when we're talking about training, and sometimes that's not even an issue. Sometimes we can only get capital when we need operational funding. Sitting down and really strategizing around what is working and why it is working and using that as the strength rather than trying to change policy because something has changed with regard to the direction of the government is something we have to look at.

The Chair: Ms. Chartrand, you can give us a short answer, please?

Ms. Suzanne Chartrand: I'll give you a short answer.

When you asked about some of the solutions, I'm going to tell you to put the funding into education. For those of us who do get educated.... I came here 20 years ago with 16 garbage bags and two children, and because of strong warrior women who helped me through my journey, I'm here to be able to take another sister along with me, chain-linking. When funding is asked for, make sure it's put into education. If you want us to be sustainable and healthy and taxpayers, we must be able to get that education.

Being invited to other places is another open door so that we can continue to say the same thing over and over till the message is delivered by women like you sisters, who can help us. For those of us who are not yet at that level, like I said, with Ka Ni Kanichihk, Moon Voices, we need to bring more women there so that when we are able to sit down and never relax but be in the back, we could encourage others to carry on.

I want my grandchildren to have a healthy lifestyle. My daughter is a third generation and I'm a second generation of residential impact. It affects me, yes it does. Most of all, it's difficult because it is Caucasian people who bring those stereotypes. With my dad being French and my mom being aboriginal, first nations, Métis, it has affected me.

I look more like an aboriginal person, but then my father is a Frenchman from Quebec, Saint-Théophile. Yet I know if he were alive today he would be here to support.

I think we need to be able to understand that for aboriginal people—our children who are going to school, our grandchildren, my grandchildren—the schools will give us back our language and teach. We should not be segregated to one school system. If they allow the French to *parler français*, we should allow the other cultures in this country. I know we have a lot of different cultures, but for those that are first nations and Métis, I would say look at the funding part.

When Ka Ni Kanichihk is doing Moon Voices and you remember us women, remember that behind that we have to have that funding to become successful, and that there are many of us who don't even have a voice, many women and children.

If the message could be taken back that we look at the Native Women's Transition Centre, where my journey began, and Ikwe, where another part of my life is, those places for women are important, and there are not enough of them.

They built a brand-new humane society for animals, for crying out loud, and yet we are second-class citizens, even to that, because there is not enough. What happens is children come into care, things happen, and then the mothers end up on the streets. We're tired of the people being murdered and killed.

Thank you.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chartrand.

We're really going over time here. We're not going to be able to do a second round. Because everyone's gone over on this round, I'll let this round go over. But if we have a second round, I'm going to have to be really sharp on timing with you; otherwise, we won't be able to get to the second round.

Now I'll go to Ms. Glover, who is a Conservative.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): I'm new to the committee. I want to thank the committee members for being here. I'm sorry, I thought Ms. Mathyssen was going before I was, but I'm glad to speak to the witnesses today.

I want to say *meegwetch*, first of all. I know many of you from a couple of different hats that I wear. It's a proud moment for me to see you here with the courage that you have, speaking about how we can change this horrible system our women have lived through. I have to acknowledge some of the things you've said, because you're absolutely right, money isn't going to be the only thing that solves this. It's collaboration and it's cooperation between different people and different agencies, including the government. The government is here today to find out what is working and what's not working.

Leslie, when you said there were non-aboriginal-led organizations asking for your input, that is not right. Those reports you submit, once the funding is done and your projects are done, are so important. That piece of information ultimately should lead decisions to go another way. Right?

I would ask—and I don't want to put you on the spot here today, Leslie, but I would love to know, perhaps through a written submission to the committee—how that happened, the story of that, and which organization that was. Because when we get applications for funding—and the Government of Canada gives more money to this issue than it has ever before in the history of Canada—that is the reality. When you ask for money, and if there are 20 organizations that ask for a pot of money that might be able to support only 18, those pieces of information you've just provided are really important. So I encourage you to work with us so that we know exactly what worked and what didn't work. That's what I'd like to focus on.

I heard many of you say that aboriginal women's rights have not been observed on reserve or off reserve. I understand that the funding is important. When the Native Women's Transition Centre asks us for $72,650 they get the $72,650, and we expect that it all goes to the project that it was supposed to sustain. But what do we do outside of money? Because that is an important piece. You've all said something about rights. At this point, we have bills before the House. That is a big part of what the Government of Canada does and what all the MPs sitting here do. We put bills before the House to help manage and to help protect the people in Canada. One of those bills is the matrimonial real property bill. As Elder Sutherland—and I want to acknowledge the elder here today—and of course Suzanne Chartrand said, they didn't have any rights when they came off reserve. They didn't have any rights to keep the marital home. Yet all other Canadian women across this country, as Sharon Morgan said, have the ability to phone the police and get a protection order or a prevention order and have safety for them and their children while the violence and the situation dissipate and everybody calms down. Yet aboriginal women on reserve don't have that.

There's a bill before the House called the matrimonial real property bill. I'd like to hear from you, Elder Sutherland. How you think that bill might help or hinder? If we have time, I'd like to hear from Suzanne as well, seeing as you've both suffered from having no rights on reserve.

● (0900)

Ms. Jojo Marie Sutherland: What is going to help in the reserve—because I go and visit in the reserve, and I have learned a lot in the western society, and I bring back the good part into my home and to my daughters—is for the women, as I always say, to use their voices. I have to use my voice. I have to fight for who I am. I have to protect this body. I have to live. I have a lot of talks with women in my reservation back in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. You guys must have gone by it. That's where I come from. It has a population of maybe 8,000.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I come from Saskatchewan. My family used to play Duck Lake rummy.

Ms. Jojo Marie Sutherland: Yes.

If we could have the voice.... I'm fighting for my reservation women to have that voice. Get into the chief and the council. Vote for each other to have that voice. I fight for rights for the women in my reservation because I have granddaughters, and I would want my granddaughters to leave their home and their husbands to live comfortably with what they have earned in that home.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: If I'm hearing you right, you think that kind of bill to give women rights on reserve is a good step forward.

Ms. Jojo Marie Sutherland: Yes, it is. It is.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Suzanne, can I ask you the same question? Is there a bill like that we ought to be undertaking to help them, or is there some other idea you have that we might seize so that we can get aboriginal women their rights?

Ms. Suzanne Chartrand: Coming here 20 years ago, the number one thing that I look at is that there was a place to come and transition into. The Native Women's Transition Centre has always opened the door. What I think needs to happen is we need to emphasize that we support these places, that we see there's a place for women to come when they're trying to get away from domestic violence.

Sometimes we leave everything and we take what we can. What we need to do, though, is encourage these young women. We need to build up warrior women who will come to speak and bring these changes. When that happens, poverty affects us. Either you're going to go down.... What I chose is not to fall through the cracks of society or to bow down to ignorance.

Like I said, if we can find that, when we hear there are no transition homes and places for women from those communities to live, we have the right, if we don't want to live on a reserve—because I didn't, I lived in a community—to go anywhere in this country we would like to go and reside, and to teach our women to be a voice against domestic violence.

When these bills are being talked about, we will know the right time to be there, and when it's election time we will teach our women to vote, and allow politicians to be accountable for why we voted for them. That's where the change will happen.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good. I know that Shannon—

The Chair: Ms. Glover, Ms. Marin would like to answer your question. Through the chair, Ms. Marin would like to answer your question.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Could I just finish, being that it's my question period?

The Chair: No. One witness would like to answer your question, so I will allow her to do so and then you can ask a second question.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I will allow her when my nine minutes are up.

I just want to finish with this organization, because reclaiming the power is important. The Government of Canada provided some funding for your project called “Reclaiming the power”, which gives women their power. I want you to talk about what that did for women and what it does for women so that I know whether you would like to see this continue.

Ms. Shannon Cormier: Absolutely.

The Chair: Ms. Marin, would you please speak?

Ms. Margaret Marin: It's just a follow-up with Jojo. She had asked me to also indicate around the Indian Act and what effect that bill is going to have, because it does fit with all the questions you're asking about empowerment.

That legislation, when you talk around discrimination, is the legacy. So when we look at that, when you're looking at those bills, and hearing the voices of the elders and the stories, it's really important that the voices be heard around how that impacts the act as well as the changes to bills, because it does impact all the way down.

● (0905)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

The Chair: Everyone seemed to get nine minutes, so I will give you one more minute if you wish to engage.

Ms. Shannon Cormier: Just to add to what everybody's saying, another option is to also honour the commitments that have been made. At the national aboriginal women's summit, I think it was in Kelowna, the Kelowna accord, the government agreed to do four aboriginal women's summits. There have only been two. One was supposed to be held here in Winnipeg at the end of last summer. That has not happened. So yes, money is important, but so is having an opportunity for aboriginal women to have their voice heard so that these issues can be talked about in more than the few minutes that we do have available, and which we're very grateful for. These aboriginal women's summits are also extremely important.

Part of the aboriginal women reclaiming our power program, with Ka Ni Kanichihk, is to offer women a sacred place, an opportunity to find their voice. How we do that is through cultural programming. It's through education. It's through connections.

Culturally relevant programming is not what we do. We don't "aboriginalize" our programs. It's who we are. That is the biggest reason why we don't have to go ask other organizations to help us find people to come. That's really important, and that makes a very big difference.

The Chair: Now we will go to Ms. Mathyssen, from the New Democratic Party.

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

Thank you for this generous welcome to Treaty 1 territory. It's a privilege to be here. I thank you for your courage and your willingness to speak to us.

I have three basic questions. I have no illusions that I'm going to get to all of them.

The first question has to do with funding. I was looking at the projects that have been funded by Status of Women Canada in Winnipeg. There are 13. Of those 13, six have been completed. What concerns me is that many of the projects seem to be very, very short-term. When you're dealing with the kinds of realities that first nation women face, 16 months or 18 months is not going to begin to touch the problem, much less a solution. My concern is the ad hoc nature of that funding, the fact that it is so brief.

We heard in Prince Albert that very often there is a situation, a reality, where community groups have to manage to provide programming that fits funding rather than reality, and that's a problem. A lot of energy is involved in securing that.

Finally, there is some fear on the part of groups that if they say the wrong thing, if they upset the powers that be, that funding will be cut off. I assure you that is a situation we find most egregious.

My second question has to do with this discussion about young women arriving from the reserve. They're vulnerable. We heard in Prince Albert and we've heard elsewhere that there's a judgment placed on these women by authorities, social services, the police, that they're bad, and no understanding of how they got to that place. I'm wondering if the group could describe what happens to a young woman. How does she arrive in such a terrible situation?

The third thing.... Suzanne, you alluded to the apprehension of children. We've heard that is profoundly destructive to the community, to women. I was hoping that you could touch on that.

I know that's a huge amount of information I'm asking for, but if you could, please, I'd appreciate it so much.

The Chair: Suzanne, would you like to start?

Ms. Suzanne Chartrand: I read the report where it stated that residential school kids in care outnumbered the children who resided in residential schools, and shouldn't Canada be ashamed of that? We need to be able to understand. Again, I will stress it, because it's the only thing that made me get to where I am. We must encourage that. When we look at programming, I think in total, if you look at the aboriginal directory, there are over a hundred organizations fighting for dollars. If you want to make a difference, make sure that you know where your funding is going.

In the past, I've seen that when something goes good for aboriginal people, and we start to let our crutches go, and we start to heal, those programs get cut. At that level, for us women, we need to make sure the message goes out that you take a look at each and every one, what is happening, how we all link together as sisters fighting for the same cause but may do things just a little bit differently because we women are at different levels.

For me, I'm living in a time when decolonization, if you were to put it into the computer.... When I put it in maybe seven years ago, the computer didn't know what that meant. A professor who was an English woman asked, "What is decolonization?", and I was able to reply. It means to turn the things that have been done wrong and turn them back, so we can make sure this will never happen again to the generations of our children.

My vision and goal is that children belong at home with their families. We need to take a look at that, too. When you look at mothers and children, when it comes down to being able to care for them, that doesn't happen. The people who are missing at the table are social services and income. I've never sat at the table with them. The government, the day they put social welfare into the system—I was told by an elder—was the day they crippled our people.

We do want to work. We do. For a Métis woman, I do pay taxes. I am contributing to society. We don't need only small programs. We need to get our degrees. We need to be able to go to school full-time. In the past, I saw these training programs, but they lasted only so many weeks. We need longer education.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Leslie.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: Just indirectly specific to the whole funding regime, one thing that's good about the Status of Women Canada funding is that it's multi-year funding, so you can do a project within a particular timeframe. Lots of federal funding does not permit for multi-year funding. So I would recommend that this would be a policy change in some of your other systems.

For example, for the Canadian Heritage funding you have to come up with a project every year. While you get your project done within the deadlines, very often the funding decisions don't come out until six or seven months after the clock starts ticking. You're always kind of stuck in this no person's land or on hold, and then it's a hurry up kind of thing, and then you report. It's a little bit challenging to manage a project like that.

Very often we're told now that food, which is so critical for people who are coming from places of real hunger and real challenge in terms of their food security, can no longer be considered part of the supplies that we're using.

The other thing is administration. None of the project-based funding will permit paying for the executive director, for the management structure. The challenge is that you need a management structure to effectively administer an organization, and the project-based funds don't permit that.

Reporting is a challenge. We have multiple reports, monthly reports, and we're doing it.

One other thing I'd like to add is that we recognize that in Manitoba there is a French school division. French families can go to school in the French language. I'm kind of like Suzanne, in that my children are part Métis, part first nations, and part Irish. My children are educated in French through the immersion system. There is no aboriginal school division here in Manitoba or off reserve in Winnipeg. The highest number of aboriginal people living in Manitoba is up in Winnipeg. There's a French school division but no aboriginal school division. It's a legislated thing within the Manitoba act of whatever year it came to be. On top of that, in the current school system, only about one-quarter of our children are graduating.

So we think there are some issues there. Again, it could be that we need to look at a different model of delivering education. We believe that once children have a strong identity and cultural identity, they'll be okay in whatever system they engage in as adults. My recommendation has been, in Manitoba, to move courageously, and similarly in the francophone community, in upholding our rights.

The other thing I'd like to add—

● (0915)

The Chair: Add it in 20 seconds, please.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: Okay.

We have a framework now that's been passed by all nation-states in the world, and that's the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. That's our standard. That's where we go. That's where we move. That's where we get out of this situation that we're currently in.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have 15 minutes left. We have another panel waiting to begin on time at 9:30, so it would be really difficult if we ate into their time. I'm going to ask you...or I'm going to try. There are four questioners. If I give three minutes to each group, that time will have to include the answers. Otherwise, I will just have to cut you off or else we don't go to a next round.

So I will go first, just very quickly, to Ms. Neville for three minutes, please. Answers will be cut off, because we cannot encroach on others' time.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to direct my question to one person, and that's Ms. Morgan.

You've been quiet, and you haven't had an opportunity in the responses. You went through a very important list of your concerns and issues. You spoke about the fact that you had many come back into your shelters who were repeat “visitors”, for lack of a better word. Give us your best advice on how we can help you, and help them, in terms of the recommendations we make from this committee.

Ms. Sharon Morgan: Well, I guess there are different ways to work with these young women. One is that we would like to perhaps make the residential stay a little bit longer and do more work with them one on one.

Secondly—

Hon. Anita Neville: Who imposes the 30 days?

Ms. Sharon Morgan: We get our funding from the family violence prevention program, which is also funded by the Manitoba government. We don't get any federal funding at all.

Part of the problem, of course, is that when the women leave the shelter, sometimes they have absolutely no place to go but back to their abuser, back to their community. What we'd like to see is perhaps more work being done with them, just for the continuity and longevity of working with these young women.

Secondly, you'd asked a question earlier that I wanted to answer. It was about the non-aboriginal women coming to shelters. We do get a lot of immigrant women coming in—from Ethiopia and other places in Africa, from the Philippines, and so on. That takes up, say, 10% of our clientele.

To get back to how we can work with these young women, we do programs on domestic violence—how to see the pattern, how to break the pattern—but there are all the other things that come into play and that have been talked about around this table, including education, housing, and more mental health workers. Oh, my God, it's so hard to find somebody to help these young women who need that help right away. And most of them, if they do see a psychiatrist, are medicated.

So what we'd like to see is more work with these women for longer periods of time, and just generally more work with the family as well. If this woman is in a dysfunctional family, then there's work to be done in the family as well.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Very good.

Now I'll go to Ms. Glover for three minutes.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We have three minutes, so I'm going to try to be brief.

There are other funding pots. Leslie did mention Heritage Canada. Of course, there are the ones that Ms. Mathyssen mentioned under Status of Women Canada. There's Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth. There's the Department of Indian Affairs and Health Canada. Funding comes from a number of places.

There are a number of other programs going on here in the city of Winnipeg, programs that I'm quite proud of, that do fall under different pots of money. One of those programs is from the Native Women's Transition Centre. It has to do with community-based succession planning for aboriginal youth.

I'm hearing all of you talk about education, and I'm wondering if you mean these types of programs. Is that the education you're talking about? Are you talking about K to 12? Specifically, when you talk about education, are you talking about educating our aboriginal women in protecting themselves and moving forward to raise their families, etc., or are you talking about the basic K to 12?

Perhaps I'll ask Ms. Marin, and then maybe Leslie will want to answer that.

● (0920)

Ms. Margaret Marin: First of all, when we're talking about education, I think we're talking from the time of birth right to the time of death.

Right now, the age I'm at, I don't know how much more you could teach me. You could probably teach me a little bit more, but I think right now the grain is the education and identity and self-respect of our children. We've always made that a central, important part of our lives. When we develop programs, the programs are set for families. They're set for the mother and the children at the time they come in, from birth to the time when we see the children who are struggling to stay in school, ages 12 up to grade 12.

When we try to look at the programs, especially for the success of native transition, it's always been that we've asked the community what their needs are. We ask them, and they bring forward to us what they feel their needs are. It's been working, and it's been working for a long period of time.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you. I have only a few minutes, and I just want to make sure that Leslie has a chance.

The Chair: Actually, you don't have a couple of minutes. You have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Oh, 30 seconds.

Sorry about that.

The Chair: Go ahead, Leslie.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: Similar to what Margaret said, it's all of it. In the education system, we know that for grades kindergarten to 12 it's critically important that our children start experiencing success, at least at the same rate as other Canadians, and go on to post-secondary. That will be part of what supports them and us to have our good life, our *bimaadiziwin*.

But the other piece of education—

The Chair: I'm sorry. Thank you, Leslie. Maybe you can fill it in some other time with another question.

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Suzanne, to have access to education—something that is very important—a woman must have access to childcare services and affordable social housing. Are quality childcare services and affordable social housing accessible here in Winnipeg?

[*English*]

Ms. Suzanne Chartrand: From the beginning, no, they have not been. We can see that, given the poverty going way back 20 years to when 60% of aboriginal women were living in it. I don't know today if that has changed. It hasn't, I guess, since the last time.

No, it's not available. That's why our women are on the streets. That's why they're prostituting themselves, because there are not enough funds there. Social services and the federal and provincial governments must bring those people to the table. You cannot find suitable housing, and we must look at the slum-lords and slum issues, because for a single woman to get 200 and something dollars for rent is not realistic. I think we need to be able to allow you to remember that so you can bring that forth too. It's a long, long road, so we have to continue to encourage.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. James.

Ms. Val James (Representative, Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.): With regard to child care and whether it's accessible, it isn't. Actually the waiting lists are extremely long. When you have a spot in day care, you hold onto your spot for dear life, because as soon as you let it go, there are another 200 people behind you wanting that spot. That's for infants all the way up to school age. If you're trying to work because social assistance workers are saying your kid is over the age of six and you need to work, but you don't have anyone to provide before-school care, lunch-time care, or after-school care, then how are you supposed to work to support yourself and your children? It's impossible.

● (0925)

The Chair: Ms. Morgan, did you have your hand up?

Ms. Sharon Morgan: I did want to add to the child care issue. There are even schools that don't allow kids to have lunch at the school. That to me is just ridiculous. It really does stop a lot of women from going out and seeking jobs because of the child care problem and also because of where it is. These women have to take public transportation, and sometimes to get to their child care or their day care centre could take a very long time and two or three buses. So no, child care does not work well here.

The Chair: Thank you. That was bang on.

Now we go to Ms. Mathyssen, please.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to come back to Elder Sutherland and Ms. Marin, because during your presentation you talked about a facility or the kind of facility that was needed that would help young women to manage. You didn't really have a chance to describe it, and I wonder if you could do that now.

Ms. Jojo Marie Sutherland: When an aboriginal girl comes into the Native Women's Transition Centre, we have a lot of programs. We also have our culture. I'm the elder for the Native Women's Transition Centre. I teach them who they are, to find themselves as an aboriginal person, and to be proud of who they are.

I also teach the little kids to respect themselves, to respect their mothers. We had lost that when the residential schools came about because of the impact of the residential schools. We had lost that.

You have to re-teach to love. You have to re-teach to respect. You have to bring back the seven sacred teachings, as they do come in.

Also, I was sitting here listening about child care. When the women come to the Native Women's Transition Centre, they come there to heal themselves, the educational part of themselves, who they are. We give them back who they are. Also, there is no child care during their education. A lot of them give up. They want to go back to do their grade 5. They want to go back to do their grade 3, grade 10, but there's no child care. They apply for work and they apply for school. They are accepted, but they cannot go because there is no child care. We need more money in child care for aboriginal women.

We need more help in funding the cultural part to find who we are as aboriginal people. Once we find ourselves, once we take back what was taken from us, our language, our culture—that was taken, robbed from us—you will see aboriginal women walking with their heads up.

My children do walk with their heads up as aboriginal people, as I do myself. I walk with my head up. I will never let anyone walk in front of me or push me to the side, as was done to me in the convent. I was told, “Shut up, you're just an aboriginal person.” But I was a person, and I claimed that person, who I am, and that is what I brought to the Native Women's Transition Centre, my cultural part.

Listening and crying with them, laughing with them, and playing with them is an important key for that healing.

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

That's it, I'm sorry. It's now 9:30 and we have another group waiting.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming. I know it seems rushed. We have had so many people wanting to present to this committee that we've had to really tighten the timelines, so we could have as many panels as we'd like.

Thank you for coming.

If we could, we'll have a two-minute suspension, so that we could get everyone to change places and bring in the others.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

● (0930)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. It's an all-party committee, which means that all four political parties are represented. It is not a partisan committee. We are here to gather information. We are here to listen and we're here to see what Parliament has to say and recommend about the issue. We're looking at violence against aboriginal women, the high levels of violence. We're looking at the root causes of that violence and wanting to know what the extent of the violence is, the types of violence, and the nature of the violence.

We're hoping we could have some solutions. When we as a committee agreed to do this we believed that there has been a lot of money and funding and all sorts of programs put forward in the past, and it has had very little effect. So we would like to see an effective solution to these problems.

Each of you will have five minutes to present, and then we have a question and answer period. If we are going to finish so that we can go to the next panel I'm going to have to be really strict with your answers and with my colleagues on their questions.

So now we'd like to begin with Commissioner Bill Robinson of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Commissioner Robinson, five minutes, please.

● (0935)

A/Commr Bill Robinson (Commanding Officer, "D" Division, Winnipeg, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you.

Good morning. I'd like to thank the committee for allowing the RCMP to appear here this morning. It means a great deal to us.

“D” Division RCMP provides policing services to most of Manitoba's rural and remote communities: more than 446,000 people, including 59 first nations and 48 Métis communities.

The RCMP has long been working closely with our aboriginal communities to strengthen mutual communication. “D” Division's aboriginal advisory committee includes elders and aboriginal peoples from different backgrounds and perspectives. We also have well-established public safety protocols with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the MKO, which represents our northern chiefs, and the southern chiefs.

“D” Division's aboriginal policing service facilitates communications processes on high-profile matters of concern to the aboriginal leadership and community. Just last year, in August of 2009, “D” Division RCMP and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs signed a memorandum of understanding that saw a regular member of the RCMP, Ms. Monique Cooper, who is behind me here today, join the AMC at their work.

Responding to the feedback from the commanding officer's aboriginal advisory committee, we established a new position of gang awareness coordinator in April of 2010 to implement the gang prevention, education, and initiative strategy.

We are also actively involved in human trafficking prevention and awareness. “D” Division participates in the provincial human trafficking and response team committee with representatives from the Winnipeg Police Service, the Manitoba Department of Justice, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Salvation Army, the Canadian Council for Refugees, Manitoba Status of Women, Manitoba Justice Victim Services, Ma Mawi, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and others.

“D” Division RCMP continues its efforts to raise awareness among its members about the emerging human trafficking concern and the issue of murdered and missing women in Manitoba. “D” Division's contract and aboriginal policing services, in partnership with the RCMP northwest immigration and passport section and the national human trafficking coordination centre in Ottawa, provide training and awareness tools to our members. Training has been delivered to the Manitoba north, east, and west districts intelligence officers and groups and to our “D” division traffic services, which patrol our highways every day.

In addition to the awareness training workshops, “D” Division training has also incorporated human trafficking awareness and the video *I'm not for sale* to candidates on a number of courses, including our new member orientation course investigators, drug, basic intelligence, child abuse, investigative interviewing, and traffic services interdiction teams.

I would like to provide you with a brief overview of “D” Division RCMP efforts in addressing and responding to the issue of violence against aboriginal women, including the high-risk missing persons project, Project Disappear, and the Manitoba integrated task force for missing and murdered women.

In 2003 the RCMP and its partners at municipal police services in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta responded to concerns about unsolved homicides and missing persons by establishing the high-risk missing persons project. In Manitoba, “D” Division, the Winnipeg Police Service, and the RCMP participated in this multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional regional effort to identify, collect, collate and evaluate, and analyze all high-risk missing persons and unsolved homicide cases.

“High-risk” in this context is defined as people whose lifestyle, behaviours, or circumstances place them at risk of falling victim to violent crime. The high-risk missing persons project produced a significant number of findings that were well documented and require further investigation and analysis.

Project Disappear was created in 2007 under the purview of the Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police, representing Manitoba's nine police departments, four of which have missing persons files. Managed by the “D” Division historical case unit, the project and website include persons who have been missing for six months or longer.

More than 170 missing persons and unidentified human remains investigations in Manitoba are detailed on this website. The oldest missing person file is from 1939. Project Disappear's ongoing work includes the review of data and provincial standardization of policies, procedures, tools, and approaches.

The Manitoba integrated task force for missing and murdered women was formed in August of 2009. The task force consists of five RCMP members, two of which are RCMP division criminal analysts, and four Winnipeg Police Service members. The mandate is to review all unsolved homicide investigations involving female victims; to review missing person investigations involving women where foul play is suspected; to analyze investigational information to determine what, if any, linkages exist between occurrences; and to determine the appropriate avenues for investigative follow-up.

● (0940)

Located at “D” Division headquarters in Winnipeg, the integrated unit began its work in October 2009 and is currently at the analytical stage of its mandate. This includes collecting and collating information and conducting investigational reviews and forensic reviews for all mandated cases. In addition to actively reviewing all reported cases of missing women, the integrated task force is developing best practices relating to information sharing, file management, file coordination, and disclosure that can be shared with other investigative units or implemented in similar initiatives across the country.

We are committed to providing answers, comfort, and closure to families and loved ones of the victims while respecting and ensuring integrity of the ongoing investigation. Let me assure you that the RCMP investigates and takes seriously all cases of missing and murdered individuals, regardless of sex, ethnicity, background, or lifestyle.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Now we'll go to Lisa Michell of the Women's Memorial March of Manitoba.

Ms. Lisa Michell (Chair and Organizer, Women's Memorial March of Manitoba): Good morning. I'd like to say *meegwetch* for asking me to come and present today. I'm the voluntary chair for the Women's Memorial March.

Just so you have a little bit of information about the work we do, this is our fourth year. I myself am a grassroots person. I've been in the grassroots community for the past 20 years, and I've been working diligently at eliminating violence against women, and not just aboriginal women but all women.

For our march, the list of missing and murdered women goes back as far as 1968. The oldest woman we have had was 86 years old. To date we have 216, but as I said earlier, that includes all women, not just aboriginal women.

In my presentation I just want to talk a little bit about the root of violence against women. The way I see it, it's poverty. Poverty comes in many forms. Even when they have access to an income assistance program, there isn't sufficient funding for them. They're set up in lower-income housing in high-risk areas. They're not set up in safer places. So that's a big issue. They're not given sufficient funding.

Some mothers, when they go out and work for minimum wage, could actually get more money from staying at home and being on income assistance, because then things are taken care of. So that's a real gap.

Another thing is that because of a lack of money and because of poverty, many moms do want to support their families and their children, and they end up out on the streets. Being a sex-trade worker is not something you do by choice. Many people beg to differ, but I say they're not there by choice. When they were young, they didn't say, “Oh, someday I want to work on the street”. That's not what happened. They are there because of financial stuff. Yes, some of them are there because of addiction, because that's all part of it. It becomes part of it. People will say, “Oh, well, here's something.” It's a vicious cycle, so it goes on and on.

As for some of the gaps in the justice system, racism is one of the contributing factors with regard to justice in our communities. Because my ear is close to the ground, many people come to me, and they say, “This is what happened to me”, and it is racism. It's not everybody, of course, but it's still there.

It's the same thing with discrimination. We're discriminated against because we're women and because we're aboriginal women.

Here in Winnipeg, we have a task force, but we have noticed a gap. The task at hand is to paint the fence, but how is it going to be painted? Is it just going to be painted in certain spots? My goal is that the fence would be painted in a good way.

There are flaws in there. One of the big issues is communication. Jurisdiction and things like saying, “Oh, well, they're on this side of the road, so we can't deal with it” really need to be dealt with.

We had a case here. In St. Vital there was a man who robbed a 7-Eleven. He left the city of Winnipeg, and Winnipeg Police Service went in to apprehend him in a small community south of Winnipeg. So if they can go out of town to apprehend a criminal in action, why can they not cross that street or cross that road to go find a woman who has either been murdered or is missing? That would be one of my questions.

There are gaps in appropriate victims services. Many of our community members do not know how to access them. They don't know what those are. Yes, the Winnipeg Police Service does have a victims services branch, but they don't know how to access it.

In terms of healing in our families and communities, it starts with me, and it starts with me and my family. I work that way: my family, my community, and now the nation. So that's how healing really happens.

In terms of education, reserve to urban, there need to be supports for people when they move here.

● (0945)

The other thing is that we have programs here in Winnipeg, but they don't fit everybody. For example, if I was being assaulted by somebody and I wanted to go to a shelter, I wouldn't go because my children are over the age of 18, and I'm not going to leave my children at home at risk. So there's a gap right there.

The Chair: We will now hear from Carolyn Loeppky, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child and Family Services, Government of Manitoba.

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky (Assistant Deputy Minister, Child and Familly Services, Government of Manitoba): Thank you very much, and thank you for inviting me to speak here today.

I come here today with an interest in Manitoba's children and a career that I've had working in the public sector for nearly 40 years. The areas I have some responsibility for now, and overseeing within the provincial government, are child care, child welfare, family violence prevention, and family conciliation services, which are geared toward families experiencing separation, divorce, and custodial issues with respect to those.

I'd like to talk a little bit about each one of those areas and identify some of the current trends that we're seeing and also some of our challenges, and perhaps offer some information that may be of help in the future deliberations of the panel.

With respect to child care, in Manitoba we have a child care program that, as you have heard, does not meet all of the needs for all of the families that we have. We've had a system that we've been building consistently and steadily over the last number of years. We are right now in the middle of another five-year strategic delivery where we're trying to expand the number of spaces for families as well as improve the quality of our child care.

There is no national program for child care. Each province is working within its own framework in order to look at the needs it has within the province to find ways to ensure that it works toward building a program.

Within child care right now in Manitoba, we have approximately 1,100 centres, and half of those, or about 600, are centres that would be located in schools and other community facilities. The remaining are in family homes where we have licensed people within families where they have smaller numbers of children, but they do provide licensed child care.

In looking at child care, definitely we do see the need to continue the growth for training in order to expand the programs, because with training comes quality programs. We look at the issues of capital facilities and infrastructure. One of the things with child care programs is that they do not enjoy the same kind of infrastructure that many of the other established programs have, like the school systems.

Most recently, we've been having some dialogue with the federal government because of the initiatives that are being undertaken with child care on reserve. There is a directive that the federal government is expecting to have child care on reserve licensed by the year 2015. The opportunity here exists to look at, again, trying to have a program that is equitable and has the same opportunity both on and off reserve.

In child welfare in Manitoba, we've had a long history that started many, many decades ago, but there were some profound events that occurred prior to 1991, and with the release of the report of the aboriginal justice inquiry of Manitoba”in 1991. Ten years lapsed before there was activity with respect to that report and its recommendations. Now in the year 2011 we have a system within Manitoba that was jointly designed with the aboriginal community, the Métis community, and the provincial government in order to look at the governance of child welfare within the province of Manitoba.

This is a very challenging area. I think we all know the challenges this presents to families. The biggest drivers for child welfare, of course, are addictions, housing, and poverty. This is what brings children into the child welfare system.

Our social workers, who are the front-line firefighters in terms of trying to keep children safe, have many, many challenges that they themselves cannot do by themselves. Most recently our work with the federal government has resulted in a landmark activity in terms of the development of a joint or harmonized funding model for child welfare. It was finalized in terms of the work that we were doing together last July, when there was an announcement by the federal government with respect to the proportion of funding they were going to contribute to ensure that we would be looking at a model for child welfare that would reduce the number of children in care by providing resources and funding to prevention services, and to enhance family services across the province.

● (0950)

In family violence prevention, we continue to work across the province in terms of the resources we provide for women who have the experience of domestic violence. This is an area that continues to be of concern. We're also looking forward to the work that we're going to be doing collaboratively to improve the services on reserve.

My time is up. I wish I had more.

The Chair: Thank you. Hopefully you can make some more points during the question and answer time.

We now have the Stop Violence Against Aboriginal Women Action Group. Lisa Forbes is going to speak. Shawna Ferris is also from that group.

You have five minutes. I don't know who would like to take the five minutes. If you want to divide it, I'll tell when you're halfway.

Ms. Shawna Ferris (Member, Assistant Professor of Women's and Gender Studies, University of Manitoba, Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women Action Group): We were told we had ten minutes, but Lisa will speak on our behalf.

The Chair: That's fine. Go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Forbes (Asset Building Program Coordinator, Supporting Employment & Economic Development (SEED) Winnipeg Inc.; Member, Stop Violence Against Aboriginal Women Action Group): First, let me say thank you to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women for inviting us to present on this panel as witnesses on the issue of violence against aboriginal women.

As well, I'd like to commend committee members for your particular interest in understanding community perspectives regarding the continuing and troubling fact that aboriginal women and girls continue to be overrepresented as victims in acts of violence. It is widely acknowledged that more violent crimes happen to aboriginal women than to other women in Canada and that those crimes are less likely to be solved. It is very disturbing to us that young aboriginal women are at least five times more likely than other women in Canada to die as a result of violence.

We are here representing the Stop Violence Against Aboriginal Women Action Group. This is a grassroots initiative of aboriginal and non-aboriginal citizens who are creating and implementing tangible actions with the goal of preventing violence against aboriginal women and girls here in Winnipeg and also at the national level. As this panel was looking at current research and service provision with respect to violence against aboriginal women, we will refer to the findings from our community-based research conducted in Winnipeg in May 2010.

In order to understand the gaps, the needs of aboriginal women and girls living in violent situations, and the ways that could prevent further violence, the Stop Violence Against Aboriginal Women Action Group held a community organization gathering and focus group that brought together a diversity of perspectives from aboriginal and non-aboriginal men and women from across Winnipeg. Participants represented 44 social service delivery, research, education, justice, and policing organizations, as well as community groups that work in human rights and aboriginal women's and victims' advocacy.

A survey preceded the focus group, to which 28 organizations provided input. We would like to draw your attention to two of these questions. Organizations were asked to state whether the supply of programs and services was meeting the needs of aboriginal women and girls living in violence. Half of them stated that needs were somewhat being met by the supply. The results show that over a third were not or were only somewhat meeting the demand of aboriginal women and girls in situations of violence.

One of the participants stated that current programs are overused and women are regularly requesting more support, particularly around domestic violence. Another noted that the current location and types of services do not always fit with the needs of the community—for example, faith homes for sexually exploited youth. One reply made reference to the deep and insidious roots of violence, stating that efforts are being made, but the problems experienced by aboriginal women are overwhelming. These include unsafe housing, poverty, addictions, chronic ill health, involvement with child protection, violent neighbourhoods, limited employment opportunities, and the long-term effects of complex post-traumatic stress disorder on mental health, such as the legacy of colonialism and residential schools.

The second question asked the organizations to rate the importance of 19 different services and programs for aboriginal women and girls experiencing violence. The top five priorities included greater access to safe and affordable housing; the development of specialized training for police and social service workers; poverty reduction policies and initiatives; increased addiction treatment services; and greater advocacy for aboriginal women and girls.

There was general consensus among the participating organizations that anti-violence work specifically addressing the plight of aboriginal women and girls must begin, continue, or be strengthened on many other fronts as well, including domestic violence prevention for boys and men; services for male violent offenders; transition services for ex-gang members, those who have reached age 18 and are leaving the ward of CFS, and those coming to cities from reserves and rural communities; support services for families of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls; anti-racism training and awareness for the general public as well as the news media; women's resource information networks; resources for sexually exploited people; and services for those who are involved in the justice system. Organizations agreed that services need to be culturally rooted, around the clock, and receiving multi-year core funding.

● (0955)

We learned from the participants that there are current practices in the community that can be built upon to prevent further violence against aboriginal women and girls. These include aboriginal space, culture, and spirituality that are reclaimed through culturally appropriate services, elders, traditional ceremonies, awareness of colonial history, and an increase in aboriginal teachers and aboriginal history in school; respectful engagement and consultation by government with community groups through increased networks between government institutions and grassroots groups; grassroots community organizing and networking; leaders who lead by example; counselling for children who have experienced or witnessed violence; initiatives that build women's and girls' capacity to be strong, independent, and empowered instead of feeling victimized; positive language use by police; and projects that reach out to youth.

The focus group members were interested in the creation of a network of the organizations that were present that day as well as others for the purpose of informing each other of relevant initiatives, and the creation of strategic alignments toward the prevention of violence against aboriginal women and girls. A network model is currently being developed in consultation with aboriginal women.

The Chair: I would like to ask if you could table the results of that survey with the clerk. You have? Good. Thank you. So it can be distributed to the committee and we can read it.

We've heard the presentations, and now we're going to go into our question and answer period. The first question and answer period is seven minutes long, and as I've explained before, that seven minutes includes questions and answers, so I would really like everyone to be as succinct as they could, please. I know it's difficult, but we have another panel coming up after you, so we have to end on time.

We will begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberal Party.

● (1000)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's seven minutes?

Thank you all for coming. I very much appreciate hearing from you.

I'm going to try to weave something together, and I hope I'm not creating something.

Yesterday, as you heard, we were in Prince Albert. One of the overriding concerns we heard there, and what I have heard in other communities, not large urban ones but smaller communities, was with regard to the systems in the community, the social welfare systems, the justice system—Lisa Michell spoke about that—and the policing system. We heard today from Mr. Robinson what the police are doing, particularly as it relates to missing and murdered aboriginal women. But what we heard was a real concern that many aboriginal women do not feel they are treated appropriately by the systems, whether welfare, justice, or the police. In one community I was at, they said starkly that they didn't feel safe, that they didn't feel they had protection here.

I would like your comments and your recommendations on what we should be recommending to work with, help, or support organizations, because—and this is my view—we are dealing with racism and discrimination to a large extent.

I'm rambling a little bit, and I'm not sure if I'm gathering the essence of what I want to say, but if I make sense to you, please respond.

The Chair: We'll hear from Commissioner Robinson, please. Then we'll move on to social services, and if we have time we can hear from them.

A/Commr Bill Robinson: Thank you for the question.

We police, as you know, a majority of Manitoba's rural communities and first nations communities. I think there are a couple of very important points we have to get across, certainly relative to policing and partnerships. I think the first is with regard to perceptions training for the police. Every year we participate in and give as many of our officers as possible aboriginal perceptions training. It's important that they understand the communities in which they serve and the issues and how aboriginal first nations people view them and vice versa. I think certainly that's the first step.

But as far as the safety issue in communities goes, a lot of our more isolated northern communities in Manitoba are policed by a detachment that in some cases has to fly in or we have to do visitations into the communities. I've heard it said, certainly, that in some instances some people don't feel safe, of course, because we're not there all the time. But we do the best we can with the service level we have in those communities, and we try our best to provide safety to not only aboriginal women and men but also the children in those communities by getting into the schools and doing those things.

Hon. Anita Neville: Commissioner Robinson, the community that I heard it from most assertively was not a Manitoba community; it was a northern community. The women were quite clear: they do not feel safe; they do not feel they have anywhere to go.

When these issues come to your attention as a leader in the RCMP, that there are issues of discrimination, racism, neglect, or however you want to describe it, what action do you take?

● (1005)

A/Commr Bill Robinson: I travel extensively in the province, and the communication to my members is this, and I know this is relayed across the force: you will treat all persons in Manitoba with the same level of dignity, respect, professionalism, and compassion as you would any other person. What does that mean? Does that mean that when you show up at a house in a northern Manitoba community and there's been domestic violence you have the same resources available to you that you may have in Winnipeg or Brandon or Dauphin? No, it doesn't. It means exactly the opposite. In some cases the ability to remove a husband from the home or the ability to find kids adequate care is very, very, challenging. What we try to do is find family members and locate people and put them in areas of safety.

The one point I do want to get across is that no one agency in the north, or even in the south, can do this alone. It has to be a partnership activity. There has to be the ability for Child and Family Services, for the RCMP, for Awasis, for all of the agencies to come together and work together to find solutions for this.

I've heard many people talk about addictions this morning. I've heard many people talk about communities that are in a state of crisis. And that is true. There is little doubt that those are some of the overriding issues.

As far as systemic racism, what do we do—

The Chair: We only have about 30 seconds left.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'd like to hear from somebody else.

The Chair: Well, we don't have the time, because with 30 seconds left we can't do it in a fulsome way.

Hon. Anita Neville: Can Lisa Michell answer briefly?

The Chair: No.

Seriously, if you can do this in 20 seconds, Ms. Michell, do so.

We will have to go to Ms. Loeppky in another round to answer the rest of your question, Anita.

Ms. Michell, you have 20 seconds.

Ms. Lisa Michell: In terms of the RCMP, there is a relationship issue. It stems from the Indian residential schools, when they came and removed our children and took them forcibly. And yes, we realize they're working towards it. They're coming into the schools and building partnerships, but when they're on the street, it's a little bit of a different story.

The Chair: Thank you. Very good.

Madame Demers from the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for being here today.

I find the group of witnesses testifying here very interesting. It is a very different, but very interesting, group than the others we have heard from this week.

Carolyn, I'm wondering about something. Problems with children are starting to crop up in the other provinces. The services responsible for protecting children are starting to remove them from aboriginal communities when there are problems with the family, with young mothers, and so on. These services remove them and take them outside the community for a certain period of time. The same problem existed during the era of residential schools. Even though they aren't being sent to schools or residential schools, they're being sent to foster families and homes where they are cut off from their culture and environment.

A little earlier, you said that you wanted to try to do something different and focus on prevention. That gave me a big smile. We learned yesterday that we're doing the same thing in Saskatchewan as we're doing in Quebec, and that's a mistake. I think that, in 15 or 20 years, we'll see the same problems cropping up as those created by the residential schools.

Could you explain further what you're trying to do here, in Manitoba?

[*English*]

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: In Manitoba we have 17 child and family services agencies that are specifically managed and run by first nations and/or Métis people. They have the responsibility for oversight and for mandating those agencies, using provincial legislation that gives them the framework with which to protect children and provide services. The agencies are responsive to a governance model that is also managed by first nations and Métis people.

We still have the problem of increased numbers of children in care. We are now working on a model where we're going to try to look at providing additional resources and services for prevention and early intervention services. It's really focused on enhancing the capacity of the family. New resources specifically dedicated to looking at ways to try to reduce the number of children coming into care is something that has started, and will be growing over the next number of years.

We feel, as one of the panel members said early this morning, that the place where children belong is with their families and in their homes. In order to do that, we have to look at different ways of helping family members in order to support them in the parenting and in the nurturance of children.

It's a challenge—

● (1010)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I don't have a lot of time.

Lisa, you have talked at great length about young women who end up on the streets and have no choice but to become sex trade workers. We know that most people who are in prisons in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are aboriginal. The government is currently investing a lot of money in making existing prisons bigger and in building new prisons.

Do you think this is a good investment, or should the money be spent on prevention programs to help these people to get off the streets, to stop drinking and doing what they are doing to feed their children?

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Michell: Absolutely I would say that is 100% true. Housing more people in jail—that's not the solution.

One of the big things is that when a mother or a parent needs her family the most, what happens is that the children get removed. There was an incident where a violent offence happened to a young infant. All of the children were removed from that home, at a time when she really needed her family the most.

One of the big things, too, is that we need to really look at working extensively with the family, with the grandparents, the uncles, the aunties, the cousins—all of that. We need to look at that.

I worked in the child welfare system 10 or 15 years ago. Back then it was like this: you can't have the foster parents and the parents together.

Well, about a year and a half ago, I worked with an agency where that wasn't the point. The program was all about the child.

That's what needs to happen. The programs need to be all about the child, because you know what? The child is now going to be removed and placed into a different setting. I'm a product of the "sixties scoop", so I have a little bit of an understanding of that. When you take the child away from the community, and if there's no access, then how is that child going to learn about their culture? How is that child going to learn about who they are?

At the age of seven, I knew already that there was something missing in my home, but I didn't know what it was. It wasn't until later, when I met my biological dad, that I realized, "Oh, now I know what was missing: my culture." Still to this day, unfortunately, I don't have my language.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Robinson, one of the problems we've experienced in Quebec is the fact that the RCMP does not work well with the local police. For example, when two young girls disappeared in Gatineau, RCMP officers were in charge of one of the missing girls, and local police forces were in charge of the other. They did not compare notes and, unfortunately, the case remains unresolved. Those two young girls are still missing.

● (1015)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathyssen): Very quickly, Mr. Robinson.

A/Commr Bill Robinson: We have an integrated task force where our police agencies are working together. We've reviewed approximately 84 files, and we're reviewing more. We're looking for similarities between the investigations. So we're working very closely together. All of the files from all of the police agencies will be touched, they will be reviewed, as will the relationships across the country.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathyssen): I'm so sorry, but time is up. Thank you.

Madam Glover, please, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I too want to welcome you here and thank you for the hard work you do for our communities on a day-to-day basis.

I do want to acknowledge, for the police officers who are present here today, the loss of a police family member: Sergeant Ryan Russell, of course, was lost in the ultimate sacrifice yesterday.

I also want to acknowledge, for the RCMP's benefit, a first that has occurred; I want to acknowledge the appointment of Chief Superintendent Russ Mirastyi, who will officially take over as the commanding officer—the first first nations commanding officer—of "F" Division. I commend these aboriginal success stories. I want to highlight them, and the reason I do that is because during these kinds of sessions we hear the bad, but we rarely hear the good, and I want to give the RCMP an opportunity to address some of the things that have been said here today. I guess I'm a little bit spoiled because I happen to be a police officer on a leave of absence, so I've had relationships with the RCMP and other jurisdictions. It is a family. So it's unfortunate to hear that sometimes they don't get to talk.

But with the RCMP, when Ms. Michell mentioned jurisdictional problems with task forces, can you address how we overcome that? There's $10 million that has been allocated to the missing and murdered aboriginal women's file, and I believe a part of that money may help to prevent that gap from reoccurring. So if you would, tell me your impression of how that would help and what your experience is here in Manitoba jurisdictionally.

A/Commr Bill Robinson: Just starting in Manitoba, I think we've had many success stories here, going as far back as 2003. The creation of the task force and the missing persons project that we undertook in 2007, to identify all missing women where foul play was suspected and looking at all missing persons, I think was a huge step forward for us.

The relationship here is one where the homicide units within the WPS, the RCMP, the Brandon Police Service, and all the police agencies would need routinely to discuss cases of interest. This is certainly not done in isolation in Manitoba. I think the money that's going to be put into improving systems and altering systems like CPIC, where you have a broader ability to put case pictures and information on CPIC—which of course is the Canadian Police Information Centre and is used by all police agencies across the country—will be a great step forward in the child exploitation area and in the missing children area, where you're going to create a database. It will again provide all police agencies and all agencies across the country the step forward in order to take us from where we are today to a formalized system where we will be able to track this stuff.

In Manitoba, as I've said, we have Winnipeg Police Service members and their files sitting in the same room as RCMP members and their files, and actually doing analytical comparisons. We've identified 84 files to date that are getting very stringent looks. We will be progressing further and looking at more files. You know—

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Can I interrupt?

It sounds like those measures that you talked about that are being implemented, particularly CPIC, would prevent what Ms. Demers is talking about. It's tragic to hear that that happens, and it's good that we're addressing that.

I do want to also take note of what Ms. Loeppky said about some of the relationships. I know when she was talking about social workers having challenges—because they can't do this alone; they can't help aboriginal women alone. But I know, just from my experience in the Winnipeg Police Service—we had a domestic violence unit that partnered police officers and social workers. Again, we removed that jurisdictional bias.

I'm aware that there are already measures in place in the Winnipeg Police Service to do that in the vice unit, because they work very closely with many of our vulnerable aboriginal women, many of our abused aboriginal women, working shoulder to shoulder with social workers.

Does the RCMP do something similar?

● (1020)

A/Commr Bill Robinson: Yes, absolutely. We begin working with the youth, of course, in schools, with our youth workers and with our in-classroom officers. We work shoulder to shoulder with Child and Family Services. In fact, recently I worked with a member in Thompson. We worked one full evening beside a Child and Family Services worker, looking at some of the problems, and of course they were right there when we needed them. This goes on every day across Manitoba, not just in RCMP jurisdictions and Winnipeg jurisdictions, but also in our smaller municipalities like Brandon and Rivers and this type of thing.

I think another important piece to all of this, of course, is what the next step of this review capacity is going to be and how we continue to talk to one another as police agencies across Canada. I think the days are certainly behind us where we no longer talk.... Our analysts continually talk. We have ViCLAS, the violent crime analysis system, which is where we enter data on murdered and missing women. Of course, this is a nationwide system, and it provides clarity to similar types of acts and offences against women and men right across this country. The additional moneys will do nothing but increase and broaden these programs we have out there.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

I don't have much time left, but I did want to acknowledge all of the yellow T-shirts in the audience. Thank you so much for representing.... You're doing a great job of portraying a message without having to say anything, so thank you for being here.

I read something in the newspaper about an exhibit in another province on missing and murdered aboriginal women, which your group spoke up about and tried to stop. It was a depiction of Robert Pickton's victims. Do you know anything about that, Lisa? Can you tell me why this is something that you would say no to and why we shouldn't bring about awareness this way? To counter that, what would you like to see done to bring awareness to where it needs to be?

The Chair: Lisa, I'm going to have to ask you to take 20 seconds to answer that, please.

You're over time.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: You can submit it in writing to the committee.

The Chair: But I think the committee might like to hear the answer.

Ms. Lisa Forbes: Actually, if I have 20 seconds, what I'd just like to say is that we would like to echo some things we've heard today regarding stable core funding towards organizations and programs that are working on domestic violence and other social programs, including shelters and safe houses.

I'm sorry, but I'm not able to answer that question directly anyway, as I'm not familiar with that initiative.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'd like to go to Ms. Mathyssen for the NDP.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for being here. I very much appreciate the expertise you bring to us.

I would like to ask everyone a question, but I'm going to start with Lisa Forbes and Shawna because I know the time is limited.

My question is in regard to the survey you outlined. There were some very interesting things there. I would like to hear more about it, particularly in regard to some of these things that have been asked by my colleagues pertaining to what we heard in Saskatchewan about the very negative attitudes young women face when they go to social services, or that are sometimes from the police: that passing of judgment that makes it impossible for them to get the help and support they need. You mentioned some of that.

You also mentioned the news media in terms of anti-racism training. Now, we know there is some training going on, but if you could touch on that survey and some of those specifics, I'd appreciate it.

Ms. Lisa Forbes: Yes. I'd like to say that when we did that survey we did find that the negative attitudes are pervasive. It is an element of systemic racism. It's an element of colonialism and those kinds of things, which we've heard before. Those things continue to exist. I acknowledge that there has been some work, as the RCMP representative has said here.

However, for one of the things that was noted there, we've noted it in Sisters in Spirit reports from NWAC, and we've noted it from Amnesty International. We noted it again in our survey of local organizations. There needs to be training for police and social service workers regarding anti-racism. It continues to be a pervasive problem. Women are constantly running against that in all government systems. It continues to exist.

● (1025)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: And the media...?

Ms. Lisa Forbes: In regard to the media, we have some research. Actually, my colleague here, Shawna, is a researcher on the racist portrayal of victims of violence who are aboriginal—compared to non-aboriginal—and we as a grassroots group are planning to address that issue as well in terms of codes of conduct for journalists and those kinds of things. That's what we're working towards.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you.

Ms. Shawna Ferris: If I could, I will just say as well that Lisa is one of the members of our group who has been really pushing an initiative to create a charter for journalists to sign, a charter saying that they will not portray aboriginal women in these negative ways and that they'll actually resist these kinds of portrayals as well as things like sensationalizing violence against women.

Did you want to talk a little bit more about that, Lisa?

Ms. Lisa Forbes: No. That's it.

Ms. Shawna Ferris: Okay.

I wanted to emphasize as well that education for RCMP and social services workers is very important. One of the places where that begins is before they become those workers, so it's education across levels of education systems—elementary, high school, and post-secondary education—that focuses on colonization and ongoing decolonization efforts in order to start thinking through the ways that racism and colonialism perpetuate our culture and to inform how everybody responds to one another or reads one another.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: You mentioned funding and the fact that there is never enough. We've heard this over and over again. What would you do with $875 million? That's the latest tax cut to the banks.

Ms. Lisa Forbes: What a great question. Everybody here wants to answer that.

What I think is that we found we were asking that question too. We were wondering what's happening with the money that's being spent on this issue and why we are not seeing satisfactory results.

So we started asking that question. We asked people: individuals, community organizations, and social services organizations across the board. What we're working on now is this integration that we talked about with police forces and Child and Family Services. There needs to be an integration among social service providers, with a singular goal: to have it as a goal to reduce violence against aboriginal women and girls and to have it being to create strategically...to work with each other to create initiatives towards that goal.

I'm talking about domestic violence prevention programs that educate men and boys, for instance; transition services for people moving from a reserve to an urban area; and having the police and the justice folks and the people who do justice advocacy at John Howard and Elizabeth Fry in the same room and having them working together in all the ways, with all the tools we have at hand, to put our efforts towards that one goal of reducing violence against aboriginal women.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Yes. Thank you for mentioning Elizabeth Fry—

The Chair: You have one minute, Irene.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: —because I know that in northern Ontario their funding was cut off. And that makes it very, very difficult.

I'm sorry, Madam Chair...?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Oh dear.

Very quickly, Carolyn, you talked about the lack of affordable housing and the lack of a national child care project. If the federal government were to step up to the plate, would that help you to do the kind of work that you would like to do in the field?

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: With respect to looking to the future, I think if we have equitable and stable funding for services on and off reserve in various disciplinary labels in child care, in child welfare, where we have made great progress, and also with respect to family violence, that would be exceptional in terms of the work we could be able to do.

I want to echo, though, what Lisa talked about. I think coalitions and collaborations with purpose go a long way in improving services. In Manitoba, we have the experience where we've been working with high-risk victims, with StreetReach, and with sexual exploitation and human trafficking. More recently, we're working on a children's advocacy centre, where the sectors are coming together to talk about the expertise they bring to the table, and they work jointly and co-jointly. It's difficult work at times, but when you in fact can reach the conclusion, you see much, much better services for children and for families, and strength of communities improves.

● (1030)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We can now go into a second round. The second round will be a three-minute round. If we had a five-minute round it would be very difficult, because we just have a little under 30 minutes. I could make that a five-minute round, but you're going to have to be really disciplined. Okay? Let's do a five-minute round, then.

Let's try Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to pick up on something we heard today and yesterday. It has been prevalent along the way. It is the apprehension of children, which we're hearing a lot about, and the numbers of children. What we also heard is that when domestic violence occurs, many women do not come forward, either to social service agencies or to the police—or to whomever—because of the fear of losing their children.

Can you speak to that in terms of how it can be addressed? I understand that there's always a concern of what's in the best interests of the child, but it creates a whole other layer of issues.

Let me start with Carolyn. What is the province doing and what recommendations would you have to the federal government?

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: In looking at domestic violence and children, we started some initiatives a while back in terms of looking at children who witness domestic violence. We tried to put some new programming resources into our women's shelters specifically for children's services, so that when women do enter a shelter and they have the children along with them, there is some specific programming for children. It certainly was an initiative that we felt was important. Over the last number of years, we've been able to increase some of those resources, but—

Hon. Anita Neville: Sorry, but what I'm concerned about—and that's important and valuable—is the woman who does not come forward because she's fearful of losing custody of her children. Are you working with that in some way?

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: The area in which we see some promise and/or hope in terms of helping families who have challenges and/or struggles is a lot of the work that we do with family resource centres, with women's resource centres, and also with parent-child centres that you would have in communities and/or in schools, where you would begin to build some relationships with women and try to get some support and services to them that would be community based and not necessarily mandated services.

In Manitoba, we fund a variety of different community-based organizations like Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, Andrews Street, and the Wolseley Centre, where we have the opportunity for women—and for men, in some of them—to come forward to get some services and supports and to start to build a bit of a community of support for themselves. So that would be an introduction or a beginning.

But it's certainly a challenge, because when we do look at children, it's the safety of children that does come first. If in fact we're going to be looking at some success factors around our new initiative around prevention and family enhancement, it would certainly be to look at ways in which the family can stay intact, so that if there's an offender in the family, the female doesn't get victimized or punished because of that.

● (1035)

Hon. Anita Neville: Ms. Michell, can you comment on it?

Ms. Lisa Michell: I just have one comment about who defines the best interests of the children. Who defines that? To me, it would be the grandmothers. In our community, it's the grandmothers who define the best interests of the children—not a child welfare system.

Ms. Lisa Forbes: I just wanted to say that I can speak to that as well. Respondents we heard from at our survey said that there need to be more beds in shelters for women who need to leave in the middle of the night, no questions asked, and without referrals from CFS. They need to have a place to go. There are some spaces like that, but there are nowhere near enough. Having more funding put towards shelters and safe houses is needed so that for women it can be “no questions asked, middle of the night, I need to be here to leave a violent situation”. We do not have enough spaces like that.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Do I have any more time, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, whoever wants to go for that.

Hon. Anita Neville: Anybody else?

I'll pass, then. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Anita.

Now we go to Mrs. Glover for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do want to acknowledge that shelters are an important component of what the Government of Canada is addressing, with $55.6 million announced for over a five-year period to invest into shelters. Just recently, $2.2 million more was dedicated to support the construction of five new shelters, including one here in Manitoba.

So I agree with what you said, Ms. Forbes, that shelters need to be available, because it's certainly something that will help these women get the resources they need.

Ms. Michell mentioned earlier that young girls don't wake up one morning and decide that they want to be prostitutes. The reason I bring this up is that the Government of Canada agrees that these are victimized women and that there are a number of things that have to come into play to protect them. What the government is responsible for doing is finding ways to do that, including legislation. The matrimonial real property legislation has been put forward. I believe many of the women who are missing or were murdered left reserves because they didn't have any rights, came to urban settings where they don't have transition centres, etc., and became exploited because of their vulnerabilities. They then became our missing or murdered. That is why it's so important that we have police and all these other agencies working together. So we're going to push forward with that bill to try to give rights back to aboriginal women on reserve, and the grandmothers are those women who are going to help us make sure those rights are given back.

Now let's talk about the kids at the other end, the small kids, and about what we're doing to capture them, to protect them. I'm in total agreement that taking them out of their families is a horrible, horrible situation, which is why I'd like Ms. Loeppky to describe the prevention-based approach. This is a new approach, and I believe $177 million has been invested here in Manitoba so that we can look at a different system. The CFS system before of taking them out of the homes was not working, so a new system has come about.

Perhaps you could describe that for us, Ms. Loeppky, and tell us why you think that might help these young girls from becoming further victims.

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: Thank you.

The funding model that has been developed and agreed upon by the federal and provincial governments will be providing a shift of the resources. It will be going to prevention and early intervention. This means that if a family comes in and is at what would be determined to be low risk, there would be ways in which the social work system could refer and/or support the family in terms of the services they need.

It would be working with respect to not someone outside of the family telling them, in a prescriptive way, “Here's what you need to do: A, B, C, and D.” This would involve working closely with the family, with the mother, the father, the extended family if there is extended family, to talk about what they believe are the important things they need in order to take the kinds of steps with their children that they want to take.

It might be as simple as the fact that they can't get their laundry done because they don't have a machine in their house and they can't get to the laundromat. It might be something about wanting to get into the world of employment. Is there some educational support that we can either lever, link, or help to support? Is it going to be something around looking at basic needs within the house that are preventing the family from moving forward? Is it parenting issues they want to address with respect to parent-teen conflict and/or parenting of little ones who are going through difficult times in terms of developmental stages?

● (1040)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: And there's the kinship, which is what you're addressing when you talk about the families coming into play. Rather than taking these kids out of the community and out of the family, it's trying to find foster parents within the family, etc. That plays a part too.

But continue: how is this going to help us prevent them from becoming victims?

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: Well, we know that when families have a first brush with child welfare, it's generally when children are taken out of the home. It's generally not for a long time. We see a lot of children who come into care for very short periods of time. That's what we would like to address, because if you can avoid taking children into care....

We've done some analysis, and it's generally for about 36 days that a child would be taken out of the home while the home stabilizes in order to have the child back and the child be safe. If we can avoid taking that child into care in the first place, and provide the services and supports either in the home or with the extended family, it will avoid that first contact with child welfare. By stabilizing those homes, what you'll find is that children will do better in daycare and in the school system, and they may move forward in terms of being able to actually complete school. In the child welfare sector, educational outcomes are also not in the success range that we would want to see them at.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Ms. Michell, good or bad approach...?

The Chair: Ms. Glover, you've gone over your time now.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Sorry.

The Chair: Thanks.

Now I would like to go to Madame Demers for the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Basically, in all the places we've visited so far, the people we met with insisted on the importance of opening centres for both the victims and the offenders. We were told that if we didn't try to heal the whole family, we would always end up with the same problems. What is your opinion, Lisa and Shawna, and perhaps you too, Ms. Loeppky?

In fact, Lisa, you are right: grandmothers are in the best position to take care of children and decide what is good for them. I've personally been taking care of my grandson for a number of years.

The suggestion to open healing centres for the whole family came up a number of times. What do you think about that?

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Forbes: I could speak to that.

I've heard from people who definitely think that model is a good idea and that it is whole family healing. I guess what I mentioned before is what I heard people say: that there weren't enough programs to address issues with men, so sometimes.... There were programs for women. Women may learn some aspects of domestic violence communication skills and those kinds of things for prevention, but their partners in the home may not have any training in that matter. So to have an approach that addresses whole family healing would definitely be something that I heard service providers say they would support.

Ms. Shawna Ferris: I can just add something.

When I used to teach in Ontario, I heard from speakers in the Six Nations reserve who actually have an internationally recognized program that does exactly that. I can't remember the name of the program, but I can e-mail or send it to the committee. They've been invited all over the world to talk about the groundbreaking work they're doing with exactly that kind of program.

Ms. Lisa Forbes: I'd just like to add, too, that one of the things I haven't heard made mention of too much here.... I did hear Lisa mention it and I think Carolyn might have said it. Regarding poverty, housing, and those kinds of issues, some kind of a healing centre may be helpful, but if the family is still experiencing these kinds of things.... So to have policies and put money towards poverty reduction, affordable housing and also education and training to improve an economic situation...those things all have to happen together. That's the thing with this. With such a pervasive problem, we do have the opportunity, in that there are so many places to intervene, and they do have to be...we have to intervene on all fronts in a strategic coordinated effort.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Lisa?

● (1045)

Ms. Lisa Michell: Thank you.

I just want to say that in terms of healing in our community, it's not just about smudge; our culture is a way of life. That's how we live. It's not just something that we do on certain days. It's the way we live and how we walk in our communities. That's what culture is all about.

I would also agree, too, that in terms of healing it has to be the whole family unit. It takes a whole community to raise a child. And you know what? I'm still somebody's child, so there are times when I need that.

We also need tremendous support for our men. Jail is not the solution. Incarceration doesn't work. We need to have a holistic approach, a way of life.

Talk to those elders, because the elders have all the answers. When I hear them talk about the child welfare system or any kind of system—the federal government, the provincial government—how much consultation has happened with our elders? I have to ask that question. It's something to think about.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Are there consultations between aboriginal communities and the various levels of government?

[*English*]

The Chair: Who would like to try that?

Ms. Loeppky.

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: Actually, within our legislation in the child welfare area, there is the opportunity for communication, for consultation, for leaders at the political level. It's a required activity. Within the working level, there are also legislated entities we have that provide the opportunity both for collaboration and for communication and consultation in the child welfare area.

In Manitoba, we also have Healthy Child Manitoba, which is a group of seven to nine ministries that come together on a regular basis to talk about the priority programs. We do joint work together around some priorities for services and programs.

The Chair: Thank you.

That finishes that part.

Ms. Mathyssen, for five minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to go back to some of the things I heard. We know that it's important to have shelters and that they be functioning. In previous testimony we've heard that there's money for capital, so you can build the shelter, but there's no money for the operations, the important part of the work that goes on there. I wondered if you could comment on that.

Also, in these surveys that Lisa and Shawna talked about, you said that people said there need to be safe homes for sexually exploited youth. I found that extremely disturbing. I wondered if you could expand on that and explain to the committee what is happening to kids on the street or kids who are being exploited.

Ms. Lisa Forbes: For the first aspect—I'm trying to recall different conversations we've had with various service providers—as you said, there's money for capital but not for services. What I can say is that service providers are frustrated that they don't receive multi-year funding in order to be able to initiate programs and see them through.

To have to constantly be writing funding proposals according to the flavour of the month, for whatever they are being asked to address, is a constant problem. It is hard to keep trained people in when you have to say to them, “Well, listen, March 31 is coming up, and I don't know if I can hire you after April 1”. That is a constant problem; everyone across the board in social service delivery says that. That's the first aspect.

Regarding safe homes for sexually exploited youth, there has been some really good work done in Manitoba with the Sexually Exploited Youth Coalition, the SEY Coalition. That is several different social service agencies; I believe that policing is involved. It has a whole bunch of different ranges. From what I've heard, it's a good model for being able to think of integration across many different social services and across policing and government agencies and that kind of thing. That seems to be working well here in Manitoba.

In regard to spaces, I've heard that there are two elements to this issue. One is that there are not enough spaces for those sexually exploited youth to go to for shelter. The other aspect—this may sound a little controversial—is that funding and programs need to be across the board for needs as needed—not just to say that we're addressing sexually exploited youth, we don't want to see those 13-year-old girls on street corners, we want to address that, and that's our flavour of the month.

It also needs to be addressed that...some of the concern is that we put efforts into some programs for youth, for instance, but not for women and maybe not for children. Some people are saying there are fewer services for women. The truth is that it needs to be across the board, and that's not to belittle the fact that we do not have enough services and outreach workers for sexually exploited youth or, specifically, enough beds for the safe houses.

● (1050)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Are these kids ending up in the judicial system and ultimately being institutionalized? Are they ending up in prisons?

Ms. Lisa Forbes: Anecdotally, I would just say yes, but I don't have expertise about that specifically.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Carolyn?

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: I can just add a little to what Lisa talked about in terms of the provincial funding for family violence prevention services. We fund approximately $12 million annually for 32 different programs. That funding is considered to be core funding, and it provides money for operational funds as well as for core funding, and we have three-year agreements for those. These are not programs that have annual...they're not projects. They don't have a beginning and an end; they are ongoing programs. So this is the provincial approach in terms of funding for family violence prevention programs.

We still see some challenges in these programs. Second-stage housing is certainly a growing area and a growing challenge. Women who may have surmounted the initial attack or violence need to have that transition, and I think you heard that earlier this morning.

In addition to that, when you talk about sexually exploited children, in Manitoba in 2002 and 2008 we took some initiatives to look at sexual exploitation and human trafficking. It came under the umbrella of what we call Tracia's Trust. It has primarily four major components to it. We're looking at issues of legislation and law enforcement, a continuum of service, which talks about early intervention, prevention, and at times the kinds of things Lisa was talking about in terms of building new resources that are specific to some of the needs identified. Examples of that would be some things that are being done with some of our community-based agencies. For example, construction is under way right now for a rural healing lodge.

Breaking the silence is another area we've talked about. This would be with respect to incest in families primarily and people not wanting to talk about issues of sexual exploitation or abuse that occurred, and also looking at child, youth, and family community empowerment, because we believe that is also at the heart of how you begin to address the issues of sexual exploitation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Loeppky. I think the time has ended for that.

Before I thank the panel for coming, we do have five minutes left. I did not ask a question in the last panel because we ran out of time, but I would like to now. There are some questions that came up from some of the members of the committee for which I felt I might like to get a more fulsome answer.

One of the things we heard, especially when we were in Saskatchewan, was that some women said they fall into a catch-22 situation. They come into town—because we're in Winnipeg, I'm speaking about off reserve. We are told that some of the issues on reserve can be dealt with on reserve. But when people come into the city, they face this whole mess of whose jurisdiction they are in, and it's a sort of lost area.

What we heard was that women would leave and come into the city, where they'd be afraid and they'd go to a shelter, where they may not be accepted, or only for a short period of time, and they would be facing the question of their children being taken away from them. In order to keep their children, they also have to have a place to live. When they are given welfare, it isn't enough, quite often, in the city to rent a place large enough for them and their children, so they therefore don't even qualify. It's a catch-22, and the children are then taken away. So the women are forced out of the home they know. They've come into a strange place in a city. They've not only lost their family ties, but they've lost their children. Their children are also traumatized from losing their family, and now a mother, who doesn't seem to want to take care of them, as far the kids are concerned, because she doesn't have a place to keep them.

It's a vicious cycle. It doesn't really solve any of the problems—and we know housing is one of the issues. I'd like to hear what you think we can do.

I have a real concern about the issue of urban aboriginal women who face violence, because I think we have to find a way to stop this jurisdictional problem. If the federal government, as far as I'm concerned, has a fiduciary responsibility to aboriginal people, I believe that responsibility should be there no matter where the aboriginal people live and no matter what the issues are. It's about health. It's about their children. It's about safety. It's about security. It's about housing. These issues should be taken care of and not be left in the provincial jurisdiction. The province, really, is left holding the bag for a lot of these services, and these women fall in between the cracks. This violence and this problem continue.

What do you suggest? I'm asking you a question and I'd like you to speak very frankly. It doesn't mean you're going to do it, but I would like you to find a response to this, because it is the problem.

Mr. Robinson.

● (1055)

A/Commr Bill Robinson: I guess from a policing perspective the RCMP and the Winnipeg Police Service face this all the time, of course, when you have women and people travelling back and forth between jurisdictions. We've had instances where we've had people come to Winnipeg and they've simply vanished, and people from our rural communities of course come in and try to organize searches and whatever.

I think the secondments that we've placed at the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Manitoba Métis Federation, and our cultural diversity programs that we've placed in our Muslim communities and so forth, take away some of the confusion surrounding where a person might go to get advice from police when they do come in from a community and they have a problem, such as having been victimized on the reserve or in the community, and now they're in Winnipeg and they don't know where to report it.

I think other issues as well, as far as collaboration is concerned for various programs between police now, between Winnipeg and the RCMP, have helped, have assisted. Now, is it perfect? No, it's not perfect. I think there probably needs to be greater communication surrounding it for the people in communities. I know that when I speak with chiefs from across the country or across the province, we constantly talk about this overlap. It is a concern. I think the overlap we have and the representation we have within our first nations communities provide at least a conduit for people when they come in. But again, the communication aspect of it could be broader.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Loeppky, as a provincial person, you might be able to help us to see if we can square this circle.

Ms. Carolyn Loeppky: Well, I believe the issue of jurisdiction and providing services is a very complex one that has its roots in a lot of the legislation, either provincial legislation or federal legislation. The conversation we had when we talked about funding for child welfare I believe was probably one of the most significant conversations we've had about funding and jurisdiction in a long, long time. And we were able to come to an agreement, because it is a partnership between the two levels of government.

It wasn't without its struggles. There were definitions you had to go through. It still isn't complete, because we've just begun. We're going to learn from it. We're going to look at what's working and what isn't working. There has been a commitment on both sides to do that. But I believe it would require a great deal of thought and careful examination to begin to look at how the historical issues around the Indian Act and other legislation come into play with something like that.

What we do outside of that in order to try to make it work better for people is that we do develop those partnerships and we do look at different ways of providing service, so that when people come off reserve, the intimidation factors you talk about can be reduced to some degree. So trying to house services together.... In the urban area, and now starting in some of our rural areas, we're looking at trying to do a better job of integrated services. In Winnipeg we have access centres that have health and social services joined together, co-located, and that also do some casework together so that people aren't going to five different places to get one thing here, one thing here, and one thing there.

● (1100)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Loeppky. I have to keep to my own timelines here too.

I just wanted to ask Lisa Michell something. It would seem to me that the Kelowna accord was something that tried to pull that together with signed agreements between the federal government and the provincial governments in terms of aboriginal people and housing, health, and education specifically.

Ms. Michell, did you think that was a worthwhile thing to be pursuing? Or did you think it was in itself doomed to failure?

Ms. Lisa Michell: Well, I think we really need to sit around the table and actually talk about this. I think that's a good starting point, because we need to develop partnerships. The thing is, as I'm sitting here and listening to all this dialogue, you know, in my community we keep things simple. We keep things real.

You know what? Just to add to your earlier question about when a young woman comes to the community, comes to Winnipeg, how would I treat my niece when she comes to Winnipeg? Would I throw her out? No. I would ask her to come and stay with me. That's one of the things we do. We open and we welcome.

I think, too, getting back to the federal, the provincial, and all that government stuff—obviously, I'm not a government stuff person—the thing is to consult with the people. Consult with the elders. Get the youth involved. We need to have everybody being part of this because that's where healing comes from. It comes from within. It comes from ourselves, our families, and our communities. That's how it's going to work.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank you all for coming. I want to thank you for answering, especially in this round, some fairly complex jurisdictional questions that have constitutional and legal ramifications to them. I hope that we were able to cut through some of the barriers and will be able to find some way through this to some resolutions.

Again, thank you for coming. Thank you for being frank and honest.

We're going to suspend for about ten minutes. Then we will begin with the third panel.

● (Pause)

●

● (1120)

The Chair: I'd like to call this session back to order.

This is our third panel, and we have four presenters.

This is a parliamentary committee. As I've explained to everyone, a parliamentary committee is a body of Parliament. It reports to Parliament. It's made up of all the political parties, so it's not a partisan body. It's a body that is here to listen, to deal with the particular issue that we're dealing with, which is the issue of violence against aboriginal women.

We're looking at the root causes of violence against aboriginal women. We're looking at the nature of violence against aboriginal women—in other words, what types of violence, and the form that the violence takes. We're looking at obviously the extent of that violence, and we would also like to talk about solutions. We are travelling across the country to listen to communities and groups who present to us. We have already had hearings in Ottawa with many of the national organizations.

I want to welcome you. To begin, you will each have five minutes to present. We have four groups, which means there will be four presenters. I think you will decide who will be presenting on your behalf.

I'd now like to begin the five-minute presentations. I'll give you a signal at one minute to let you know that it's time for you to wrap up. We are on a tight timeline—we have a site visit to go to later on—so I would really like us to try to stick to the time.

We will begin with Kelly Gorkoff, criminal justice professor at the University of Winnipeg. She is presenting as an individual.

Kelly, would you like to begin?

● (1125)

Ms. Kelly Gorkoff (Professor of Criminal Justice, University of Winnipeg, As an Individual): Yes, absolutely.

First, I'd like to thank the committee for their important work and for inviting me to attend and present today. Most of the information I'll be presenting today is the result of my work as a research associate at the research centre on violence against women, where I studied for eight years, and research after the Montreal massacre.

Part of my work there involved a variety of research topics and evaluations of programs associated with violence against aboriginal women. I can't get into the specifics, but I headed a three-year study on prostitution across the prairie provinces and talked about experiences and some demographic information, as well as program responses. I'm not currently working in the area of domestic violence, but my current work is on criminal justice programs, on the evaluation of new, innovative court programs and related criminal justice policy pertaining to the case at hand.

I've decided that today, instead of focusing on specific projects I've evaluated, I'll give you a summary of the elements of alternative justice approaches that have proved important or promising and, as well, point out some elements that are not so promising. In addition to this, I'll comment on the difficulties of incorporating these elements and programs in a current crime-control climate that is in many ways antithetical to some of these elements.

The first that I want to comment on is to set a context, and I'm sure it's the context of this committee. It is to recognize that the criminal justice system, in all of its responses, operates as a set of colonizing institutions or a set of institutions against aboriginal people.

I'll quote Ovide Mercredi's opening statement at the aboriginal justice inquiry: “In law, with law, and through law, Canada has imposed a colonial system of government and justice upon our people without due regard to our treaty and Aboriginal rights”. It's within this context that I'd like to continue to talk.

We must consider the use of the Canadian criminal justice system to address the rights of female aboriginal victims of crime as inherently colonial instrumentally, and symbolically limited. This manifests itself in a variety of programs from inadequate police attention to stigma, policies, and laws that push aboriginal women into unsafe spaces, where they are generally vulnerable to being abused. Thus, the task is to find out how these colonial practices manifest themselves, in what spaces, and through which policies, laws, and practices.

In accordance with this, I'd like to break down my very brief five minutes into the following themes: first, causes and responses to crime; and second, spaces of vulnerability specific to aboriginal women.

In terms of causes of and responses to crime, many current criminologists argue that crime, including violence, is caused by or associated with the link in the breakdown of ties in communities between people and their relationships with one another. If this is indeed the case, societies are generally more fragmented, and as people become more detached from communities, from those things that are meaningful in their lives, and from the bonds that hold them together, crime will increase.

This, then, forces us to think about solutions to violence against women in the context of community building: re-establishing ties between individuals that will undoubtedly be more productive and beneficial than those that focus on the offender alone as responsible for his or her actions. Often, traditional criminal justice approaches such as incarceration continue to erode those bonds that give rise to the behaviour in the first place, with this again becoming a circular, vicious cycle.

These solutions b include elements of restorative justice practices, which tend to hold more offenders accountable than, really, the western-based legal system. This would include strengthening community programs, indigenous-based community anti-violence programs, and the use of indigenous cultures to reject violence. These can be plentiful, both at a pre-crime level—or what some call prevention—and a post-crime or responsive level. These are often difficult to establish again in an era and ideology of just deserts and a return to retributive kinds of practices.

The second issue I want to talk about is reducing vulnerability at an institutional level. One of the major findings in the study I did of prostitution across the country was that individuals, in looking for service, tended to avoid those state-sponsored, government-based programs. They tended instead to go to programs that were more insecurely funded but offered much more harm reduction, less fear of coming under the realm of the criminal justice system or the Child Welfare Act, and really, the avoidance of particular kinds of state services.

● (1130)

I'd also like to throw out, maybe as a discussion, how the law itself, particularly in terms of prostitution, tends to put women in vulnerable spaces, where they're much more likely, in order to do their jobs, to avoid law and the arm of police and take their work into very unsafe positions that leave them vulnerable to violent incidents. These laws then increase stigma, increase violence, and decrease the health and safety of women on the street.

I'll leave it there.

The Chair: Perfect.

Melanie Nimmo, I think you are presenting for the John Howard Society. You have five minutes.

Ms. Melanie Nimmo (Member of the Board, Assistant Professor in Criminal Justice, University of Winnipeg, John Howard Society of Manitoba, Inc.): Good morning.

Thank you for having us here. This is a really important issue, and I'm happy to see so many people out and finally paying attention to this.

My name is Melanie Nimmo. I'm an assistant professor in criminal justice at the University of Winnipeg, with a background in street gangs. I'm on the board of John Howard Society, and I'm here speaking for our executive director, John Hutton. He's not able to be here today. However, Kate Kehler is here, and she'll also be able to attend to any questions the committee has.

I apologize in advance, but unfortunately I will have to leave at noon. I teach today, and this is as much time as I could allot. I'm really sorry that I'll have to dash out.

That said, I also want to thank you for the opportunity to share some of the important work we're doing at John Howard Society. We work predominantly with men in conflict with the law, so a lot of people question what we can offer in terms of aboriginal women, the violence against aboriginal women, and the issue of missing aboriginal women. However, it comes into play because we take a very holistic and multi-faceted approach to crime—namely, restorative justice, which is based on traditional first nations notions of community healing and how to deal with offenders and repair harm in the community.

First I'm going to talk a little bit about John Howard Society in Manitoba, and then I'm going to talk about the notion of restorative justice, and specifically our program “Restorative Resolutions”. I then want to conclude by highlighting two programs that we've found to be very successful in attending to violence perpetrated by men, and not just aboriginal men but white men as well, against aboriginal women.

John Howard Society is a national coalition. We have 65 chapters across Canada. We all come together under the banner of advocating for an effective, just, and humane system. In Manitoba, John Howard Society formed here in Winnipeg in 1957. Shortly after that, we also recognized the need in Brandon, and they were incorporated into John Howard Society in 1965. We are currently trying to expand our services to reach out to northern reserves and communities, which are also in dire need of some assistance for alcohol-related and violence issues on the reserves. We're trying to reach out in that regard.

Now I'll talk a little bit about restorative justice. I know that a lot of people are familiar with it. It has a long history. In a nutshell, restorative justice seeks to repair harm. At the same time, it instills accountability on the part of the offender. We note that many victims....

By the way, 41% of the programs that fall under the auspice of restorative justice are for violent offences. Not many people know that. It's not just property crimes. We have found that it's a very rewarding experience for the victim. They're able to describe the harm that was done to them. The victim, the offender, and the community work together to mediate, and to make amends, and to repair harm. So we find it's very significant for empowering everybody involved in the process.

As an example of that, we began running the restorative resolutions program in 1993, with the focus of encouraging men to take responsibility for their behaviour, including violent behaviour against women and children, and to make amends for that.

There are a couple of statistics that I find really interesting: 95% of our proposed plans have been accepted by the courts, and 89% of our clients have successfully completed the conditions without reoffending. This translates into 51,000 hours of community service done in our communities. As well, 450 clients have provided their victims with letters of apology. Again, we're talking about making amends and repairing harm. Finally, in terms of monetary compensation for acts of violence and property damage, over $1 million has been paid back to victims directly.

We strive to meet the root causes of offending. In that regard, we deal with literacy. We deal with employment skills and helping to reintegrate an offender into the community. We recognize that this is the only way to really resolve some of the issues that bring a person into offending to begin with.

I now want to highlight two specific programs that deal directly with acts of violent behaviour.

● (1135)

The Chair: You have only about 20 seconds to do that.

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: Okay.

One program is our parenting class. It offers men an understanding of their role as fathers, as loving, respectful fathers who give appropriate discipline.

Secondly, significantly, we also offer an anger management course. We offer it three to four times a year. We always have a waiting list for this course. We wish we could offer it on a full-time basis. Unfortunately, we're not able to.

With that, I'd like to thank you very much for the opportunity. We really believe in a multi-faceted, holistic response.

Thank you.

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

Now we go to Cathy Denby, a child and youth care program instructor at Red River College.

Ms. Denby, you have five minutes.

Ms. Cathy Denby (Child and Youth Care Program Instructor, Red River College, Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad (Ndinawe)): Thank you.

I'm here representing the Ndinawe and the Red River child and youth care program. I'd like to talk about two programs, so I'm also representing White Wolf Speaking, under the aboriginal community initiatives program, through the Sexuality Education Resource Centre.

Let me talk about the Ndinawe and Red River child and youth care certificate program first.

Previous to this program, it was identified within the community, through a few groups that were doing some healing work with women and transgendered women in the community, mostly aboriginal, who had exited the sex trade, that there weren't a lot of services for women once they did some of the healing work and stuff. Many of the women, knowing what the waters were around sexual exploitation and the sex trade, were wanting to give back within the community. At the same time, they were wanting to get off social assistance, wanting to attain higher education and have a better life outside the sex trade.

So the program was developed in late 2006. Funding was confirmed for the joint pilot training program between Ndinawe and Red River College to recruit and to train former sex trade workers in the field of child and youth care in a community-based and supportive environment. The program was developed as an in-community model, with accredited training consistent with the mainstream child and youth care course at Red River College. They have a diploma program there.

This one-year program that was developed through Ndinawe and Red River is a certificate program that can lead into the diploma program at the college. All of the curriculum is exactly the same as Red River College, so there's no differentiation between what's delivered in terms of curriculum; rather, it's more about the supports and the in-community model.

The program was designed, as I said, to help women who were formerly entrenched, or exploited as children and youth, in the sex trade. About 75% of the participants in the program are aboriginal. To date there have been aboriginal transgendered women graduates and also one aboriginal male graduate.

The program is based out of the north end in Winnipeg. We have a program coordinator, a teaching assistant, a counsellor, and two full-time Red River College instructors. We've been running the program since January 2007.

The program provides cultural and social life skills, along with academic supports, that are designed to promote success and decrease the barriers that a lot of the women face in order that they can successfully graduate from the program and go on to gain meaningful employment. The program's main goal is to support the women to further their education after having exited the trade. All participants are on social assistance at the time of entry into the program.

To our knowledge, there isn't any other program like this in Canada. What's unique about the program is that the participants bring an experiential knowledge base that is so specialized and so important to the field of child and youth care. This is an education that you can't get; you have to have lived it. These participants have lived it. They are the ones who are the experts in this field, knowing what to spot, what to look for, and how to better help children who are at risk of being exploited. In many of the practicums that the students are placed in, they are able to spot the child who is at risk of being exploited. They are able to take some action there and are able to work with them.

For most of the women in the program, they see the program as a way to both educate themselves and work towards eradicating sexual exploitation and human trafficking of women and children. We know that the numbers of aboriginal children in care are high.

To date we have 28 graduates of the program. Most are fully employed and completely off social assistance. We also have a class of 12 today that hopefully will graduate in June.

● (1140)

The program has excellent cultural....

My time is up?

The Chair: Yes. Maybe members will ask you questions about your program and you can expand on it.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Cathy Denby: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now go to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. We have Chief Betsy Kennedy, and Chief Francine Meeches is here.

Welcome.

Who will speak for the five minutes, Chief Kennedy, or will you share the time?

Chief Francine Meeches (Swan Lake First Nation, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs): If there are two of us, does that mean we get five minutes each?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: No. Nice try.

Chief Kennedy.

Chief Betsy Kennedy (War Lake First Nation, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs): Good morning, members of Parliament and staff of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We welcome you to Treaty 1 territory here in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Chief Betsy Kennedy: My name is Betsy Kennedy. I'm the Chief of War Lake First Nation. With me is Chief Francine Meeches of Swan Lake First Nation.

We have many notes here, I notice, and a lot of information, but we would like to speak to the family violence prevention programs, the missing and murdered women, and also the sexual exploitation of our girls and women in our communities.

To give you the history of the AMC women's committee, the chiefs sit on this committee. It works toward improving the situation of first nations women and ensuring that Manitoba first nations are involved in decision-making. This is comprised of chiefs and councillors in leadership roles in their communities.

The issue of family violence and intervention is one of our major concerns and takes up many of the lead initiatives. Bill C-3 is supposed to highlight this, but I think some of these things also pertain to what's happening in the communities and how these women are being exploited.

Bill S-4 deals with matrimonial and real properties. When women have to leave the communities because they're just not going to be able to stay on their reserves, they are coming into the city, and this is where many of them are being exploited. I mention this because I believe you wanted to know some of what happens here.

There's also our section 37, which we would like to see. I know this is going to go to the Commons. This has to do with the missing and murdered women of Manitoba and Canada. Following the directions of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the committee continues to advocate on the issues of missing and murdered women, as a disturbingly high number of women have gone missing and have never been found. Most are aboriginal. According to the Native Women's Association of Canada, approximately 580 aboriginal women have gone missing and have not been found across Canada; 84 are from Manitoba. The AMC has called upon the federal government to initiate a public inquiry into this number of missing and murdered women. There has also been an announcement by the federal government that the amount of $10 million is to be spent within the two years.

Also, in 2009 Grand Chief Evans developed an agreement with the RCMP to have a first nations community liaison worker, Constable Monique Cooper, to be located at the AMC office in Winnipeg. This was established when the parents, the mothers of these missing and murdered women, came to us. We had a working relationship with the RCMP, and now have a woman working exclusively at the AMC office. We would like to recognize that work, which is happening right now. To this day, in both southern and northern Manitoba, there has not been any word on these women to their parents that they've...or how far this was going. The AMC continues to work closely with the families of these missing and murdered women and with the RCMP and Winnipeg Police Service's missing persons unit.

There's also the issue of human trafficking. Since 2009 AMC has been actively addressing human trafficking. The grand chief and the women's committee continue to raise the issue for discussion at the chiefs assemblies.

I want to tell you that when we have our annual assembly, women's issues are being brought out to the forefront, and we do have the support of all our chiefs. We are very proud to say that they really recognize what we've been doing. In turn, these discussions bring awareness into our homes.

● (1145)

The next part will be on family violence. We sit on a committee on family violence and—

The Chair: Perhaps, Chief Kennedy, you can bring that forward in answer to various questions. We've now finished with our presentation time. Thank you.

Now we'll go to the question and answer time. The first round is a seven-minute round, which means that the questions and the answers are included in the seven minutes. Again, brevity would be appreciated.

We start with Ms. Neville from the Liberal Party.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I'm going to begin with you, Chief Kennedy.

Chief Kennedy, if you would, tell us about the family violence program, what it consists of and how widespread it is, please.

Chief Betsy Kennedy: The family violence program has been going on since 1998. This information is in your package. We started sitting on a committee, the leadership, comprised of the women chiefs in Manitoba. One of the first things we wanted to look into was family violence.

There are some elders and there are some community members who sit on this board. We have made booklets available to the communities, and these have been sent out to every first nation in Manitoba.

The causes of family violence...there are a lot of problems. To me, I think it started from going to residential schools. When you were at school during those times, you were not with your family or with your parents, so there was no relationship there and the bonding was lost. When we came home—and I'll say “we” because I attended. You lose your language and people make fun of you because you do not speak your language. Even your own family, your brothers and sisters, make fun of you because you don't speak the language. I think that's one of the reasons why family violence starts. It starts with ridicule.

It also starts when you're going to school. Many of us didn't even start going to school to take a course until we were 30 years old. I know I started when I was 30, and I finally completed everything I wanted to by age 40. Many of us are not fortunate to have this support. I know that my grandparents were the ones who gave me the biggest support in what I was doing.

In the communities there is isolation and a feeling of despair sometimes. You want to buy something, you want to get something for your children, and you just can't, so you find other ways of doing things. Much of this is taken out on the wife and the children.

I think there needs to be a holistic, cultural approach.

● (1150)

Hon. Anita Neville: We've been advised, in both this forum and in other forums, of models of family violence intervention that have been successful. Can you cite any in Manitoba that the committee can reference and look at? Can you cite whether they've been successful? We frequently hear about Hollow Water. I've heard anecdotally about others, but I'd be interested in your perspective.

Chief Francine Meeches: Can I speak to that, please?

Hon. Anita Neville: Sure.

Chief Francine Meeches: I want to speak about what we do in our community. I'll just explain that she comes from a northern community and I come from a southern community, so we have one from the south and one from the north.

How we deal with family violence.... In our communities it's not something everybody is aware of. It's hidden. Nobody is going to admit to any type of family violence in their home. When you have situations where children are acting out like parents would act out, then you know you have a problem. And we have that.

We work closely with a shelter from a nearby community—I think it's Winkler or Morden, or somewhere around there. We work closely with that shelter. The lady from there works really well with our health centre. When you have that kind of working relationship with the surrounding communities, it benefits your people.

The thing we're finding is that we need a lot of counselling in our communities. It's going to take years to get to the point where we want to be, because counselling is a big thing. Right now we're in a situation where we have so many different areas where people need counselling that we don't even have the money to pay for it. We can't get money from FNIHB in INAC to cover that cost for us. You provide us an amount; we've already expended that amount, but we're trying to help—

Hon. Anita Neville: We're talking about family counselling.

Chief Francine Meeches: Yes, I know, but when you think about counselling, it's part of family violence. Think about it.

Hon. Anita Neville: I agree.

Chief Francine Meeches: When you have violence in your family, you need counselling. Counselling is a really important part of dealing with that family violence.

● (1155)

Hon. Anita Neville: Is there a willingness to access the counselling if you had the resources?

Chief Francine Meeches: Oh, yes, there is, but as I say, it's always the money. It's always the funding that you don't have. We're putting in money from our own source of revenue in order to cover that cost, but you have to do something to help your people. If you're not getting it from where you're supposed to be getting it, how do you deal with it?

If we could have counselling for a lot of our families, a lot of these issues would not.... Your family violence program wouldn't be so expensive. But you need counselling, and it does help.

Hon. Anita Neville: Can I just interrupt for one second?

Melanie, when I mentioned Hollow Water, I saw your head going up and down. Was I right?

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: Absolutely. It's been put on the map—

The Chair: You have about 40 seconds in which to answer.

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: It's been put on the map as one of the most successful models for restorative justice and dealing with the issues of family violence, substance abuse, etc.

Hon. Anita Neville: How can that be successfully replicated? What are the ingredients needed to replicate that elsewhere?

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: I think it has to be driven by the members of the community. I don't think a successful philosophy like that can be imposed on communities. I think communities know best how to solve their own unique issues.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Madame Demers from the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here this morning.

This is a bit difficult. We've actually heard from three groups of witnesses this morning, and they have all said different things. For example, Assistant Commissioner Bill Robinson, who is the commanding officer for the RCMP “D” Division, was here a little earlier, and he described the relationship between aboriginal communities and the RCMP when it comes to missing persons. The picture he painted was very different from yours, Chief Kennedy. You told us that families have not received any information to this day whereas he described in great detail all the steps taken to keep families informed of the investigations into murdered or missing persons. I personally believe you. I don't want to say that I don't believe him, but I believe you.

Ms. Kehler, you talked about alternative justice. You also talked about reducing risks. I'm very interested in those topics too.

Melanie, you talked about programs and sources of funding. Could you tell me more about that?

Cathy, you mentioned a training program for women who got involved in the sex trade to take care of their children. That's a fantastic program and I would like to know more about it. I hope this program can become available elsewhere and I would like us to implement it in other places where it could be very useful.

Those are some of my questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Who would like to start that answer?

Chief Kennedy.

Chief Betsy Kennedy: Thank you.

On the information, regarding the information going out to the families I believe the RCMP are doing all they can, but it's hard to go to all the missing and murdered women's families. I know that in the north they constantly ask about what's happening. They need updates. Maybe there is need for a further RCMP involvement and closer ties to the communities, especially...because I know there's a lot of work being done here in the city of Winnipeg.

On exploitation, we have brought out information about it, and we also sit in with and tell Monique, who sits on our committee. She gives us information about all that she does. She has an office here at the AMC where the women go if they need to talk about anything that has to do with the exploitation of women. This is one of the ways how we could help.

● (1200)

Ms. Kelly Gorkoff: When we talk about reducing risks.... I'll talk about the study I have completed. It was a fairly small sample of about 60 women involved in prostitution across the prairie provinces. We also surveyed 173 service providers who provided services, both state-mandated and non-governmental organizations who provided services, mostly for young people involved in prostitution. We did 43 site visits. They were trying to develop some best practices kinds of models.

There were three things that women who are involved in the sex trade talked about as reasons for why they became involved. First and foremost, it was money. It was an easy way to make money. That would go to the fact of sustainable incomes for individuals. There is a risk factor—sustainable incomes. We know poverty is related to these particular instances.

The subculture that all of the women talked about was in many cases the lack of a loving relationship growing up and finding that loving relationship on the street. Interestingly, for 70% of the young women we talked to, the reason they came to work on the street was through aunts and friends. So we didn't find the big, bad pimping issue. Now that could have been a result of the sample we spoke with.

The subculture also means a risk. That certainly points us to the community building kinds of aspects in all of the programs that everybody here is talking about.

In terms of program use, all of the women said they would avoid using state-centred services. As young people, they were very hesitant to become involved in, and had bad experiences when they were involved in, child welfare agencies, but tended to gravitate towards programs that were harm reduction based. This is where they could go and get condoms and clean needles and where they could go and just talk to somebody, not necessarily an official program, but the door was always open and they could come and go as they pleased. Those programs were the ones that were the most insecurely funded.

By the time we had actually finished our study, 20 of the 43 programs had lost their funding. Those were the programs that were the most often used, whereas the child welfare.... Interestingly, in this particular timeframe, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act in Alberta came into effect and the sexual exploitation program in Ontario was in its last reading. I know Manitoba had a very different approach in developing the healthy child initiative, which was a different approach in terms of certainly the Alberta model.

The Chair: There are 30 seconds left, if anybody wants to drop a 30-second pearl of wisdom.

Ms. Kehler.

Ms. Kate Kehler (Assistant Executive Director, John Howard Society of Manitoba, Inc.): Hello.

I don't know about a pearl of wisdom, but I would like to echo the idea that people do access the John Howard Society, because we are a street-level organization, both here and in Brandon. All of the organizations make themselves available to people at the street level. It's not a big, scary building to walk into; it's a small place right in the downtown area. So we make it as comfortable as possible for people to access us.

We are able to offer our anger management program free of charge. All of our services are free of charge, but unfortunately, the John Howard Society of Brandon actually charges for their domestic violence anger management program. They have a two-tiered program that addresses domestic violence, but they are unable to offer it free of charge, so that is an additional barrier that they recognize as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will go to Ms. Glover for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you very much.

I want to welcome you all here. I want to acknowledge the chiefs and the fact that we're on Treaty 1 territory.

I want to clarify something with Chief Kennedy, if I could. When I heard you speaking, I thought you were commending the relationship between you and the RCMP and having an RCMP officer in AMC to help have communication with the missing and murdered aboriginal women. Perhaps there was a language barrier. Were you commending them or were you criticizing them?

Chief Betsy Kennedy: I was trying to commend their efforts and what they really want to do, especially with what was established by the first nations.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: And they have had contact and some communication?

● (1205)

Chief Betsy Kennedy: Some contact.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Okay.

I just wanted to get that on the record, because I know it was said, but there was a little bit of miscommunication there.

I did want to address Chief Meeches' comment about counselling. The residential schools apology was long overdue—long overdue. The residential schools situation is a historic tragedy in this country. I'm proud that Prime Minister Harper did make the apology and committed $5 billion towards a settlement agreement. Much of that money was also supposed to go to counselling.

I'm curious to know, if you're looking for more counselling, are you able to access more funds there? Are you suggesting that that's not available? How can we help you to access that if that is what you're looking for?

Chief Francine Meeches: In our community, we're allowed a counsellor twice a month. That's all our funding from FNIHB will provide.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: But through the settlement agreement, did you look for—

Chief Francine Meeches: No. We don't go through the settlement agreement.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Have you applied?

Chief Francine Meeches: That's not how we.... We're not going into that type of counselling. The counselling we do for our people is for the families in the community, okay, and—

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I get that, but I'm thinking that because you have so many victims of the residential school tragedy, they can access—

Chief Francine Meeches: Yes, but that's separate from this.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: And did you apply?

Chief Francine Meeches: Yes, we have. We will access that—

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Okay.

Chief Francine Meeches: —but what I'm saying is that the counselling we currently have is for situations in our communities, for the young people, the young parents. Suicide is another thing. We were trying to use our suicide dollars, our family violence dollars, whatever dollars we could tap into. We were trying to use what we could. But FNIHB will only allow you to use so much, right?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Right. I'm going to try to help you, because after this is all done, I'd like to have a conversation with you.

Chief Francine Meeches: Sure.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Because there's another $199 million on top of the $5 billion that was put towards residential school victims so we could get that help. There are healing centres that are open, so please, we'll meet afterwards—

Chief Francine Meeches: Okay.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: —and I'll try to help you with that.

I wanted to come back to Cathy, because she hadn't quite finished what she was talking about, and I know this program is tremendous. It also speaks to what Melanie was saying. I think it was Melanie who said that when you have experiences and you can share those, sometimes that's the most influential.

I had a car thief phone me from jail when I became an elected official. He's now incarcerated for murder. Actually, he didn't phone me—sorry—but he sent me a card saying "Please continue what you're doing. When you were a police officer, I should have listened to you. I should have listened. Now here I am. I went from car theft to drug dealing, and now I'm in for murder."

I went to see him and asked him this question: "With your experience, would you be willing to talk to others?" Because it seems that some kids and some people who get involved in the system don't listen to moms and dads and what not; they listen to peers and they listen to people who've been there.

So I want to ask you about this. Your program, which is funded by the Government of Canada—and I'm proud of that—does exactly that. How does what your program is doing prevent more women from becoming victims of violence? How does it help? Should we continue this and, like Mrs. Demers said, spread it across the board?

Ms. Cathy Denby: Certainly a dream of ours is to see.... The program could be a template model, I think, for other places and could be modified to fit other communities where exploitation is going on.

But let me talk a bit about Sacred Lives, which is a program that was just funded in October as a result of the child and youth care program. Sacred Lives is a program that will employ the alumni of the child and youth care program to go into the schools to deliver preventative workshops on exploitation to kids aged 10 to 17.

The experiential child and youth care workers will be talking to the kids about how to respect themselves and how to spot potential dangers. All of this is also coming from the teachings of the Miikiwaap , so all the workers have taken training. The cultural teachings are also brought into the workshops for the children. We're really happy about developing that program right now and hope to go into the schools next month to start delivering the workshops.

Yes, it's those voices, like I said before, the voices of the people who have been there, who have that life experience. They know best how to approach and talk to kids so they don't get involved.

● (1210)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I believe that. I believe those women were exploited and forced into the sex trade and they can prevent.... Women are very, very influential in our aboriginal communities. I want to acknowledge that with the chiefs.

As well, you mentioned the MRP bill. I believe that is going to help our women regain and reclaim the power not to be forced off of reserve, not to be put in a situation where they're exploited. I'm wondering if you could comment on that bill. Do you see that as a tool to empower them?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds in which to respond.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: You could send it by mail if you don't—

Chief Francine Meeches: This is not anybody else's feeling; this is my own feeling.

There are two sides you have to look at when you think about matrimonial real property, especially in our community, and we deal with that. If we're in a situation where the male is from our community and the female is not a member...those types of things just don't jibe in our community where the wife can keep the home. It doesn't work like that. You have to be a member of our community in order to be entitled to a home in our community. That's just the way it is, and that would probably go in any community.

So when you talk about matrimonial real property and what rights does the female have if the husband should leave the home, you really don't have any rights. You either go back to the community you came from, or, if you're not status, you're basically not allowed to live there. That's just the way it is.

The Chair: Now I'll move on to Ms. Mathyssen for the NDP.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for the kind welcome to Treaty 1 territory.

I have a number of questions. I'll try to be succinct.

The first is for Kelly. You talked about harm reduction. One of the realities we're facing with the Himel decision in Ontario is the attempt to decriminalize solicitation, bawdy houses, the johns. The federal government has appealed, but my great fear is that this will become a judgmental kind of response, that instead of seeing these women who have, as you say, been pushed into this role of sex workers, we won't have the intelligent discussion that this opportunity provides. You mentioned clean needles and talks, but it seems to me that when women are ready to make that transition, the resources aren't there. I wonder if you could comment on that.

Ms. Kelly Gorkoff: I guess the only comment is to completely agree with you. I think there has just been, for whatever reason—and I'm not really sure what the reason is, if it's some type of moral stigma, if it's some type of.... I could speculate until the cows come home on why we don't have exit programs. Perhaps it could be a lack of sustainability for programs. I think we've seen a lot of programs come and go and come and go and come and go. We have had programs. POWER in Winnipeg was foundational. Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights was a foundational program, which, again, lost its funding. So it has had six or seven different iterations, and currently at Sage House.

So I'm not really sure that programs have necessarily gone away. I think they've been forced to reinvent themselves. I think, though, that it's a more complex process than simply very specific programs for prostitutes who want to leave because there's some stigma attached to that.

The women we talked to—half of them left and half of them were still involved—had trouble getting housing. So housing is an issue. They had trouble with sustainable employment. They mentioned good living conditions, national child care. These are all issues that are entwined for anybody who's trying to make a go in terms of a life change.

Specific programs are definitely necessary, but because the issues are much broader than that, I think it's the responsibility of a variety of different departments to assist.

● (1215)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you.

Melanie, you talked about the multifaceted holistic approach in terms of our response to crime. You mentioned that the recidivism among people who had gone through restorative justice was 89%. What's the recidivism rate for others who are incarcerated?

We've heard a lot about spending many millions of dollars on more prisons and more jail time. Is there a better way to spend that money?

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: Yes. I think many of us agree that there is a better way to spend the money. We know that incarceration in fact makes most offenders worse. It further fragments family systems that have already been fragmented enough due to colonization and the residential school system.

To back up and answer your questions about recidivism, our recidivism rate is 17%. Compared to male offenders who do not go through our program...it routinely hits about 50%. I was speaking specifically to that one program and the recidivism rate there.

But I think what we really need to attend to, which John Howard has been attempting to do for a while, is assisting with reintegration for those offenders who we do put into the correctional institutions. We're not saying that people should not be held accountable for their behaviour—that's not what we're saying—but we are recognizing that people do need more resources to facilitate their reintegration into society.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you.

Ms. Kate Kehler: Can I add to that, please?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Yes, very quickly.

Ms. Kate Kehler: Thank you.

I just wanted to say, just to be specific about what we do with the restorative resolutions program, that they do go through cognitive errors and they do go through victim empathy. That's the same approach we take in our parenting class and our anger management class as well. We talk about all those issues. We talk about blended families. We talk about different cultures. Our approach is to give them the tools in order to avoid the violent behaviour so they don't have to fall back on violence.

Thank you.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Cathy, in regard to the program you talked about that pertained to trafficking of women in Canada, you said that it was a one-of-a-kind and very significant program. I wonder if you could tell us a little about it. Has there been an adequate response in the rest of Canada to the issue of the trafficking of women?

Ms. Cathy Denby: Well, I don't think our program is known across Canada yet. Just in terms of the research, or not in terms of the research, but.... It's just not known across Canada; we are so busy delivering the program that we haven't even been out there or able to promote it.

What we do need is a very comprehensive evaluation of the program. Of course, we don't have the dollars to do that. Our funding comes in about eight different pockets, from both the federal government and the provincial government, which is just enough to run the program. We do need a very comprehensive evaluation, I think, so that we can develop a very stellar template that can go across the provinces and across the country. In order to do that, we need the funding, core funding. We're grappling all the time. Every year we're writing proposal after proposal, trying to hold on to the five positions that we have to continue to deliver the program. Those are barriers.

We have another couple of barriers in terms of the program. One is the bridging programs into education. Women don't just get off the street, come out of the sex trade, and suddenly have all of the educational skills they need to go into a college program. There needs to be more bridging done. They do healing work first and then that piece needs to come in. And as for post-program, after being in a program for a while that is very sensitive to their needs, and where we understand and look after them quite well so they can academically succeed and gain employment, they still need that support after this as well.

So there are still some glitches in the program, but definitely, as for what we have developed, if you look at 40 graduates and each one of those going out onto the street and stopping one child from being exploited, generationally, that is a cost saving to the government of billions of dollars.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

That's it, Irene.

Now we're going to go into a second round. We have 20 minutes for the second round, so the second round will be four people at five minutes each. We're cutting it very fine here, so I'm going to really cut you short, guys, if you go over five minutes.

Starting with Ms. Neville for the Liberals, we'll have a five-minute round.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I have two somewhat unrelated questions. One of them in part was directed at Melanie, but she's leaving.

It's okay.

The Chair: We'll give you a note for being late.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: I'm teaching about aboriginal policing and first nations policing.

Hon. Anita Neville: Well, it's important.

I have two questions. First of all, how do we share best practices? We talked about Hollow Water being a template. How can that information be shared? We talked about Cathy's program at Red River. You talk about developing a template and getting it out there. It's about sharing best programs and best practices and getting that out there.

My other question is totally unrelated. We've talked a lot today about the issue of apprehension of children and violence against women, women going for support. What we also know anecdotally.... My question is about whether you have any statistical data as to whether children who are taken into care are more likely to be engaged in prostitution and anti-social behaviour, however one wants to describe it. I've heard stories from various organizations, but do any of you have any collected data, any of you?

Those are my two questions.

The Chair: Well, we've asked that you stay behind to answer that. Would you like to go ahead, Melanie?

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: I would love to.

On your first question about sharing best practices, I think there are a couple of avenues. Of course, government reports...but who reads them?

Hon. Anita Neville: Right—your staff.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Melanie Nimmo: Yes.

But also, they hold the purse, so to speak. I'm also a huge fan of public service announcements and media kits. We're finding that really successful in some of the anti-gang initiatives that I'm involved in, in terms of involving the community with real, doable best practices. It's building that awareness, because the community has to know about resources that may be available to them. We find that this is an issue, so I think reaching out and opening that to the community is important.

I don't know specific statistics. Maybe Ms. Kehler can attend to that, or my colleague Kelly Gorkoff can. With respect to children who are in foster care and what we do see, let's face it: if a child is being put into foster care, they're not living in an ideal living situation. Very likely, they're living in a situation where there's substance abuse, where there's neglect, and where there's violence. We see a number of issues in fragmented family systems.

As for what's happening in the foster care system, it's not like this child moves into a loving arrangement where they're cared for. They're being bounced from.... The number of placements that these sexually exploited girls go through is mind-boggling. So to think that they can have some sense of self-worth and self-respect, or that anybody gives a damn for them given the circumstances they're experiencing in their home life and their street life.... It's really disconcerting.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Anybody else...?

Ms. Kelly Gorkoff: I'll just add to that. There is no monolithic experience of people who are involved in the sex trade. Of the people I spoke with, some come from loving homes. Some of them come from the foster care system. Sixty-eight percent of my sample had some experience in foster care systems when they were younger, but not all individuals of foster care will definitely take that path. Is it a cause? It's probably one of many factors.

The women I did talk to said, again, that the defining characteristic—and it sounds hokey—is the development of a loving relationship with one or two people who they could trust. So foster care systems and their reinvention, perhaps, clearly.... I don't think that's news to anybody in this room. Clearly that's something that can be fostered.

A voice: Cathy, did you want to add anything?

● (1225)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Cathy.

Ms. Cathy Denby: It's estimated that there are about 400 youths being sexually exploited each year in Winnipeg and the majority of those are aboriginal youth in care. The average beginning age of involvement ranges from 11 to 16. Thirty-five percent started at the age of 14 years. Seventy percent to eighty percent of the adults started at the age of 18 or more. Forty-four percent of the youth remain involved for two years or more.

The average length of time in the trade was about 12 years. The range is from two years old to 22 years old exploited in the sex trade, and the youths are comprised of approximately 30% non-aboriginal and 75% aboriginal.

Hon. Anita Neville: Where are those statistics from?

Ms. Cathy Denby: They're from the.... I'll think about it. The Manitoba strategy....

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay.

Ms. Cathy Denby: There are a number of pieces that we put together for our presentation.

The Chair: Thank you.

We've gone over the five minutes, but I just want to suggest that you've heard us asking for statistics and data, so if you have either a link or data, could you send it to the clerk, please? She could distribute it to the committee and we could read it and get some further information. Thank you very much.

Next is Ms. Glover for five.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

I'd like to go back to our chiefs again. First of all, I'm always impressed with strong women in aboriginal communities, and we don't have enough of them, so you are here as role models, true role models, for our aboriginal women.

I know you touched on this very briefly, but there's a program being run by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs that is called "Prevent Human Trafficking: Stop the Sexual Exploitation of First Nations Women and Children". We've focused a little bit on Cathy's program, but this is another program that's funded by the Government of Canada and is being run quite a bit by members of your communities.

I'd like you to share with us how that's helping to reduce aboriginal women's violence. As well, how can we improve it?

Chief Francine Meeches: I have not seen any numbers to prove that it has decreased, but the awareness campaign that the AMC provides.... When I got involved with that committee over a year ago, I was really unaware of this whole issue. I had heard about it years ago, but I just didn't know.

What we do as chiefs is we try to express the importance of this campaign at the assemblies. Some males will kind of frown upon that type of discussion. In our communities, it's kind of like that. We try to make them aware of how important this is and how they need to go back to their communities and speak to their membership.

In our community, we had the AMC staff come out and do a presentation. A lot of our people said, "You know what? I never knew this before. I never knew this happened." So that's really important. If you continue with a program such as that, where you're continuously providing that campaign out there....

I was involved with the walk we had here in the city. It was unbelievable the amount of people who showed up for that. When you have that type of awareness out there, at least it educates people, especially the young people. Those are the ones you have to really target. They, in turn, kind of educate their parents and grandparents.

To me, with AMC coordinating this it's really great, because it goes out to all the 63 first nations in Manitoba.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

Do you, Chief Kennedy, have some knowledge of the program and how it's working?

I just want to say welcome to Ms. Simson, who's arrived from out of town. She's another member of Parliament. I just want to welcome her to Winnipeg.

Go ahead, Chief Kennedy.

Chief Betsy Kennedy: In terms of the importance of this program, as Chief Meeches was saying, there has to be an awareness program out there. Our children in the communities up north come here, or in many of the urban communities or centres, to go to school. We don't give them information on what could happen out there. All we say is "Be careful", just "Be careful".

With this campaign that we've done, this really has made a lot of parents think about what to tell their children, and also to have this done in the schools before they leave. I think that's very important. I know when we do it in our communities, we try to have the parents talk to their children; either that or...because it's very scary out there. Many of the children lost in the north were going to school here, and they're still missing.

● (1230)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Yes.

Thank you.

Do I have a bit more time, Ms. Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Excellent.

Thank you so much for the statistic you provided about exploited children. I visited the ICE unit at Winnipeg Police Service about a week ago and I looked at their computer system. It actually showed that people were accessing child pornography within the last 24 hours. I couldn't believe the hits in Winnipeg alone; you could also look at it bigger and bigger.

There's a lack of being able to proactively look at those. Are the statistics you shared with us the actual ones that have been followed up? Because, I'll tell you, on that one screen, I'm sure I saw over 100 to 200 hits just in Winnipeg during one day. Some of those are children who are being exploited and we haven't even started investigations.

So I want you to clarify that about the statistic. Do you know if it's...?

Ms. Cathy Denby: The stats on this are only for the visible sexual exploitation trade. We're talking straight trade, so we're talking outdoor trade, not indoor. That would be considered indoor trade.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: So this is much bigger—

Ms. Cathy Denby: Yes—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd like to move on to Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you for allowing me to speak in my own language.

I would like to continue along the same lines as Ms. Shelly Glover, who talked about role models. In my view, that's a very important issue. I also think that aboriginal women play a very important role in putting an end to the violence they are subjected to. You, who are strong accomplished women, have shown strength and courage. You have succeeded in becoming chiefs in your communities. You are living proof of how much today's aboriginal women can accomplish and of how they can share their experiences with others, as it used to be the case, when aboriginal communities followed a matriarchal model.

I wonder whether it is possible to have a mentorship program by calling on aboriginal women who are successful to pass on this power to women so that they can put it to good use and escape the grinding poverty in which they still live today. No one should have to experience such poverty. It is not normal, especially for aboriginal women.

Chief Meeches and Chief Kennedy, what do you think about that?

[*English*]

Chief Francine Meeches: I was just thinking of this on the way into Winnipeg this morning. We really need to empower our women. It's really important.

I was talking to Chief Kennedy in the restaurant earlier. We were talking about how strong we have to be as a person, especially the female of the family, because you're the one always worrying about your family. The man doesn't have to worry about the kids, because you're going to take care of them, right? That's just the way it is. We have to be strong regardless of what it is. We have to be the ones to wipe those tears away and we have to be the ones to send that child off to school.

There are males out there who do that; I really have a lot of respect for men who take care of their children, men who are single parents. That's important. The child needs at least one parent, for sure. If you can't have both parents, that one person has to be there.

But to me, there are not enough of these programs and services out there to empower our women. In my community, I try to speak to them, whether it's a cousin or a niece. I try to take them with me when I go somewhere, or to an assembly, for them to see what is actually out there. They need to see that.

Sometimes in our communities, we confine ourselves to that little line that's in our communities. A lot of our people are so comfortable in our communities that they don't see what's outside that. They're so happy to be in their own homes. They're so happy to come home to that house and so happy to wake up in their own home that what's out there is not as important as what's at home. But they also need to see what's out there.

I had the opportunity to leave. I struggled when leaving the reserve. I did. It took me a while. Even as a child, I never saw myself leaving the reserve; I thought I was going to live there forever. That was my dream. But when I did leave, I finally realized that there is more out there.

That's what we need to do in our communities. We need to show that there's more out there and that you can come home afterward and share whatever experiences and education you have and help your community. That's the way I've always seen it.

Thanks.

● (1235)

The Chair: There are 30 seconds left.

Chief Betsy Kennedy: I just want to add to what Chief Meeches said.

Right now we have so much development going on in the north. I encourage the women in our community—I encourage anybody I speak to on the street, whomever—that they can become a truck driver. They can become an operator. They don't have to do just the regular women's jobs. They can become doctors and lawyers.

We always struggle to.... We always want to inform the children of that in our communities. As chiefs, that's what we do. Yes, as women chiefs, we are expected to do a lot more than what our regular role is, and we are happy to do that. As a matter of fact, when I'm home I do as much as I can. This shows the women that you can do things.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Kennedy.

Ms. Mathyssen for five minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I haven't had a chance to ask Chief Meeches and Chief Kennedy any questions, so I'm going to focus some of this questioning their way.

You talked about the Sisters in Spirit campaign. We know that $10 million was allotted to address the reports that were provided by the Native Women's Association. How would you like to see that money spent, or how would you have liked to see that money spent? We know that $4 million of it actually went to creating a database, so that's 40% of the money that's not available.

Have you given it any thought? Where should it have gone?

Chief Francine Meeches: I've never really given it any thought, but the thing that really disturbs me at times is that it's okay to announce millions of dollars going to organizations or first nations people, but what happens is that by the time it gets to where it's supposed to go, half of that money is already spent. Those are the things that really have to be looked at.

Who are the in-between people who get the funding? Who benefits from this? By the time it gets to those community members in our community, we don't have a whole lot. The $12,000 that we get for family violence is not a lot of money. It's $1,000 a month. What can you do with $1,000 for your membership when you have 720 people in your community? What can you actually do with that?

Those are the things that really have to be looked at. To me, that's important.

Chief Betsy Kennedy: The program was a certain help, I guess, in providing a lot more than what were doing or what we were receiving. It's been a struggle in our communities to try to do something.

The families that we have, they don't come out and say things. They will do anything they can to keep the family together. That's very sad. Even the children, they have the same thing. They will not say anything. They will not say anything against their parents. But I would like to see the children and their families become a unit where they can have love and have trust again instead of hiding their feelings all the time.

Somebody mentioned child and family services. The children will not say anything because they do not want to enter the child and family services programs. Also, for the women, it's hard for them to go into a program where there's nothing there for them. After they leave, they have to go back home: home to what?

Thanks.

● (1240)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you.

You're touching on something that I wanted to ask about too. There's been a great deal of discussion here and we haven't heard a great deal about health and mental health. It seems to me that mental health is a centrepiece of this. I'm wondering about services in regard to issues of mental health.

I'm also wondering about the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which is winding down. The funding has ended. I'm wondering what impact that has on communities and on the work that you do.

Certainly anyone who can answer, or is willing to answer, would help.

Chief Betsy Kennedy: I know there are a lot of programs out there for off-reserve organizations, but in our first nations communities, we don't get that much. We're always having to go to many of our funders to try to get something and we have to do a lot of reports on everything.

Many of those things have to do with mental health, the women, and the children. But when we bring this out, they have restrictions that they have to follow and they have to inform the RCMP. That hinders their things, so they're really stuck.

It's very hard trying to get somebody out there to listen to you. As the chief of my first nation, I will say that we have a lot of that. We try to do anything we can to protect women. We do other things, things other than just having to do some of these programs, but we don't tell anybody about it. The person out there is out there trusting you not to say anything. It's a lot of hard work for us also.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think that brings to an end this particular session.

I just want to introduce one of our Liberal members of the committee, Michelle Simson, who is going to be going on to Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay tomorrow.

Welcome, Michelle.

Thank you very much for coming. Those were very interesting and very different presentations. There are a lot of statistics we would like to get and also all the best practices that we would really like this committee to have a look at.

It's very interesting, Ms. Denby, to find out that you have this unique program. I think it's worth our being able to see how the program is set up and maybe to see some of your outcomes.

Thank you for taking your time to be here. We learned a great deal from you, as always. Thank you very much.

Would someone move that this meeting be adjourned?

An hon. member: So moved.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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