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Thursday, January 20, 2011

Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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● (0810)

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): Good morning. We'll start the meeting.

My name is Anita Neville. I'm a member of Parliament from... from where?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Acting Chair (Hon. Anita Neville): From Winnipeg South Centre. I don't know where we are; we've been on the move a fair bit.

Welcome. Thanks to all of you for being here on an early, cold morning. We very much appreciate it.

This is the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. As you are all undoubtedly aware, we have been travelling literally right across the country speaking to the issue of violence against aboriginal women.

As for Yellowknife, I've been up here a number of times, but we knew that Yellowknife would be an important stop along our way. We're anxious to hear what you have to say.

We have four presentations. We're on a fairly tight timeline, but I'm going to suggest that you take seven minutes to make your presentations; I don't know what you've prepared. Following that, there will be questions by members of the committee. If you don't get in everything that you had hoped to say, you can use the question period to add to it.

Let's begin with Lorraine.

Lorraine, we're delighted to see you again. It's nice to have you here.

Ms. Lorraine Phaneuf (Executive Director, Status of Women Council of the Northwest Territories): Thank you for giving us the opportunity to present.

I am with the Status of Women Council of the NWT, and although we don't do front-line service, we do a lot of advocacy with women who come to us after they've probably exhausted all other resources.

Aboriginal women who come in for advocacy have indicated to us they are being terrorized in their homes, in the streets, and in the workplace. When they are thinking about and planning on leaving an abusive partner, they face many barriers and challenges in terms of housing, finances, and general well-being. It is important for women to have a safe place to go when they are fleeing from abuse.

Once out, they need lots of supports, both physical and emotional, to regain their power and start over. In Yellowknife we have both shelter and transitional housing, but not all communities have shelters, RCMP, or resources that are easily attainable. This year 314 women and 253 children used the shelter services across the territories.

INAC provides operational funding to a network of 35 shelters used by first nations women who ordinarily live on reserve. In the Northwest Territories most communities have a large demographic of aboriginal women. We have one small reserve that could potentially apply for this fund of almost $56 million, from which first nations communities are effectively excluded because a majority of first nations women of the northern territories simply do not live on established reserves.

In the NWT, five shelters service an area of over 1.17 million square kilometres containing 33 communities. Current shelter programming is limited in meeting the needs of women and children who are struggling with family violence in their homes. This limitation is compounded by a broad range of functioning among the shelters, which means women in some shelters receive more support than do women in others. For instance, some shelters operate with only three staff members and are able to offer only a safe place to stay, whereas other shelters are functioning at a level that allows for the implementation of limited supportive programming for residents of the shelter.

Currently there are very few services that are dedicated to the issue of family violence intervention, prevention, and risk management in the NWT. Rates of violence are high, yet there are few other options for families struggling with family violence.

The rate of reported sexual assault in the NWT in 2008 was more than six times the national rate. Most communities do have one of the following resources based in their community: a nurse, social worker, community wellness worker, and/or an RCMP officer.

With limited support and many responsibilities, the turnover rate is very high. Residents of these small communities also have limited means to travel to another community, meaning that at times they are often not able to access any additional supports or services that might theoretically be available to them.

Eleven communities in the north do not have RCMP and rely on members to come from other communities. Further, aboriginal women suffer from the most severe, life-threatening forms of violence, including being sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or attacked. In some communities the rate of violence against aboriginal women is as high as 90%.

Council would recommend that funding be increased and that there be policy changes regarding the on-reserve funding so that shelter services and communities in the territories can do their important work of reducing violence against aboriginal women living off reserve. We respectfully request that the committee review INAC policies within the family violence prevention program to address this issue. We need to work on culturally appropriate strategies that include fair and equitable services to all aboriginal women living in jurisdictions that lack services. We need to consider a national strategy to increase awareness and prevention of violence against women and to maximize services for family violence prevention. We need coordination among all levels of government, non-governmental agencies, service agencies, police forces, aboriginal governments, as well as national and other aboriginal organizations.

The Status of Women Council of the NWT co-chairs the Coalition Against Family Violence with the Native Women's Association of NWT. Since 2000 the Government of the NWT has been working in formal partnerships with various service agencies, non-governmental organizations, and interested professionals to develop and implement specific strategies and action plans to improve service delivery to victims of family violence. Currently the family violence action plan phase two is in place.

The Coalition against Family Violence was a partner in the development of the family violence action plan phase two. It also helps monitor the plan, and has begun the work to present further recommendations that will be presented to the Government of the Northwest Territories.

● (0815)

Lyda Fuller, executive director of the YWCA in Yellowknife, is a founding member of the Coalition Against Family Violence. She has been an integral stakeholder in family violence plans one and two, and she will now continue.

Ms. Lyda Fuller (Executive Director, YWCA Yellowknife; Representative, Northwest Territories Coalition Against Family Violence): Thank you.

As Lorraine said, since around 1999 the non-government organizations have been working on social issues relating to family violence and engaging the Government of the Northwest Territories, especially the social envelope departments, to improve social conditions relating to this pervasive issue.

Originally, the coalition began by doing research. We wanted to describe the nature, extent, and impacts of violence against women in the territory. We released a report in December of 2002 called *Family Violence in the NWT: A Survey of Costs, Services, Data Collection and Issues for Action*. Some of the key findings of that report helped us to develop the ongoing work. Those findings included: a lack of understanding in the territory about the dynamics of family violence, and the presence of attitudes and beliefs that perpetuated it; an underfunding of the shelters for abused women, which led to staff turnover and to shelters doing bingos in order to keep their doors open; a need for improved and consistent collaboration so that there wouldn't be gaps in collaboration; a need for more resources devoted to children, youth, families, and communities; and a concern for the response of the justice system.

The research led to the development of recommendations. We tabled in the legislative assembly an NWT action plan on family violence for 2003 to 2006. Actions were around changes to policy and legislation; expanding the reach of the coalition outside of Yellowknife; capacity-building for communities; culturally appropriate training; prevention through support for healthy family relationships; education and awareness for the public; and service system enhancements for women, men, and children.

This led the government to provide an official response, called "A Framework for Action", in 2004, which described and coordinated the efforts of various social envelope departments on 71 actions that they agreed to take. An implementation steering committee was formed by the social envelope departments, but it also included two members from the non-government associations to meet and talk about progress that was being made.

Unfortunately, a number of the 71 issues were things that were already in progress and sort of tangential to the issue of family violence. However, real gains were made. New legislation included the Prevention Against Family Violence Act, which allowed women to get emergency protection orders and have the partner leave the home so that the women and children could stay in the home.

We started developing inter-agency protocols so that we could work together to better address family violence in Yellowknife, with templates for the communities. Research was summarized around programs for men who were abusive. So we felt that we'd made progress. We entered into phase two with another set of recommendations through 2012. That was funded. We all worked together to try to condense 17 critical actions into the funding available. That happened. We are now embarking on phase three.

I guess when we look at engaging with the government, one of the barriers we have to overcome is the turnover here on both sides of the table. We need to keep people connected and engaged; it's easy to lose momentum when you have the levels of turnover that we have.

● (0820)

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Perhaps we can follow up on some of the other things you have to say during the question and answer period, because we have gone over the allotted time.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, for the Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, Sandra Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker (Manager, Abuse Prevention Policy and Programs, Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association): Good morning, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Tucker, I'll give you a two-minute warning when you have two minutes left, and then one. There's leeway, but it helps you keep your head in the space.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Absolutely.

Thank you to the honourable committee members for allowing me to present today. I am the manager of the abuse prevention policy programs at Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. On behalf of our president, Elisapee Sheutiapik, I wish to extend our thanks to the committee for the opportunity to present on the development and implementation of our national strategy to prevent abuse in Inuit communities.

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is a national organization that represents all Inuit women across Canada. Established in 1984, our mandate is to foster greater awareness of the needs of Inuit women and to advocate for their equitable participation in community, regional, and national concerns.

Pauktuutit is active in a wide range of areas. Files include health policy and programs, gender equality, violence and abuse prevention, protection of cultural and traditional knowledge, economic development, climate change, and leading in policy development and community social change.

Since its inception in 1984, abuse and violence prevention has been a high priority, yet a lack of recognition and resources has caused change to be painfully slow. Those who work in abuse prevention and community services—shelter workers, crisis counsellors, Inuit healers, and police—are discouraged, and nowhere is this discouragement more acute than in the north.

In the north, for example, the circuit court system can be a significant barrier to accessing justice for Inuit women. Furthermore, dynamics of family violence and abuse can be different in smaller communities that are facing the unique challenges and circumstances of overcrowded housing, poverty, and high costs of living, combined with lack of basic community programming. In addition, over 70% of northern and remote communities do not have a safe or emergency shelter for women to access when fleeing abuse.

New and emerging issues for Inuit women are related to resource extraction activities, transient workers, and the associated increases in sexual and domestic violence, exploitation, and substance abuse and alcohol addictions. A considerable sustained effort with adequate resources continues to be urgently needed.

The strategy was created through consultation and collaboration with those most affected by abuse and those whose mandates include prevention and treatment—safe shelters, justice, and corrections. Pauktuutit brought together a multidisciplinary team of health and social service workers, RCMP, court services, safe shelter operators, and Inuit associations from across Inuit Nunangat. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, NAHO, and observers from the Inuit relations secretariat and programs branch at INAC, Justice Canada, and Qulliit Nunavut Status of Women were also involved. We all share a common interest in preventing abuse in Inuit communities and collaborating on the development and the implementation of this unique community-based strategy.

The strategy is based on the six Inuit principles of healing and working together: working together for the common good, environmental wellness, service to others and leadership, empowerment, resourcefulness and adaptability, and cooperation and consensus.

The strategy began with a vision of an Inuit society of healthy individuals who respect the past and embrace the future as Inuit, and who live in supportive families and caring communities where violence and abuse are rare occurrences and are dealt with swiftly and justly, according to the Inuit ways. Abusers are held accountable for their actions, and both victims and abusers are supported in their healing process.

The goal of the strategy is a steady reduction of violence and abuse in Inuit communities and the eventual predominance of caring, healthy, and respectful relationships. We envision the attainment of these goals by meeting objectives outlined in the strategy: to develop sustainable relationships among partner organizations that are committed to the reduction of violence; and to coordinate efforts so that resources can be best used to the best advantage, and implement effective and culturally appropriate services and programs to prevent abuse and promote healing.

In addition, the national strategy sets out strategic priorities for the implementation. Our first priority is to make abuse in Inuit communities a priority issue, which we have done. Priorities also include: to raise awareness and reduce the tolerance of abuse; to invest in training and capacity development; to sustain front-line workers and community services; to deliver services that heal Inuit; and to expand programs that build on Inuit strengths that prevent abuse.

● (0825)

The accompanying guide, “Sharing Knowledge, Sharing Wisdom”, provides inspiration, ideas, and examples of successful initiatives that can help individuals, groups, and communities implement the national strategy. The guide includes tools to use designed for Inuit communities. They include information on community mobilization; advice on the national advisory committee on advocating for change; facts and statistics that can be used to convince others; some thoughts on the root causes of abuse in Inuit communities; Inuit principles of healing and working together; steps in planning activities and actions; and sources of information and help.

Since 2006 Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada has used the national strategy as a guiding tool in the development and implementation of projects aimed at abuse and violence.

In 2006-07, through the support of Status of Women Canada, Pauktuutit implemented the violence against women and children project. The objective of this project was to identify promising practices in violence and abuse prevention. In total, we consulted 11 communities, and each community formed its own coordinating committee in order to address the needs of the community they live in.

During the same period, we undertook a broad dissemination of the national strategy, including presentations at various events and workshops. Because of the national strategy, we began the process that led to the development of the national Inuit residential schools healing strategy. It has been implemented predominantly through support of projects by INAC.

Concurrent to this work, we began our work on the women's shelter component, including the creation of the National Inuit Women's Shelter Association and the development of our “Making our Shelters Strong” training module for front-line workers. We continue to work on these two components. The shelter training has now been delivered in each of the four regions of Inuit Nunangat, and there continues to be an ongoing demand for the training, not only by shelters but also by various community and governmental agencies and departments.

In response to participant feedback, we are currently developing a web-based training module, as well as peer-to-peer user forums for shelter workers and a single point of contact for the shelter association. This site will also contain a blog, which will serve as a means for us to disseminate emerging resources and practices to the shelters across the north.

We have also undertaken what we term as on-the-land projects. In the last fiscal year we were able to take two groups of women, one group aged 20 to 55 and the other group aged 55 to 82, for a week-long on-the-land project. Our younger women's project had women taking the leadership role in family violence, where we integrated traditional activities of kamik-making and being on the land. We combined that with education, resource building, and information sharing, so that the women could take the leadership role.

Our most successful project to date has been with regard to elder abuse awareness, where we took eight elders on the land—and our youngest was 82—for a week-long expedition out into the country just outside of Kuujjuaq, Quebec, where our elder women not only returned to their traditional practices but we were able to provide them with information, resources, and a safe place to talk about the elder abuse occurring.

I'm going to stop here. If you have any questions, by all means.

Thank you.

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

We go now to the Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority, Barbara Lacey and Sheila Nelson.

Who's going to speak for the group, Ms. Nelson?

Mrs. Sheila Nelson (Manager, Community and Family Services, Child Protection Program, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority): I guess I'm nominated to do that. I'll start off.

The Chair: All right. I think everyone seems to have gone ten minutes. I'm not going to give you ten minutes, but we're going to play with it.

● (0830)

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: I won't take ten minutes.

Good morning, everyone. On behalf of the Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for the invitation to appear before you today.

I'd like to begin by saying that as a service provider mandated to carry out the roles and responsibilities of protecting children, we see the devastating impact that family violence has on aboriginal women and their children daily. Violence against women has a ripple effect. Violence creates fear, and this fear impacts all women, including the service providers whose role it is to support and protect them. Our child protection staff is currently all women. Acts of violence tend to trigger emotions for people, and on numerous occasions I have witnessed staff being intimidated by the high-risk situations that some of the aboriginal women they work with are faced with every day.

We see and hear many reasons why aboriginal women find it difficult to end an abusive relationship. There is fear of retaliation, not only from the perpetrator of the violent crime but also from community members as well as members of their own family. Often the women lack resources to support themselves and their children with the basic necessities of life. We see some aboriginal women who have tried to leave abusive relationships only to return because they didn't feel they received the support from their family, friends, and the agencies tasked to help them build lives free from violence.

A number of the aboriginal women we see have poor self-esteem due to a history of witnessing and experiencing violent acts since they were young children. To ease the pain, they sometimes turn to substances such as alcohol, street drugs, prescription medications, or solvents. Unfortunately, doing this can in turn have a spiralling effect, and quite often it's the reason their children are apprehended.

In 2010 Yellowknife Health and Social Services received 74 reports of violence occurring in homes where children were present. This number does not reflect the reality within which we work. The majority of these calls came from law enforcement when they were called to homes where there was family violence. A large number of the reports we receive are referred because of neglect or alcohol-related issues. Once a report is investigated, we learn that family violence is also prevalent, and it is often the underlying cause of the neglect.

In December 2010, just one month ago, our agency had 51 active family service files. Out of this number, 34 of the families had been identified as having ongoing family violence issues, which is a contributing risk factor to the safety of the mothers and their children. These families have a total of 71 children who have been exposed to or affected by domestic violence in one form or another.

Children who live with domestic violence face numerous risks, such as the risk of exposure to the traumatic events, the risk of neglect—which is often the reason given when we receive a report from someone who is concerned about a situation—along with the risk of being directly abused.

In order to develop solutions that will empower aboriginal women to sustain themselves, they need to be provided with tools that are readily available and easy to access. I can't stress that enough. It is important that aboriginal people be respected and listened to when they share with others what is in the best interests of aboriginal people.

It is equally important that perpetrators of violent acts be held accountable. Programming needs to be accessible in small communities for all parties, for without some form of change in this regard, aboriginal women and children will continue to be at risk of harm. It's imperative that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women continue its efforts to support the human rights of aboriginal women to be protected from acts of violence.

To the aboriginal women who have suffered acts of violence, lost family members, and overcome challenges they have faced along life's journey, we salute you. As an agency, we will continue to do our part to advocate on behalf of aboriginal people in order to get the services they deserve to deal with the conflict issues we see every day.

I thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was great. You were under five minutes.

● (0835)

Mrs. Barbara Lacey (Manager, Clinical Supervisor, Community Mental Health and Addictions, Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority): Can I take the other five?

The Chair: You'll get your chance. As we go into the question session....

Oh, you wanted to do another few minutes. Fine. I thought it was just Ms. Nelson alone. You have time. Go ahead.

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: Thank you.

I'm the manager for Community Mental Health and Addictions for Yellowknife Health and Social Services. Community Mental Health and Addictions is made up of family counselling. Family counselling provides individual work to men and women as well as couples therapy. We do the mental health work for children for Yellowknife Health and Social Services, so 30% of our referrals are from child and family services for work with children. And the children they're referring to us are the children who, for the most part, have been victims of family violence.

The other issues that might show up could be grief, sexual abuse, at-risk behaviours, or not attending school. Those might be the primary factors that are identified, but family violence is most often behind them.

Reasons adults are referred include depression, stress, individual partners in relationships seeking support, grief, separation and divorce, and addictions. If we look behind those, most often there is the issue of family violence.

In the last three months alone, according to our intake person, who does same-day appointments—we've provided two same-day appointments daily, so someone can call in the morning if they're in crisis and get an appointment—she's seen 19 aboriginal women living with family violence, and another ten aboriginal women have made it on to our wait list. That's just in the last three months.

I've been here only a year, so Yellowknife is very new to me, and I can speak only about Yellowknife. We have two communities, Lutsel K'e and Fort Res, which I've become familiar with. But when I have looked at our caseload for the year I've been here, at any point I could have pulled five or six men out of that caseload. If we had a group to support these men who have had issues of violence, that would be great. I know we're working with the justice people. I know there's a partnership to get this kind of a group going, but to me it's one of the significant missing links. So we really need to be supporting the men who have the issues of violence if we're going to make a difference to the family.

The second piece I have noticed missing—I've worked on task forces concerned with family violence since 1989—is the education groups. I know they were spoken about, but we don't have one in Yellowknife. If we don't have one in Yellowknife, we probably don't have one in the rest of the Northwest Territories. They're called survivor groups, and they're usually run by transition houses. So the women would maybe do some individual work with a counsellor, and then we'd refer them to this group program through transition services. They'd go through this education program, and then maybe they'd come back and do individual work. We don't have that kind of a group, and our shelters don't have the funding support or the staff support to run that kind of a program. We do individual work with these women, but I'd love to see a group program started. That doesn't mean that family counselling can't do it—we're looking at it—but it's tough to do everything.

We have a family violence protocol group, and we're working on a common tool, the ODARA tool, Ontario domestic assault risk assessment tool, which is wonderful. We are training across the Northwest Territories on how to use the tool. Having a common screening tool is very important, and I think we're doing great work on that.

Family counselling uses a screening tool for couples, so we have many. For one thing, we're still funded to do couple work, and there isn't that kind of funding anywhere else in the country. So that is a real blessing. We certainly need it here because of the family issues that we address. So we are still funded to do couple work, and we have a screening tool. With that screening tool, most of the couples are initially screened out for violence. It would be really nice to be able to do the education with the male partner around the violence issues, but so far we haven't been able to put that group together. And we need the training to put that group together. For me, those are big pieces that are missing.

Primary care is another project that Community Mental Health and Addictions is involved in. We've moved into this primary care clinic downtown, and we've moved family counselling in. That means that our physicians can refer clients coming in to see them to family counselling quite easily. We build the connections.

● (0840)

We did this exercise yesterday as a team where we were clients, and we all had of these case situations. We had to go around to housing, in one part of the YPCC, and income support somewhere else, and mental health somewhere else. I had 22 steps I had to take as a client to try to get what I needed, and in the end my children were taken away from me.

You know, we're trying to do primary care, and we're really trying to help, but if we look at the client.... It's so cold out there, and there's no transportation. Housing in Yellowknife is very expensive. Employment is really tough to come by. I felt dizzy, absolutely dizzy, with those 22 steps, trying to get to all of the places I had to get to. In the end, I'd done everything I should have done—I'd gone for addiction help, I'd gone to mental health and income support, I'd talked to child and family, the whole deal—and still my kids were taken away.

So we've got lots to do.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lacey. That was very interesting.

We're now going to go to the question and answer section. This is a seven-minute round. I'm going to be.... Please look at me, because we can't keep going over. If we go over too much, then the next panel gets a shorter period of time. We need to remember that.

We will begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Hedy.

Thank you very much for your presentations. I'm sitting here trying to formulate a question. As you're undoubtedly aware, we've been on the road and we've heard about a number of situations, much of what you've identified here today—lack of resources, lack of staff, the need for more help.

One of the things I'm struck by, listening to you, and maybe I'm missing something, is that there seems to be a community willingness to coordinate, to plan, to work together that we haven't found in quite the same way in many other communities. In fact, in some it's been quite the opposite and quite disastrous.

The other thing, as I'm listening to you, is that you all represent service delivery organizations, and you talk about.... One of you, and I think it was Lyda, made the comment that it's important that our clients be respected and listened to.

It was you, Sheila? I'm sorry.

One of the things we've heard on our travels is that aboriginal women particularly do not feel respected, do not feel listened to, do not feel valued by the communities, and are frequently marginalized and treated in a very disrespectful way.

We're just getting a half-an-hour view from five of you sitting here, but I guess I'd like to know a little more about the dynamics. If I'm right in saying that you are working together, recognizing that your problems are not insignificant but that you're making a coordinated effort to address them, what's making that possible—if I'm right?

Ms. Lyda Fuller: I'd like to answer that.

I think the Coalition Against Family Violence has been very effective in having all of us work together. It's not easy. It takes a lot of work—it takes skill—among the members to compromise and to come to agreement. But the issue in the Northwest Territories is so pervasive and so impactful on the lives of women, and the front-line workers hear and experience so many chilling stories and examples, that it really motivates us to work together as a group.

We want to make progress in a planned way. Barb Lacey was talking about services for men who use abuse; well, the coalition has been working on that issue over a long period of time. We're finally now at the point where there's going to be a pilot project, but a huge among of time has been spent in the development of a good program for that, a program that will be effective and that takes into account all the learnings across the country.

We had a real arm-wrestling experience when we were trying to fit those 17 action items into the amount of money. We knew that we had to support the existing shelters that were underfunded and we knew that the women keep asking us for services for their partners, so with limited funding, how do you do that?

Our government partners were at the tables with us. We finally came to an agreement that we would fund the shelters and seek outside funding to augment the territorial government funding for the development of the program for men who use abuse. We have heated debates and heated exchanges, but we are all really driven by what we see every day and by the pain for women, children, and whole communities—and for the men, too.

We're a small territory. We form relationships with each other, and trust develops over time. We work hard to try to preserve that and to move forward in ways that will really, at the end of the day, have a positive outcome for those women.

● (0845)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Does anybody else want to comment? Sandra?

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Yes, I'd like to comment as well. One of the things that Pauktuutit takes exceptional pride in is that any project, any program we deliver within the communities, starts with the communities.

All of our projects are driven by advisory committees made up of community members, local subject-matter experts, and input from our partners, which are often the land claims organizations, the GNWT, the GN, and the Nunavik Regional Government. We start off by going in and saying: “Here's an idea. Let's work together. You tell us what's going to work for you”. We do that rather than going in and saying, “We think you need to do this”.

This model has been exceptionally successful in that it creates community mobilization. From the inception of the project to the delivery, the end of the project, the community has a stake in what's going to happen. All of our projects are tailored to the needs of the specific communities. We'll go in with the model and that model gets adapted to what the community needs are.

Not unlike what Lyda was saying, we see it nationally that women are fearful of going into safe shelters—if they're even available in the northern communities—out of the fear that their children are going to be taken away. Even if they go to the shelter, the protocols and procedures of various organizations that need to come together in order to support a women's transition to safety are incongruent and often opposing. So you need to be on the housing list, but in order to get on the housing list you need a letter from income supports to say that you're going to get income support. But if your husband has damaged the residence you're at, you're still responsible for the arrears. It is a vicious cycle that keeps women down.

One of the major concerns that we've had, Anita—and we've spoken of it—is that lack of sustained funding for shelters. We have 53 northern remote fly-in communities. As of today, we have 14 operational shelters.

Hon. Anita Neville: Wow.

The Chair: Ms. Tucker, Ms. Neville, we've gone over time. Thank you.

We now have Madame Demers for the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Good morning, ladies. Thank you for being here.

I am very surprised this morning to hear that so many people agree on the solutions needed to counter violence against aboriginal women, all the more so since certain organizations are local, recognized agencies. Indeed, we have not seen that anywhere else. It must be said that we have not heard from many agency representatives, be they local, provincial or from some other level of government; people did not come.

I am happy to welcome you here this morning, Ms. Nelson and Ms. Lacey. We are very pleased to know that you are working together. It is surprising, but it makes me very happy.

In other places, people want to get rid of others rather than help them. The other day, we learned that some physicians wanted to get all of the drug addicts out of Williams Lake. They want to eject them from the city rather than treat them. They are not going to be offered any treatment. If people arrive at the hospital after having taken any drug whatsoever, because they are injured or because they have broken an arm or a leg, they will not be treated; so there is no point even trying.

The situation is quite serious in several places. Women are being mistreated. Your coalition functions very well, but does it work as well within the community? Do you have the respect and support of the community? Does that support extend to the people your coalition seeks to help? You are looking for housing for the women you want to help. Are you finding affordable housing for these women, places where they will be able to raise their children without fear?

You seem to be telling me that it is difficult. Is there racism in the community? We were told last night that Yellowknife has the highest average household income in Canada. If that is the case, how is it that aboriginal women and men are poor? Homes cost at least $350,000. Who can afford a house at that price?

I would like you to answer those questions.

● (0850)

[*English*]

The Chair: Who would like to try that first?

Sheila, would you like to go?

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: Oh dear, that's a tough one. That's a tough question. Certainly the points that you've made are very well taken.

In my experience, working at the front line and managing a very good team of social workers, I find that when we go for services, the services are not as readily available as we would like them to be for the clientele we are tasked with servicing. Housing is definitely an issue. Yes, properties are expensive in Yellowknife. A lot of our families cannot afford to rent apartments. Unfortunately, we have one landlord in town who owns a lot of the buildings, so if you're evicted by that property owner, it's often difficult to find housing in another unit.

Personally, and I'm speaking from my own experience, I would like to see the departments work more closely together. I find that housing, income support, and social services through our Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority need to work out a system where the services for the families we're here to assist are more readily available.

Right now, as a last resort, families are referred to child and family services because the family doesn't have any housing. We try very, very hard not to bring children into foster care because of the fact there isn't housing available. Very often, social services is the one that ends up paying rental arrears, so people will have a place to live. It doesn't make sense to me.

We need more people at the table to build and develop a solution that is going to maintain the families who require services. It puts a lot of stress on people. Unfortunately, the stress that parents are experiencing impacts children. As much as we don't want to apprehend children, there are occasions when we do.

We have a lot of positive things going for us, don't get me wrong, but there are still areas where we could improve. I think if we worked more cooperatively as departments, we would provide better service overall.

● (0855)

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes left.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: I'd just like to acknowledge that housing is a huge issue here. If I could make one plea to the federal government, it would be for a national housing strategy.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lyda Fuller: It's a huge issue for us, and it's going to get worse, because the federal funding for social housing is backing out. It will become strictly a territorial responsibility. So, please, we would love a national housing strategy.

I'd just like to comment about community engagement. It's difficult in the north to spread your impact out, especially to the small isolated communities. The four women's organizations have recently undertaken a three-year project with funding from Status of Women Canada, and supplemental funding from Justice Canada and INAC, to work with women in the 11 small communities without RCMP. We just started that work at the beginning of the summer. I am fascinated by how that's going. But the women are feeling supported. They said to us that we couldn't go in just once; we would have to be there for them. That's what we're doing. So we'll have lots to report down the road on that.

The Chair: I will now go to Mrs. Grewal, for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for appearing today and sharing their insights with our committee on this very, very important issue.

I think we all agree that violence against aboriginal women is a very, very serious problem. Unfortunately, it's a very complicated problem with no easy solutions at all. I'm wondering if you could highlight any success stories taking place here in B.C., Yellowknife, and Alberta. They could be successful lessons, which we could then use throughout Canada.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: I firmly believe that the models our organization has developed can be applicable in any community across this country, particularly within aboriginal communities, be that first nations, Métis, or Inuit, because they are models designed for the community to put their input into and to tailor them the way they are. We also look at really integrating the cultural traditions and the cultural way of life back into our programming.

We're actually successful on both sides. One of the biggest successes we've had has actually been with the on-the-land projects, to the point where other government and territorial regional health boards have said that this is so successful—their communities are saying that they want more—that they're actually funding this to occur. We've gone in and we've presented it when we've piloted it in the communities. Now the communities are saying, "You know what? We see this."

Our communities are strong. The 53 northern and remote Inuit communities are strong. They are survivors. Although we have very, very few resources, they do amazing work. I think one of the things we need to take into perspective is that in the north, at a lot of our shelters, the woman can only stay for a maximum of six days. How do you arrange housing, income support, mental health, addictions, all of that, in six days? You don't. And that's given that a woman has access to these shelters. We have some communities that are....

All of our communities and fly-on and fly-out. I have yet to come across any abused woman who has $5,000 or $6,000 at her disposal to grab a plane ticket to get to the nearest shelter or to go to the south to get away from abuse, where often she is abused again because of the vulnerability.

I think one other point that really does need to be recognized is that because of the lack of support...and it comes down to money and the lack of money. Often Inuit women are told by health and social services—and this is not finger pointing here—that they don't have the resources to fly them out. We have documented 16 cases so far of where a woman has been murdered by her spouse within 48 hours of returning home after trying to get away from the community. This is unacceptable, absolutely unacceptable. We should not be subjugating any survivor of abuse, be it a woman or a child, to that.

● (0900)

The Chair: Nina, is that your question, or would you like to ask another one?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: No, anyone can answer.

The Chair: Ms. Lacey.

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: You asked about a "good news" story. This isn't necessarily about a victim of family violence that I'm actually aware of; it's about a young woman who's a single parent with a couple of children. She's in her early twenties and she has her mother in the picture, so her mother's able to look after the children. This young woman was able to go to Aurora College, do her diploma in social work, and do a practicum with us in family counselling. Because of the internship program at YHSSA and Stanton health authority, she now has a social work position prior to her finishing her degree with Stanton.

If I think back to the beginning of the feminist program back in the early eighties, that's when women started standing up and speaking. I think our aboriginal women have to be visible, have to be present, have to be in the positions. So to me this is a good news story in that we have a young woman, an aboriginal single parent, who is getting some education and who, because of both the education policies here and the internship program, has a position. We'll start to see some of that representation, I hope.

To me, that's a good news story. But we need our aboriginal women to be seen.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Chair, do I have some more time left?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Okay.

It's suggested that one solution to reducing violence against aboriginal women is education campaigns. If women have a better understanding of their rights, and resources are made available to them, they will take better steps to protect themselves.

Do you believe that education campaigns would be an effective weapon in tackling violence against aboriginal women?

Ms. Sandra Tucker: I think education is always a good thing, but again, speaking on behalf of the 53 isolated and remote communities in the north, you can do all the education you want and you can do all the safety planning you want, but if there are no resources on site, nothing's going to change, right?

We can talk about younger women or we can talk about elders; if there's no safe shelter, if there's no mental health counselling, if there's limited police interaction..... I mean, NWT is fortunate in that they have the emergency protection orders that force the abuser to leave. In Nunavut that's not the case; the woman again is taken out.

So I think we really need to look, at a federal-provincial-territorial level, at ensuring that each and every community has resources. The best education campaigns are worthless without the resources to follow through on those plans.

The Chair: We have thirty seconds, if anyone would like it.

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: I just want to refer to the anti-poverty conference that many of us were at this fall. Out of that anti-poverty conference, the issues that were identified by the aboriginal community were housing—if it's there you still can't get into it because you don't meet the criteria—the cost of food, wanting a subsidy for food, and the relationship with income support. I think those were the main issues that were identified. And for family violence issues, those connections all have to be worked on if our women are going to be able to get out of situations and into new situations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we go to Mr. Bevington for the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thanks, Madam Chair.

I want to thank you all for participating in this today. I've had the chance to participate today because our critic in this area, Irene Mathyssen, was unable to attend, but I'm very pleased to be here as well, because of course as a lifelong resident of the Northwest Territories I have experienced these issues every day throughout that time. I'm seeing the effects of it.

I want to touch a bit on preventative work that has been done. I remember when I was mayor in Fort Smith in the late eighties and we had the first "Take Back the Night" march. I remember that the reaction of some men to that was really quite extraordinary, they felt so threatened by it. But as the course of those "Take Back the Night" marches went on, that disappeared.

What can we do throughout the north to continue the work to raise the awareness of men about their roles, their responsibilities, about their interaction with women in society? Is it something we should take up more in the schools? Is it something that should be a national campaign of awareness for men across the country, continuing to do that work?

What are your answers there about the preventative work that we need to do?

● (0905)

Ms. Lorraine Phaneuf: I can only speak to small steps that we've made through the coalition. Government and non-government work together to come up with strategies and work together. Sometimes folks are there and they talk about different issues, not necessarily ones the coalition is working on, but we do promote awareness. This year for "Take Back the Night" we had a huge representation of men who attended the walk. I often call it the most phenomenal day I've had here in Yellowknife. It was awesome. We had good press coverage. We had community agencies coming together to discuss the issues. The media was there. We had pictures of all kinds of cases on a big flip chart, all the cases in one year of abuse and violence on the streets in Yellowknife. People were engaged. I've been here for five years, and sometimes there were a few women's groups walking and that would be about it. But this year I don't know what we did or what we didn't do. I suspect it had something to do with the white ribbon campaign. Some young men from Yellowknife have been quite involved in that. I don't know if they brought it or what happened, but it was actually a very good event.

I think the work of the coalition is important. Although we may not have every task force that they have down south, we certainly have very passionate people at the table who are interested in the same goals and visions, and oftentimes projects such as the one the Y is doing have engaged the women's groups to help. So we get to also hear what's happening; we're not working in a silo. We hear what's happening in the small communities, and I think it's just a good way to move forward.

The Chair: Ms. Nelson.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: Thank you for bringing that question forward, Dennis.

From what I see on the front lines—and I often don't get an opportunity to be involved in the larger picture in the community because of the workload I have, but what I do see and what I did when I worked in the eastern Arctic.... When I worked there I worked in the area of sexual abuse. As a new person to the north, I went into all the remote communities and Baffin Island, and I thought, oh dear, there are a lot of issues here, but how am I going to address them? So I thought to myself, okay, I can't do this alone. I need to form relationships within the community, and I need to find some strong males who are here who will speak out against abuse against children.

I think we need to do that in the Northwest Territories. I think we need to do that at the grassroots level.

I don't think people want to address violence. They know it's wrong, but they're afraid to speak out. I think we really need to have men on board to speak out about violence in communities.

I'm all for having education in the schools as well. I think our young children need to know what's acceptable and what's not. Although the Government of the Northwest Territories has a no tolerance policy, there are times when my staff take a lot of verbal abuse from people who come into the office. I'm very adamant, if that is the case, and they're told it's not acceptable. You need to speak to people in a proper way.

I would certainly do all that I could to bring more men on board to speak out against the violence in the communities. Without that, without role models, I can't see a lot of changes occurring.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Fuller.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: I just wanted to say that in December I was in Whitehorse, and they have been conducting a campaign. I brought posters back to bring to the coalition. They engaged men and they have developed posters with men saying, this is not okay, and I honour my wife and I protect my kids. They have had lots of success with that. They gave me a group of posters, and we'll talk about it at the coalition. I think it's critical.

The Chair: Ms. Tucker, quickly.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Very quickly, I just want to talk about engaging men. In Nunavut, actually in Repulse, there is a men's counselling project going on. When an individual is charged under the domestic violence act, he and his spouse are referred to this program. He undergoes anger management; he gets a lot of psychological education around violence and abuse prevention. They're given couples counselling, and she's also given counselling.

Out of the 64 individuals who have been court ordered to attend this, there have only been two individuals who have been subsequently charged with a domestic violence offence. The rest have made changes in their relationships.

Maybe this is something we need to look at as a part of this: if you're going to be charged, this is what you have to do. If there's successful completion, the charges are dropped. So we're educating that way as well.

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

Now we're going to go to a second round. The second round is five minutes; that means five minutes for questions and answers.

I'll begin again with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

An issue that has not come up here today, which I would be interested in knowing a little bit about, is what is your relationship, as agencies, as organizations, with the police? What is the role of the police in addressing domestic violence? How does the person who is abused deal with the police? Do they go? What's the role of the police in this community? We've been hearing different things across the country.

The Chair: Ms. Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Very quickly, from a national organizational standpoint, our relationship with the policing services, be they regional or RCMP, is actually phenomenal. They're actually calling us and saying, “Here's the situation we're facing. What information do you have? How can you help us?” To have that exchange with policing services is phenomenal. We know from a national perspective that they're engaged in the work that we're doing and we're engaged with them.

The Chair: Ms. Nelson.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: I would have to say that the working relationship our staff have with the RCMP is very positive. There are times when we have our differences, but we're able to work those through.

Many of the calls that we get are call-outs after hours, in the evening, from the RCMP asking for assistance. I have seen them on many occasions to be very accommodating of the victim and supportive. Again, it depends. Some people are more comfortable with that role than others, but overall I think we're quite fortunate. In the smaller communities of Fort Resolution and Lutselk'e I haven't had any concerns being voiced by staff. They're always there when we need them and they do their best as well. So we're fortunate.

The Chair: Ms. Phaneuf.

Ms. Lorraine Phaneuf: For us, our role with police would be mostly to sit on committees. They're usually very interested in doing that.

A lot of times we get a frantic phone call from women in small communities where there may be no RCMP present, or there is RCMP but they're scared. So oftentimes I will just call our person from the coalition. He works with us to call those police officers, those Mounties that are in those communities. Sometimes what happens is the women feel the men are going to be in remand, but then they're sent back.

There's no shelter there, and unless something else happens there's not much the police can do, so they're usually frightened in their own homes. Oftentimes we'll call and just ask them to keep an eye on them. They always say yes, they will. I don't know if they actually do. I have no evidence of that, but am hoping they actually do that. So for us it's been quite positive.

● (0915)

The Chair: One and a half minutes, Ms. Fuller.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: Because we're designates for the emergency protection orders, we've been working closely with the RCMP in most of the communities across the territory. I would say they try very hard. It's variable what you hear back at the community level.

We meet with them regularly, and whenever we raise an issue—and we will dog it, let me tell you—they have followed up and responded. So we have seen some good outcomes over time around that, but there' s always work to be done. I think it's very difficult in the small communities without RCMP.

In my presentation later I will talk about how sometimes they can't find some of the partners. When they serve emergency protection orders, it was a bumpy start-up, but we've been five years into that process and things have gotten better. We do have an ongoing regular relationship with them.

Hon. Anita Neville: If I could just make a quick comment, Madam Chair....

The Chair: Yes, you have 30 seconds.

Hon. Anita Neville: There seems to be something different about this community that we've not experienced nor heard about in many others we've participated in. That is not to minimize the problems and the challenges you have, but there seems to be a distinguishing characteristic here. We need to find it, articulate it, bottle it, and recommend it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very well said, Anita.

I go to Ms. Cadman, for the Conservatives.

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): I'm going to ask a question, and I don't mean it to be rude or anything, but I want to know: are any of you Inuit or aboriginal? Yes, I thought you would be.

We have been told that aboriginals want services for aboriginals, about aboriginals, and run by them. Now, you're not. How does this work here? Are they upset that you're not an aboriginal? Are they upset that you're a white person working for them? How does that work?

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: My experience has been that it depends on how you relate to that individual. I think there are some aboriginal people who do struggle with the fact that I might be Caucasian, but on the whole, I would have to say that I'm very well accepted by the people I work with. I would like to see more aboriginal people involved. We certainly do strive to have aboriginal staff in our office.

I think, though, overall, I guess I can't say enough. It really depends on who you are and how you relate to the individual before you. I think it's so important that we respect each person who comes to us for assistance or that we seek out. You work at developing your relationship to the betterment of them.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Are you taking some of these younger women who may have gone through a program and mentoring them to help you, to hire them if you can, or to use them as role models?

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: No.

We do have—and I think Barb touched on this—the Government of the Northwest Territories if you are an aboriginal person.... If you're a social worker and you get your degree or complete the diploma program, then you are put in a position in one of the social service offices. We have had a number of staff come to us that way. We work along with them and they're out there doing the same thing—

● (0920)

Ms. Dona Cadman: What about these women who don't have the education but have had the experience? Sometimes the experience is much more important than the education. You learn more that way, I think, having gone through it...experience is everything.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: Experience certainly does help you. For the social workers that I'm responsible for, you must have a college diploma as a minimum. Experience is certainly.... We look at equivalencies, but it's becoming more and more difficult to do this job; there is so much court involvement. So the requirement is that you must have a diploma or a degree.

Ms. Dona Cadman: All right. If you have this woman who has gone through it and is willing to go through an education program, would you help her? Is it your mandate to help her? Or is there another organization that would help her go through the steps and maybe help her with the money and help her with her children, if she has children?

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: Well, she possibly could be eligible for a student loan—

Ms. Dona Cadman: Okay.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: —if that's what you're speaking about, but our organization does not.... We would be there to support her, but financially we would not be supporting that person through that process. There are other opportunities.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Do all the organizations up here work together, or are you individual...? Is it that you're here, Sandra is there, and Lyda and Lorraine are over there? Do you work together? Do you join together? Do you communicate?

Because working alone is harder than working together. You share your experiences and your education—just everything—and it's a stronger group, instead of working alone.... How does that work? Do you work alone?

The Chair: We only have 30 seconds, and Ms. Lacey had her hand up.

Would you go ahead, Ms. Lacey?

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: I know I'm the newcomer, but having adult services, mental health, and family counselling, I have to work with Lyda. I don't have a choice.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: I have to work with Sheila. I don't have a choice.

If you're asking about what it is that we have to bottle, well, we need to have good relationships and work together, because we're it.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Okay.

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: There aren't other options, so we have to get over ourselves, work with each other, and negotiate.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go to Madame Demers again.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The question my colleague Dona asked is very important. The day before yesterday, we met with a few young women and one man. He told us that aboriginal women were victims of the “buckskin ceiling”, rather than the glass ceiling. These women cannot get beyond that ceiling because most of the time they are condemned to work at lower levels even if they have degrees that would allow them to go further. It is very important to point that out and to try to determine why that is.

In my opinion, Lorraine, your organization can make great strides in solving that issue. You talked about shelters and first, second and third stage transition houses, where aboriginal women are taught various ways of taking themselves in hand in order to get out of this vicious cycle, homes where they can learn a trade or a profession.

Currently, there are shelters, or transition houses, but I presume that this is a first stage transition house. How long does that first stage last?

[*English*]

Ms. Lorraine Phaneuf: What we're really trying to do at this point is to stabilize the shelters, because if we don't have shelters, we have nothing. We don't have enough shelters.

I'll regress a bit. in order to offer training for aboriginal women and women of the territories we have just launched and finished a three-year project, which I actually presented to this committee maybe a year and a half ago, about how we work with marginalized women—that is, women who were in the shelter, women who were in a homeless shelter, women who were couch-surfing. They were brought into a three-year program to learn how to do non-traditional trades.

What has happened is we've had a funding lapse and this project has come somewhat to a standstill. When the government has given us the three years to work with marginalized women, those women are now in the system with us. We advocate for them. We have no staffing dollars, but we still have the women in the program and we lead them through. When they come with us they are surrounded with services. So if they need a place to stay or day care, or if there's any kind of barrier that would have prevented them from becoming successful, the project had dollars through HRSDC and INAC to follow through.

We have had some great successes. We have had women who were in the shelters. We have women who were couch-surfing who got jobs at DeBeers who are now in apprentice programs. The numbers may not have been huge, but in fact out of 30 women, five women are now in apprentice programs and are now working. Perhaps they're not working in trades, but one of them is a librarian in her community.

It's very important that if we are going to help people, we have to surround them with the necessities for them to be successful. If it's just little bits and pieces, when you go to the next place there's a big wall there preventing them.

● (0925)

The Chair: Ms. Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Pauktuutit is very pleased that we've also developed an Inuit women and business program. Through the gracious funding of INAC it looks like this year we're going to be able to continue that training, as well as the establishment of an Inuit women's business network. From our perspective, we are assisting Inuit women in gaining the skills they need to become entrepreneurs to start their own businesses to gain those skills.

The one thing I want to say is when you look at Inuit women as a whole you see a group of exceptional, strong, well-informed women. Our current government has a very good example of that in Leona. We have Nellie Cournoyer. We have Mary Simon. We have Elisapee Sheutiapik. We have exceptional leaders and very, very, wise and brilliant women. It's a bragging right for us that they are the examples of how you can become a leader in your community and facilitate change.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll now go to Mr. Bevington again for five minutes.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thanks, Chair.

Someone mentioned here that Yellowknife has one of the highest per capita incomes for families. But Yellowknife also has one of the highest per capita expenditures for families. Throughout the north the cost of living is a problem that simply exacerbates everything else. When you get to the smaller communities, where unemployment rates are very high and yet the cost of living is considerably higher than here in Yellowknife, the impact of that on family relations has to be very severe.

Of the base causes of family violence, in many cases we would see that in the south a lot of them would be economics. Does economics play the same role here in the north in terms of causes of family violence? Do you see that as one of the prime movers?

The Chair: Lyda.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: I'm struggling with how to answer that.

For me, the prime mover around the violence here is the colonization that happened and the oppression and trauma that have impacted whole communities.

On top of that, other stressors that are in place certainly keep the pot stirred around things. And poverty has a huge impact on families. It's hard work to be poor. It's hard work to try to meet your ongoing needs. So it definitely has an impact.

Once again, for me, it's housing, housing, housing, as the key driver. We see so many situations with overcrowding. That leads to stress and things fall out of that—arguments. We have lots of requests, as a shelter, for women to come from Nunavut and from small communities here in the territory because they want to relocate to Yellowknife where there are more services and more housing, although certainly not enough housing. You see that migration. You see the pressure. You see agencies and women themselves saying, "We feel like we have no options."

For me, the big driver is that huge cultural disruption that happened over a long period of time, and that still has an impact, and the housing situation.

● (0930)

The Chair: Ms. Lacey.

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: And addictions. Absolutely, what Lyda is saying.... Part of coping with the trauma is addiction. There are both males and females in that population, of course, but if you look at who's on the street, you will see a lot of male aboriginals with addictions issues. We're looking at the integration of mental health and addictions services, which is being looked at across the country, but we're not there yet in Yellowknife, as far as being able to address the addictions issues in the way we need to.

Addictions and family violence certainly are connected.

The Chair: You have three-quarters of a minute.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Really quickly, we also see the clash of the traditional ways of living and the modern ways of living, especially with the younger population. The older people are still looking at the community as a whole: everybody shares the wealth, everybody shares the resources. We have a younger population that, like every young person, is very materialistic, which leads in a lot of cases to elder abuse, draining grandma and grandpa's cheques right at the beginning and using the threat, "I will commit suicide if you don't." With the rates of suicide, nobody wants that hanging over their head. So there is a clash of traditional versus modern.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have the time to go into a three-minute round, a very tight round. If someone has already said something that you wanted to say, you can add something new and that will be fine. But I want to hold this tightly so that we can get it done.

I will go to Ms. Neville again.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We're here as part of the federal committee on the status of women, and my question to each of you, recognizing jurisdiction—and jurisdictional issues often get in the way—what would be your primary message or recommendation to us? Identify one thing that we, as federal politicians, can bring forward in this report or do for you.

The Chair: Madam Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: More money for programming and projects on the ground, and getting federal moneys to the provinces and territories to make sure that resources are in each and every community the way they should be.

The Chair: Ms. Fuller.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: In addition to housing, I would say money for community development...how important it is, how critical it is. The distances even to travel to communities are so great, and women want support and assistance with that.

● (0935)

The Chair: Does anyone else want to respond to that question?

Ms Lacey.

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: I would say increased support for programming for both men's and women's shelters around the education, so the psycho-education piece for both men and women.

The Chair: Ms. Phaneuf.

Ms. Lorraine Phaneuf: I think it's important for the committee to consider that services need to be equitable and accessible to all the women, so even if you are in a remote location, you should still be safe and have services available to you.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have any more time?

The Chair: Yes, we have about one and a half minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville: Sandra, at the end just now, you raised a larger issue, the issue of elder abuse and the disagreement, I guess, between generations. How prevalent is that, and how is elder abuse manifested?

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Actually, we're just currently undertaking some work to find out the rate of prevalence of elder abuse. An educated guess would be that it's exceptionally high in the communities. It's manifested in elders not having enough food to eat. Their basic needs are not being met. I just came, actually, from Inuvik, and there was an elder, a 69-year-old woman, who was taken to the emergency shelter there because her son was physically abusing her because she wasn't able to give him more money. And this is something we hear consistently across the country. Again, it's not something that's often spoken about in the communities, but it's rampant. It's going to be the next epidemic.

Hon. Anita Neville: Is it usually a woman that's abused?

Ms. Sandra Tucker: No.

Hon. Anita Neville: No, but it could be?

Ms. Sandra Tucker: It can be the woman or the man, whoever it is that has the income coming in. Typically, it's the older person whose name is on the lease and who has the most stable income coming in, so we're seeing it with both male and female elders. The numbers are rising, and more and more are going to shelters.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Thanks, Anita.

We go now to Dona Cadman.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Lorraine, I know what this term means, but maybe some of my elder colleagues don't. Could you tell us what "couch surfing" is?

Ms. Lorraine Phaneuf: Oh, sorry. Because of the cold weather or just the nature of Yellowknifers, women and children who have no place to live are often taken in by relatives or friends, and they just stay there. They don't have beds. They don't really have a spot in the family, but they're allowed to stay there because they have nowhere else to go. Oftentimes, because of the overcrowding or however many social issues, they're moving from house to house with really no place to go, sometimes getting food where they can through the shelter systems, but really not having a home for themselves or their children.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Thank you.

How large a problem is child apprehension? Is it a big problem up here? It seems to be a big problem every place we've talked. Is it big up here too?

Any of you, please go ahead.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: Since I work in that area, I'll speak from my experience.

It's definitely higher than we'd like it to be. Taking any child into care is totally against my belief. However, there are situations in which a parent is unable to provide for them at a given time, and we have to provide alternate arrangements for them. It is very difficult to find foster homes, to find families that will take in children, so it's always a struggle for us. And as much as people think we take children without reason, we have to really prove a case to the courts. So it's not that we do that flippantly.

There are a lot of children still living with families even though people might question us about why we're leaving those children there, but my experience—and I've been in this field for a very long time—is that you try to maintain that connection with family. One of the things I've found living in the north as opposed to what I found when I lived in Ontario is that the children always know their family members. They're here, and they eventually go back to them when they reach the age of 16. So if we can do anything to maintain that relationship, that's definitely what we do. But, yes, there are situations in which addictions are involved and violence is involved, and we do have to remove children for their protection.

● (0940)

The Chair: Ms. Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: Just speaking further on what Sheila was saying, one thing that we're noticing is that a lot of women are now not choosing the option of going to shelters because of fear of their children being apprehended.

I want to bring to this committee's attention a situation I just became aware of. There is one shelter here in the Northwest Territories that provides double duty. They are an emergency foster placement/women's emergency shelter. Can you imagine the trauma on a child who's been apprehended from his or her own home—usually, violence is somehow related to that—to live in the same facility where a woman may be coming in beaten, bruised, and bleeding? This particular shelter, and God bless those shelter directors, is a 50-year-old building. We shouldn't be in a situation where the resources are so limited that we have to put them together.

A voice: It's wrong.

The Chair: I'm going to go to Madame Demers again, so we'll give you some time to get your headpieces on for translation.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to ask you one last question. There are people from the media present here this morning. I would like to know what type of relationship you have with the media. When the time comes to expose discrimination, social problems and problems in the community, do you get media attention? Are your problems interesting enough to the media? Are they there for you or are they only present when the Standing Committee on the Status of Women visits you?

What do you have to say, Lorraine?

[*English*]

Ms. Lorraine Phaneuf: I think we're very media-rich in the north, as you know.

[*Translation*]

The media are everywhere, all the time.

[*English*]

They are everywhere. Even if we're having small events, the media really covers issues for women and family violence. That's been our experience. When we had our northern women in mining, oil and gas project , having come sometimes from different jurisdictions, funders were amazed at the amount of media coverage we got from our project. For us, the media has been quite rich.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: And what do you say, Sandra?

[*English*]

Ms. Sandra Tucker: We also have a very good relationship with the media. In the past, they've been great supporters of us. We would always like to see more media coverage. We drive our media contacts crazy with press releases and news releases, but we're doing it because we want to get things out into the forefront.

One of the big challenges we've had is with the national newspapers. The local and regional newspapers have been phenomenal. CBC North and the radio have been phenomenal. It's the big newspapers—*The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, and the *National Post*—because we can send them information over and over, and it doesn't seem to catch at that national level.

I don't know how we can change that, but it's something we really need to see some growth in, getting these issues into the national forefront, so they don't just stay as regional issues. We keep spinning our wheels. People need to know what's going on. I'm open to any suggestions from the committee on how we could encourage them to listen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: In your opinion, how do you think you could share what you are doing here? Because you are doing extraordinary things, you are achieving extraordinary successes, as opposed to some other places, like Williams Lake or Prince Albert, for instance, where the situation is more desperate. These communities are experiencing tragic situations.

According to you, how could you convey to others what you are doing here; how can you let them know how you are managing to achieve your objectives? How could we share your way of doing things with them, so that these people are given hope that they will some day get out of their situation?

[*English*]

The Chair: A very short answer. Who would like to tackle that?

Ms. Nelson.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: I just have a comment. You're really building up our self-esteem this morning. I am starting to feel wonderful. Wow, look out, we're out to advocate now.

Honestly, I don't know. I oftentimes feel very isolated in the program I work within just because child protection is sometimes frowned upon. I still try to get out there and do the best I can for the families that come to our attention. I find that in Yellowknife, and I also find this in Lutselk'e and Fort Resolution, if we want something, we ask for it, and we usually get people who want to work together on a project, if there's something. For instance, if I need some housing from our transitional housing here, I have built a relationship with Kate, and she will say, “I'll see what I can do for you”. It's really working one-on-one. You just have to build those relationships.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I concur with everyone's vision of the Northwest Territories. I do think that, although our problems are very large, and I don't disagree with that, there are some things that we do here very well, because we are a balanced society.

We have great empowerment of aboriginal people throughout the Northwest Territories. We have built over many years good relationships that are really the driving point of our lives. They are the things that we all hold very dear. Those are things that are real strengths for the people of the Northwest Territories. We have the challenge of creating a society that is unique in Canada, in that we will have strong aboriginal governments as well as strong public governments. That is something that I think drives all of our equations.

Getting back to the economics of this, we have seen great economics in the Northwest Territories with the development of mining. We have chosen a pattern of taking people out of their communities for two weeks and then putting them back as being the pattern we're going to follow. Do you see that as having a positive or negative effect on family violence?

The Chair: Ms. Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: It can have both.

The development of the resources in the north brings in additional income. But what we are tending to see, especially in this area and also in Nunavut, is that when the husband or the breadwinner in the family has gone out to work in the mines or on the oil pipeline, he makes wonderful money, and coming home, he makes some pit stops along the way and that money kind of all disappears. He comes home and he's broke. The rent is not getting paid and there is no money for food.

That of course again exacerbates any situation related to domestic violence, because housing is now at risk, there is no food, and there are no basic services. I don't know how we are going to change that. We're dealing with people a lot of times who have had very limited income and now have access to a whole lot of money. When you get a whole lot of money in your hand, the urge is that you sometimes really want to spend it.

We're also dealing with addictions issues, particularly alcoholism, and that money is being spent quickly. We are hearing from our contacts in the north that most of the money that's being made is being spent before it ever gets back to the family unit.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends this round, but before we end, we have a couple of minutes left.

Without belabouring it, I want to remark on what my colleagues have said, which is that you are indeed a unique community, although I must say, in Nunavut we also found that same sense of uniqueness. I don't know if it's because you are territories, because you are smaller.... You're talking about colleagues you work with, Ms. Nelson, by their first names. In British Columbia you have a hierarchy in every bureaucracy, with a deputy minister and five ADMs and six directors general, and by the time you get down to the field worker, that hierarchical system is a difficult one to deal with. I think that may be the secret of your success. Let's do away with hierarchical systems right away.

That's important, and there are many best practices that we can learn from you and from Nunavut. When we were there, we heard that same thing.

I want to talk about a couple of things. Dona talked about couch surfing, and actually it's not a phenomenon up here. It's not because of the cold weather. Couch-surfing is a way for women to stay under the radar. It happens in Vancouver more than you would ever realize and in the cities; it keeps them under the radar. Children and family services don't know that they don't have a place to live. They stay under the radar and their children are not taken away from them.

I wanted to talk a little bit about that. Ms. Lacey said something very important that touched me deeply. She said, “I really tried. I tried. I was running around confused, and they still took my children.” At the heart of all this is the fragmentation of families, and children who are already traumatized by watching violence in the family, children who are already traumatized by one parent leaving the home, invariably the mother, and then to be wrested away from that mother is extraordinarily traumatic. You can see how, generation after generation...we know that 45% of children who live in abusive homes turn out to either become abusers or to have partnerships with abusers later on in life. So there is that intergenerational thing.

I need to ask this question, and it's a difficult question, Sheila. I'm not trying to say, you guys are nice because you don't have any options. I know that you seem to really get it and you seem to care. Ms. Lacey really moved me with her statement, “They still took my children.” In many places we went, one of the biggest fears of women reporting violence at all was that they have nowhere to go; there were no shelters for them, and in isolated communities they are just stuck. As you said, they don't have money for a plane ticket to get down to wherever there are shelters, and the shelters are limited—30 days in some areas, but six days is really terrible. So really people just stay where they are and they continue to live with the violence.

We've heard something really important, and I want to ask about this. Housing, of course, is extremely linked, but we've heard that another reason women will not leave the violent situation is that once they get out of the shelter they have such little money from social assistance with which to pay rent.... Nicole brought this up earlier. We heard in certain areas that the foster parent can get $2,500 a month to look after three kids and the mother of those three kids gets about $600 to do the same work. I'm not asking anybody to say what's wrong with that system; it's obvious what's wrong with that. But I would like to find out what we can do to change it. Everyone is aware of it, and surely there is a built-in bias. I understand that women who have been victims of violence quite often aren't good parents because they themselves have been so beaten down, but surely there's a way we can intervene to find a way to give these women.... If we can't find housing for them, at least we can pay for market housing for them, appropriately, if we can do it for a foster parent.

I'm specifically directing this to Sheila and Barbara first, and then I'd like to hear your opinion on it.

Sheila, what can we do to stop that real unfairness and total tragedy from occurring?

● (0950)

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: I wish I had the answer for you. As hard as it may be for people to believe, apprehending a child from a woman who has left an abusive relationship is the last option we want. We put out a significant amount of money to assist families that are on a very limited income, and sometimes income support just doesn't pay enough. It's not uncommon for us to give out gift cards on a regular basis.

The Chair: So you supplement...?

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: Oh, supplement. As a matter of fact, I can tell you that on average we probably give out between $5,000 and $6,000 a month to supplement.

The Chair: From your department.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: It comes from our department.

The Chair: This is unique again. It doesn't happen anywhere else but with your department here in Yellowknife. It doesn't happen elsewhere.

Mrs. Sheila Nelson: The reason we do it is that I don't believe the child should be removed from a parent if they're able to look after the child. If they're short on money to pay.... Often we pay utility bills. Often we pay housing arrears so that a person can get back into the housing system and have rent geared to their income.

Like I said earlier, there is work we need to do between our departments, and I think that change has to come from above me. I certainly speak out about it, but the change has to come from higher up than my level.

The Chair: But the supplement is an important piece.

Did anyone want to tackle that a little bit? Ms. Lacey?

Then we'll close on our questions.

● (0955)

Mrs. Barbara Lacey: I wanted to answer the question from more of an assistance perspective. I really do believe that the case management model is the model we have to put in place.

It doesn't matter if you're a woman in family violence coming out of a family violence situation and trying to get yourself reorganized, or a mental health client, or a homeless client, I believe that having an advocate, having that support, that case manager, to help with the negotiation and navigating the system.... I came from methadone maintenance treatment in P.E.I., and we had to work with income support all the time because our clients were the injection drug users, and nobody likes them. To have a good relationship with income support was often the key, because that kept them in their housing. If I could keep them in their housing, maybe child and family services would then look at getting the children back in.

My clients did not have the skills to negotiate any of that. Often, our women getting out of these situations don't have the skills to negotiate everything, as we found when we did this experience yesterday. So I really believe in the case management model. That means more money. That means more funding and more positions. Lyda has some of this in her outreach team and the independent supported living program. We know how much good this does. Our individuals trying to negotiate a system need somebody with them. That would be my answer.

The Chair: Thank you. That was very helpful.

I want to thank all of you for coming and for sharing with us. We've learned a lot. It seems as if pennies are dropping. As we go everywhere, we're getting more pennies just clicking down.

This has been a very good session for us to listen to and to compare and contrast with other areas. Some of what we've heard has been heartbreaking, but you seem to have had a certain amount of success, as has Nunavut. I think maybe it's because you're territories and you're not as fragmented as all of the provinces.

I think this is good. Thank you very much.

I'm going to now suspend until the next session.

● (0955)

(Pause)

● (0955)

The Chair: I will now call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this Standing Committee on the Status of Women is studying violence against aboriginal women.

You know that standing committees are made up of all four parties. It is by and large a non-partisan effort, because we are parliamentarians here and we all want to come together. Whatever we find and report will be presented to Parliament first, and then of course the government of the day will have to respond to the report and the recommendations within 90 days.

Given what we heard from the Sisters in Spirit reports, that there are over 580 missing and murdered aboriginal women around the country, there have been calls for a national inquiry. We know that this is an issue, with best intentions or not, that people have been trying to remedy for a long time with very little success. While most people tell us that this has been studied to death, we're not trying to study anything. We know the data. We know the statistics. What we really want to do is talk with people on the ground and see if they can cut through all of this to tell us what the root causes are and tell us what is the nature and extent of the violence against aboriginal women. By nature, I mean different types of violence. As you well know, violence can be sexual, it can be physical, it can be emotional, it can be systemic. Racism is a form of violence.

So we wanted to look at the nature and the extent of violence. We also wanted to look at the root causes, and I think we've been hearing now a repetitive measure of what the root causes are. But we'd like to also, more than anything, listen to solutions you can offer us—solutions that are not the same old, same old, because the same old, same old has not been working. So we'd like to hear about creative solutions, innovative solutions, systemic resolutions, but we also want you to be as frank and honest with us as you possibly can.

That having been said, I'm going to start the presentations. We have four groups represented here today. We will give you between five and seven minutes; seven is the upper limit. If you can just check me out occasionally, I will give you a little signal as to whether or not you have a minute left or you should wind up; it doesn't mean stop immediately, but it means winding up within about 20 seconds.

We will begin with the Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories. The presenter is Therese Villeneuve, but she also has Ms. Thomas with her for support. Thank you.

Ms. Villeneuve.

● (1000)

Ms. Therese Villeneuve (President, Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories): *Mahsi cho* for having me here.

[*Witness speaks in Dene*]

I would like to thank you for taking the time to visit Yellowknife and to find out first-hand what is occurring in the area of violence against aboriginal women in the Northwest Territories. As you probably already know, the incidence of violence is much higher in the Northwest Territories. Statistics indicate the incidence is seven times higher, and we know the actual incidence is probably much higher than that reported.

These statistics have not changed over the past few years, and the nature of assaults seems to be getting more serious in many cases, and by more serious we're talking about deaths of spouses. Women are sometimes being beaten up in their own homes.

Sentencing has not reflected the serious nature of these assaults. As you can well imagine, the future does not look good in terms of reducing the incidents, considering the number of children who are witnessing these acts of violence.

I will ask you to excuse me, because sometimes this becomes very emotional, especially for aboriginal women.

The Native Women's Association of the NWT was established and incorporated under the societies ordinance in 1978 as a non-profit organization. Headquarters are located in Yellowknife. We offer a victim services program, aboriginal human resources development program, and a full-time aboriginal adult training centre. We also have a contribution agreement with HRSDC to pilot a literacy and numeracy program specifically designed to reflect the needs of students throughout the Northwest Territories.

We get core funding from the Government of the Northwest Territories, and this provides us with an executive director, financial manager, and administrative assistant. NWA of the NWT also sponsor workshops and special events, such as Sisters in Spirit luncheons, judo programs for youth, etc. One of our main services in Yellowknife is directly linked to the topic we are discussing today.

The mission of Yellowknife victims services is to offer compassionate support and system information referral to victims. The majority of our clients are aboriginal women; however, we also see men and non-aboriginal women. We have one coordinator and one victims services worker. As well, we hire a trainer to train volunteers, as the after-hours work is done by volunteers. We provide 24-hour services that include court accompaniment and preparation, support through RCMP statements, victim impact statements, information about the criminal justice system, emotional support, crisis intervention, and referrals. Although we mainly see victims from Yellowknife, there is an increasing demand in communities that do not have victims service workers.

About 25% of the people victims services provides services to are aboriginal adult women who are victims of serious violent crimes. The demand for our programs at the training centre continues to grow. New funding from the GNWT as well as the federal government has allowed us to diversify our programming as well as focus on curriculum development.

At this time there are approximately 15 students enrolled in our adult education and pre-employment. Our classes continue to focus on math, English, computers, employment skills, and life skills, including traditional activities. This is a unique program. We service mostly women who have very low literacy and numeracy skills who would not be able to upgrade, as no other similar holistic programs are available for this population.

Obtaining funding on a yearly basis is always problematic, and is getting even more so, as the funding for this population is getting harder to obtain. Federal money from INAC or other departments is just not available for a long-term commitment that is needed for this population. We believe that if the federal government is serious in reducing violence against aboriginal women it will invest in education and housing for at-risk women.

Our students are dedicated to making a difference in their lives, but they face many uphill battles, including addictions, homelessness, poverty, violence in their lives, and lack of child care services, as many of these women are single parents themselves. The best way to reduce violence against aboriginal women is to provide them with education. Other resources that are lacking include outreach workers and counsellors. The Government of the Northwest Territories does not see a need for funding these resources.

In terms of violence against aboriginal women, one of the things the federal government could do would be to change the on-reserve and off-reserve funding process. Another recommendation would be national awareness, with an education program to raise awareness, at local and national levels, of family abuse, sexual exploitation, and alcohol and drug abuse.

You talked about the root causes. Well, one of—

The Chair: You have thirty seconds, please.

Ms. Therese Villeneuve: Okay. I just want to focus on the root causes.

As you know, many of us have suffered from the impact of residential schools in our lives. Aboriginal people were not violent people in the past. The men did not abuse their wives, their families. We were brought up on the land. The women were very, very honoured.

I think if we're going to go back to that, one of the programs that could be really supported is the on-the-land program. We can go back and renew all this honour that we were once born into, and used to, and lived, because our aboriginal culture, it's what we lived. This is not our aboriginal culture, the situation we are in right now.

● (1010)

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

Now I will go to Lyda?

Ms. Lyda Fuller: Yes. I'm here now—

The Chair: For the YWCA.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: —for the YWCA, yes, but on behalf of our shelter for women fleeing violence, women and their children.

I won't go through the statistics. They're listed here. It's very high in the north.

I just want to say that most women in NWT communities face formidable barriers to accessing services and support to escape from violence. There are only five shelters in the NWT that serve 33 communities spread over a vast area. Women often in the communities without shelters have to go a local social service worker to get their trip to a shelter paid for. And often this person can be related to the partner that the women is trying to escape.

Violence starts early in their relationships and continues through child-bearing years. We see very young women with a number of children already who repeatedly come to our shelter. By the time they can really think about how they want to change that violence in their lives, they're tied down with child rearing and see no way out. They are busy caring for their children, the housing options are limited, and there are really significant community sanctions for disclosure of abuse. That's often a barrier to seeking meaningful help.

Women use the shelters as respite for periods of time, to regroup and go back. Elders use the shelter in this way too. We have seen women in their sixties and seventies, with multiple healed fractures, who get dumped out into snowbanks and come into the shelter.

Women often don't think change is possible because the abuse is endemic. It's often what they have known and grown up with. And women have sympathy for their partners, because their partners have been abused as well. When you look at the root causes around cultural disruption, and residential schools, everybody in the community is suffering. A lot of times women don't see the larger system as offering helpful support. They want to heal as a community.

The women who come to us say that it's primarily physical and emotional abuse, but we see a wide range of all the types of abuse. We see women beaten severely who then miscarry while they're at the shelter. We see women who can hardly walk due to beatings. We see women who end up leaving the shelter and are beaten to death. We see women who are held against their will and then physically abused over periods of time, who give notes to their children to take to school asking for help. We see women who jump out of vehicles in the liquor store parking lot and hop into taxicabs to come to the shelter.

We see a lot of young women from Nunavut communities who access shelter services here in Yellowknife. As isolated as you can be in this territory, you can be even more so in Nunavut. Transportation is very costly, so often we are the cheapest alternative.

Resources in Nunavut are scarce. I'd like to make a real plea, on behalf of Nunavut, for better support to those shelters there, because they really do need that. Women often go back to bleak circumstances. We have women in from the small communities in Nunavut who might have a child with a disability. They're struggling. They've come to the shelter, and the partner has moved another woman into their home. So what do they go back to? These women have no economic independence and sometimes few alternatives because of that.

Recently a woman come to us from a Nunavut community. She and her five kids were put into cells in the Nunavut community because that was the safest place there until they could arrange for a flight to get her and the five kids to come out. Partners, however, it seems to us, have no trouble following the women to the communities with shelter and will often drive by the shelter to make sure that we see them, and that the women see them. That becomes a threat in itself. It's interesting, because when you talk to the communities and the referral agents, they say “She's coming for counselling. This is her problem and she's coming for help.”

We have been facilitating emergency protection orders. That's been really helpful except in the small communities without RCMP, because there is no way for that to be followed up. We have received phone calls from women who have obtained emergency protection orders and then they're left without food, baby food, and diapers. We take supplies out to them because they're economically tied to that partner and he's now gone from the home.

Women who are at high risk often have few supports long-term. We try to keep them safe in our transitional housing, but if that partner is known to the other tenants and they're scared of him—watch out. We had emergency protection orders granted and that has been helpful

The last thing I want to end on is the work we're doing with the other women's groups in the eleven small communities without RCMP, which I think is a key to what we want to do. Communities need community healing and community development.

● (1015)

The Chair: I'm going to give you an extra minute to quickly expand on what you just said.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: One of the key pieces is around community development. Healing and community development are inseparable. You need the whole community to heal and come together to address some of these issues. Healing and community development are not on the radar for funding. It's very necessary. It needs to happen and there are few resources to help that.

The women in the eleven small communities have been very thankful that we've managed to get some pots of money to look at working with those women and working within the broader context of that community. The women are very savvy. They say, “We don't want the community to be upset that you're coming in to help us, so let's have a community feast. Let's bring in some resources. We want to do this, but let's share those resources with the school.” It's really a key issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to go to Arlene Hache.

We're coming to visit your place a little later on, Arlene. Thank you very much.

Arlene is from the Yellowknife Women's Society, the Centre for Northern Families.

You have a few minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Arlene Hache (Executive Director, Centre for Northern Families, Yellowknife Women's Society): Thank you.

The stew with bannock is on. We're happy that you're all coming and everyone is invited.

I wanted to thank you for opening the table so that I could present, even though I wasn't scheduled.

It's really critical for our services, because according to how the Government of the Northwest Territories defines things, women who stay at our shelter are not considered to be battered women or women living in or fleeing violence, even though they all do.

Our shelter is categorized as a homeless shelter, and our funding is one-third of what you would find in at least some shelters for battered women.

Part of what I hope to do is talk about the work we do, why we're important, and how we take sort of a different approach. Part of it is really to talk about the systemic barriers we find as an agency that serves marginalized women and how we could improve those.

The Centre for Northern Families has been in existence for 20 years. I came here when I was 18 years old. I hitchhiked up from a farm, and I was fleeing family violence and sexual abuse. I came to this community, and I hung out with the girls and the women from N'dilo and Dettah and the girls at Akaitcho Hall, and I found a real family of women whose experience was similar to mine. They opened their arms to embrace my challenges as I kind of rooted around in the community and tried to re-establish myself emotionally, physically, and in every way to become a contributor to the community that I ended up moving to.

Over the years the Centre for Northern Families was born out of the fact that we were just women in trouble trying to help each other. It began with women whose children had been apprehended at child welfare, women who didn't even know what was being presented to them in English, women who didn't speak English, and who were losing their children to a system they really didn't understand. The Centre for Northern Families is really rooted in experience.

Some people were talking earlier about mentorship and how important that is, and how important it is that you look at lived experience as a real benefit when you are providing services to the women who are escaping violence.

The Centre for Northern Families does give priority to hiring and training aboriginal and Inuit women. We do have aboriginal women in management and leadership roles within our agency. We meet with chiefs in the communities. In fact I just came back last week from a meeting with a chief in a small community who was very supportive, very kind, and very funny. At the end of the visit he said “I can't sit here talking about women all day”, so that was the end of our conversation. I said I would let him go, and he could talk about men after I left.

Northern people in Nunavut and in the NWT certainly generally have heard of the Centre for Northern Families, and that recognition resulted in our work being acknowledged through the Order of Canada. More importantly, we get calls from people all across the territories and Nunavut thanking us when we really put our neck on the line to step up and speak out against the violence we find being perpetrated against northerners generally and against women in particular.

I wanted to focus on the fact that we find that colonization is the root of the situation in which we find ourselves today, but part of the escalation in violence against women, from my perspective, is the fact that there is ongoing oppression. Residential schools have not ended. That method has not gone away. It hasn't disappeared, and it has not ended. It has transformed itself into the foster care system and into other oppressive kinds of systems, like income support, like the correctional centre, and all of the systems that take such a European approach, something that is really foreign to how northern people do things.

I am reminded of a study that was done in a region of the Northwest Territories that showed that four out of five girls had been sexually abused by the time they were 18, and three out of five boys had been sexually abused by the time they were 18. That study was done a long time ago.

I just wanted to highlight the fact that we have two challenges. We have lots of challenges, but I want to address two specific challenges today. One is racialized violence, which we find very prevalent in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

● (1020)

The other challenge is the fact that it is gender violence, not family violence. I find that we're not permitted in the Northwest Territories to talk about anything but family violence. From my perspective, that's because people want to put that out there as being a family problem, not a societal or a systemic problem.

The other thing I wanted to talk about was that this means, going back to what Lyda talked about, that there is a real sort of angst in the community, in that everybody is in trouble, not just women. How do you deal with the fact that everybody is in trouble?

Part of what I wanted to highlight is that those systemic responses that take such a European approach are very unfamiliar and foreign to people. It's very discriminatory and very punitive. I'll just let you know that in the child welfare system in the Northwest Territories, 97% of the children who have been apprehended are aboriginal. That is an astounding statistic when you look at the fact that across Canada it's 50%—already, people would say, too high for the support that's supposed to be out there for families.

Do I have to wrap it up?

● (1025)

The Chair: Yes, please.

Ms. Arlene Hache: I have solutions. Do I have two minutes for solutions?

The Chair: No, you don't have two minutes, but I am sure one of our colleagues will be pleased to ask you for your solutions in the question and answer session.

Thank you very much.

I would now like to go to Sandra Lockhart, who is chair of the Public Service Alliance of Canada's aboriginal peoples committee.

Ms. Sandra Lockhart (Chair, PSAC, Aboriginal Peoples Committee, As an Individual): Hi there. I'm just nervous. It's an amazing thing, eh?

I want to start by saying that I'm the daughter of John and Mary Head from Mistawasis First Nation. I'm a Dakota Cree woman originally born into Treaty 6. I exercised my nationhood and mobility right and transfered to Lutselk'e First Nation when I married my husband, who is Denis Sikoulin.

I would also like to acknowledge the teachings of my elders—and it will help me too. They say that when I go to places like that, I should make it very clear that I don't talk for all aboriginal people. Also, take a moment to pray, because I have ancestors behind me who live in me, and I'm hopefully speaking for the future.

I want to cry. I need to settle down. I'm going to take a minute to do that. I hope this is not offensive to anyone.

[*Witness speaks in Cree*]

I'm asking that you come and speak with me and help me today as my grandfather and my helper. Creator, I'm thanking you again for giving me life and being able to share whatever it is you're guiding me to do. Forgive me if I speak wrongly and offend people.

As the chair of the NWT aboriginal peoples committee, it's very important that we were formed. In 1994 the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the union, began to recognize that aboriginal people were not being acknowledged as aboriginal people in Canada. For the union to be as progressive as we are, we needed to have a policy paper that would speak to that. I want to read a couple of phrases and I want to talk a little bit about our community in the north, because we're very involved with social justice. I also want to say that I went through the whole residential school, and I am one of the people who aren't acknowledged. The government decided, no, your experience doesn't exist for us. I'm also a foster parent and a community member.

The 1994 policy says that the Public Service Alliance "supports the right of aboriginal peoples to self-determination, encourages all governments in Canada to fulfill their historic treaty obligations..."—and I'll just insert something here.

I think that's very important, because I think a lot of Canadians have forgotten that they're treaty people too. I don't think our schools or our governments are educating us: if you're Canadian, you also are treaty, because those treaties weren't made in isolation just with us. They were made on behalf of Canadians and Canada. It's just that as aboriginal people today we want to benefit from that treaty as well as Canadians have done.

In the alliance, we want to encourage all governments in Canada to fulfill their historic treaty obligations, and we urge the timely and just settlement of all land claims. The alliance believes that aboriginal people have been historically disadvantaged, both in society and the workplace, and supports mechanisms that re-addresses this disadvantage.

Aboriginal peoples have the right to employment in the professions they wish to pursue. The alliance believes that employment equity initiatives are fully justified and necessary mechanisms to ensure that aboriginal peoples are provided the opportunity to pursue their chosen careers. The alliance will work to ensure that our union itself is fully accessible to all aboriginal members and that it thoroughly represents the interests of those members.

In the north here, in the NWT, we formed a committee. We have several aims and objectives, but there is one that speaks loudest to me. We work with other organizations, so we do partner. We believe in partnership, because it's very cultural. We don't talk about families or individuals like they're isolated; we talk about nationhood and we talk about community. It's real, and we still try to live that way, and when we come up against policies, it hits at the core of who we are.

So when my sister here talks about policies that are still hitting us, it's very, very true. I know that within PSAC we're going to be addressing what some of systemic policies are that are still there for assimilation and are killing us culturally. We're going to be reviewing that.

We want to support. Our committee works with supporting aboriginal peoples. It's not just in the workplace. It's not having this part at work, this part at home, and this part in society; it's your full life. It's to support aboriginal peoples in their struggle for full access to all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of their right to preserve and strengthen their own political, economic, and legal traditions and institutions.

We want to be active in our own country. This is our homeland. It's not like we can go back to some other place. This is it. We want what governments have been talking about and what service providers talk about with partnerships. We don't want it to be lip service anymore. We want to be at the table.

In order to do that, I think what has to be acknowledged first is that as an aboriginal woman—I'll speak for myself now—I was born into systemic racism. It was there, and it's still there, so when I hear a bunch of things that my sisters have said—and I will address them because I know I have a short period of time.... There are still a lot of systemic services that benefit service providers, which aboriginal people then become dependent on.

When we become dependent, what do we lose? We lose our autonomy, and then governments and service providers get to say, “But we're doing it for your own good”. Or if they want to open up something like child-family circles or something, where we can do something in the community, it's all under their cultural frameworks. They're not acknowledging.... Like our president of NWT, Terry Villeneuve, said, we have wellness practices, and those need to be recognized just as much as some of the social services or legal traditions, and they must start becoming mandatory, because they work for us.

Also, we must have ethical funding. We'll start getting funding like Sisters in Spirit. It works great, right? The government grabbed it, ran away, took it away and called it their own. Yet there is more work that needs to be done.

I'd love to talk more on this.

● (1035)

The Chair: Thank you. You'll get that opportunity during the question and answer segments, Sandra.

Now we will move into questions and answers. The first segment is seven minutes for questions and for answers. I will have to be very strict with you, because that stew and bannock is waiting, right? We have to leave here at 12. We have timeframes that we're working in when moving from place to place.

Ms. Neville, for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all of you for appearing.

I have so many questions and so little time, but I'm first up, Arlene, so would you like to make your recommendations that you didn't have time to do?

Ms. Arlene Hache: Yes, I didn't have time.

Hon. Anita Neville: But can you do it quickly? I have a lot of other questions.

Ms. Arlene Hache: I'll make it short. One is that I think there needs to be funding for family support services, because addressing violence is not all about shelters and not all about the court.

The other one is that down south the bands have band reps to represent children in court, because they're band members and they have a stake in what happens. In the north, that doesn't exist. There is no representative who goes to court to say, “We have a stake in what happens”.

The other thing that I think we need is federally established standards—that has been lost over the years—along with a gender analysis. I think it's critical that funding is available for aboriginal and Inuit women to have a voice, because it is often silence by collaborations. Collaborations are great unless you have to toe the party line. You guys know better than anyone else how disempowering that can be—not always, but it can be.

There were only two other things that I had thought about. One was having equalized financial support. In Yellowknife, for example, parents who have to feed their children get $4.50 a day to feed them. Foster parents get $25 a day—that's minimum—and I think inmates get more than parents are getting to feed their children. So we need a real federal effort around equalizing or some rationale around why children, who are the most important, would get different benefits depending on where they're sitting.

The final thing that I think would make a massive difference is to make sure that we have trauma-informed programs that are culturally relevant. From my perspective of working in the north for 30 years, we have a population that has been convinced there is no problem systemically. They've been convinced that they're drunks who just sort of can't manage. I remember that years ago the only treatment available to them was addiction treatment, because it was all about drunks. And that's not what I see. I think culturally relevant and trauma-informed programs that acknowledge the colonization that took place, and the ongoing oppression, would change the world in aboriginal and Inuit communities.

Thank you.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much.

Ms. Fuller, I don't know whether you or someone else in the previous panel raised the issue of elder abuse. You talked about older women coming in with broken bones and whatever. Could you talk about it a bit more? When women are coming in at 60 and 70 years old, abused and beaten up, has that been the pattern of their life for the most part? Can you generalize?

You're nodding, Arlene.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: Yes.

Hon. Anita Neville: Always? So have they lived their lives like that? And what should we, as the federal government, be doing?

Ms. Lyda Fuller: They have lived their lives like that. Once again, I would urge community development, healing programs, and housing.

We just had an elder abuse conference here in Yellowknife for across the territory, and a study has been done on a survey of elder abuse, which is significant across the north. There are now groups working on how to assist elders at the community level. I think that project is federally funded.

So certainly, investing in allowing people to come together, look at solutions, and develop solutions at the community level is important, but adequate healing, adequate development at the community level, and housing seem to me to be keys.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have more time?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Sandra, would you talk a little bit more? You said that you're born into systemic racism. I'm assuming you're saying that by virtue of being an aboriginal person, you're born into a system that will discriminate against you. Is that what you...?

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: That's exactly what I'm saying.

I went through the whole system of education, foster care, and residential school, and what I learned to do through all of that to survive emotionally and feel some kind of dignity was to internalize that racism. I hated being aboriginal. I was ashamed of aboriginal people. I missed all the teachings from my grandmother. Thank goodness there's a spiritual way you can get all the teachings. So although we're changing some of that, we're still not changing the bigger system.

While I agree with my sister here, Lyda, who talks about needing community healing, I also think service providers need the same healing. They're born into the same system. There's this idea that they're appointed to fix us, but if they're all acknowledging that aboriginal people are still under a colonial, oppressive system, then they're part of it. They're either colonized or the colonizer.

I think that in order to have really effective programs there needs to be a joint healing process for service providers and communities. Otherwise you're just going to perpetuate a different name for the same systemic oppression.

● (1040)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'm going to go to Madame Demers from the Bloc Québécois. Go ahead, Nicole.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here with us today.

This group of witnesses is very different from the previous one. You have shown us the other side of the coin. The previous group had positive, laudatory things to say, said that things were going well and that everything was fine. What you have set out for us looks like the other side of the coin. This is testimony from people who are grappling with these problems within the communities. That is reality.

Sandra, you said that women did not want to become dependent on established programs because that did not solve the issue. I found that very touching. Even if those programs are set up by well-intentioned people, they don't live the problems and can't really solve them. These programs are indeed not set up nor offered by aboriginal women, whereas they should be. As you said so well, when you are not in a given situation, you don't know it from the inside, you don't live it. The solution has to come from you and you must solve these problems within your communities. We are not the ones who are going to decide in your stead how to solve them.

We are here to attempt to find ways to put an end to this violence. Give us the means to help you; suggest solutions to us. We are here to listen to you. You said it very well: this has to come from you. Please, share your ideas with us.

[*English*]

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: I just want to clarify very quickly that there are women who appreciate the programs.

Let's talk about identity. Sharon McIvor went and tried to do that, and said "You can't be declaring who we are. Hear us." She had everything there, and the government only went so far.

So government has a role. The federal government has to take the role seriously and implement the treaty agreements we have. They have to start supporting the Assembly of First Nations instead of cutting funding when something AFN does might offend them.

So that's what I'm talking about, ethical funding. The funding that you do provide has to be directed by the community: what do we need, for how long? I like what I heard earlier this morning about programs that are stratified rather than one blanket fits all. There are certain women...and I'm grateful, because I was one of those women who were on the street, living like that, and I went through a stratified recovery. In Edmonton there are programs like that, but we don't have them in the north. We actually have one treatment centre. Northern people have been crying forever that not everybody's alcoholic. Everybody's having other trauma issues. We don't have services like that. Communities need to tell us what it is we want.

I like what my sister Arlene said, that we need to be including the leadership. We have a government; the public government is also the aboriginal government. So they need to be acknowledged for that. The president for the NWTalso said to give us some ethical funding, not just "Oh, we're doing our part; here, you can have it."

We have to start recognizing the systemic violence, and until the federal government does a review of the policies that are in place that oppress or assimilate us, the rest of us have our hands tied. I think that needs to be acknowledged, and they need to partner with a whole bunch of people in order to really clean that up.

Merci.

● (1045)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: You talked about the Sisters in Spirit. Can you tell us what you would like to see in that regard?

[*English*]

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: I'd like to see that go back to those who created it, and the funding done for it, and then have a lot more partnerships, with the national Native Women's Association leading that.

I know here in the north that PSAC partners. I think we could develop that much more. Because a lot of funding isn't staying with us. The way I understand it—and please forgive me if I don't have the correct understanding—there isn't much funding coming to the north, and a lot is going to the police. I think the police need to be culturally oriented too. I think in the north we do work fairly well with the police, but there are a lot of things missing and we have to do a lot more orientation with service providers again.

Service providers, Sisters in Spirit, that needs to go back to the Native Women's Association and they need to have and own the database, because that's OCAP, those are research principles—ownership, all that stuff. We have to own what belongs to us. And if you want to help us to change, then recognize our nationhood. Fundamentally, that is what has to be done. We're enshrined in the Constitution, but there's a lot of lip service. Canada has to be re-educated on the history of Canada, because Canadians are not recognizing us as full nations within Canada. I hear a lot, and I did a lot of training with PSAC, did a lot of education, because I had to decolonize, and I still have to. Any time aboriginal people get back the sense of who they are and get recognized for their nationhood, people start screaming that it's reverse racism. Reverse racism is not real; that's just people of privilege having to give up a little bit and share. That's all that is.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: What do you think, Ms. Villeneuve?

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Villeneuve, you have 30 seconds to respond to what Madame Demers has been talking about.

Ms. Therese Villeneuve: I want to jump on the impact of residential school that I talked about, because I am a product of residential school. I was in there for ten years, from the time I was seven years old till I got married. I remember the nun telling me, "Don't forget, you're getting married for one reason and one reason only, and that's to procreate. You do exactly what your husband wants you to do." When I got married, that was all I knew.

That's why I said we've lost our culture completely, through the residential school era. That's why I always argue for an on-the-land program. Now, when I go on the land, that's where my spirituality is, that's where everything is for me. It's not when I go into counselling or I go to meetings or anywhere; it's on the land. I think that's where we have to go back to, after the residential school trauma that we've experienced.

I know that a lot of my friends went through the same thing. They were forced to get married right from the residential schools. They didn't even know they were getting married until the nuns told them the night before they were getting married the next morning at six o'clock.

These are the things I lived through. So if you want a witness, I am the witness for that. That's how I want to respond on that.

● (1050)

The Chair: Thank you very much for sharing that with us.

Now I'm going to go to Mrs. Nina Grewal for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, ladies, for your time.

Violence against women is certainly a very serious issue, and serious attention needs to be given to it. Our government considers ending violence against aboriginal women a top priority. We're dealing with an issue, however, that is a shared responsibility of all levels of government, whether the police, the justice system, aboriginal peoples, or civil society. Our committee previously heard about the need to address the issue of jurisdiction and whose responsibility it was to provide services.

It is important that the federal government articulate a vision for all Canadians, whether they are aboriginals or immigrants. We need some guiding principles to aid all players in dealing with this terrible situation and the problems we are facing today. What suggestions can you offer for helping our government to deal with violence against aboriginal women? Could each of you please give your suggestions?

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: I really struggle, because you talk about violence against aboriginal women—and I just did a piece about something in *Time* magazine on this—and you talk about women as if we're separate from the rest of the community, which makes it really hard. If you hurt me, you're going to hurt my child, you're going to hurt my husband, you're going to hurt my community, and you're going to hurt my nation. So I would like to see a more holistic principle in anything you're going to do.

You need to start looking at how you are preventing us from having our nationhood. You don't settle our land claims. The current system is dividing up our land and dividing up everything, because you're not recognizing us as a full nation. Every nation needs its land.

I'm going to say it again, and I'll say it until the day I die: I'm in my homeland and yet I'm studied to death as an aboriginal person, and now as an aboriginal woman, and yet I'm the least understood.

I'm going through decolonization, and I hurt. I can name what's going on, and when we come to public things like this and name it, we still have to live in it and then walk away. And Canada still doesn't want, for whatever reason, to really rectify the wrong that was done within our treaty, within the agreements the Inuit and Métis have. That has to be recognized and re-education has to happen, and the principle has to be that we're a holistic people who still very much live with our land and want coexistence.

I'm a nurse who recognizes that. I'm a traditionalist with the medicine. I'm very fortunate to be able to offer a holistic approach to people who want to make their own choices.

So we're not saying that there aren't good things. There are several good things that we have within Canada with each other, but we have to be recognized as a nation. So please recognize us as a holistic nation and have a holistic approach.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Do any of you want to share your thoughts?

Ms. Arlene Hache: I want to talk just briefly about an experience we had where we developed, or are in a partnership around, a trauma recovery program for northern women who have experienced violence.

The women who came to that program really struggled with a European approach to therapy. I find this a constant challenge, in that northern people, Inuit and first nations people across the country, always have to fit their recovery or experience into a European approach that doesn't work.

So at the end of the day, the Government of the Northwest Territories withdrew funding for that program because in their view it didn't work. They didn't take the next step to recognize the great discoveries we had made and to say "Let's move on from there".

The other brief challenge I'll just highlight is that I find federally and territorially when the government announces funding, there are two problems. One is funding is always announced in the south. As you know, all the centres of excellence of anything are located in the south; but the problems are in the north, and there's never a centre of excellence in the north. We don't have the research resources to demonstrate that we do have solutions that work. At least if you look in Vancouver in Sheway, Sheway is touted as being great, good practice, with the best service going, and I agree. We do the same thing here, but it's looked at like we're crazy, off-centre, not quite right, totally disorganized, and we shouldn't get funded. It's because we don't have the connection to the research or the longitudinal resources to say we do fantastic work.

● (1055)

The Chair: We have about a minute and a half. Does anyone else want to...? Lyda?

Ms. Lyda Fuller: I'll just throw in how important it is for discourse across the three northern territories. Arlene talks about research. We, as women's organizations across the territories, have done work on the causes of homelessness for women. It led to the development of on-the-ground services like the homeless shelter for women in Iqaluit. We can do great things—I would like to say that—but we need to be able to talk to our counterparts across the north, and the distances are great. There's not much opportunity to do that.

The Chair: Therese.

Ms. Therese Villeneuve: I have three recommendations I'd like to bring forth. The federal justice department should be working with the communities on alternative programs. We all know that jails do not work, so don't build any more. Traditional programs could be piloted. There should be funding available for the NAWS III, because at NAWS II, as we all know, aboriginal women were empowered and realized it was possible for them, as a group, to come together and develop their own solutions to the problems facing aboriginal women, not only here in the Northwest Territories but across Canada.

I would also like to support Sandra in requesting that funding be reinstated for Sisters in Spirit, because the Native Women's Association of the NWT also worked with Sisters in Spirit, and we know that we need the data research done in the Northwest Territories. Our stats are not very accurate due to a lack of data here in the Northwest Territories.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now go to Mr. Bevington for the NDP.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Once again, thanks to everyone for being here and sharing your wisdom with us and with this committee. I would be remiss not to say that I'm substituting for our critic, Irene Mathyssen, who was unable to be here.

Having grown up in a medium-sized northern community, I've seen the progression, and I agree very much with Lyda. My experience has been that the improvement in housing has been a very important part of any community development. I saw in my community that as housing improved, the situation improved. We also had champions. Sister Sutherland was a champion for women's shelters and for the family. That in a smaller community really provides a lot.... Larger communities might have more agencies and boards.

One other thing I want to mention in terms of smaller communities is inter-agency groups. We had a very successful inter-agency group that brought together not only the social groups but the schools, the RCMP, and the bands once a month to speak to these issues in the community. They tried to take a holistic approach to what they were doing with their funds and their direction in dealing with social issues of all kinds. Sometimes you have more resources in a medium-sized community that may be able to be accessed through that medium.

I don't have the experience in a small community like you have, Therese, in Fort Resolution. I'd really like you to talk about a small community, how these issues have evolved over your lifetime, what successful directions you can take, and what hasn't worked in your small community.

● (1100)

Ms. Therese Villeneuve: I come from a community where the population is about 400, mainly aboriginal—90%, I think. We have abuse problems. It's not only alcohol, but there are hard drugs out there. I think the change I see is that in my young days growing up I didn't see alcohol. I didn't know what alcohol was until I was a teenager. Then it became worse later on. Now there is much more addiction.

Any time you have those problems associated with residential school impacts and the rest of it, people react in a different way. Any time a person drinks, they don't act like they do when they're sober. Some of these people are the best people when they're sober, but when they're drinking they have different problems.

My worry is for the younger generation nowadays, because they're growing up witnessing all this violence. There are also all the other distractions in their lives. Whether it's TV or all these games they're playing, there's nothing but violence out there. You see it. You see it on TV. Some people see it in their homes. Some people see it in their communities. That's what they're growing up with.

I'm really worried about the future generations. At least in my young days I didn't see alcohol or any of that abuse. Some of the young generation who are growing up now can't say that, because alcohol is all over. It's not just in my community. So they can't even compare the good times to how it is now. That's my worry, especially in a small community where they don't have any resources to go any place.

In the summertime, when I go to Ottawa and see sessions there, I think it would be great for young people to witness what there is out there. There are good things out there too, but there's no funding for the youth to get out of their community at all, except for games. There's life besides sports too.

That's where my worry is for the younger generation, future generations.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: I'm a member of the Lutselk'e treaty first nation. When I lived in the community and my father-in-law Morris Lockhart was still with us, he used to say, about the way our youth were getting educated, that they looked out the window and looked at the land.

When I first moved there—we went through many hurts in our colonization, so we learned to categorize people—some people said you're not from here, blah, blah, blah, and of course that would hurt, right? But then there was this one elder, who's no longer with us, Annie Calflick, who used to say to me, "You know, you're not from here." We know, as human beings, when it's safe to respond, so I said, "What do you mean when you say that? Because it's hurtful." She said, "Well, I can tell by the way you walk with the land that you're not used to it. That relationship needs to be built. Then you'll move with the land here."

That type of teaching is not happening, is not recognized in our schools. My brother-in-law is a cultural worker; it's not built in across Canada as mandatory to recognize aboriginal cultures and how they see that with their own particular area. It's nice that we have that, and it's kind of a nice thing that we do, but it's not mandatory, and I think that needs to happen. We go out a lot on the land, as I think a lot of the communities do, but it's not recognized the way that social studies is recognized. In our on-the-land healing programs, as Therese has said, it's not recognized that you're seeing a therapist.

It doesn't mean that a therapist can't come, but our traditional healers—I get a lot of calls at my place of employment, because I'm an aboriginal wellness coordinator—struggle with getting what they need. There's a lot of discrimination in that health care policy. They'll say, "Sandra, if you need to see a neurologist, we'll ship you to Edmonton, no problem. We'll get it done. You can see a traditional healer under non-insured health benefits, but you have to do it within your community, in your own province of territory. We will not fund you to go outside."

What they are saying, unknowingly maybe, is that there's a lot of bias and prejudice in that policy. It assumes that there was never any colonial practice here to kill the culture. It assumes that all of the traditions we have here know every practice. They don't. We have to go seek our traditional healing approaches in other provinces. We don't have the funds and means to do it, because it is very expensive.

Again, it goes back to looking at the bigger policy picture: Do you recognize us? Does Canada recognize that it coexists with another nation inside of Canada? Until that's acknowledged, the rest is just lip service.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to a five-minute round now. I would like to ask everyone to try very hard to stay within the timelines. We've actually sometimes gone two minutes over. We need to be able to fit everybody in so that everyone gets a chance.

I'm going to start with Ms. Neville again, for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I have a lot of questions, and I think I'm going to start with you, Sandra. If I have time, I have a question for Therese as well.

You talk about traditional healing and the importance of it. I guess there's a recognition of it among those of us who are sitting here, but how does one explain the importance of it and the nature of it to non-aboriginal people who are making the decisions and who are developing criteria for programming? Whether it's right or wrong that they're doing it, they're doing it.

How do you explain that? I have found myself a number of times in the situation of trying to explain, and I don't know that I do it very well, the relationship of aboriginal people to the land. How do you do that?

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: I'm going to reframe it, first of all.

Hon. Anita Neville: That's fine.

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: There's a whole bunch of me that wants to cry right now. And never do I apologize for my crying, because it's really sacred. I mean, pain is sacred, because that's when you're closest to your maker, who's sort of sharing that relationship.

I don't think it's the explaining. I think people can understand very well. I think it's the acceptance of what we're explaining. That's the problem, okay?

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay. Fair enough.

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: When we talk about acknowledgement of our traditional healers, what we are starting to talk about now is power and privilege to whoever we're talking to, because the health care system has been taken over by the Canadian government. We're getting into corporations. We're getting into international trade and we're getting into the economy.

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: So maybe we're doing it backwards. Maybe we should be talking about how we're going to share those dollars and how that land produces the medicine, and we should go back to treaty. Maybe we have to start talking about sharing the benefits of those treaties with aboriginal peoples and how we wanted it done, how we negotiated it to begin with, because we negotiated our education system. We negotiated the medicine chest. We negotiated our sustenance of food and all this. That was already done, and I think the thing that irritates me the most is that we're redoing it, but we're asking people to give up some of the power and privilege so there's all this resistance.

Again, Anita, I don't think it's explaining it. I think it's getting people to accept it and to share power and privilege.

We'll see.

● (1110)

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have more time, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Hon. Anita Neville: Therese, I don't know if in a minute and a half you can answer my question or explain what I'm going to ask you. You talked about young women in a residential school getting up one morning and being told that they're going to be married and that their job is to produce children. Can you talk about the experience—I don't want you to go to your own experience or whatever—of some of those young women who found themselves in that position and what life brought for them?

Ms. Therese Villeneuve: Okay. This happened, I know, during my lifetime in the residential school. I saw my friends being woken up in the morning and told that they were getting married at six o'clock in the morning. I've since spoken to some of them, and 50 or 60 years later they're still in the same relationship, a lot of them, and mainly because it was implanted in our head that once you marry, you stay married forever. That's life. You're in there for life—through bad, through good, through sickness, through health, whatever, and we took that literally. I'm still with my husband, and thank God I didn't experience any violence, but I know that some of my friends did, and they stayed in the relationship, and they're still in the relationship.

So it's all these other things that were taught to us in residential school. The nuns pounded into our heads that if you leave your husband for any reason, you're going straight to hell, and this message scared us, and it continues to scare me today. For instance, I'm still scared to miss church on a Sunday. I think I'm going to go to hell if I do. Everything we did in the residential school was a sin. We went to confession every week not knowing what we were supposed to confess about, but we were told we had to go to confession and tell the priest. And some of these priests wound up to be sexual abusers.

In the residential school, we were not taught the good things. We were taught everything that was bad, not the way we were taught at home. I remember the elder always telling me, if I took good care of myself, life would be good to me. That's all they told me. They never said everything we did is a sin. They never said that. So the teachings of the elders and the teaching that we received in residential school were very contradictory. So many of us left residential school very confused, and some of that confusion stays with us today.

The Chair: Thank you, Anita, very much.

Dona Cadman.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Thank you for that.

Do the young learn the old ways from the elders? We hear about elder abuse, and this seems to be a lack of respect for the elders and a lack of respect for the abuser himself. He has no self-esteem.

So I'm wondering, with this lack of respect, how do you reach, convince, and teach your young about their heritage and self-esteem?

The other question I have is with respect to the impact of colonization. That has been quite devastating to your people. Madam Villeneuve spoke about going back to the land. It might be possible up here because you're so isolated, but how hard is it going to be due to the technology of today and with the young having been touched by it? How do you go back to your old ways, the traditional ways?

● (1115)

The Chair: Sandy.

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: Yes. I raise four grandchildren. They're really into technology, and, as my sister Therese has said, technology is very violent. Why can't we be working with companies? Why can't our bands be working with companies to develop tools that are implemented into technology?

But the land, she's alive, and she does exist. None of us can live without her, right? I think we have to bring back some of the teachings of the elders on our relationship to her. I was just sharing with sister Arlene here—that's a union thing, “sister”, and if anybody is offended by that, I don't mean to offend—that it's about building that relationship again of who they are with themselves.

What is called for all across, for all Canadians, is decolonization education. We all need to get decolonized. I can be colonial just like that, right, and not recognize it; then I have to go through it, and then you go through shame and hurt. But if we go through it together, I think that's the healthiest thing for Canada. If Canada acknowledges that we're all living under this together and that it's a “we” approach, not “Canada's aboriginals”.... I hate that term, because I don't belong to anybody, just like Canadians don't belong to the States. I think that's something that needs to be done.

When you talk with youth.... My granddaughter is doing a thing on residential school right now. She actually kind of gets what happens with people, because she says, “Well, how come we're here?” She's only eleven, and she's asking how come we don't take care of our own money. I say that it's colonial, and that's too big for her, but think if we started with.... When you talk about healing, I think it's really about re-identifying. It's not healing. I don't think we need to heal so much as we need it to be acknowledged that we know what's going on. We can identify it.

But when is Canada going to stop hurting us and why are we always the ones who need the healing? I think we just keep reacting to the systemic policies that keep hitting us and hitting us.

On our own lands we're having to try to protect for third-party agreements; we're trying to acknowledge a treaty that was supposed to have been done a long time ago. We want implementation. I know that the Gwich'in nation is asking, “When is it going to be implemented?” We finished this a long time ago, they're saying, so come on, right?

I think there's too much focus on us and not enough on Canada. What is Canada willing to do? What are you going to do as Canadians to hold government accountable to re-educate Canadians as a whole? A couple of years ago, there were immigrants who were getting their citizenship and, at that time, our premier said that was much like the aboriginals, who were the first immigrants. No, we weren't.

I'm not criticizing him, but he was educated too. Do you know what I mean? You get born into that kind of ideology. Well, I think that as a whole we have a responsibility, as first nations, Métis, and Inuit, to work again with that treaty with Canadians, so that we have a co-existence that is one of friendship and peace, that recognizes who we are so that it benefits everybody, and so Canada gets to wear that pride again, that pride of being that peaceful country, because we can't wear it that way anymore.

Mahsi.

The Chair: All right, Dona, that's that.

We're going to go to Nicole Demers again.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much.

Sandra, this woman told you that you weren't walking with the land, and I understand that very well. I was born in the red light district in Montreal. It is very similar to the Hastings district in Vancouver. When I go back to my neighbourhood, whatever happens, I feel confident. My roots are there, and I am walking with the land. I am not frightened. I feel at home, and I am walking with the land.

And so I can understand what that woman said to you. When one is on one's own land, one feels at home. How is it that after so many years people have not yet understood that this is your land? How do you explain that after all this time, you still have to fight? How is it that we still have to do tours like this one and that you still have to repeat to us again what you have just told us? Why is that? How is it that after so many years, people have still not understood? I am ashamed. I am ashamed. I don't know what to say to you. I am at a loss.

I would like all Canadians to be educated about this, to be taught about our history and to know that aboriginal people, the first nations, were not immigrants, but came from here. You welcomed us, you agreed to let us live on your land and agreed to conclude treaties. You are entitled to the money we give you today, it is your due; it is not charity. We are refusing to give you your due. I want people to know that. How can we do that? Tell me.

● (1120)

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you want to wait a minute before you respond?

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: Again, I don't apologize for my way of being, but I appreciate your thoughtfulness.

There are so many thoughts going through my head. It's a funny thing, because I had to be re-educated too. The term that my husband helped me use was decolonization. I had to be decolonized. I did that with the land and I did it in the community of Lutselk'e, because I didn't know the difference between the Indian Act and the treaty. The people of Lutselk'e taught me very, very well, and I'm proud to be from there. I'm also a proud member of the Mistawasis first peoples, because I was born there.

The land here loves us all; Mother Earth loves us all. When I first came to the north, I got out of a vehicle in Fort Providence and this energy ran up my legs. I said she's either going to make me or break me. Believe me, I was very mixed up. I was three years in recovery when I came to the north. I was bouncing all over the place and I didn't know it; I thought that was normal. So the north has been very, very kind to me. My sisters at the table here have all contributed to my well-being in one way or another, and I acknowledge that. More than all, I acknowledge the Creator. When we have aboriginal meetings we always acknowledge the Creator. I know in my job that we're implementing spiritual health. It's part of recovery. I think we all need that spirituality.

I would like to see this committee acknowledge the whole thing about the treaty and the nationhood. That's the start. How can we amend that? I know Canada is doing it. What's going on is that there's an economic base here; there are corporations and governments. As human beings, we have a tendency to get greedy. It's our nature to be in the place we are. If we don't acknowledge the Creator and ask for that kind of help, we're in big trouble, because we're human beings.

I don't know what else to say, other than I hear you, sister. It's nice to hear that. It's nice to come to things like that for a change and to hear that you've heard us. I'll just leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you. I'm glad to have another opportunity to question, but I've got to think of where to go here right now.

I sense that what you've talked about, Ms. Lockhart, is of primary importance.

I think of an elder who I used to respect a lot. He was a drinker, but what people would say about him was he's good on the land. That concept for males in society, for men who got their respect and dignity from what they did and accomplished, is one of the problems we have here now. In the society we have where your respect and dignity comes from the fatness of your wallet, and you may have gotten that from one source or the other, the dignity that aboriginal males have got from traditional practices has been very much taken away from them one way or the other.

It's like the caribou issue last year. Actually it's like a number of issues I've dealt with where males' role in this northern part of this world, where we still are hunters and gatherers and it's a very important part of our psychological makeup and it's a very important part of who we are, has been downgraded one way or the other.

As I'm the only male voice here today I thought I'd better throw that in and ask you for your comments about what you think about the role of men in our society, aboriginal men in their society, and how important that is in dealing with violence and the family and dealing with unity in the family.

● (1125)

Ms. Arlene Hache: I wanted to point to a real difference between the north and the south around a really critical issue. My sister is a band council member on a reserve in northern Ontario, and they have boundaries around that reserve. So whether it's child welfare or police, it doesn't matter who it is, if they go on that reserve the reserve knows about it and they have to give permission. There is a clear relationship there.

In the Northwest Territories relationships are very muddy because there are no reserves except for a very small one. It's all about public government, being friends, and collaboration. When community people come in contact with those systems that are public they don't understand the racism involved in that.

I'll just give you an example. I sit in the legislative assembly every day, and whenever community MLAs respond to almost any question, whether it's aboriginal or not, they always spout out policy of government, from my perspective. So there's a real buy-in where community people are confused because there are no clear boundaries around aboriginal and non-aboriginal rights in the Northwest Territories. Unlike my sister's reserve, any child welfare worker can walk into any home in the Northwest Territories and take any child—it used to be up to 45 days—with no questions asked. Now there are questions asked, but it's the government system that's asking the questions. That government system is racist and discriminatory, and in fact the human rights violations in the Northwest Territories are at the extreme end. You have people who don't understand that.

I'll just give you a quick example of a recent case where we had a social worker in the Northwest Territories. For years there were nothing but child welfare workers. Sad to say but true. But we have a new social worker in the Northwest Territories and they are hired by defence lawyers now to interview victims of violence. The women in the Northwest Territories don't know who they're talking to. They think they're talking to child welfare social workers. No, they're talking to defence lawyers hired by offenders to discredit those women, and we have no defence against that.

We have no capacity to go to the community and say, “Watch out, women. Those social workers who are contacting you work for the guy that just raped you or beat you up. Be careful.” So our situation is really different from that of the south.

When you're talking about all the inherent rights of aboriginal and Inuit people in this land, those are very muddy waters up here. There is really an impression that we're all working for the good of everyone, and that's just not true because of those discriminatory systems that are so entrenched here and not questioned.

Our agency was specifically defunded because we didn't agree with child welfare policies. And that was in writing. We were specifically defunded. So if you're not on board, you are not happening. And the federal government has a very specific kind of requirement for money to be transferred to the territorial government. The territorial government keeps it, and they deliver these services to communities whether they like it or not. So there's no real capacity for the community to stand up and say “We don't do things that way here. We need our own money.”

So be aware of that. The north is in particular jeopardy because there's a real facade of public community good that doesn't address racism.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think we can go to another round, but it's going to have to be a very tight three-minute round or else not everyone will get to ask questions and interact. So I'm going to be really strict with this round.

Ms. Neville, for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I was going to ask something totally different, but, Arlene, I can't let your last comment go without asking you to elaborate.

You talked about a public facade of community cooperation underlain—my word—with racism.

Ms. Arlene Hache: Well, in the Northwest Territories there are no party politics. We have a majority aboriginal MLA representation. Those MLAs still have to work within a public government system. There are no reserve boundaries, at least that I can identify or more importantly that people in the communities can identify, to say we control what happens here . So when families run into trouble, there's no mechanism of their own, like a band representative, for example, that they can look to and say, “Help me out here. I don't know what's going on. My children are being taken”, or “I'm being attacked”, or whatever. They have to look to the public government that has those systems set up.

There's something I'll never forget. In a recent legislative sitting a community person asked their MLA to ask a question, so the MLA asked the question in the House. The minister who came back is an aboriginal minister, and he said, “You know, the policy is this. I'd love to help you out, but I can't, because this is the policy.” One of his buddies in another community, another MLA, said, “Well, are you a leader or are you a paper-pusher? Are you here to just spout policy? What good are you, then?”

So it's clear down south, where you have really clear boundaries around what happens on reserve and what happens off reserve. Bands get money directly. Up here it's one public pot.

Take NADAP funding, the native alcohol and drug abuse program, for example. We had a young Inuit man who wanted to go to an Inuit program in Ottawa, the only one that exists in Canada. He was on the street. He wanted to go to an Inuit program that spoke his language and that was certainly designed by his community. Our territorial government, unlike any other in Canada, wouldn't send him because it wasn't accredited.

So we have a whole system up here built around a European approach, and it looks as though aboriginal people agree with that, because they're aboriginal MLAs. Down south at least you have somebody standing up and saying “No, we don't do that here”.

I just find it a very common difference between the north and the south. And it's really important, because the federal government insists that the territorial government agrees with where the funding goes.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: That is very interesting.

Ms. Grewal, for the Conservatives.

● (1135)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Lyda.

If I remember correctly, it was in November 2010 that Ms. Ambrose announced your three-year project that is increasing safety for women in Northwest Territories communities. Right? That will develop and pilot safety options for women, many of whom are aboriginal and experiencing intimate or partner violence in eleven isolated communities where they don't have any RCMP detachments.

I would like to learn a little bit more about your project. Could you please tell us?

Ms. Lyda Fuller: We have two women, one long-time northerner and another aboriginal woman with a healing background, who have gone into five of the eleven communities, I believe. We're going in sort of under the radar. We're not going in saying we're here to talk about violence, because we don't want to get the community up in arms about that, but we're meeting with the women in small groups and then in larger groups on the second visit, talking to them and taking direction from them about what they would like to see happen and what their needs are. For example, in one community the women said they weren't really allowed to meet together, so they wanted to go mountain climbing because if they go climbing in the mountains around that area then they can be off by themselves and talk about things. That's the direction we've taken, and we're working toward their being able to go mountain climbing.

The women have said that traditionally they used to tan moose hides, and that's when they would go off by themselves. They talked about when you're scraping that moose hide you get a lot of your feelings out. Then the elders can say to you that this is analogous to the lives of women and take them through the steps. It is really interesting, but they aren't able at this point to get off by themselves and do some of those traditional things. So on the one hand we're looking for funding to allow that, and on the other hand we're also looking for ways to help them find other avenues to get off by themselves.

What seems to be critical is to do this in ways that don't raise a ruckus in the community. For example, in another community the women said if they wanted to be able to meet as a women's group, without fear, they needed the community to sanction this, so they had a community feast. We found the resources to have the community feast with 90 people in that community, and then a whole bunch of women could come to visit a women's group meeting the next day.

It is just feeling our way in each individual community but taking direction from the women there.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Chair, do I have some time left?

The Chair: No, that's it. I'm sorry, Nina.

Nicole.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Villeneuve, some people told us the other day that the bill on matrimonial rights was ill-conceived and that it was going to harm women in aboriginal communities rather than help them. Could you give us some details about that?

[*English*]

Ms. Therese Villeneuve: Yes, I understand the bill you're talking about, and the reason we are very concerned about the bill is that it gives a lot of power to the RCMP, rather than to the women in the community.

This is especially true of the women on reserves who stand to lose their homes sometimes. They can just tell them to get out of their homes with their children if it's deemed to benefit the men. That's why at the national level the Native Women's Association of Canada has rejected the whole agreement and the report on matrimonial property. That's one of the areas that really concerns us.

In the Northwest Territories we have some land claim areas. We don't even know if there's any section in there to address women in their homes. Right now the woman is the one who has to flee all the time, and the man stays home. I've seen it many times, because I worked at the shelter when it first opened in Fort Smith.

Sutherland House was the first one that opened. I was the executive director there. I remember that it was always women. Some of them showed up with their six children, and the men stayed home. It's still the case today that it's the women who have to flee their homes. So that's one area that really concerns us. That's why the agreement on MRP really concerns many women in aboriginal communities and on reserves.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Ms. Villeneuve.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thanks.

I guess I'll give my time to you and ask you, one by one, to succinctly give one message you want us to take away from this.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington, you don't have to do that. We'll do that after. So if you have a question, ask it. Don't use up your time like that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay, Madam Chair, if you're going to take over my work, that's lovely.

I want to go back a little bit, because I didn't really get the answer I was looking for on aboriginal male issues. I wonder if any of you want to speak to that, because it's a key part of this problem. I've seen it over and over again through the years.

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: I'm the chair of the committee with PSAC, and we have a male vice-chair. We're really pleased to have it that way. We have a national aboriginal peoples circle with PSAC. Karen Wright-Fraser is our female representative for the north for all three territories. We have a male representative too.

Again, it's cultural. There needs to be a balance, because there's no way I could tell you what it's like to be male. My husband would need to do that. As his wife I recognize what the impact of cultural change has done when you talk about dignity.

My husband takes my sons out on the land. We custom adopted my grandson. Boy, there's a lot around that to talk about—and foster care. He has taken him out since he was two years old, so he's good on the land. He has FASD, so there's the healing power, the identity, and all of that.

I think if you're going to have a standing committee with aboriginal women, you're not going to get the full picture unless you do it with men too. You'll only see a small part of the picture. Men have been terribly impacted, because they lost their role of being good on the land—the power of the land, the recognition of all that. A lot of men are not educated, so they're not valued. Education is being valued more than the land. So there's a lot that's impacting our men.

I know in Yellowknife—I've heard about it, but I've never been invited—there's this healing thing for men. But I think there are a lot of women sitting on it, and a lot of people from Yellowknife. Forgive me if I offend anyone, but whenever I hear about violent men it tends to fall on aboriginal men from the community. They're not looking at the impact of trauma from residential schools and the stripping of who they are as aboriginal men as being contributors to that—and losing the role of being equal partners.

We used to understand each other. I was taught a little differently. When we did have violence and sickness, we had specific things we did for it. It wasn't that we were free of it. Some of it could get really harsh.

The worst thing I heard was that you could excommunicated from your community and live alone. That is the harshest thing you can do, be alone. They do that in the judicial system; they'll segregate and isolate them as punitive measures, right.

I think in some way, when you talk about healing and you're not including the voice of men and the perspective of men, we're creating that excommunication and isolation again. We're putting it all on their shoulders. Then we wonder why they're still responding.

Again, I think that aboriginal people, when they medicate.... I think a lot of our approaches are always addictions. We don't always look at it as these people medicating because they have nothing else. We're not doing enough harm reduction. I tell my children that I want them to be responsible with their drinking. I don't say drinking is bad and they will become alcoholics. You have to respect alcohol and this is how you show respect for it. Drugs are illegal; they come from plants. So I make it more holistic and it's working. At some point they're going to experiment, and I want them to talk to me.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to give everyone a minute, but before we do, Sandra mentioned that she couldn't speak for men. We are not travelling as a committee to only meet with women. We're speaking to the issue of systemic violence against aboriginal women and the fact that very little has been done. We wanted to investigate that.

We have had men come and speak with us. They have actually spoken to the issue of a loss of self, a loss of dignity, and a loss of value. We've had women plead with us to understand that about the men and to understand that the men have been taken away from who they are. Because so many of them are unemployed and have little education, they can't go to anything else to give them value. They become useless. They become angry.

The women we heard yesterday, interestingly enough, said that as the women get stronger—because the women are still undertaking their traditional roles, which is to have children, nurture the children, make sure the children get fed, etc.—the women in fact actually assume a larger role in the families than the men. These particular women told us they have to learn to be careful in how to do that, because then they revictimize their own men.

This is a very important issue. Dennis, I'm glad you brought it up. We have been hearing about it very, very often, about how the men have been denigrated and how they have completely lost their dignity.

I will ask Therese, Lyda, Arlene, and Sandra, in that order, to summarize in one minute. In that minute, I want you to actually focus on how you feel we could make recommendations that will get to the heart of what we're hearing.

We heard about systems, etc. It may very well be that the systems need to be changed. What are the things you think we can do? What are the most important things you can pick as priorities that you think will hit the heart of the problem and resolve it? So give me two things.

Therese.

Ms. Therese Villeneuve: My priority, naturally, will always be the on-the-land program. I've witnessed it. I've taken people on the land: elders, youth, and young adults. That's where I found that they really connected with one another. They could talk about anything when they're out on the land.

When we talk about being out on the land, we don't just mean sitting there, sitting around the campfire, and talking. That's not what it is. It's good for physical exercise. It's good mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—all the four directions. It touches us. That's why I really am always clear on that. We have activities. We're never sitting down doing nothing when we're on the land. There's always something to do.

You either have to get water or you have to get wood. You have to cook and you have to visit the nets. You make dried fish; you make fillets. You make dried meat; you cut meat. There are activities from the time you get up until evening. Evening time is spent in relaxation, getting together, and communicating with one another.

This is what “on the land” means. We don't just go on the land and sit around all day and do nothing.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Lyda.

Ms. Lyda Fuller: I would say, have pots of funding that can be accessed by women at the community level so that the control is in the hands of the women about how they want to proceed in their community and what they want to do.

I would just say that so much needs to be done. We need to have strong support systems. We need to have training around cultural awareness. It's a huge issue here, the racism that you see at the community level.

I think if we just had control in the hands of women at the community level, we could do so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Arlene?

Ms. Arlene Hache: There are two things that I think would be really helpful. One is to follow a family support model rather than a service delivery model. That is how we recover together. We were able to recover so that we could contribute back to the community. That model is a really critical thing, and if anyone's interested, I can provide you information on that.

The Chair: Would you please send that to the clerk?

Ms. Arlene Hache: I could, yes.

The other important factor when you're talking about nations that have been colonized within Canada would be a trauma-informed approach.

In the Northwest Territories the approach that is taken is medical, addictions, and kind of psychiatric blaming. Women staying in our shelter can't access battered women's shelters sometimes and they can't access the hospital because their behaviour supposedly prevents them from accessing things.

Women and children in the Northwest Territories, from my perspective, are never assessed for post-traumatic stress disorder, and I suspect if you really looked at that question, you would have levels in small communities that you would find in prisoners of war. I think if you looked at the trauma-informed approach, we would change how things were done in aboriginal and Inuit communities and it would make a world of difference.

The Chair: Thank you.

Sandra?

Ms. Sandra Lockhart: I'd like to look at a commitment to co-existence with aboriginal governments that really acknowledges and has the governments at the table when you do international agreements, because it would protect trade agreements. Right now our lands aren't protected. Canada is doing agreements that give other countries jurisdiction over our land, our water, our plants. That is because Canada is not recognizing the nationhood of aboriginal peoples.

The other thing I would like to see is a decolonization program and Canada-wide education on what that is, starting with service providers working along with community in that process. People are put in a system. They don't recognize what it is. Even me—a lot of times I say, “Oh my God, I'm doing it again”, because we're used to being service providers, and when we are, even in our own aboriginal agencies, we'll get caught up in being the provider. We have the authority. We make the mandates and all this. Decolonizing is giving back to the community, co-existing, and having partnerships where everybody has that cultural safety, and it is the people who are deciding what their culture is and who they are.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've had Ms. Thomas sitting at the table, and although we have gone over time, I wondered if you had anything you wanted to share with us, just as a quick comment.

Ms. Sharon Thomas (Representative, Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories): It is hard to throw this in, but I don't want to forget about the education of the women, because I think it's very important for them to be able to be economically sufficient. We are really struggling to get money for education at our training centre, and I think this should not be lost sight of, because I think that is going to be very helpful for them to be able to deal with these situations they're in.

● (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank you once again for sharing and being so open and so very frank. I think every time we come somewhere we learn something new, not only in the place we come to but also from the different witnesses we hear from. You all bring a very new or different perspective that helps us to look at the picture in a broader and bigger way. Thank you again.

I would like to have a motion to adjourn.

An hon. member: I so move.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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