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Chair

Mr. Ed Fast

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● (0835)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

This is the eighth meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. For the record, today is March 30, 2010. We're continuing our study on organized crime. We have with us a number of witnesses from the Winnipeg area.

You probably know that we have been travelling across the country to the largest cities across Canada to try to get some information on how to better address the issue of organized crime. It's a huge issue, and we've realized that the problem is different in every region of the country. So we're looking forward to what you have to share with us today.

I think you've been told that the process allows each organization ten minutes to present, and then we'll open the floor to questions.

We have with us on this first panel this morning the following organizations and representatives: Macdonald Youth Services, Paul Johnston; Gang Awareness for Parents, Floyd Wiebe; Resource Assistance for Youth Inc., Kelly Holmes; the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg Inc., Michael Owen; and from Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, Laura Johnson.

Why don't we start with Paul Johnston, for ten minutes.

Mr. Paul Johnston (Director, Client Services, Macdonald Youth Services): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee.

I have circulated a brief document in terms of some of the points I would like to touch on this morning. Some of them will be repetition. I think there are points that are always raised in this type of discussion, but that doesn't in any way speak to their importance, and I think they are always worth repeating.

Just to give you a bit of background, Macdonald Youth Services is a private, not-for-profit, charitable organization that's been active in providing support and services to youths and their families in Winnipeg communities since 1929. Our legal name is Sir Hugh John Macdonald Memorial Hostel. We were started by a group of concerned citizens in 1929 upon the death of Sir Hugh John, son of John A. Macdonald, who had a number of roles in Manitoba, one of them as police magistrate. The work he did, in terms of a fairly progressive approach to administering justice, looked at solutions that involved not just fines and incarceration. Rather, resources, a place to stay, a connection for jobs, and some reassurance were also seen as valid ways of administering justice.

We currently provide a variety of youth programming in and around Winnipeg, as well as northern Manitoba in The Pas and Thompson. On a provincial level we receive funding from the departments of family services, justice, and education, as well as the United Way of Winnipeg. Federally, we receive funding through the housing and homelessness initiative in support of a youth shelter that we operate, and through the skills link funding of Service Canada for a program that uses a model of community service supported by volunteer mentors as a way for youth to build the skills they need. That program grew out of our work with the justice department and the community service order program, looking at ways of working with youth to change the way they see the world, and the way the world sees them and the skills they have.

In speaking to the state of organized crime in Canada, our perspective is from one of youth programming and the importance of investment in prevention. We see youth involved in street gangs and in criminal activity, and we see also an opportunity to intervene at this point. It's based on our confidence in the ability of young people to make good choices when provided with realistic options. It's also based on the knowledge of the difficulty of change, and the need to have programs that are accessible, flexible, resilient, and effective. When people talk about early intervention and prevention, I often find they're focusing on youth zero to six. As an agency, we focus on youth 12 to 17, as well as some programming that extends past that into early adulthood—we see lots of opportunities for intervention and prevention at those times, as well. My concern is that at times we tend to write off adolescents as a group we cannot reach other than through the courts or the police.

Some of the areas we are not talking about today—police and the court system—are an important part of the work we do. Some of the programs we provide as an agency only work effectively where there has been adjudication through the court system and a probation order that supports the work we do. I think the root causes of some of these things are well documented in terms of poverty, discrimination, addictions, and violence. I don't have a lot of specific information about organized crime, but certainly we do see ourselves as competing with organized crime in terms of the youth we work with. That is one of their career opportunities, if you will. What we want to do is provide options so they choose to not pursue that path. But that's a difficult one.

I will speak only generally about the programs because there is a limit of ten minutes. I could speak a lot about them, so if you would like specifics, that certainly is available.

Programs need to have staff that connect with youth. In this day we focus on more and more Internet and computer access. The youth we work with need that human connection in terms of building relationships and starting to address some of the issues they have not been willing or able to talk about. We need to involve the youth in the community. Our programs provide opportunities for them to be out working in resources like Winnipeg Harvest, seniors centres, and the Humane Society, so that they see themselves as a part of the community, and the community changes its perspective of them and sees them as a viable part of the community.

We need to challenge the negative stereotype they have of themselves and the community has of them. When they're putting together a food order for someone less fortunate, they are the helper, a role they have not been in often.

● (0840)

We need to allow youth to identify and develop their strengths. Their strengths may not be academic. School has not supported them in their involvement in their academic development but more in terms of the emotional intelligence, the ability to develop relationships. I think some of the opportunities we provide reassure them that they have those skills. When you're out at a seniors home and someone who presents themselves as a tough adolescent is very empathetic to a senior who is angry and frustrated with the situation, they can reach out and develop a relationship with them. They have a lot of skills. They don't necessarily feel they do.

Programs need to be accessible. They need to be flexible. I think this is a point where my experience as a parent as well as a professional working with youth and the way everybody goes through adolescence and the challenges they face.... We need to have flexibility. We need to demonstrate that we believe in and value youth and we need to allow for failure. Often failure is a very important learning experience, but often for these youth failure means everything they have falls apart. So we need to provide programs that can support them through those difficult times.

There are the challenges that we find in terms of programs, and I think that's general to most programs. Funding is usually project-based and needs to be renewed each year. Much time and energy goes into applying for funding, developing a contract, filing claims, and we're not certain if funding will be renewed. That can make staffing difficult. You ask someone to commit to the challenge of working long-term with these youth, but the funding is up in six months. There's somewhat of a contradiction in there. Being project-based funding, it often doesn't take into account health benefits, pension, and holidays are limited to the basic minimum. Again, we're asking people to commit as a career to working with these youth and we need to give them the message, just as we need to give the youth the message, that this is an important area of work.

Often, once funding is established, the next year brings a reduction in the amount available or no increase, which is effectively a reduction as costs go up. The other piece that's challenging to talk about is evaluation of these programs. Often evaluation is shor-term in nature. I can tell you when they left the program, this is what they did, but what they do a year or two later is the piece we're looking for, and often that is because we don't have the capacity to follow up other than anecdotally, being specific about the impact that programs have.

In terms of considering our plan for intervention in terms of helping youth choose a different path, there are challenges for us as a community. We are competing with organized crime or with street gangs as an employer of these youth, and they are very serious competitors. They have a lot to offer and it's enticing in the short term. Often youth do not see a future for themselves in our community. It's unfortunate, but when they look to the future the message they receive is that there isn't a viable place for them. They do not see us as caring. We say we do, that youth are our future, but often the messages we give in terms of the supports that are available contradict that.

With the global economy there's a growing number of good jobs that are not there any more, and I think this is related not just to these youth, but to youth in general. There is a range of jobs that are not available in our country any more, that were available without university education. You could get a reasonable job and have it for a career, and I think those jobs are not available.

The latest in the paper this morning is that Convergys call centres are closing up their operation. At one point, they employed 2,200 people, often young people getting their start. My son started there and has moved on to another job, but he certainly gained a lot of skills through that experience, and that will not be available. It didn't require a university degree.

So I think we have to accept that many of the jobs we would like young people to have require much more education than they used to. For many of the youth we work with, education is not accessible...not allowing them to learn what they need to know, and often teaching them exactly what we don't want them to—that they cannot learn, that they are stupid, and that they have no place in school.

● (0845)

One of our greatest assets is our aboriginal population, a rapidly growing youth segment, but our concern is that we don't see it as an asset and they don't necessarily feel we see it as an asset. Fortunately, in Winnipeg there's a growing number of aboriginal groups working with youth successfully, and I think that investment has a double impact. Not only is it reaching out to youth in an appropriate way, but it also allows them to see that there is a future in the community. They see people with jobs and programs that can employ them and that the investment they need to make in terms of the energy and the challenge of changing is worth while.

Those are some of the pieces I wanted to present. Maybe I will leave it at that and await your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have the questions after everyone has presented.

Before we move to Mr. Wiebe, I just want to mention that, as you make your comments, what we're really looking for here at the committee is proposals for reform, whether it's more resources or legislative reform. We're looking forward to moving forward on organized crime, so if there are any specific proposals you have, you can highlight those as well.

So we'll move on to Mr. Floyd Wiebe, for ten minutes.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe (Executive Director, Gang Awareness for Parents): Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this committee.

I'm probably the only person to appear before this committee who wishes he wasn't. My 20-year-old son TJ was brutally murdered on January 5, 2003. His murder was well planned by four young men aged 17 to 20. He was beaten by two of them, injected in the neck with Drano, strangled with a shoelace while being pulled by his neck over the front seat of a car, stripped of most of his clothing, dumped in a ditch where one of them did jumping jacks on his chest, and stabbed multiple times in the neck, only to be found five weeks later under three feet of snow.

Three people were convicted. Two of them received life sentences with a chance of parole after 15 years. One is up for parole in just a few weeks. The 17-year-old mastermind was acquitted after they all refused to testify against him.

This was my beginning of a journey that brought me here today. What started with rage and disbelief ended in a devotion to prevention. My wife Karen, who is sitting behind me, and I created the TJ's Gift Foundation, now a registered charity, which raises $50,000 a year, with 100% of that money going to peer-led drug education programs in Manitoba schools.

I recently left the business world, and just eight weeks ago the Manitoba Department of Justice invested in my new organization, called GAP, Gang Awareness for Parents. My mission is to educate parents before their children get involved in gangs, and offer guidance to help them.

This journey has not been easy. It has been heartbreaking, depressing, enlightening, and rewarding. During these seven years I have talked with far too many victims and I have met many drug-addicted youth, gang wannabes, and street gang members.

How did these individuals end up where they are? There's really no greater gift than that of being a parent, and yet so many abuse and squander this gift. When our youth are abused and squandered, in many cases they end up being cared for by the system.

We've all been raised with the adage that it takes a village to raise a child, but the problem is that we throw many of these children in jail. An example of this is when we see kids stealing cars. They are incarcerated over and over again, and now we want to throw them in jail for even longer. Is that how we want to raise our children? Is that what we want to do with the gift that we were given as a community when they were abandoned? Do we continue this cycle and toss them away? No. We treat them, we stand by them, we help them, we care for them, and we believe in them.

Last week I was in a Toronto conference on gangs. I listened and talked with many former gang members who had turned their lives around. Not one told me that being in jail or the threat of being in jail turned them around. I asked what did. They told me that people standing by them and believing in them turned them around. That is what they needed, someone to care for them. Someone in the village cared. Now these abused and abandoned people are caring for others. That truly is a village raising a child.

The public is demanding that the government do something about the state of gangs in Canada, so changes are being made to the YCJA: more mandatory minimum sentences, longer sentences, and as a result, many more people in jails. The Canadian government is presently spending $1,000 a day on the incarceration of three of my son's murderers. This case alone costs $360,000 a year. This cost will go on for many, many years, and in my case justifiably so, as they murdered my son. We are not talking about the average person who goes to jail. This was murder. I can't help but wonder, though, why we couldn't have invested that thousand dollars a day—or even half of that—on prevention. Maybe I would not have to be here addressing this panel.

I use the term “investment”, and I'm glad Paul used that word as well, rather than “spending”. We invest to gain returns. We spend when mistakes are made.

This is the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I thought it was an appropriate title. With the justice part, it needs to be handed out when dealing with organized crime and gangs. It is difficult to write laws that are specific enough to do what is intended or needed. Generally they are too broad. I believe the laws should somehow—and I'm not a lawyer, so I don't know how—be written to deal with gangs that are part of the higher-level organized gang and their puppet clubs. I do believe that this country needs to crack down on these gangs.

I personally know a puppet club member who was recently arrested in Winnepeg. I've know him since the day he was born. This person did not come from a disadvantaged background. He made choices along the way, all the time knowing what may lie ahead of him. He knew what he was doing.

● (0850)

He made a lot of money. He lived the life, he drove fast cars, and he had all the toys. Only now, when he is facing 12 years, is he realizing that he needs to change. He had just gotten out of jail after several years and was attempting to change, or so he told me just a month before he was arrested. However, he fell back into it very shortly, but he knew the consequences when he fell back in and he still made a choice. He is not unlike anyone else in these puppet clubs; in fact, he is the norm—and I'm sure you've heard about those kinds of gangs in other cities.

However, each province has unique gangs in their cities. The street gangs that exist in Winnipeg do not exist in Vancouver, Toronto, or other cities. The street-level gangs need to be handled differently, with an understanding of how these young people got to where they are. Today, judges take aboriginal ancestry and upbringing into play. When considering sentencing, the judge will often reduce that sentence; in fact, it's demanded of him or her. That same type of consideration needs to be given to these lower-level gang members.

When I meet with street gang members, and I have met many, they are a completely different story from the person I was referring to above. Every single one got there as a result of poverty, mental illness, being in a variety of foster homes, and a whole host of other reasons. The other presenters here today, such as Just TV and Turning the Tides, work with these young people and have huge success with keeping them out of gangs. I hope my organization will do the same. There are many groups like this that are trying to save these kids. In fact, they're all meeting today, coincidentally, two floors below us.

The other component of this committee is human rights. As a country—the village—it is our children's human rights to receive every opportunity to survive and prosper. Unfortunately, not everyone will. Some will fall through the cracks. We need to be there to pick up the pieces. Yesterday I read that the Canadian government wants to increase its prison budget by 27% to $3.1 billion. I encourage this committee to press the government to take 100% of this anticipated increase away from the prison budget and reallocate every cent into human rights, into prevention. This reversal would mean an investment in our country's future and would not even be considered by the public as a cost at all.

I know the cost of a life gone.

Excuse me....

I just wish that someone would have invested in and cared for TJ's murderers. Maybe they would have cared about themselves, and maybe they would have cared about TJ.

Thank you.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will move on to Kelly Holmes.

Ms. Kelly Holmes (Executive Director, Resource Assistance for Youth Inc.): Good morning, everyone. Thank you for allowing me to be here. I feel honoured. I'm really hoping that today we can have an impact towards some change. I'm counting on it.

I represent an agency that works on the street with youth, aged zero to 29—and I say zero because they often have babies, so they are invited in as well.

I wrote a brief that I've distributed. I'm just going to condense it, because I know we have a timeline, but I'd like to take you through a trajectory of a child's life that I've seen over my 30 years working in the field.

It begins with a family breakdown. Marginalization begins at home. Many youth experience abuse and neglect at the hands of their immediate support system.

Poverty in the home leads to economic marginalization, a cycle that is not easily broken. Traumatic events in the home, perpetrated through addiction, abuse, and neglect, or any variety of unforeseen tragic circumstances such as death of a parent, can lead to feelings of alienation and marginalization. Without proper intervention, these young people are left without the necessary supports or skills to properly deal with their issues. At this point child welfare can enter into their lives or not.

School system breakdown is the next obstacle they face. In most mainstream schools, personal social circumstances are not a priority, meeting the curriculum obligation is. Onset of mental health concerns are common during adolescence, but they are rarely captured, or the behaviour is misinterpreted. Often learning disabilities go unnoticed, only to fail the needs of a child. Different learning styles of young people are respected, depending only on the teacher's value base. Without specific needs being met, failure for students can happen on a number of different levels, including social, academic, or athletic. As a result, behaviour and thinking that is not a part of the dominant culture within our schools begins. Typically this results in expulsion or dropping out.

A professor of education at the University of Winnipeg was quoted as saying that society tends to see dropouts as quitting on themselves without looking past at the system that conspires to keep people down.

Enter the streets. A young person arrives on the streets ill-equipped and disconnected, either angry or afraid. Without resources, money, or life skills, the streets become the next option when home and school have broken down. Many youth have reported to me that the street is safer than their home.

Soon, crime becomes the next part of their behaviour. The need to belong, to be protected, and to be cared for is a natural human inclination among street youth. This need is amplified a hundredfold.

Unfortunately, positive role models and healthy relationships on the street are not readily available. Youth, as a result of their history, become apathetic, angry, and they soon begin to act out their emotions and rebel against the society that hasn't helped them. They have distrust toward systems that have hurt them, and they loathe them as a result.

The lack of supervision, guidance, and healthy connections become a breeding ground for crime. As a result, we become a society with exacerbated social problems. Our burgeoning and floundering systems reflect that.

Most crime is born out of youth mischief and lack of adult supervision, or it is simply for survival purposes. Early criminal activity involves road violations, petty theft, break and enter, trespassing, assault, joyriding, mischief, possession, underage drinking, public nuisance, noise violations, panhandling, disturbing the peace, fraud and/or aiding and abetting, and destruction of property. Without proper intervention, these petty criminal activities will likely progress, with or without gang involvement.

Street youth are viewed by the police and the majority of society as delinquent troublemakers who have to be dealt with harshly or, conversely, completely ignored. Reports of police brutality are commonplace at my agency. The potential to access the very representatives of public safety is diminished completely. Frustration and anger among the youth escalate. Their hope is diminished, apathy grows, and the youth then progress to the next steps: possession with the intent to sell, aggravated assault with a weapon, possession of a firearm, dislodging a firearm, armed robbery, home invasions, domestic violence, car theft, destruction of property, living off the avails, manslaughter, production of a dangerous substance, and murder.

Marginalized youth, regardless of the resources of their family of origin, are disconnected by the very systems that are intended to help them. Without intervention, criminal behaviour persists. The youth realize the immediate benefit to a life of crime: most often, it's money. They understand that money equals power, options. The criminal youth who have become prolific will become more sophisticated, more organized, and they will have a firsthand understanding that there are many youth who want the same thing: power and options. Recruitment begins.

Addiction, as well, can beget crime. The overwhelming physical desire can result in a desperate criminal act in an effort to sustain their individual high. The high becomes an escape from their reality—a reality they do not want to confront or deal with.

Enter jail. The Winnipeg Remand Centre was designed to hold 289 pre-trial inmates. Currently, 416 inmates are being held. Based on my observations and experience in the field, I've concluded that those who populate our detention facilities are the very ones who have fallen through every crack, in every system.

● (0900)

The systems—welfare, school, youth corrections, housing—are in fact partially responsible for creating the criminals and the criminal mentality we see today.

At RaY, we have come to know many such youth and young adults who have been in conflict with the law. To them, jail is not a deterrent. The youth report that incarceration most definitely cramps their social scene, but more often they report that they appreciate the fact that they have three square meals a day and a guaranteed place to sleep. So in fact jail is a step up from their previous existence. The other inmates tend not to pose a problem or a threat since for many, they are in the company of family. For those first-time offenders, jail becomes a meeting place whereby negative associations are born, fostered, and developed. Jail offers an environment where an inmate can eat, rest, work out, have conjugal visits, become stronger, and in many cases healthier. The penal system provides an opportunity where plans can be discussed, gangs can recruit, and generally crime can become more organized.

Those offenders who do learn their lesson and are committed to change often fail. Too often, after they are released the inmate is unable to access the supports they require to change their lives in a meaningful way. Despite the strong efforts and diligent release planning on behalf of the parole and correction officers, the resources outside of the prison are not always available. Whether it be an inability to access basic needs supports and services such as housing or community resources and employment opportunities, the parolee will meet with gaps and barriers to services and supports once he's left prison.

I don't want to make this all about problems; I think it's important that we look at solutions. If it were up to me to make a recommendation, I would love to just deconstruct all of the existing systems and rebuild them so they are more accessible and a lot less bureaucratic. We know we can't do that, not in this lifetime. I could list about 50 recommendations to impact crime, but I will narrow it down to my top 10. Having said that, I support all of the recommendations that came out of the recent Senate report.

If we are going to deal with crime, we need to address the root causes and issues that drive crime. We need to support families that have issues that complicate their parenting. Public schools need to work with communities; schools need to be equipped with a range of services and resources to address the complex needs of all students. Welfare rates must be increased. We need more safe, affordable housing stock. We need to expand and enhance mental health services in the community and within penal institutions. More resources need to be infused into the area of addiction services; more treatment beds are necessary to reduce wait times. Addictions and mental health services must be integrated and work together, creating individualized support plans. Community-based, street-level organizations need to have stable core funding to maintain strong services. Penal institutions need to develop a stronger mandatory rehabilitation program, including mental health assessments—and I mean functional assessments, where you learn about the functioning of the client, not the label—and evidence-based programming for those with FASD. We need extensive supportive programming with a focus on exiting incarceration and reintegration into society, requiring cross-sectoral planning. The above will require coordination and regular communication across justice, health, and family services departments. And I haven't even begun to mention the north.

That's it. Thank you for having me here.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Michael Owen, representing the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg. You have ten minutes.

Mr. Michael Owen (Executive Director, Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for the opportunity to address this committee.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg has been in existence for over 30 years. We run after-school and evening programming for children. Last year we served almost 4,000 children and youth, six to eighteen years old, in our ten sites in areas of this city where they are needed most. Our membership is 70% aboriginal and 25% newcomer children and youth. Most of our newcomer families come from war-torn countries.

Organized crime impacts on our members through youth gangs. Youth gangs are controlled by organized crime through organized crime control of the supply of illegal drugs.

There have always been youth gangs in Winnipeg. Initially, they were loosely organized neighbourhood territorial gangs. Violence between various gangs consisted mostly of fist fights, with the occasional use of some kind of club.

In the early 1990s, that all changed. Territorial gangs began to imitate the youth gangs in America. They became involved in drug trafficking and controlling prostitution. Inner city neighbourhoods became dangerous places to be. Knives and later guns became the weapons of choice. Gang recruiting became very active. Kids would join gangs because they were afraid not to. Young people have been maimed and killed because they were in the wrong part of town and were or were suspected of being in rival gangs.

We believe what is needed is a commitment to crime prevention programs that focuses on creating positive opportunities for youth, particularly for those most at risk. It is not only a more effective way of reducing crime, it requires less funding in suppression or secondary intervention methods. Investment in after-school programs and other systems of support is seven times more effective than incarceration.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg provides safe places for kids to be after school, and we build resiliency in kids. The "safe" part of the statement is pretty well understood. We provide a place for kids to go where responsible adults supervise what happens and make sure the kids interact with respect for each other and conduct themselves in an acceptable manner.

It is the "resiliency" part that often needs explaining. The word is mostly understood to describe the ability to recover from a bad situation or to overcome adversity, a life skill that challenges each and every one of us. In a healthy living environment, the skill can be developed and nurtured. In a less healthy and more challenging environment, resiliency is far tougher to achieve.

Many of our kids and their families come to Winnipeg from isolated northern communities or from war-torn countries. Each of these situations brings unique cultural and social barriers into play, but for all of these groups, there are some common challenges.

Adjusting to our city's urban society is the obvious challenge for many of our kids and their families. Many from both communities face language barriers and are separated from the support of family and friends. Adjusting to different expectations regarding social and employment situations is often difficult. Limited resources and access to support also puts more pressure on people. The challenges and barriers people face are multiplied in a single-parent family situation.

It is well understood that young people are most likely to be drawn into criminal activity when they are living in low-income circumstances, experience social isolation, generally are not successful in school, and have little hope for later success in life. Violent youth crime is most often gang-related, and gangs have a powerful appeal to youth without opportunities, because they offer status, profit, protection, mentoring, affiliation, and excitement. These are normal developmental needs being fulfilled in unhealthy ways.

There is no way that we have the human or financial resources to deal with all the issues that our members face on an individual basis, but we do provide programs that make our members more self-confident, that inspire and encourage them to learn, to stay in school, and to build their hope for their future, programs that make them more resilient and less likely to join gangs.

We provide exciting programs that cover a wide area of interests that appeal to kids. We make sure that kids are in programs where they are likely to succeed, because we know that success breeds success. The more successful a person is, the more likely they are to try new things and learn new skills.

● (0910)

This is accomplished by being very selective about the staff we hire and the volunteers who support what we do. We hire people who want to work with kids, and relate well with them, who are good role models, who represent the community they work in, and have valuable life experiences or appropriate post-secondary education.

If we can help kids believe in themselves, to have confidence in their ability to learn and deal with issues they face, they will be less susceptible to negative influences and peer pressure. If we provide opportunities for them to take part in organized sport, to experience the arts, and to further their education, the more they will believe in their potential, the more resilient they will become, and the better off our communities and families will be.

Crime costs Canadians $70 billion each year. That's a quote from Vic Toews. This means that it costs each citizen $2,000 a year. More than 70% of those who enter federal prisons are high school dropouts; 70% have unstable job histories; four out of five have substance abuse problems when they are convicted; and two out of three youths in the criminal justice system have been diagnosed with two or more mental health problems.

One of Canada's pre-eminent researchers on youth crime, Dr. Michael Chettleburgh, suggests:

> ...supervised, high-quality, challenging after-school programs have been shown to be an effective buffer against delinquency and victimizations and to benefit children greatly... These programs are already everywhere across Canada, but their chronic underfunding renders them incapable of addressing our growing gang problems.

A recent report from Canada's National Crime Prevention Centre identified after-school recreation as a promising tool to prevent crime. James Alan Fox, a well-known criminologist in the U.S., recently suggested: "after-school activities targeted at the "prime time for juvenile crime" (such as the Boys and Girls Clubs) all have payoffs far greater than the investment."

He goes on to suggest that we need to

> identify and promote healthier means for [young people] to achieve the same need-fulfillment, constructive ways to feel good about themselves and their prospects for the future, while at the same time having fun. This...is where youth enrichment initiatives play a significant role, and a role that, given ongoing trends, needs to be expanded.

The key to effective interventions is they are long term and reliable. Many effective programs have been undermined by either being time-limited or ending after the completion of the pilot phase. Ensuring the availability and reliability of successful youth crime prevention programs must be our first priority. Youth themselves emphasize the importance of having access to programs that are welcoming and safe, and that are consistently available. Sustaining programs through multi-year investments and public policy is a key ingredient to achieving any lasting impact on delinquency, crime prevention, and positive outcomes.

In 1993 the Horner commission called for an allocation equivalent to 5% of the federal criminal justice budget towards tackling risk factors associated with crime. We believe this is a reasonable investment and that more than half should be targeted to sustainable investments in community-based crime prevention programs for children and youth. In particular, we believe a portion of these investments should be directed to the successful and proven after-school recreation programs.

Furthermore, we believe sustainable funding needs to be targetted to underserved and high-needs populations, such as aboriginal children and youth, newcomer children and youth, youth involved in gangs, young girls, and youth living in poverty. It is critically important that funds are directed in a manner that supports multi-year funding to existing reputable organizations working with young people.

One of the fundamental principles for the allocation of resources should be the creation of positive environments and opportunities that engage youth and contribute to healthy youth development. Young people have spoken strongly for the need for programs that provide them with opportunities to gain skills and confidence, which they can do only over time and in positive environments in which they built trusting relationships.

By providing adequate base funding, strengthening the capacity of organizations to expand and enhance programs, and supporting evaluation to measure long-term impact, the government would ensure that its funds are providing the greatest benefit.

● (0915)

We believe that investing significant funds in youth crime prevention will generate dividends for all Canadians, as young Canadians and their families will live better lives and be productive, contributing citizens, participating in the labour force and saving taxpayers' costs many times over by reducing the need for a more costly criminal justice system to respond to crimes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move on to Laura Johnson. You have ten minutes.

Mrs. Laura Johnson (Project Coordinator, Just TV Project, Broadway Neighbourhood Centre): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this opportunity.

I'm from the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre. I'm going to start by giving you a brief overview of what we do there.

We're located in the heart of Broadway, in the core. There are prominent gangs in the area. There are a number of social issues and poverty which we contend with on a regular basis. The centre provides a drop-in centre for young youth and a food bank, as well as a number of other programs.

My focus is the Just TV program. I coordinate a gang prevention and intervention program based out of the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre. Our target demographic is youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Just TV was designed to provide youth with an opportunity to express themselves through multimedia in a safe and creative environment as an alternative to negative influences such as gangs or drugs.

Participants of Just TV engage in all facets of the audio-video industry. We work with youth to give them skill sets. We try to draw them in through the hook of technology. Many of our youth are interested in music videos. It's not specifically a music program; however, that seems to be the draw. They can create whatever they want, as long as it's appropriate and is not encouraging negative behaviour.

That's not to say they can't talk about their experiences. Youth do talk about their experiences in gangs and with drugs, but they talk about the negative aspects or how it has impacted them. Music lyrics are a socially acceptable way for youth to talk to their peers about their experiences. It's often not acceptable to talk just in a general conversation about their feelings when their friend gets shot. But if they're going to create music, it's acceptable, especially in the hip-hop genre. We find that it is quite therapeutic.

Videos that the youth have created discuss issues such as poverty, racism, gang involvement, and substance abuse. We offer a stimulating, positive, and encouraging environment, and we hope to foster in our participants a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves, which is known to reduce the likelihood of gang participation. We give young people a voice when otherwise they might not feel that they have one. We have a film festival at the end of each year to which they can invite their social workers, their probation officers, and their family members. This is often an avenue for these young people to share how they're feeling, when otherwise they wouldn't be able to express it.

We put out 500 DVDs a year with all of the work the youth have created. These go out to other organizations by which young people might be influenced. So the body of work they're creating is aimed toward other youth, to share the stories and talk about.... One of our videos, for instance, is called *Caught Up*. It was done by three gang members talking about getting caught up in the gang life and being in and out of jail. So it's quite powerful.

Thus our program connects with those who might otherwise slip through the cracks, who don't fit into the sports programs or the homework clubs, and who maybe aren't engaged in the school.

Given the demographic that we work with, it is as I said a prevention-intervention program. Some of our youth are at high risk of joining gangs. This might mean that they're affected by poverty and unemployment, that they have dropped out of school, that they're gang-affiliated, maybe in such a way as having a family member who's gang-involved. The reality is that some young people are born into gangs. When I say born into gangs, I mean that their family members are already quite gang-involved, and so they're surrounded by it from the time they're young.

Many of our youth have touched the justice system, whether or not they've been convicted of an offence. Almost 50% report having been in a gang—actually 44%—and 77% say that there are gangs in the areas in which they live.

If there's a lack of social programming and a lack of opportunities and draws, you can only imagine what it's like to leave your house every day and contend with the draw of joining the gang. There's definitely more drawing in of youth to criminal activity and some of those negative influences.

In 2007 the National Crime Prevention Centre, in its “Youth Gang involvement: What Are the Risk Factors”, cited the following as “the most important risk factors for gang involvement”, and I quote them: negative influences in the youth's life, limited attachment to the community, overreliance on anti-social peers, poor parental supervision, alcohol and drug abuse, poor educational or employment potential, and a need for recognition and belonging.

● (0920)

We try to find a place where the youth can feel they belong, and even if some of the youth remain gang-involved but two nights a week are off the streets and in an environment where they can be themselves for a while, we feel that we've been successful. We've seen a number of successes, such as youths receiving film grants through the work they have created, such as seeing youths leave the gang. Just the fact that we have youth from rival gangs at times attending the program at the same time and seeing each other as individuals rather than as opposing groups is a success.

As my focus today on how we can better equip ourselves to address the issue of organized crime, I've picked one thing. I believe in prevention and intervention and I believe it's key. One of the challenges I see with pro-social programming is that there is a lack of funding or the funding is limited. By the time we really polish what we're doing and find that we're being effective—maybe at that three-year mark—we're scrambling for funding again. By the time we've trained our staff so that they're very effective, they need to seek employment elsewhere, because the funding has ended.

I've seen less competition between community program groups and more working together, trying to share what they've learned, encouraging each other to find funding, and helping each other out. There are a number of good programs out there, but I believe we need to expand the programming. If pro-social community-based street-level programming were offered for ten years, or re-evaluated at the three-year mark and if successful renewed for another three years, we could be much more effective.

Thank you.

● (0925)

The Chair: We're going to go to questions from our committee members.

We'll begin with Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, witnesses, for being here.

I think we're particularly touched, Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe, by your experience. We have met many victims' representatives over the years that I've been here. It is quite interesting that many turn from an initial or perhaps an ongoing shock or dismay to a realization that what they wish to spend effort on in the future is prevention and "what could have been". Some, however—and I think you probably agree—understandably are not as willing to think about prevention but are willing to think about what we would call justice. That's understandable. We take it very seriously; it's the first-hand evidence of victims.

I'm struck as well that the theme of the panel is prevention and intervention with youth at risk, if you like. We are here studying organized crime, and I have a couple of questions. I'll just make them brief.

There are people in Ottawa who are thinking of national programs such as a national service policy for youth. I understand that there's a provincial-federal cut-off, and that many of these programs we speak of are provincially mandated. Is there something nationally we can look at in terms of getting the youth engaged and getting them diverted?

Secondly, is the victims ombudsman office helpful in any way? There's a fair amount of money there. There's going to be a new ombudsman sometime soon. Is there something that can be done with that to improve things?

Finally, and probably this is the first point I'd like you to address, we're assuming that youth are either directly involved or are pawns in organized crime or higher-level crimes. I met with some Winnipeg police officers a year or so ago who suggested that some gang elders or gang older members will use the persons who are within the age range of the Youth Criminal Justice Act to do acts—steal cars, or whatever—thus insulating themselves from blame. If you have time, perhaps you could alk about the specific use of youth and actions of youth towards gaining what we've all learned is the manna of criminal activity and of organized crime especially: money.

I would open that question to the panel, because we have quite a few minutes left, don't we? Is it about four minutes, or five?

It would be about a minute each.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: First of all, to answer your last question first, when you were talking about the victims ombudsman, I think that Bill C-43 before the House is absolutely perfectly written. It addresses many concerns from victims.

In fact, we are attending a parole hearing just weeks from now, and it's crazy how they decide how it's done. The murderer sits in front of me, we have to sit behind him. We're not allowed to look at him, we're not allowed to look at him. He's not allowed to look at us. How archaic is this? This person murdered somebody, we're there, and we're asked to come and give a victim impact statement about how this person affected our lives.

First of all, we have to present our speech two weeks ahead of time so he gets to read it before. Then after he reads our victim impact statement, he can just go, "Well, I'm not meeting with these parents; I forgo my stuff." So it puts us through a massive hell up to that point. That is all being changed, as I understand it. I have asked, actually, this next parole board if I can actually face him, and we'll see. I have not been told that I can, so we'll see. This addresses that.

As far as the national program, I know many of us here are all talking about what's happening today locally and what we're all doing for prevention. I think at the federal level, there are funds available to help eliminate organized crime, etc., but try to apply for them. I would invite every person on this panel to go and download some of these applications and try to fill them out yourself. Don't get a lawyer involved, don't get anybody else involved, but try to fill them out yourself. Paul referred to how much time we spend—and I'm the newbie here, I've only been in business for seven weeks. My wife has tried to fill out some of these applications. So when you talk about what can be done, that can be done.

I addressed to this committee at the very end of my speech how I just cannot understand how we as a country can have a 27% increase in funding to build more prisons and hire 4,000 new staff. Hire 4,000 new staff? Take that 4,000 new staff and direct them into prevention programs. To me, that's not even a question, because I believe the 4,000 people working previous to gang involvement can certainly help every single person who goes into that jail way more before they get there. That's my personal opinion. And to answer what the federal level can do perfectly, it's that right there. To me, that's absolutely a no-brainer.

● (0930)

Mr. Brian Murphy: I'd just like some specific evidence on how youth are being used by criminal organizations.

Ms. Kelly Holmes: What we've seen is, even back as far as the Young Offenders Act, when they made it that you could be incarcerated at 12 years old, that dropped the age down to eight where the crime started. They would get their younger brothers to fit in through the basement windows so the 12-year-old.... The kids figured it out, never mind the adults. This is old news.

Mr. Brian Murphy: What kinds of activities? I can give you an example like a car theft for certain functions, then junking the car. What are we seeing?

Ms. Kelly Holmes: We're the robbery capital of Canada. We were recently the car theft capital of Canada. Many of my kids are stealing cars to have somewhere to sleep. It's not always viewed like that, obviously, by the person whose car gets stolen, but a lot of these crimes are born out of desperation. Also there's just a lack of direction, a lack of supervision, a lack of intervention in life.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Guay, you've got seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank Mr. Wiebe and Ms. Holmes for being here today. It takes a great deal of courage to do the work you do for young people. I think we should be looking after young people.

The sound is really terrible, I'm sorry. Can you hear me?

● (0935)

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Guay, the interpretation is coming through.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: It's okay? Perfect. I hope you haven't taken too much off my time, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

So I want to congratulate you on the work you are doing, but at the same time I think we really have to get young people before they join a street gang, because once they are in a gang, it is extremely difficult to get them out. They get threatened and there are all sorts of reasons why a young person cannot easily get out of the street gang system. So I congratulate you on the work you are doing.

You talk about your centre, and I find it extraordinary. I come from a family where at the age of three I was placed in a foster family. I lived with 13 different foster families. You can imagine that this was not an easy life.

So I know what it is to live from pillar to post. They don't always keep us because they like us; they keep us because they're paid. I also know there is no feeling of belonging. So we are always looking for something else to belong to.

At the time, when I was young, there were no street gangs. But there were biker gangs, which were much more prevalent, but fortunately I didn't live in that situation. I was blessed. There are others, though, who did live in that situation, and it is extremely difficult to get out.

Ms. Johnson, is your centre open to all young people? Can a young person go to your centre, even if they belong to a street gang, and try to get out?

[*English*]

Mrs. Laura Johnson: Yes, as long as they're within the 16-to-24-year-old age range they're coming to our program. There are little kids in the drop-in programs upstairs. The gang members wouldn't be able to just use the community centre. They would have to come specifically for our programming.

The rules that we have for safety, because safety is a concern, is we don't take more than one or two youth from each gang in a program year, to avoid the group mentality. Youth have to drop their gang colours, so they can't wear their rag. They can't represent their gang when they're there. The young people who come into our program are expected to show respect for the program and for each other and to come as individuals, who are artists, who are trying to work towards a common goal. So, yes, we do accept youth if they're gang-involved. As long as they don't threaten the other youth, there's not a safety issue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Do you have a service to help the ones who are really very young? Young people 11 or 10 or even 9 years old are joining street gangs or criminal groups. If a young person starts at 9 years old, when they get to 13, they will be extremely difficult to get back. Don't even talk to them about going to school. It's really getting them out of a whole situation. Where do they get sent? I know I was tossed from pillar to post, myself.

Can the services you offer really help young people so they no longer feel they are compelled to join? Young people no longer have that opportunity. They don't want to do it and too often they have been sent back and forth.

Does your centre offer that kind of service?

[*English*]

The Chair: Just before you start, Mr. Owen, could I ask everybody to take their BlackBerry off the table? Just holster them, because we're hearing some interference from some of the BlackBerrys from time to time.

Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Owen: Our programs start when the kids are six years old and go right up to age 18, but we start offering different supports right at age six. We certainly encourage them to come to our clubs on a regular basis. We have staff who can relate to them well. We feed them every day. A lot of the kids who come to our clubs do not eat regularly, so we offer them a meal. Last year we had something like 3,500 kids who ate at our place. We served over 60,000 meals. So we start meeting their basic needs, and from there we get them into programs where they can learn new skills or help them in school, and these kinds of things.

In the summer we have summer learning loss programs that we run. These help kids keep up with their learning even though they might come from homes where English is a second language. It helps them continue and feel confident in their school work, and things like that.

Ms. Kelly Holmes: If you look at this whole panel, many of us work together on an ongoing basis. Mike would have younger kids, and I would have older ones. I'm the final safety net, as it were, of this panel. Laura's area is that of projects; it's time-limited and money-limited and we'd love it to be ongoing, but hers is project specific. Paul does the residential group home aspect of this, including foster homes and a number of other continuing supports around it. So all of us are trying to fill in every gap of every system, wherever these kids can fall through. We all struggle with money.

I was just thinking back to youth. Just off the top of my head, the gangs that we know of are the Mad Cowz, B-Side, Native Syndicate, Manitoba Warriors, Indian Posse, Zig Zag Crew, Deuce, and Manitoba Bloods. That's just off the top of my head. I think there are about 16. Those are gangs of kids, but could have members anywhere from age eight to 27.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: I have one final question, Mr. Chair, and I will ask it quickly.

The government is talking about toughening the Young Offenders Act. I would like to know your opinion on that subject.

[*English*]

Ms. Kelly Holmes: That's not the solution.

● (0940)

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Thank you, Madame Guay.

We'll move on to Monsieur Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Ms. Johnson, how long has your project been funded?

Mrs. Laura Johnson: We were funded in 2007. It's four-year funding and our funding is scheduled to end at the end of this fiscal year, March 31, 2011.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I've worked in agencies since I first became a lawyer about 40 years ago, and the pattern you mentioned seems to repeat itself every time there is a new government, even a long-term government. The new government will do short-term funding and then look to create another agency. A new agency comes on the scene, oftentimes duplicating what is already there.

Is that same pattern still continuing?

Mr. Paul Johnston: I think there is also the belief, for some reason, that something new will be more effective, as opposed to investing in experience and connections and building on those. So I think it's more a matter of reviewing and looking at the outcomes we would like and the work that's being done, as opposed to believing that something new will hold some kind of magic answer. I think you're right that for many years that cycle seems to be repeating itself.

There is the question, too, of the pressure around the political nature of investment in funding. Sometimes there is an issue that becomes more prominent and funding seems to be targeted to that place, and some of the other things fall into the background.

Mr. Joe Comartin: We have had a bit of a debate ongoing—including yesterday, when it was fairly prominent—about whether we should deal with organized street gangs differently than we do with the traditional stereotyped Mafia, Cosa Nostra types of groups, or the bikers. I'd like to hear from you if you have any comments on that. Can we use our traditional methods of fighting those groups, that is, by getting at the money sources and other mechanisms, or do we approach these differently?

I want to go that far because there was some discussion about whether we should have, within our Criminal Code or criminal justice system, a different definition for street gangs or youth gangs from what we presently use, still recognizing that they are somewhat organized but different from the adult ones.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: I think in my speech I referred to that very instance. When I read the new bill—I've read so many bills in the last few days, fourteen or fifteen, I don't remember which one it was—where it discusses organized crime, basically, as I recall, it's just a very simple one-liner, that if there are five or more people getting together and doing a crime that's an indictable offence, they constitute organized crime. I'm sorry, but five little Mad Cowz who are 13 years old are not the same as five Zig Zag Crew members or five Hells Angels getting together and creating a crime.

As I said, I'm not a lawyer. I don't know how you can define that. Currently, organized crime laws are already a horrible thing, because every time the courts get it, it falls apart. We built a huge courthouse in Manitoba, five or eight years ago, and it fell apart. The legal department, the justice department, really needs to take this, analyze it, and actually split it.

I'm saying, similar to aboriginal sentencing, somehow we got to the point where we sentence aboriginal people in this country different from other people because of how they got to where they are and how they got to create that crime. How can we then not do the same thing with organized crime, because it's just too broad?

I've met too many of these kids in the Youth Drug Stabilization Act. I've met too many kids at coffee shops—with Kelly, in fact. You have this little kid who comes from a horrible situation, and he has his bros and he has his homies, and they go out and do some stupid things like steal cars, and some of them steal a lot of cars. My truck was stolen by one of them. Yet you cannot take those same kids and treat them exactly the same under one bill that says "You're five people and you were doing something that's an indictable offence, so we're going to treat you the same as a Hells Angel." I fear that, because with judges today—and believe me, I've been in front of a lot of them—this judge will do this and this judge will do that, and you need that input to those judges from the attorneys, from the prosecutors, that these are not the same. They cannot be just put into jail because of this law.

● (0945)

Ms. Kelly Holmes: I'm not condoning crime. None of us here are. We understand that it's bad. We are the ones who listen to the news and hear about the stabbings every weekend here. But I just would like to caution you to consider that most of them, whether they're adults by age, cognitively they're not. They're functioning around age 13 to 16. There's lots and lots of FASD in this province. There are lots of huge cognitive deficits, learning disabilities, trauma-related stuff. To stick them in a regular penal institution or environment, we are breeding a stronger, better criminal.

They need intervention and they need help.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Are there any models we can look to elsewhere in the world in terms of dealing with youth crime? I mean that in terms of prevention, intervention to reduce the rates.

Mrs. Laura Johnson: I was at a conference in Toronto a couple of weeks ago. An interesting concept—and of course it would need some adapting—was a program, the whole theme of which is to stop killing people. It is where they work with gang members, and they're not saying to get out of the gang; they're not saying anything other than, when somebody has been murdered, they rally. They have outreach workers who have been in gangs, who go and connect with the gang members and work with them, and the whole focus is that they're trying to get them to stop killing each other.

What I like about the program is that they're connecting with the gangs—and these are big gangs, these are not Mad Cowz or B-Siders, or whatever—they're connecting with the gangs as people, as individuals in the communities where they are. They're getting to know them and they have more influence.

What they say is, with that, you have the most influence in trying to draw somebody out of a gang immediately after they've been victimized. So it's trying to get to people as soon as possible, because I truly believe that there's a place for the criminal justice system, but when you incarcerate somebody, many of their peers are in that same system and it's that group mentality and thinking as a pack. What we need to do is get these individuals to think as individuals and have self-confidence to go beyond that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Monsieur Petit, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here this morning.

The questions we have for you relate to a study on organized crime. Within organized crime, we find the segment of young people who may move into more organized groups like the Hells Angels or other groups like the Bandidos.

You have been telling us about several possible approaches. You have referred to mental illnesses. We are well aware that a lot of young people and even older people suffer from mental illness and end up in the penitentiary system. We have a problem. The system for treating illnesses is under provincial jurisdiction and not solely federal jurisdiction. So we have a conflict. The fact is that a lot of people have mental illnesses and are in the penitentiary systems.

Next, Ms. Holmes, you talked about fetal alcohol syndrome. In fact, we spoke yesterday with people who work with aboriginal people. They said they are even thinking of banning alcohol on reserves because all the reserves are not close to cities, and there is a real problem. However, when we talk about banning alcohol on a reserve, we are talking about prohibition. When we talk about prohibition, everyone says it doesn't work, because in the 1930s, it didn't work. So now we have another problem. We are having to deal with several problems.

You are on the ground. Mr. Wiebe, you testified. You have been through something extremely tragic where you lost an important member of your family, your son. That is what I understood. Yesterday, we talked about problems young people have with street gangs. They recruit young boys and girls, 12 or 13 years old. They use them for prostitution because it's more profitable than buying drugs. The young girls and boys sell their bodies and make money for the older ones. There are multiple levels.

It's all very well to say that we don't want to lock them up, but we have to try to find a way of preventing 12- and 13-year-olds from prostituting themselves on the streets. You have this in Winnipeg. It happens in Alberta and it happens in Quebec City, in my city. It is happening everywhere. So what suggestions would you have for us, precisely to prevent these young girls and boys from then falling in with organized crime because of drugs?

The main problem is drugs. They are produced and handed out. A moment ago, one person was saying that we have to be able to control the drugs supplied by the gangs. Nonetheless, we aren't in favour of giving young people drugs to keep them with us. We will have a problem.

So how do you think it can be done? Drugs are currently the main problem facing young girls and young boys. Because of drugs, they prostitute themselves, they give money to the older ones and they are unable to get out.

Who would like to speak? The question is open to everyone.

● (0950)

[*English*]

Ms. Kelly Holmes: Currently, provincially, we are working on this initiative called Street Reach, where a number of our organizations bonded together. There were eight executive directors, and we put together a strategy to deal with that.

Our girls who are on the street or have been put out on the street by their families in some cases are as young as eight. This initiative was born out of a policeman who took this young girl off the street and had nowhere to put her and drove around the city for 17 hours looking for a place.

We don't have a place because we don't have funding. We're expected to be the first responders on the street to help these kids in an emotional way, and we do not have stable funding. We're expected to keep these youth stable, and we do not have stable funding. For us to do any kind of that work, any of that emergency response, we have to be well funded in a stable way. That's been said over and over. It can't be repeated enough.

In terms of prohibition, we've got to come into this century. That's not the answer. We don't even have enough information about FASD to treat it. There's not enough research going on in any capacity with regard to mental health.

We've been at a two-day conference on gangs where we listened to correction officers talking about people: inmates, who have an IQ of 72 or less, brain injury, cognitive deficits, and a range of co-occurring disorders.

We have mental health with one aspect of the government over here, health over here, addictions over here, and nobody is talking to one another. People need to talk to one another. That's a huge beginning.

I've listed recommendations and I have the brief. A number of recommendations came out of the Senate report and they're being repeated over and over again.

We don't want those youth on the street as much as you don't want them there. They shouldn't be criminalized for being on the street or being a victim of their family. Their families are victims—it's generational. There need to be intervention points, and we need support to do our intervention.

I can't be more clear.

Mr. Paul Johnston: We do, as an agency, provide some programming for the girls you're identifying, in cases where child and family services would be involved and there would be one-on-one staffing, but the challenges are great, in terms of trying to keep them safe and away from some of those influences.

As far as programs go, I think the other piece, in the position we are in, is that when you start to look for solutions you are moving outside of the justice department. A part of the challenge is the partnering of various departments. Child and family services, education, and health are all a part of that solution. In terms of a coordinated plan, often you start talking to a gang member and one of his issues is that he has no place to stay.

I think the problem is identified very clearly in the justice department. When we have youth being held in our youth centre and their release date is coming up, we wonder what we are going to do, what we are going to try to provide to support things being different. I think, at times, for us, there is the issue of the fragmentation of the approaches since there are concerns in each department. Child and family services may have a concern, but if someone's locked up in the youth centre, it becomes a justice concern. It only comes back to child and family services upon release, so it's not a cohesive plan. A number of years ago, the province attempted to establish a youth secretariat that brought the five departments of government together to coordinate strategies for youth. Just as a parent does, you deal with all aspects of your child's involvement. The difficulty of making that work and the difficulty of departments sharing not just staffing but funding seems to be the undoing of that. Certainly from my perspective, it held a lot of promise, in terms of coordinated efforts and the acknowledgement that for many of these youth, all of those departments bear some part of the solution in terms of strategies.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Ms. Mendes for five minutes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you to all of you for being here.

I know you've just touched on that subject, but I really would like to see it from the federal level. What could we do? What could the federal government do to avoid the recruitment of underage children to commit adult crimes? The bottom line is that's what they're used for. How can we help? I know the funding is a big part of it, and I defend it fully, but are there suggestions from the justice department or from the victims ombudsman, as my colleague mentioned? Are there ways to plead?

Mr. Michael Owen: I think we've spoken on not only the funding, but the application forms and the whole process for federal funding that goes to local organizations. It's extremely complicated. Often despite what you try to do, what you start out trying to do, once you get through the process, you end up doing something different. It is almost like the bureaucrats basically tell you what you're supposed to be doing rather than listen to what needs to be done. Often, I think, that is the feeling. Often the funding comes late, and as an agency, you're expected to carry the program for a while, even before you have confirmation that you have funding. It's just not a very friendly system. In fact, some of us don't even bother applying for federal funding any more because it is so complicated and labour-intensive. You have to spend hours and hours filling out applications and evaluations and doing all kinds of reports, and you give all kinds of information that doesn't seem to be relevant to what you're trying to do in the first place. It's extremely complicated, extremely time-consuming, and for the most part it doesn't address the need that you wanted to serve in the first place.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Would you think that the youth secretariat idea that you had here in the province of Manitoba applied federally would be something that could help you, having different federal departments involved?

Mr. Paul Johnston: I certainly think from my experience that when you have a forum and you have in the room the people who are focused on a solution, you come up with a much better plan and commitment to working together. A recent example of using federal funding to try to address a problem would be the use of the housing and homelessness money. Some things that were developed in Manitoba are currently in Manitoba and they wouldn't have been here without that. Certainly we received funding from that for our youth shelter, which is an eight-bed place where kids can show up and spend the night safely, or a few nights safely, if they have nowhere to go. The question of whether or not that will continue after the end of this funding year or whether the province will pick it up—and we're not sure—leaves it in limbo. I agree that often discussions on solutions break down because they are not the responsibility of the group that's in the room, so if you have everybody in the room, you have a much better dialogue, I think.

Mr. Michael Owen: You could ask for it to include both the provincial and the federal departments.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: If you realize, the people in this room, that it's your budget that controls the $3.1 billion in prisons—it's your budget here, right?—I think it makes sense, then, for you to figure out, with the ten provinces, why you're inheriting all those people from the provinces into your federal prisons. You're the one who is paying for it.

If you want to reduce how much you spend on that, then I think you need to listen to all of these people here who are all doing provincially—most of us, provincially—because we're actually the ones who are trying to prevent the ones ending up federally....

When you ask, Mr. Fast, that we might deal with federal issues, to me that makes the most sense. It is a federal issue when the provinces are dealing with all of the funding for all these prevention programs. I think getting all those people in the room makes total sense, getting what he said—the provincial level, making it federal.... Your question is absolutely right on.

● (1000)

Ms. Kelly Holmes: Just to piggyback on what Floyd is saying, it's about talking together and working together. We have to, with limited resources. We understand that government has limited resources in different areas as well. Maybe I'm naive, but it would be wonderful if the provincial government and the federal government could work together around some of these issues if you find that you're getting the same repetition across the nation.

One other point.... There is a national body I'm involved with—there are a number of them, actually. It's called the learning community. We learn from each other, from B.C. to St. John's, and we share our learning about best practice and how to best deal with the youth we're serving. It's been a wonderful opportunity not having to reinvent the wheel. That's a national initiative. That could have support. That could be backed federally and promoted so we're spending less money, we're working together. A number of the problems we're seeing are Canada-wide.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on now to Ms. Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for being here today and sharing your testimony with us.

Mr. Wiebe, first, I would like to offer you my sincere condolences on the loss of your son. I admire your courage and also your great humanity. Losing a member of our family can sometimes leave us feeling extremely angry and blind. I welcome your testimony, because of the strong emphasis on compassion, prevention, and trying to save children before they become criminals.

I am also a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. A few days ago, we heard the Minister of Public Safety and all the other officials. My question was specifically about prevention. In the current budget, and subsequent budgets, there is really no increase in terms of prevention, and this was confirmed to me. The budget varies between $30 million and $60 million for the whole of Canada.

I am looking at you, and you seem to be exceptional people, in your need to rescue young people, even though you have only crumbs, little bits of money, to do it with. Looking at the budget, we see that there is still no increase. This was the first point I wanted to confirm, that there will be no increase for prevention. That has been the case for several years, going back before the present government.

I would also like to talk to you about the Young Offenders Act before getting to my question. That act is intended to criminalize young people 14, 15 or 16 years old, according to the provinces.

I have been listening to my colleagues asking what we can do. In fact, you have been telling us from the outset: prevention, prevention, prevention.

There is no more money being invested in prevention. The NCPC has told us that it can't even apply for any more projects because there is no more money in the budget, until 2001-2012. What do we do if there is no more money being invested in prevention? They don't want to invest in prevention, but they want to hand out harsher sentences to young people who may have committed murders or serious crimes at the age of 14 or 15 or 16. So the real question to ask is this: what do we do after talking about prevention and not criminalizing young people? In fact, we find ourselves with a system that will do that, that will criminalize young people and won't invest a penny more in prevention.

[*English*]

Ms. Kelly Holmes: Instead of building bigger, stronger jails, take that money and infuse the jails with staff that can look at mental health issues, rehabilitation, and other avenues. It's not just about prevention, prevention; it's about support the intervention. You may look at that as prevention. Prevention to me is educating kids before they even get there. We're at the stage where we're already intervening and we're trying to stop crime. So, yes, that's my comment.

● (1005)

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: In our case we had one juvenile, the mastermind behind TJ's murder. He was held in the Manitoba Youth Centre for 32 months. Even though the murder happened prior to the Youth Criminal Justice Act—it came in on April 1, 2003—my son was murdered January 5, 2003, so he came under the YCJA instead of the YOA.

Not that I'm commenting about the YCJA so much, but just based on what Kelly said, this individual who masterminded my son's murder received absolutely zero intervention in his life from a psychiatrist, psychologist, nothing. I'm not supposed to know this, but I found out. We victims have an incredible way of finding things out we're not supposed to. I was so disturbed, even though I was enraged that this person—he was three weeks shy of his eighteenth birthday—had the capacity to convince three other people to murder for him because they did not even know my son. Even though, as Mr. Murphy said, I could be filled with rage at that, what I was more enraged with was this person was held in an institution for 32 months before he was acquitted and received absolutely no help. So what does that say to this peer? First of all he goes into a youth institution, he's held there for 32 months, gets absolutely no mental help. Do you think he needs mental help? He just had someone murdered.

It's hard for me to even go there, yet nothing happened. So what Kelly said is absolutely correct. This person needs to be dealt with; otherwise he'll kill again, because not only did he not get intervention for 32 months, he got off, which is totally another thing. Think of the power this young man may have in his system right now.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Mr. Dechert for five minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for sharing your views with us today. I'm very impressed with what you had to say, and I thank you also for the good work you do through your organizations.

Mr. Wiebe, I want to express my condolences to you and your family. I'm sorry this tragedy happened in your family.

You said a number of things that struck me this morning. One was with respect to the different types of criminal organizations that are out there. I get it that there are street gangs that are organizations of young people who perhaps lack economic opportunity, who are looking for a place to belong, or have other social needs. Then there are more serious criminal organizations that prey upon them.

I think you mentioned something called a puppet club; you used that term. You said there was an individual there who, now that he's facing 12 years in jail, suddenly wants to change. What organization is he from? Where does he fit into the whole picture? How does he or the organization that he represents prey upon these other street gangs?

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: That example was a Zig Zag Crew member. Actually he's a former Zig Zag Crew member. This individual was raised right next door to me; he lived there basically his whole life, so I know him very well. He did get involved in the Zig Zag Crew. In Winnipeg, you have to understand this, the Zig Zag Crew members.... I doubt any person on this panel.... None of those crew members are the ones these people help, because they got there for different reasons. As I said in my speech, he got there because of choice, because of the money, and all of that stuff.

Mr. Bob Dechert: He essentially is a criminal businessman.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: He's absolutely a criminal businessman. He will admit that to me every time I visit him. He knows what he's doing. He knew when he came out of jail that if he ever got caught with gun involvement again, he would get a minimum ten-year sentence. He knew that. If he was trafficking heroin, he was going to get a minimum two-year sentence. He still made that decision.

There is a huge difference between him and the people that this crew then goes down. It goes from Asian organized crime that has all the drugs, to the Hells Angels, to whoever has equality with them, to the Zigs, to the Mad Cowz, to all the B-siders. There's that pyramid schedule.

● (1010)

Mr. Bob Dechert: What do we need to do to prevent people like him from getting into business and preying on these other gangs?

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: I don't know that the other panel members will agree, but I believe in laws that take people like the Zig Zags and above, those public clubs.... And, yes, I might disagree with the panel about jails. But I'm sorry; these people are calculated, organized people who don't come from the regular homes that all these people are talking about. I believe, personally—this is just me—that they need to be put away for a long time.

When I visit him in the remand centre—I'll visit him again, and I will still support him—I tell him that he is going down for this, and he agrees. He absolutely agrees.

Mr. Bob Dechert: If we send him, and others like him, a message that we're not going to tolerate their behaviour, can we stem the flow of people like that?

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: I personally believe that you can.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Johnston, I want to ask you a question. You mentioned that we're competing with street gangs to employ some of these youth, and it's a tough competition.

How much can a gang member earn dealing drugs and putting women on the street for prostitution? What are we talking about here in terms of dollars?

Mr. Paul Johnston: I don't know that I can quantify that for you, I'm afraid.

Mr. Bob Dechert: What's the kind of lifestyle they find themselves in when they do these things?

Mr. Paul Johnston: It is the differentiation that Floyd made. These are not necessarily people committed to that lifestyle, but for a variety of reasons, they're involved in it. There's the positive piece for them, in terms of the money, but there's also the violence. I mean, when we talk about the risk and the violence, the youth we work with are victims of that as well. It's a mixture, in terms of that lifestyle. I think that the opportunity to change is not simply related to money. It's related to relationships. It's related to positive feelings.

We talk about trying to intervene at age 10 or 12. Sometimes the opportunity comes at 16 or 18 or 20. Sometimes it's related to a significant influence—the death of a friend, the birth of a baby, a relationship—and they're willing to make the choice at that time. If they have relationships, not with family but with organizations, unfortunately, at this point, they can reach out to them at that point when they're ready.

It's not necessarily competing on a financial basis. It is that relationship. It is that belief in them and pointing out to them the strengths they have and nurturing that piece that then moves them to the point where they can change.

This is maybe more of an answer than you want, but on the concept of how people change, one of the concepts is to build a pile of stones or to tip a balance. You're adding to that with each piece in a positive or negative way. Programs that have contact with people are able to add to that. You're never quite sure when you're going to reach that tipping point or when you're adding that last stone that allows them to have the motivation and the support and the energy to change.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

We'll go to Mr. Murphy for five minutes.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Over the days we've had this hearing, there's probably been some substantial agreement on this committee. I'm hearing it from Mr. Wiebe, and there's some head-nodding, that the identifiable kingpin, the puppet master, the organized crime mastermind who is using youth, who is looking for the manna, which is the money, who uses the tools, which are the drugs and the guns and the human trafficking, should do time. That person should be removed from society and should get treatment, perhaps. But deterrence and removal are important. We get that.

I hope there's agreement that the pawn, the 14-year-old from a broken home who is led by the allure of gang membership, who's used and does a serious crime but as a youth is not permanently responsible, shouldn't get that, at least without some efforts from the community and the system. Those cases may be easy for us to deal with.

It's the middle ground. It's always the middle ground. What about the youth who does the adult crime and is sort of halfway up the ladder? What about the victims? What about the possibility of rehabilitation? What about the deterrent effect?

We've talked mostly about rehabilitation this morning, and we get it. We understand it. It's on the deterrent effect where I think there might be some difference of opinion on this committee and in Parliament and in the community. People think that if you sentence somebody harshly, and for a long time, that will send a message.

Many judges we've heard from, and police officers even, have said that for youth, deterrence doesn't work. They're different from us. Some of us are younger, of course. But you know, it doesn't work the same way. Deterrence does not work, and that's why it's not specifically in the YCJA, notwithstanding international covenants on how children are a different entity.

What do you have to say to us about that middle ground? We're heading into this possible YCJA reform. You'd hate to put away a youth who did an adult crime who could be rehabilitated, but you'd also hate to return someone who's completely impenetrable and is a danger to society. What should we do about calibrating that? I hate to use the word “recalibrating”.

● (1015)

Mr. Michael Owen: I'm just wondering if the system we use for young people should be an adversarial one. I sometimes think it gets in the way of justice when you have long delays caused by defence lawyers, just because they know that the kids are going to get time and a half if they've been in remand for a long time, and things like that.

I go way back to the old Juvenile Delinquents Act. At that point the focus of the system was different. It had to do what was best for the individual child or adolescent. Certainly there were faults with that system, but there were some strong points too. I think the faults in the system were really there because people weren't really trained or qualified to maybe look at things at that point the way they should have. I really wonder if we've actually done a disservice because we got into the adversarial system. Each side has to make the strongest case and exaggerate it. It's a fight rather than just saying “How can we really affect this child?”

As long as we have an adversarial system we won't be able to really look at that. That might lead to a solution to some of these grey areas, where you can take a look at a person and say, “What is the chance of this person being rehabilitated? Is this person way too far? Is there too much of a danger to society?”

You can't just sort of sit down and contemplate that. There are arguments on both sides, and you sort of wonder if justice is really being served at that point.

Mrs. Laura Johnson: I think that there is a place for each. These are grey areas, so there are absolutely places for prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation. There are the strict sentences, and there have to be consequences for actions or we're not going to address this, and there's the middle ground in between.

I want to echo what Kelly said earlier about resources within prisons and adding to them—and we're talking about psychologists. You can do programming within prisons, so if you're in that middle ground.... I'm sure all of us have visited individuals who were incarcerated and continued with programming. You can be incredibly effective because they shouldn't have access to the drugs in there. They enjoy those visits, and you can build a relationship because you're showing that you're not backing away because they're incarcerated. So maybe we can enhance that area by providing some of those pieces for rehabilitation while they are serving their time.

The Chair: We'll move on to the government side.

Mr. Woodworth, you have five minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

I've been happy to hear the direction in which we've been going in the last few minutes. I want to reassure everyone that our government does take the view that there needs to be a balanced approach. We have been putting resources toward prevention, rehabilitation, and the more punitive solutions.

In my own riding of Kitchener Centre, for example, $3.2 million was given to a coalition of local community groups not that long ago to develop a gang prevention strategy. This kind of effort is going on all across the country. I wanted to reassure everybody of that.

Having said that, I hear the message loud and clear this morning that you folks are involved in the efforts around prevention. That is an essential piece of the puzzle, so I'll extend my thanks to you also for the work you're doing.

It would help me to know, to keep it in perspective, what the dollars are. In a certain sense we can never spend enough on prevention, but in another sense there are some optimum targets. This being a fact-finding tour, I wonder if each of you feels comfortable telling me what your existing budget is, what your optimum budget would look like, and how much you think the government should, on a national basis, direct toward crime prevention for youth. I would like to get that kind of information from each of you serially.

Mr. Johnston, you're in the lucky spot at the end, if you wouldn't mind starting us off.

● (1020)

Mr. Paul Johnston: This is off the top of my head, but certainly if I look at a program that we run through the skills link funding, and this would be a concrete example where we're just renewing a contract, the request is to reduce the amount we spend compared to last year. So we did some initial work, and then as it goes through the process to go up to Ottawa and back—and this is a request of between $300,000 and $400,000 for an 18-month program to work with youth, building skills through community service activities and workshops—some of the things that were cut out would be something like recreation. They said, “We are not going to fund recreation and we want you to reduce it by $4,000 in your budget.”

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Could I stop you for just a minute? We have such a limited time available.

What I was really trying to do is to get a snapshot of what each agency's total annual budget is and what each agency thinks should be an optimal total annual budget. Maybe I could also sneak in a question about how many young people you think you reach with that.

Mr. Paul Johnston: Our operating budget is about $24 million, and that is child welfare. We have a small amount from the justice department, but certainly the work we do with child welfare would be the majority of the work that we do.

An optimum budget, I am not sure how to answer that with the diversity of the programming. I'm sorry.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: I just started. I'm very grassroots. I have a $100,000 provincial grant for a one-year term. Vic Toews has indicated that they will probably match that somehow.

I did appear at the western Canadian justice ministers conference a while back. I've got all four western provinces interested, so mine will eventually, I hope, become national. So my budget is going to be a lot, because it's for gang awareness for parents. What that is right now I can't tell you.

Ms. Kelly Holmes: I just raised $1.4 million to purchase a new building and renovate. I got $99,000 from government out of that. The rest was from the private sector.

My budget is around $800,000. I have 18 staff and we have been working for 15 years in a 1,500-square-foot site. We see 60 to 70 kids a day. We tend to see more. Now we have more services: showers, food, and stuff like that.

Ultimately it is not about the size of budget. It's about stable core funding for me. It's about I can pay my staff right, that we can have a pension plan, that I can keep my staff staffed.

Project funding is always available. If you're my fairy godmother, I would say $1 million would be great.

Mr. Michael Owen: Our budget this year will be about $3 million. Of that, we serve 4,000 kids in our clubs.

Our club budget I think is about $1.6 million. I think I worked it out to it costs about $1.20 a day per child for us to provide a good preventative program.

Mrs. Laura Johnson: Our budget is just shy of $170,000 a year, specifically for the Just TV program. That is not for all of Broadway.

We serve 20 youths a year with that. However, more return. Optimally, something we would like to do moving forward pending funding is double that. In order to double that with our current resources we would need $250,000 a year, and that would be specific to continuing with our regular programming, but offering a program for 12- to 16-year-olds that is more prevention-focused, but the same program.

● (1025)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will move on to Mr. Rathgeber, five minutes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for your excellent presentations and for your attendance here this morning.

Mr. Owen, you quoted a statistic I was intrigued by, and I would like to know more about it. You said that a dollar paid in prevention is seven times more effective than a dollar spent in incarceration. I was wondering if you could source that for me, because I have never heard that ratio. If true, it is intriguing.

Mr. Michael Owen: I'm not sure that I can find that right now, but it is sourced, and I did put my document in with the footnotes there.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: We'll get it, then.

Mr. Michael Owen: Yes. It was also part of a presentation that Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada did for the preliminary budget hearing.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Again, you may have to check your notes or your sources, but when you say “seven times”, do you know what was being measured? Was it the protection of society that was being measured, or was it the ability of the individual to rehabilitate himself or herself that was seven times more effective?

Mr. Michael Owen: It is saying that primary prevention is seven times more effective than incarceration in terms of turning people around.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: So it is seven times more effective with respect to the individual, as opposed to the protection of society, as you understand it. Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe, I certainly share the feelings of the other members of the panel who have expressed condolences to you and your family, and I really appreciate your coming here to share your story, as painful as it is. From my perspective, victims of crime and families of victims are the people the criminal justice system ought to be protecting, and I was curious as to whether you or your family has ever used the services of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: We are not doing so currently. I was vice-president of the Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance for several years. It is a Manitoba group that helps victims of homicide go through the court system. In fact, I almost applied for the ombudsman job when it came up three years ago—

Mr. Brian Murphy: It's open again.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: Yes, I know, but I'd have to move to Ottawa. Move it here and I'll be okay.

I came this close, though, believe me. That position is incredible, and it is becoming more and more useful. My wife and I have not accessed it personally, but I know people who have.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: You are familiar with some of its programs, I take it.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Obviously you support that initiative and counsel other families of victims to access its services when necessary.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: I do, very much so, and so do your parole service people. We just had parole services meet with us two weeks ago, and there were many victims in the room who didn't know about it. The Government of Canada is also promoting to victims that it is available, and it should absolutely be kept. It is a very important component.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you for that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

That brings us to the end of our time. We want to thank each one of you. We've gained a little different perspective from you, because you're representing the intervention and prevention side of the equation.

Mr. Floyd Wiebe: We didn't get together on this.

The Chair: It was very powerful testimony from each one of you, so thank you to all of you.

We will suspend for a few minutes.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1050)

The Chair: We'll reconvene our eighth meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. We're continuing our study on organized crime.

We have with us, on our second panel this morning, a number of different witnesses. I'll name each of you and then you can introduce your organizations yourselves. First of all, we have with us Diane Redsky and Jackie Anderson. We also have Velma Orvis, Melissa Oleman, Leslie Spillett, and Renee Kastrukoff. Welcome to all of you.

A couple of these witnesses will be showing up in a while, I hope. While we'd like to start with Grandmothers Protecting our Children, Velma Orvis is not here yet. So we'll go to the second person on our list, Leslie Spillett.

Could you introduce your organization and then make your presentation?

Ms. Leslie Spillett (Executive Director, Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.): I just wanted to say *Anin* and *Tansi*, in our languages, the languages of this territory. I welcome all the committee members to Winnipeg and Manitoba.

In our work, we call Winnipeg the largest reservation in Canada, because the greatest number of indigenous or aboriginal people in all territories, even the eastern, southern, and northern territories, now reside in Winnipeg. Officially we think that probably about 15% of Winnipeg's population is aboriginal, but it's really much larger than that. We think it's probably anywhere up to the low 20% range of the population. So we represent a significant population.

The organization I represent is called Ka Ni Kanichihk. It's a Cree word that means “those who go forward” or “those who lead”. We are very much about doing work in our community that is culturally congruent with our value systems and our cultural paradigms.

One of the things I'd like to start with is a quote from a young aboriginal man who was a gang member. I think he represented Indian Posse, one of the larger native gangs in Winnipeg. He was being interviewed by a professor of sociology at the University of Manitoba. That research, by the way, is online under the CCPA, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. He said, “If you want to change the violence in the 'hood, you have to change the 'hood.” To me, that means that if we're going to have any success with prevention and intervention, we really need to make some structural and systemic changes that give people an opportunity to participate in a way that they feel values them and that will stop young people from joining gangs.

I've worked in this community since about 1977 or 1978, and I have worked with many gang members. I work with aboriginal gang members, not with the gangs you heard about earlier, the Zig Zag Crew and the Asian gangs, although there is some connection, and we will get to that as well.

We really need to understand this. I use an analogy like mould, which grows in certain conditions, those being damp and dark conditions, etc. It's a natural process. Similarly, gangs grow in the same kinds of structural conditions. When people find there are no alternatives, gangs are the natural outcome of those conditions. So we need to change the conditions.

In our communities we talk about a human rights approach to service delivery. In my mind, a human rights approach to service delivery demands that indigenous people be given the opportunity to take care of indigenous people. If you talk about all of the indicators —who's in jail, who's in gangs, whose children are engaged in the criminal justice system, whose children are prostituting themselves right now on the streets of Winnipeg—you will find that the vast majority of those children are indigenous children. We really have to understand the conditions those families and children emerged out of.

● (1055)

For the last 20 years, the indigenous community in Winnipeg has really been defining our own agendas. We've really been actively trying to engage resources that permit us to do this work based on our own knowledge and practices.

I would submit in a very humble way that those people and those organizations that have long done this work for us have very poor outcomes, very poor levels of success. I think if they were evaluated independently, it would show that.

I want to just talk a little bit about research that was done in British Columbia. This is accessible by Googling Michael Chandler and another professor of sociology from the University of British Columbia by the last name of Lalonde. Those two sociologists were puzzled by the youth suicide rates in British Columbia among first nations communities. They looked at that because in some communities the youth suicide rate was 800 times the national average—which is profoundly significant—and in some communities in British Columbia the youth suicide rate was virtually unknown. So they were really puzzled by what made the difference.

The difference they found was that the community that had the most control over its own self, self-determination, was the community that had lower youth suicide rates. They called it cultural continuity, those elements of self-government.

To me, that's really big. We need to look at that research and then act on that research in a policy-driven way, including justice and human rights. I'll restate that it's absolutely a human right of indigenous people to look after indigenous people's issues, because it has all been taken away from us. It has been systematically eroded and taken away from us: our language, our culture, our political, social, and educational institutions. Every institution that we knew that held us together as peoples has been distorted, eliminated, or destroyed through the process of colonialism.

That is what we need to begin to change around, to make a difference in our indigenous people's community. And we are doing that. We are doing that in a major way in this community, in a significant way. But one of the things we really lack is a real solid understanding and analysis of that. Gangs come out of those places where mould grows, in those places where people don't feel good about themselves, who have no access to material or social power or status. They will take matters into their own hands to be able to change their own social condition.

It really broke my heart this morning to hear one of the presenters talking about a young guy who masterminded three murders. I can assure you, I know our children are in places of desperation. They're not masterminding criminals. They just aren't. They're 17-year-olds. He was just a baby; he was a young boy. He did a really bad thing, but he's not a mastermind criminal. I don't know one of our youth who would fit into that level of criminality.

Writing people off and labelling them in such a decisive way.... He did a terrible thing, there's no doubt about that, but in my mind, he is our child. He is the child of all of us, and we do have to find ways to support, because there are many who are like this young man.

I just wanted to begin those comments to the committee and thank you for your attention. When our presenters are finished, I'd be very happy to respond to any questions.

● (1100)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Ms. Omelan for 10 minutes.

Mrs. Melissa Omelan (Gang Prevention and Intervention Program, Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad (Ndinawe)): Good morning. I'm here today as a representative of the Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad (Ndinawe). Ndinawe is an aboriginal organization located in the north end of Winnipeg that was established in 1993 as a community-driven response to the high number of aboriginal youth experiencing sexual exploitation.

It was recognized that a significant number of youth were regularly without a safe, stable living environment, which was putting them at high risk. Since inception, the organization has increasingly expanded in response to the needs and complexity of issues facing the young people it serves. Today, Ndinawe is an integrated service organization for aboriginal youth, focusing on shelter, culture, education, recreation, intervention, and support.

I am the project coordinator for the Turning the Tides gang intervention project. It is a three-year pilot project that serves to support and guide gang-involved and at-risk youth. To date, we have had 56 youth, ages 14 to 19, participate in this project.

I am here today to speak on behalf of these young people, to shed light on their realities and the issues that have pulled them into gangs.

In the north end of Winnipeg, aboriginal youth often face daunting challenges, such as poverty and economic marginalization, which restricts opportunities for youth and contributes to a loss of hope; family breakdown, which then interferes with the nurturing and socialization of children; and loss of culture and a sense of identity.

Many urban aboriginal youth are subject to negative stereotypes that include racism, fear, and stigma, which contribute to the lack of identity and lack of a sense of belonging.

Multiple barriers, coupled with serious gaps in services or problems with how services are provided, allow many youth to fall through the cracks of the social safety net and place them at risk. Youth are at risk of systems that do not value or understand them, resulting in inadequate living conditions, exploitation, a loss of hope, and tragic consequences.

Winnipeg is home to the largest urban aboriginal population in Canada. Here they account for over 20% of the population of 14 different census tracks, a concentration not found elsewhere in Canada.

This same community is home to neighbourhoods experiencing some of the highest poverty rates in Canada as well.

The Chair: I'm going to get you to slow down a little bit so our interpreters can catch up.

Mrs. Melissa Omelan: Okay.

In Winnipeg a large proportion of aboriginal households fall below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off.

Manitoba has the lowest rate of school attendance among aboriginal youth of any province in Canada. In the north end, one in five youth graduate from high school. Not surprisingly, aboriginal youth are twice as likely to be unemployed.

In Manitoba, as across Canada, aboriginal children and youth are drastically overrepresented in the child welfare system, accounting for 85% of children in care. Many of these youth in care are torn away from their families only to be bounced from placement to placement, never finding stability or a place to belong.

One of the youth in my program has seen over 18 placements in his time in care. For this young person there is no healthy attachment; experience has taught him it will be taken away soon enough, don't get comfortable, don't trust, don't feel, you are on your own.

Street gangs provide an alternative, a sense of family, belonging, and acceptance. For others, gang involvement is intergenerational; their mothers, fathers, siblings, aunts, and uncles are gang involved. For them, it is the lifestyle they were raised in. It's all they know, a legacy that has been passed on. Despite the negativity that comes with that lifestyle, it is at the same time their family, their identity. To reject the lifestyle is to reject their family. The expectation is that the youth should leave the gangs to be healthy community members, but in asking them to do so, we are asking them to isolate themselves and alienate themselves from everything they know.

Despite all of this, our youth, with the proper resources and supports, are capable of creating brighter futures for themselves. Youth indicate that they require positive spaces where they can go and not be treated as somehow defective or a problem to be fixed. They want a supportive place to go where they can tap into their interests, develop their talents, and nurture their leadership abilities, a place where they are more than just the sum of their problems.

Becoming enmeshed with the street lifestyle often means cutting ties. Youth become alienated from those systems that normally keep them anchored in mainstream society, including family, school, community, child protection agencies, and youth correction systems. Their focus becomes solely on the present: make money, get food, find shelter, fill your basic needs, which often leads to involvement with gangs, which only further alienates them from society.

For many young people, gangs provide what society fails to. As a front-line service provider, I have been tasked with making recommendations. In referencing the statistics I quoted earlier, there needs to be a commitment to keeping families together. Taking children into care and leaving the family to fix the problems does not work. Families have to be healed as a whole.

Recreational facilities and programs that provide access to youth and families in all communities to afford the opportunity to engage in healthier, safer ways of coming together need to be provided. Education systems need to be provided the resources to work with youth who do not fit into mainstream programming.

We have transitional schools that I am aware of in the north end of the city, but their class sizes are limited and they're not equipped to deal with some of the issues surrounding youth who are engaged in that lifestyle.

Mental health and FASD are rampant and often undiagnosed. The difficulty in receiving resources for an undiagnosed youth is astounding. Many youth who do not have a diagnosis don't receive supports or services until they are already in the justice system.

There is a lack of service to address the substance abuse issues initiative. One youth in our program waited five months on a waiting list to enter treatment. What services are available are not geared to address surrounding issues and are not culturally sensitive, and many youth who do manage to enter treatment are rejected from programs because of their behavioural issues.

Many efforts are focused on reacting to gang activities. Unfortunately, this focus tends to be punitive and does not address the factors that created the vulnerability of youth and empowered the gang members seeking to recruit them. Stiffer penalties are not the answer. While locking up youth serves to provide a short-term sense of safety to the broader community and certainly to the victims, it fails to have a long-term impact. For every youth in custody, they can see within the gang structure it has created. The loss of gang members to the penal system does not deter gangs; it triggers further recruitment of younger and younger youth. Until the issues are addressed, it remains a revolving door.

Government needs to commit to rehabilitation, reintegration, and restorative justice rather than “a lock them up and make an example out of them” attitude. Jail does not rehabilitate; it breeds stronger, more organized criminals.

● (1105)

After individuals are housed in prison, the expectation upon release is that they will be productive members of society and not reoffend. Unfortunately, the underlying issues that got them incarcerated still remain, and in most cases have worsened. There is no rehabilitation or treatment.

It needs to be heard that incarceration is no longer a threat. For many it is like going home, because they are unable to function in mainstream society.

Restorative justice models provide a form of restitution that requires the offender to take accountability for their actions, but it also serves to bring a sense of healing to the victim and the communities affected by the crime.

In summary, I would like to leave you with the following thoughts. While the aboriginal population in Canada is generally growing, aboriginal children and youth are the fastest-growing segment of the population, with aboriginal youth 25 years of age and younger accounting for 48% of the aboriginal population. The time to act is now.

Aboriginal communities believe they can overcome these challenges by fostering a sense of cultural identity in their children. Leaders and child development experts know that youth with positive self-identity feel a stronger sense of belonging to family, community, and peers, and are better able to deal with adversity. What's more, they believe that raising children with a strong sense of cultural identity is essential to healing the wounds in their communities and to the survival of their culture.

Since the overall aboriginal population is much younger than the overall Canadian population, the healthy development of aboriginal youth is especially crucial to the future of our communities. Put simply, today's youth are tomorrow's leaders. How we foster and nurture their gifts, energy, and creativity today will determine how they enact leadership in our communities long into the future.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Diane Redsky and Jackie Anderson.

Go ahead, Ms. Anderson.

Ms. Diane Redsky (Director of Programs, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc.): I will be presenting on behalf of both of us this morning.

Thank you, first of all, to my sisters in our sister agencies for being here this morning and giving that perspective of the challenges and opportunities within our community with regard to organized crime and gangs.

I'd like to begin my presentation by acknowledging a report that I use quite often in the fundraising for the work that I do, and that is by the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. It's a 2003 report on "Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change". Through this document there was a very similar process to what I understand you're going through here across Canada, with consultations with experts and witnesses on what at that point would have been urban aboriginal youth.

I just want to quote a component on page 75 of that report:

> Marginalized and powerless, many Aboriginal youth are left searching for a sense of belonging, community and identity. Gang affiliation and membership can provide Aboriginal youth with a feeling of empowerment, purpose and acceptance.

The key words that really jump out on the page are empowerment, purpose, and acceptance, and I'll talk a little bit more about that when you get to know us a little bit better.

A recommended action in this part of the report—the title is "Exiting Gang Life: The Need for a Safe Place to Go"—acknowledges some collaboration between the province and the federal government and the municipal government:

> ...in consultation with Aboriginal organizations, support the establishment of Safe Houses to assist urban Aboriginal youth exit gang life. Initiatives should be targeted to "high-risk" cities.

I'd like to share with you another paragraph that jumped out at me:

> We wish to emphasize that the underlying factors contributing to the presence of gangs and criminal behaviour has much to do with the wide-ranging limitations in the lives of Aboriginal youth. Cultural isolation, racial segregation and the anomie of social structures and supports in many inner-city neighbourhoods must be addressed. Governments must adopt community-development models, providing for safe and secure housing and economic revitalization measures in urban neighbourhoods most at risk for social disintegration.

So this report, again, has been helpful and really is the key message for this panel around services to communities and working with community-based agencies, but with an emphasis on aboriginal community-based agencies doing the work and working in collaboration.

With that introduction, I'd like to share with you that Jackie and I work for an organization called the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. We are an aboriginal-directed and -controlled community-based agency that provides resource support services for aboriginal families living in Winnipeg. That involves the whole spectrum, from services for women and teens who are pregnant to our seniors and our elders. We provide resource support services for the four stages of life, focusing in a holistic way in which people heal, making sure it is a balanced approach.

We are quite busy in the work we do, being in the aboriginal capital of Canada. While that is very much celebrated by the aboriginal community, we still have our challenges and opportunities as a community to do the healing we need to do and to be involved in our communities in meaningful ways.

I wanted to acknowledge where we are at in terms of our aboriginal community and our aboriginal youth and our young people who are joining gangs. As an organization, quite a few years ago we developed a youth cultural development strategy that involved a lot of youth in its development.

● (1115)

As Melissa from the Ndinawe mentioned, aboriginal youth are a dynamic component of the city of Winnipeg. They are the future leaders and educators, professionals, and role models of their neighbourhoods and community at large. They are the links to the history and tradition of the past, but they also hold the knowledge and vision for the future. That's our foundation and our value base for supporting our young people in our communities.

In these consultations we learned four key things, which are the core foundation of our youth cultural development strategy. A sense of belonging to either a group, family, culture, or organization needs to be firmly established and maintained. A sense of belonging brings about positive change in confidence and self-esteem levels and helps support positive lifestyle choices. Positive resources support positive life experiences. These include such things as tangible recognition of jobs well done, opportunities for outings and events, and quality training in skill development. Opportunities to experience and understand one's responsibility within the broader community provide for personal growth and understanding.

Developing personal responsibilities through exposure to different parts of the community and one's role within it are seen to facilitate the steps that are involved in making positive lifestyle choices. Being identified as somebody special builds self-esteem. Increased self-esteem provides opportunities to act more independently and somewhat less subjectively to peer pressure. So as an organization we have made a commitment to building resources and services around supporting our young people.

Before I conclude my section, I want to bring to your attention the fact that there's an organized crime factor outside of the aboriginal community, and because of that we serve a different purpose. That is the organized crime that exploits and harms our women and children across Canada. While we have many issues around our young people joining gangs, they're not getting rich, for sure. The gang lifestyle is filling a void, and it's really basic to survival.

Then we have an organized crime component that is very organized and very wealthy and is making lots of money through the exploitation of our women and children. That happens in Manitoba, from north to south, and it happens across Canada, where our young women and children, from northern Manitoba to southern Manitoba, are trafficked from coast to coast. I think one of the presentations you had was very focused on exploitation, but next to drugs and weapons, human trafficking is the third most profitable industry to get into.

You need a heck of a lot of organization from coast to coast in order to maintain that. As community-based agencies, we are totally underresourced and just can't keep up with how organized and creative they are, how they're really going under the radar, and how a lot of this is allowed to happen. Our aboriginal women are the targets of this organized crime of sexual exploitation.

It's been our experience in Winnipeg and in the rest of Manitoba that with regard to much of the exploitation, the ones involved in the organized crime are immigrants or new Canadians in immigrant and refugee communities who have formed based on their culture or their country of origin. They are the ones who are opening up these drug houses and brothels and places where our young children are exploited.

There have been some things going on in the province of Manitoba. We do have a government that has really worked with the community and the aboriginal community towards creating a strategy to end sexual exploitation of our children.

● (1120)

There is a Manitoba strategy called Tracia's Trust that has helped a lot of community-based organizations with delivering service and being able to gear service around the victims of sexual exploitation.

We have been working with a greater community coalition on exploitation as well. So lots of work has been done, but we still have so much more to do.

Our recommendation is to look at our young people and the prevention and intervention of young aboriginal people going into gangs, and help us protect our women and children from organized crime that really does a lot of harm to women. Victimization requires a long-term healing process. We need the resources to walk with them in their healing, but we also need to address the demand part of it. Until we do that, the victimization and trafficking of aboriginal women and children across this country will continue.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Renee Kastrukoff. You have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Renee Kastrukoff (Director, Pas Family Resource Centre): Good day. I'm from a community called The Pas. It's about 600 kilometres north of Winnipeg. Right across the bridge is the community of Opaskwayak Cree Nation. There's a bridge separating the two communities. The communities are very engaged and work together.

I guess what I'd really like to talk about today is prevention.

I just want to mention the name Daniel Wolfe. I don't know who is familiar with Daniel Wolfe, but Daniel Wolfe was originally from The Pas. He was in and out of foster care for the first 12 years of his life, and then he basically grew up on the streets of Winnipeg. Daniel Wolfe was charged with two counts of first-degree murder and three counts of attempted murder and was in the Regina penitentiary. He and a couple of other guys escaped from the penitentiary and were eventually apprehended and placed back in the penitentiary. At the hands of six of his own, Daniel Wolfe was murdered.

Basically, when you look at a story like Daniel Wolfe's, people will see him as a hardened criminal. At one point, Daniel Wolfe was a little boy. Daniel's mother has spoken of drinking with him and smoking pot with him. She says that he turned to gangs, because he was looking for a home that she didn't give him.

Parenting is probably the most significant factor we can look at when we talk about prevention. So many of our parents today, our aboriginal parents in particular, are living in conditions of risk. They don't feel they have the supports. They have had their ways of parenting basically taken away from them. Many of them are affected by the residential school system to this day. Those needs have not been addressed.

I know that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was established to address those needs. I think at this point in time it has basically opened a can of worms. People are left with open wounds, and there's no way to address them at this point in time. It's the children who continue to suffer.

Every day when I walk outside the organization I work for, I see a huge gang presence. We are located in the Manitoba housing units, the Kelsey Housing Estates in The Pas, which is commonly referred to as “the ghetto”. You walk through the yard in the morning to get to your office door and you come across broken beer bottles. You see broken windows. You see gang tags. You see little kids wandering around. Parents are sleeping or are not home, or whatever. I mean, basically, it's very dismal going to work in the morning.

As a result of that, we developed, based on a promising model, gang prevention through targeted outreach. We are observing in our neighbourhood kids at the age of eight or nine wearing gang colours. They're in and out of the apartment buildings. You know they're running stuff for gang members. They're little kids. They are being exploited by gang members. I know it has been said that many of them have gang members in their families. It's their parents, their uncles, their aunts, and their grandparents. It's a vicious cycle for all of them.

Through our project, we are basically looking at reaching the kids by providing alternative activities for them, starting at the age of six. We feel it is really important to start working with them young, because a lot of times, by the time they're 14 or 15, they're quite entrenched. At that point, if they haven't been reached already, it's quite a task, as I know some of the other people sitting at the table can attest to.

In just the last three years, four youth from The Pas have been charged with six murders and three attempted murders. Most recently, just after New Year's, there was a gang-related incident; a man was killed at gunpoint—shot—uptown.

● (1125)

This may not be gang related, but it does speak to the subculture within our community. A couple of weeks ago, a six-year-old girl on her way to school in the morning was abducted by a 17-year-old boy and sexually assaulted. And in the last couple of weeks, a young man from The Pas was killed up in Thompson by a fellow gang member.

That's basically what it comes down to and what the people in our community, in particular in our neighbourhood, come to expect. I think the kids look at that and most of them see that as their future. They don't believe there's something else for them. The parents are at their wits' end. They're saying things to us like, “My kid is 12. He's out running around. He won't come home. He's smoking. He's drinking. He's swearing. He's quitting school. He's doing all this kind of stuff.”

If we had been able to work with mom when that child was born, to address attachment, to look at preventing FASD, to meet the parent's needs in terms of how to parent, to provide that parent with the supports, we might not have this issue when that child reaches the age of 12. He's 12. What's further down the road for him? Is he the next Daniel Wolfe?

You know the saying that it takes a whole community to raise a child. Well, it takes a whole community to save a child. In the words of Dr. Mark Totten, the best way to prevent crime is to prevent child abuse, and the way to prevent child abuse is to educate and support parents and caregivers.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is Velma Orvis—

Ms. Leslie Spillett: I'd like to say a few words on behalf of the Grandmothers Protecting our Children's council, because our grandmother was called away to an emergency.

● (1130)

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: I just want to talk very briefly about the work the Grandmothers Protecting our Children are doing. It's been a voluntary commitment of love by a group of women.

About four years ago, there was a newspaper article about an elder from a northern Manitoba community who was incarcerated at the time for incest on his granddaughter. At that time he was before a parole board, and the community significantly got behind him to have him released back into the community. It was successful. At the same time, they banished the young woman from the community. He came back home to his first nations community and reoffended on another granddaughter.

At the time, this was making the front pages. Anything that has to do negatively with indigenous people always ends up at least on the front page, so this obviously was one of those things that was on the front page.

At that time, a group of grandmothers and women got together and said this is just enough. We were going to assert our indigenous women's leadership once more, because before, in the past, that was very much at play in our communities. No decisions would have been made without the input of the grandmothers, and very often their input would have been the information that would form a community decision. That, again, is one of those institutions, those values, that have been compromised because of the history of this particular country.

So we said we need to organize ourselves and have the opportunity to speak out against this kind of profound violence that our children are experiencing, because we know those children who are so hurt in their own families then become a part of the other systems. Again, it's another way of perpetuating that cycle of violence, including the 500 missing and murdered aboriginal women, the trafficking of aboriginal women.

We are led by three kookums. They're our spiritual leaders. Velma is one of them, and she has sent a message that she apologizes. An emergency has come up. She works for a group that works for residential school survivors, and sometimes these things happen. But I know she would want me to say that we are in the process of empowering ourselves or claiming our own responsibility again to be leaders in our communities and in our families.

For the past four years, Grandmothers has organized a sacred walk on a significant day in the indigenous people's calendar, September 21, which is moving between summer and fall, because everything we do is connected to the values that define us as an indigenous people. So our sacred walk has been very much supported by the community over the past. This will be the fourth year that we're doing it, and the message is to stop the violence perpetrated against aboriginal children—and all children, but of course we know that in this town it's primarily aboriginal children who are being hurt.

In my view, it's interesting that this committee is looking at justice and human rights, because I know that these are inextricably linked, that justice is a human right or a human right is justice. It's reversible. Again, that empowerment—first of all, the profound levels of disempowerment of people who think their only choices are to be something negative have been a part of a historical process that has led to this.

● (1135)

These systems are creating these monsters and nobody knows what to do with them, but underneath, they're just scared, frightened little children.

I have a friend who's on our board of directors. His name is Patrol Sergeant Cecil Swinson, a first nations police officer, who says, "You know, they act kind of tough out on the street, but you get them into the police car and they're crying for their mommas." We can work with them, but we need the tools. We need the resources.

My sister here talked about turning the tides. It was one of five gang intervention programs through the youth gang prevention fund. Funding for that is coming to an end in March 2011, without any extension. We know that after that particular envelope of money was announced, by the time the project started rolling out, a year and a half had already expired in that envelope year, and now we're running out of funding in 2011. So we really need resources and support from our federal, provincial, and municipal counterparts to help us do this work.

Getting back to the grandmothers, it's 100% volunteer-driven, and one of the really neat little things that we just did recently, as a part of the provincial government's sexual exploitation awareness week, is the grandmothers went to the streets. I drive the streets of Winnipeg a lot and see young girls, children, on the street, sexually exploited children, but when you go to those places and see street after street of mostly aboriginal women in the dark and the cold and being sexually exploited, and when you target certain areas and you go and see them, you just see it in a very different light. It's very, very sad and there's lots of despair, but we also know that's not all of what defines them.

They were so happy to see the grandmothers come to them, offer them a sandwich, offer them a cup of coffee, offer them some love, letting them know they were more than that. They are so much more than that. They are our children and we love them, and we need to have the opportunity, as a fundamental human right, to work with our own children.

We can change this around. There's no doubt in my mind about that. I and these other women who have been working in this area don't need to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results. We know how to work with our people. We know it and we know that we are successful when we do it. We just need the institutional support behind us to be able to do it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll start off with some questions. First of all, Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I'll defer to Ms. Mendes.

The Chair: It's for seven minutes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for your testimony, which confirms a lot of what we've heard these last two days.

I'll start with the last question, that of funding. Being a federal government, just about all we can do is to help fund some of the activities you're engaged in.

On long-term funding specifically, I think one of the big complaints we've heard from all groups is that three-year projects do not really ensure long-term care or prevention, or the change in society that we all wish for. So when we're talking about the prevention of organized crime and youth participation in such crime, how would you suggest the federal government go about supporting what you do, how you do it, and the tools you need to proceed with that?

Mrs. Melissa Omelan: I think my project is another one of those project-funded programs. We were talking downstairs earlier on, and we were saying that ultimately we want to provide stability for the youth we work with; yet we as a program are not stable, because we don't know, this coming March, where we will be.

The youth we work with ask us on a consistent basis what is going to happen and we can't give them answers. I think there definitely needs to be some responsibility put back on the government to continue funding—

● (1140)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Are you part of that?

Mrs. Melissa Omelan: Yes, I am. Responsibility needs to be put back to the government to continue funding these programs. They're not fly-by-night programs.

With our program specifically—and I know with Circle of Courage—it took us two years to really start figuring out what we were doing, what was working, best practices, what wasn't working, and the relationship that is the cornerstone of what we do with the kids we work with. You get three-quarters of the way there—and it's done.

We need to look at instituting some core funding for projects that have proven what they're doing is working; that the outcomes are there—and to continue to grow. Having five projects in Winnipeg that are federally funded is not nearly enough.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: I would like to add two points. I think education is one way to break these cycles. There are different ways, and there isn't one thing that is going to do it. Continuity of services will make that difference, because it isn't just one issue. It is not just housing or lack of jobs; it's everything.

In Winnipeg, one in five children in the areas we work in completes high school. That's significant. We know that those children will go from dropping out of schools into the criminal justice system. There's a trajectory that we can see happening. We can see it taking place.

The City of Winnipeg engaged in a process in the last couple of years around crime prevention. One of the suggestions that came out of that was an aboriginal school division. We have a small aboriginal-identified school that is part of a larger Winnipeg school division system, and it is extremely successful in graduating healthy kids. It was showcased in *Maclean's* magazine as one of the best schools in Canada. Why can't we make that a bigger operation?

I believe it's not about what the program is; it's about who's running the program. If aboriginal children see aboriginal people working, being healthy, being engaged, and being successful, they're going to emulate that behaviour. But if they only see us as being weak, insignificant, and not engaged, and see all other cultural groups providing services for us, then that's what they're going to see. So it's about who does the program, not about the program.

I know those are the key concepts, and those are the messages we need to send today.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: I think you have said from the start that aboriginal people should be taking care of aboriginal issues.

But going back to the very practical, we've been told this morning that one of the biggest problems is the fact that federal funding is difficult to access. It's very bureaucratic and very difficult to access.

Are there suggestions on your part on how we could make it easier and simpler for you to access that?

Ms. Diane Redsky: As one of the largest aboriginal organizations here in Winnipeg, we are always looking for ways to be in a meaningful relationship with funding partners. It's a two-way street around really building the relationship with the community to identify what key resources we need to facilitate the work. Those opportunities don't happen very often with the federal government.

So it's a matter of looking at common tables to develop what those priorities are going to be and then looking for the resources that can come from that. It would give us an opportunity to say that when we are looking in particular at victims of organized crime, the current system is very siloed. But having the opportunity to sit down...it's very complex. It takes a long time for a woman or even a child who has been victimized...and we need to have a long-term plan and long-term resources for that.

In the current situation we're lucky that it's three years. That's a bonus. But you just start building and start women and children on their healing journeys and you need to fight for the buck again.

I think there are always opportunities to sit down and create strategies together that come with resources that are holistic.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Guay, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I congratulate you on the work you are doing. It is quite extraordinary, particularly in the case of such a large and significant aboriginal community. I think you are the most appropriate resource people for that community. Earlier, we were talking about funding. Our communities and other organizations are also facing this situation. They get funding for a year and begin their work, but as soon as they start to get their head above water, their funding is completely cut off or they are asked to prove themselves. I understand your situation very well. You are working with a community that has specific needs that are different from others'.

Could you tell me whether you have sources of funding other than the federal government?

[*English*]

Ms. Diane Redsky: The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre operates a safe house for sexually exploited young women, as well as a number of homes that work with young people. Tragically, those kids are all involved in the child welfare system, so the funding and resources to operate those homes are child welfare dollars.

Because they are considered to be shelters for kids, there are some capital resources for renovating and purchasing properties to run these homes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: This situation in relation to young people is somewhat the same everywhere, perhaps more in your community than elsewhere. The parents have experienced exactly the same thing and they in turn are putting their children through the same situation. There has to be education done from the start, to be able to save these young people.

I would like you to tell us about success stories. You must have some. Successful experiences that would enable you to get more funding. An organization that is able to help people can use those examples to get more funding or recurring funding. In that case, you would not have to spend half your time doing the paperwork to get funding. You could be out on the ground and working with young people.

[*English*]

Ms. Leslie Spillett: A couple of things. At Ka Ni Kanichihk, we are reliant on provincial, federal, municipal, and United Way Foundation dollars. We know that we have to go into many pots to run an organization. Our federal portfolio is the most difficult to manage. I will give you a couple of examples.

Canadian Heritage has what used to be called the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres. Now it is called Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth. You submit a proposal within the timelines they request, but they vet it within their own processes. By the time it reaches the minister, six, seven, eight, or nine months have often expired when the project was supposed to start by April within the fiscal year.

Then you're catching up. It's very difficult to manage those kinds of things, especially if you're a single-entity organization. It's impossible. At Ka Ni Kanichihk, we have built up enough of a cashflow that we could manage that, but for some organizations it's simply just not possible.

The other piece of it is the reporting. I totally understand accountability, but the reporting is crazy; it's significantly onerous. Those are two very difficult things. As Diane said, when you get a three- or five-year project, that's just awesome. We really try to turn our federal dollars into provincial dollars. Where we can demonstrate that we're successful, we really start lobbying the province. But then they are limited as well, or they say they're limited. We are often in a crunch.

Right now we have about 14 young boys between the ages of 12 and 17 who are regularly attending our program, Circle of Courage. They are learning about themselves as young people. At Ka Ni Kanichihk, we set up our program right in the community. We don't set it outside the community and then have them come outside the community for the service. Like Ndinawe, we operate within our community on Pacific Avenue. I'd really love you to come by.

We do lots of cultural identity work. We do skill building in terms of life skills. The best way out of poverty is a job, so we're hooking them up to Sobeys. They don't want this to be their only choice. They want to have other options. We are successful when we're given the opportunity. People love themselves as powerful, young aboriginal children who are going to be making a difference in their own families. We have multiple success stories.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll give Ms. Anderson an opportunity to respond, because you haven't spoken yet.

Mrs. Jackie Anderson (Program Development Coordinator, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc.): Good morning. I just wanted to make reference to your question with regard to the success of programs and the young people we work with. I think what really needs to be recognized as well is that when you measure the success of an individual, you need to measure success on how the program was developed.

In particular with our agency, when we are looking at developing programs, we go to the community. We involve the young people and the adults with lived experience. To me, they are the professionals. They are the ones who know what they need. To make reference as well to funding the programs, whether it is one year, three years, or five years—when you look at the victimization that our young people are experiencing right from birth, for many of those children, that developmentally delays them.

Once we get those children and we start working with them through their healing journey, they are already developmentally delayed by three or four years. If a program is only funded for one year...you're doing so much work with that child and you're opening up so many boxes for those children, and then the program is stopped. You're putting that child at further risk of crisis.

I wanted to make reference to that. It is important. I guess that's how we value success and celebration of our children: through those baby steps of their healing journey.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know there are others who want to jump in, but unfortunately you are one and a half minutes over your time. We want to make sure everybody gets a chance to ask questions.

If there are others in a position to follow up on that line of questioning, that would be great. Then we could get others to jump in and respond to that question.

Mr. Comartin.

● (1155)

Mr. Joe Comartin: It's okay, Mr. Chairman. Just let them go ahead and respond.

Mrs. Renee Kastrukoff: Thank you.

In terms of responding to Ms. Mendes' question about funding and what would be helpful, I believe reference was made to this already.

We do see success stories. I've had the opportunity to be involved with federally funded projects like CAPC, the Community Action Program for Children, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation project, Aboriginal Head Start, and funding through the National Crime Prevention Centre.

Where we see our greatest success is when we utilize the social discipline window model. That is working with the community, with our funders—not “to”, “for”, or “at”, but “with”. That is absolutely key. You have to engage the community and the population you're intending to work with, and you have to be able to mobilize and inspire. You can't do that by yourself. It has to be at all levels of the project, right from community to funder. It's very important. It's critical.

Ms. Diane Redsky: I would like to bring attention to the reality of community-based agencies, that we are for the most part—certainly here in Winnipeg—already underresourced.

While we have the best practices stories, for the most part all of the organizations sitting at this table here hire those youths who are success stories. We engage and utilize them in helping others and give them an opportunity to give back.

The reality for an executive director in any of these organizations is that we're the ones writing the proposals, answering the phones, doing payroll, and buying fish for the feast on Friday. That's because the administration dollars that we ask for are, 90% of the time, either reduced or denied.

Organizations are underfunded to build their own infrastructure in order to be able to focus on getting the word out. When you're doing something, you're not doing something else. For most community-based agencies, we're on the front lines with our sleeves rolled up, working in the communities.

One last thing. With some federal funding and opportunities to build priorities and funding programs together, we can take a look at the reporting requirements and the value differences we have with that. Currently, most of the reporting requirements to the federal government are counting heads and counting problems. That's just not our approach in the work we do in the communities. It's about building people and communities from the inside out. That doesn't always jive with the need you have, so it becomes something in addition to the work we do.

There's a lot of stress that organizations are already under, and there's not a lot of help coming our way.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Ms. Spillett, the point you made about the grandmothers and one of the goals being to reassert the historically more traditional role of leadership by women within the communities, how is it coming? Are you having any success in doing this?

Ms. Leslie Spillett: Yes, I believe it's developing. First of all, women have come together. Lots of women have come together. We know that's important. It has spread to northern Manitoba, northern Ontario, southern Manitoba. Grandmothers are coming together. So it's catching on. It's always been there, but I think women are organizing in a much more visible way.

Now, with respect to how other people see that, I think that in our cultures we are in this.... We are walking in both canoes, in some ways. We have a system of leadership that is determined by Indian Affairs and by provincial government incorporation. As Diane said, we are doing the work within a particular context, but we are trying to make sure it fits with our values and world views.

It's not a mistake that you're not seeing a lot of aboriginal men here. Although there are men in our communities who are doing great work, it you look at who has built the aboriginal community in Winnipeg, it has been the matriarchy—women's leadership. I think it's working and it's working brilliantly.

● (1200)

Mr. Joe Comartin: In terms of the exploitation from non-first nations, Métis, aboriginal members of our society, are there any recommendations you can make to the committee as to how we could reduce the potential for that exploitation from outside the community? Whether it's drugs or prostitution or—

Ms. Diane Redsky: There are challenges with eradicating the exploitation. But first I'd like to acknowledge that there is a federal committee operated by Senator Roméo Dallaire. Jackie is a member of that committee, and she brings a young person with her every time.

The help we need the most is with resources for victims. We do that well. We have women with experience who are a significant part of that healing journey.

The second one is that we really need some help with addressing the demand. We are limited, both provincially and federally, in the tools we have to protect our kids—for example, we have perpetrators who sit outside our safe house waiting for one of the girls to come out, or they are there to intimidate them. We can call the police, but he's not breaking the law.

We can see a young woman we know is being exploited and we can call the police, but the police can't do anything. She has to be a victim. You have to prove there's a crime going on. An older man in a car going through the north end can pick up a 13-year-old, a 10-year-old, and there's limited.... Unless she can say she's a victim, which most will not, for a variety of reasons, there is nothing that can be done.

We need a national strategy on this particular issue, and what can happen—

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off there because we're—

Ms. Diane Redsky: If we had the laws to be able to call somebody to get help and stop it from happening—

The Chair: You're not advocating tougher laws, are you?

You want the ability to allow the police to do the work to intervene in those situations. Is that right?

Ms. Diane Redsky: To have the criminal charges.

The Chair: Thank you. You will get another chance.

I'm going to go to Mr. Dechert, for seven minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies, I'm going to pursue a similar theme so you will have an opportunity to expand on your answers.

Many of you have mentioned the outside non-aboriginal, sometimes well-organized, sometimes financed, and sometimes international groups that prey upon and exploit aboriginal women and young people.

A few weeks ago, I was on a plane from Ottawa to Toronto and there was a woman sitting beside me who works as a nurse in Pangnirtung on Baffin Island. She was on her way back from Baffin Island. She is of aboriginal heritage herself, from a nation in southwestern Ontario. She was telling me about the health problems that are caused by drugs in the community of Pangnirtung, which has about 1,500 people, a remote community. I asked her where the drugs came from and she said there were three full patch members of the Hells Angels in Pangnirtung. So I asked if they were local people and she said, “No, they're from Montreal and they're supplying the people in Pangnirtung.” They sat down in their clubhouse in Montreal, looked at a map of Canada, and asked themselves where they could find new customers. And believe it or not, they're going to Pangnirtung. There are three flights a week and these guys must be easy to spot.

Secondly, yesterday we heard from a very courageous woman in Edmonton who herself had been on the street. She told us the story about how she had been preyed upon by a biker gang organization. This was quite a few years ago, but she had been abused and put on the street by a biker gang organization, who then exploited her and lots of other women like her who she knew. She's now working with those women to try to help them get off the street.

So my question to you is, who are these groups that are preying upon indigenous people and youth? How should we deal with them? How would life be different for aboriginal people in Canada if we could eliminate or drastically reduce the number of these outside criminal organizations that are preying upon our indigenous young people? I ask specifically Ms. Redsky and Ms. Omelan to address that, and if we have time, some of the others as well.

● (1205)

Mrs. Melissa Omelan: I think you make a really good point. It's what they call an outlaw motorcycle gang. I believe Diane spoke earlier about this. There's this feeling that within street gangs, especially aboriginal street gangs, there's all this money and power and affluence. That's really not the case. If you look at the Hells Angels and the Bandidos and those kinds of gangs, those are the groups of people who are predominantly financially sound and making large amounts of money.

I will go back into my own history here a little bit. Fifteen years ago the sex trade in Winnipeg was dominated by those groups as well as immigrant groups, including African populations, Caribbean populations, and American populations. That's not to say they're solely responsible, but that's just predominantly what we've seen. I don't know what the process is.

I'm not an expert as far as immigration laws, but I think when we look at the African populations in Winnipeg, the cultural values they're bringing from their countries and the things they've lived through are definitely contributing factors in how they become perpetrators. In saying that, what are the processes, and how are they educated when they're coming into the country against perhaps these cultural biases that are putting them in situations of becoming perpetrators?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Should we increase the enforcement of our current laws on these outside criminal organizations that prey upon aboriginal people? Should we treat them more harshly than other types of youth gangs and criminal organizations when we get them in the criminal justice system?

Ms. Diane Redsky: Organized crime, in regard to exploitation and harming aboriginal women and children, is allowed to flourish because there's a demand for it. If you don't address the demand, they're going to continue making money, so—

Mr. Bob Dechert: I agree with you. There are two sides to the coin. There's demand and there's supply. You talked about demand previously this morning. What do we do with the supply? How do we address the supply and get the drugs away from these communities and these kids in the first place and keep these motorcycle gangs, or whoever they are, from getting the women and exploiting them and putting them on the street? How do we stop that from happening?

Ms. Diane Redsky: One thing is that we do not have a national strategy on this particular issue—exploitation. It doesn't exist. I think only two or three provinces have strategies. So we need a national strategy, a national database, a national sexual offender list. We need to be doing way better at immigration.

Our experience here in Winnipeg...there are cultural groups, the Asian gangs—

Mr. Bob Dechert: A national sex offender registry is something we should be pursuing?

Ms. Diane Redsky: Yes. There need to be the provinces. The vice teams we have across the country need to be leading that strategy, along with community-based agencies that are impacted the most by the activities.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Should we have harsher sentences for people who prey upon groups like aboriginal groups?

Ms. Diane Redsky: Absolutely. Even with the exploitation. We've had one conviction in Canada since we changed the law in 1997. As of last year, seven Canadians were charged with crimes against children in other countries. Obviously, there's a difference there.

As community-based and enforcement...we have to be able to be a step ahead of these organized crimes strategically, and we're not. We can't even keep up with how organized they get. So until we put some resources in and have the conversation and have the.... Everybody has a little piece of the information, so I bet you building a national strategy is going to have a huge impact when it comes to the activities that organized crime has been able to get away with, because we're so disconnected.

● (1210)

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move back to Mrs. Mendes. Five minutes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome you to the table, Mrs. Orvis. If at all possible, I'd like to give you a few minutes to tell us how you see organized crime impacting on your community, and what we could do to help you fight against it.

Mrs. Velma Orvis (Member, Grandmothers Council, Grandmothers Protecting our Children): Yes.

Four years ago, we formed a grandmothers' circle, Grandmothers Protecting our Children, because some children were being abused by their grandfather up north. He was in the penal system, and when his parole came up, 40 members of his community came to ask for him to go back home, because he was their guide and leader. He went back home and he impregnated his granddaughter. And then three other children came forward and said he had molested them. This is why we do our sacred walk: for the protection of children.

Also, last month we made arrangements with Ndinawe and Ma Mawi, through Diane, and Ray too. We grandmothers went out on the streets two evenings in a row with the people who check on the kids that are out on the street. We were really well received by the youth because they said they didn't think anyone cared about them; they didn't think anyone was concerned about them or thought about them. We're going to continue this.

We had a conference on the exploitation of our youth. They say, “Dear John”. Well, he's not a john when he's having sex with someone under age. He should be called what he is. He's a pedophile, he's a perpetrator, and he's a predator. That's what he is. He's not a john, and he should be dealt with in the court system as a pedophile.

I feel really strongly about this, and so do all the kookums.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: But by reaching out to these youth on the street, besides giving them some comfort, how do you think you'll be able to bring them to have a more participatory part in the community? How would you bring them back?

Mrs. Velma Orvis: Now that they know someone cares—and I've made a commitment to go out every month to visit them—I believe that if we do this, if the kookums do this and visit them, I really believe they will turn around. I really don't believe they want that life. They were coerced into it.

The reason I was late this morning was that I was dealing with a young lady who had been sexually abused as a minor, and her daughter is going through the same thing. I couldn't just say that I had to go because I had to be here at 10:30.

● (1215)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: We understand.

If I have a few more minutes, I would like to ask you, Ms. Spillett, if a social economy has been in any way something you've looked at to provide opportunities for the funding.

That question is for any of you who would like to address it. I include the development economy.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: That is absolutely a place where we need to look, and we have been looking. We have a small program for women at Ka Ni Kanichihk called the self-employment project for aboriginal women. We look at social economy as an economic alternative. We'd like to really build on that, but the resources to try to build that piece are quite limited.

I've done some travelling, and one of the places I've travelled to is New Zealand. The Maori population has really used their cultural heritage to be a significant part of the tourism industry. It's quite remarkable. I think we have so much here.

I want to just get in one little thing. Canada needs to look at the Swedish model with regard to prostitution as a way to really undermine these organized criminal gangs—the Mafia, the biker gangs, the Russian gangs, the Asian gangs, the triads. You need to really begin to look at that Swedish model to take the economic engine out of that.

Drugs are another thing. I think we need to decriminalize some parts of the drug.... But that's another story.

They make money, and they are huge. Absolutely, criminalize those guys who are the masterminds of organized crime in Canada and internationally. They are internationally based. These guys whip in and out. Talk about free trade; they have it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are going to go to Madame Mourani, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, ladies. Thank you for being with us.

My question is for Ms. Spillett.

You just said a magic word, "Swedish". Myself, and this is my personal view, I like the Swedish approach. Ms. Orvis said that people who use young prostitutes are not johns, they are pedophiles. I am glad she said that. A lot of young people, boys and girls, start working as prostitutes at 12 or 13 years old. Unfortunately, there are a lot more girls than boys. When they are adults, when they are 18, even if there is no real difference between 16 and 18, they have already had a "career" in prostitution for several years. When you are 12 or 13, you don't choose to be a prostitute; you are a victim. When you are 18 or 19, but you started prostituting yourself at 12, you are also a victim.

I am very glad you brought up the Swedish approach, and I would like you to tell us some more about it. This committee has already formed a subcommittee to study solicitation. That is a fairly specific question. I would like you to tell us what Sweden has done to eliminate human trafficking within its borders.

[*English*]

Ms. Leslie Spillett: The resources I would like to quote are Victor Malarek's books, called *The Johns* and *The Natashas*. He has done a really good job in terms of analyzing this.

In my very limited understanding, the Swedish model criminalizes the demand side, and there is no criminalization for the women who are prostitutes. This has had a profound impact on the so-called sex trade or flesh trade in Sweden. It's reduced prostitution to the low percentiles from a significant sex trade in the past. And it's done so by education and legislation going hand in hand to tell men that just because there's a monetary transaction, it doesn't mean that harm has not been committed. So there is a very definite education piece of it, but there is also the other piece of it, which is that it criminalizes the people who purchase sex. I think it's worthwhile looking at that, I really do.

Canada is a little bit behind. As a country that values progress and human rights, this model is a real, viable alternative to what we have in Canada now. In fact, right now, we're criminalizing the women.

A voice: We're prostituting women.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: I know my sister, Jackie, has been working on this for many years.

I don't know if you want to add something around the Swedish model.

● (1220)

Mrs. Jackie Anderson: I think that's the key message on who the victims are. When you look at these young people—when we're trying to work with these young people—it's to help them understand that they are being victimized, and that they're not out there by choice, as you mentioned. They are, unfortunately, being preyed upon and recruited into exploitation. I have known kids as young as six or seven who are now adults here in Winnipeg, so it does get younger. And in particular, as mentioned, our aboriginal kids are the ones being preyed upon.

What we have—it's a known fact—are perpetrators who are out there victimizing and looking to exploit our young people, who are going after the aboriginal children rather than other races or cultures, for fear of the children being undercover for police. That is another force driving them to go after the most vulnerable, who are our aboriginal children.

Our children don't want to be out there. Our children are coming up to us and telling us who the perpetrators are...the drug houses, and homes where they've been brought in, and brothels where they've been sexually abused and assaulted. They are telling us, as caregivers, who these people are. But again, because of the law, without that victim's statement there is nothing that can be done to these individuals, so they continuously come out and prey upon our children.

The Chair: We're going to go to Monsieur Petit for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you for being here this morning, even if it is going on a bit long. There are some points I would like to put to you, to make sure I am really understanding properly.

We are doing a study of organized crime—that is what we are trying to do—and one of the points I have noted is that organized crime comes from outside the community, whether it be Métis or aboriginal. That is what you seem to be telling us. I can easily imagine, like you, that it comes from outside the communities.

Earlier, one of my colleagues wondered how we should solve the problem. You are trying to rescue your women, your children, the young people, but there is always this problem coming from outside. It's what we call organized crime. That is really what it is about. You spoke earlier about certain groups that didn't seem to have the same spiritual values as aboriginal people and that seem to be exploiting children and women much more than other groups.

There was the point relating to offenders, particularly what is called the offenders registry. There is currently a sex offender registry. Little by little, the police can use it too.

There is also the problem of sentencing. Naturally, no one is against motherhood: we all want rehabilitation, we have created the office of ombudsman, and all sorts of things, and money is still a little short everywhere.

That being said, what I would like to know from you is how you want organized crime, which exploits your 8- or 9-year-old children, to be dealt with. We need to know exactly how you want us to deal with it. Perhaps you are going to tell us it is no big deal, never mind, because our laws are weak. I would like to know this: how should we deal with organized crime and exactly how can we help you? We can make tough laws. In fact we have them, but we want to make sure we are on the right track. That is what I need.

The aboriginal groups, you are very concentrated, in Winnipeg, for example. So what I need to know is how you want us to respond in the outside community. Earlier, I thought I heard that among yourselves, people want us to be tougher on adult men who sleep with your young girls and boys, who keep brothels. That is what eventually has to be solved, or else we won't solve the other problem, even if we help you. So we have to work together.

So how do you see it? How can you help us? That's why we are doing a study of organized crime. How can we help you? I'm talking not just about what is going on in your community, but also its relationship with organized crime.

Perhaps Ms. Redsky or Ms. Spillett can answer. It's an open question. I would like to know how you want us to respond.

● (1225)

[*English*]

The Chair: Perhaps we'll go to Ms. Kastrukoff.

You've been waiting to jump in a few times, haven't you?

Mrs. Renee Kastrukoff: I guess the way I would view this would be to go back to the preventative aspect, to go back to protecting our children. The most vulnerable population are the children, and most often the ones who are the most "most vulnerable", if that makes any sense, are those who have already been victimized. That situation exists within many of our communities. Sexual abuse is rampant, as Ms. Orvis told us earlier—I'm well aware of that case—and it still exists.

We need to be able to educate parents to educate their children, to let them know that this does go on, and basically educate them on how to protect the children. It's the little children who are abused at a very young age who are most vulnerable to becoming involved in prostitution, to becoming involved in gangs, and to becoming involved in organized crime.

When we talk about prostitution, it's not just the kids who are out on the streets and the johns or the pedophiles who are coming by and giving them money. We're talking about kids who are prostituting themselves so that they can get a sandwich, so that they can have a warm place to sleep, so that they can have whatever needs met that aren't being met. And we're talking about even within their own families.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mendes, did you want to continue along that line? There were some others who wanted to jump in.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Thank you, yes.

I'll just go back to what Mr. Comartin was mentioning. It has been obvious around the table.

There are six women at the table and no men. How is the educational part of what you are trying to do working with your men? We heard from an elder yesterday in Edmonton, Mr. Louis, who has been doing quite a lot of work with institutions in Alberta. But how are you working with your men to help address this problem? It's not only a mother's problem or a grandmother's problem; it affects the whole community.

Ms. Diane Redsky: I'd like to build on that and incorporate it into responding to the earlier comment.

At the end of the day, there are community-based agencies and workers, certainly at this table as well, working front lines in communities, who on an every-day basis are working with the most vulnerable in our community.

What makes our kids and our families vulnerable? We need to look at it holistically, in the bigger picture. In the bigger scheme of things, we need to solve poverty in a real way; we need better housing.

As a result of these two things, a number of kids are in care. In the province of Manitoba, there are 7,000 children in care—5,000 in the city of Winnipeg—and 80% are aboriginal kids. Rather than jumping in and protecting, we need to focus on working with systems to look at prevention and intervention strategies and at building communities from the inside out.

To me, working with the community-based agencies is the answer that will solve it all. We have a wealth of knowledge and experience and we know everybody in the community. We know what works and we know the kind of help we need. Having the opportunity to participate in building strategies and identifying resources is going to make a huge difference when it comes to the programs and services within our neighbourhoods that will be addressing the issue and giving us the resources and tools we need to protect our kids and our families.

At this point, we struggle as organizations to do piecemeal whatever we can. We work 18 hours a day to have these partnerships in place. But it's like pouring money into a bucket with a big hole in it, and going on and on. We need to be able to come together with all levels of government and with the community to fill that hole. And once we do that—

● (1230)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Would you agree that parental competency would be the first step?

Ms. Diane Redsky: Community-based agencies have relationships with families in the communities. It's all about the community development approach of building from the inside out. That extends to families and to looking at their gifts and their strengths, within what they are able to.... You honour and recognize those and create opportunities.

People do change. People want to be involved in their communities, if given the opportunity. But if you have a sense of not being able to be involved, it's difficult. Again it's "one person at a time", essentially, when working in communities. A number of community-based agencies operate from that approach of building from the inside out, and that is with each person within our communities.

But if these outside forces continue to worsen and to put stress on families, we just can't keep up to the level of poverty that our families experience, the systemic....

Most families are involved in various systems. They have a welfare worker, a justice worker, and the list goes on. We need to be able to stop and take a look at everything and put everything on the table. There need to be more opportunities to do that. Community-based agencies do this well, together and collectively. We have a common voice, most of the time. It's a two-way street; we need partners who can support us and give us the resources to have a tool belt of things we can do.

Men are very much a part of our community. We don't do things in isolation from them. We have a long way to go in terms of their reclaiming their roles as well, but there's a lot of work being done in that area.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Rathgeber for five minutes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to each of you for your excellent presentations.

I listened intently and like all the members was interested, if not somewhat shocked, at the extent of the problem with respect to children who are drawn into exploitive lifestyles. It's not unique to this city, but perhaps it's aggravated here for a number of reasons.

One of your local members of Parliament, Mrs. Joy Smith, has a private member's bill that would deal in part with this problem. It's dealing with human trafficking, I guess to some extent borrowing on the Swedish model, for which a number of you have advocated. It punishes the trafficker rather than those who are exploited by being trafficked.

I know that Mrs. Smith consulted widely with her community before she drafted this bill. I'd like to hear from each of you briefly, if I could, whether your organizations were consulted in the drafting of Mrs. Smith's bill and whether you or your organizations support it.

Ms. Spillett.

Ms. Leslie Spillett: We were very much supportive of Ms. Smith's efforts to pursue this legislative agenda within the House of Commons.

With respect to consultation, we were involved last fall in a conference that was put together by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the member of Parliament, Joy Smith. I think that was a part of the engagement. If that was a consultation, then we were consulted.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Ms. Omelan.

Mrs. Melissa Omelan: I'm not 100% aware whether we were consulted or not; I would have to refer to my executive director. But our standpoint is very supportive of that legislation.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

Ms. Orvis.

Mrs. Velma Orvis: I'm sure the grandmothers would all be in favour of this bill. We weren't consulted on it, but we often work with different aboriginal organizations within the province.

● (1235)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

Ms. Diane Redsky: Yes, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre was involved early on in the initial process with Joy Smith, and we are very supportive. When some research done by Benjamin Perrin—I'm sure anybody who knows the issue knows that he's around—shows that a perpetrator in one year makes $280,000 from the exploitation of one child, it puts some context to the enormity and the profit-making of that particular issue and emphasizes that we just can't ignore it.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

There's one more.

Mrs. Renee Kastrukoff: No, and I wasn't actually even aware of it. Being in The Pas, north from here, we're quite isolated from a lot of what happens in Winnipeg. We're quite grateful for any opportunity we get to hear about it, so thank you.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you all.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're welcome.

We'll move on to Mr. Dechert for five minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies, a number of you have mentioned the residential school issue and how it still affects and haunts the community. Could you tell me—and perhaps I can start with Ms. Kastrukoff, because I know you mentioned this specifically—how important the aboriginal school apology was to the families affected by this history, what it meant to you? Has it helped to start the healing?

Mrs. Renee Kastrukoff: It would be really difficult to speak on behalf of many others, but from feedback I get, many were grateful for it, and to many it meant a lot. To many it really meant nothing, in that it doesn't take away the pain or the cyclic effects it has caused. But at the end of the day, what was important about it was just the acknowledgement that this did go on, that this did occur, that these are the results of it, and that at some point in time the government will be taking some strong responsibility toward some healing for those who have been affected.

I think that was what we got from it.

Mr. Bob Dechert: I have to say that I didn't understand why it took so long, personally. There is a woman in my riding in Mississauga, which is a very urban area, who is a professor of aboriginal studies. She told me that her mother was in a residential school and was quite significantly and negatively affected by that experience. Her whole family was. She said that the apology really did help start the healing process; that there's a long way to go, but that she was glad it had happened.

Mrs. Renee Kastrukoff: I'm really glad to hear that. In my own case, my mother went to residential school; her mother went to residential school. I fully understand. My personal take is that I'm really glad that acknowledgement has been made and that awareness has been shown, because I think it is the first step towards healing.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Does anybody else want to comment?

Ms. Diane Redsky: I would like to echo that. It was very important. Certainly in Winnipeg, the aboriginal capital of Canada, it allowed us as a community to sort through what it means and created a unique opportunity for us to really come together and rally around defining what it means. It took a while, but it was really meaningful for many of our families. Having the next step, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and being a part of that process too is really going to make the difference in the lives of many families, even just considering the inter-generational impacts, which are sometimes not recognized. This gives us an opportunity to come together as a community to define what that looks like. It is very positive.

● (1240)

Ms. Leslie Spillett: I'd like to comment that symbolically it may have.... Obviously people had different responses to it. I think it can only be made meaningful with real social change, with a real, significant difference in Canada's policy with regard to indigenous peoples.

Again a symbolic gesture is to finally accept through the House of Commons the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It has to be concrete for this to be fulfilled. An apology.... So much is continuing into the present. It's not something that happened, end of story, get on with it. It's so integrated in every present system that we're still repeating those sorts of situations whereby a group of people feel culturally superior and act in that way and a group of people feel culturally inferior and act in that way. It continues.

I like to say that theory without action is nowhere. Well, this apology without action is not going to change my tune there.

Mr. Bob Dechert: So it's a start, but it's not sufficient.

Thank you. I appreciate this.

The Chair: We'll hear one more from the government side.

Oh, I'm sorry. Ms. Orvis.

Mrs. Velma Orvis: I think the apology was very important. I work with residential school survivors on a daily basis and inter-generationally also. The effects residential school had on our people were horrendous. It's going to take a long time for that healing on both sides.

The apology was made, and I think that if there's any meat in it, then we should have our Aboriginal Healing Foundation back, because we really need it for healing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there a short question from one more government member?

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

I wanted to thank you also, all of you, for attending today.

In particular I was interested in the comments you made, Ms. Redsky, about the question of how to account for your work. You made a number of comments, one of which was that sometimes the reporting requires counting heads and counting problems and that really doesn't jibe with what you're doing. I understand that, because your goals are empowerment, purpose, and acceptance. It's hard to measure those things. On the other hand, you gave a nice image about filling an empty bucket with a hole in it and wondering where the sand is going, so you can understand that people do need a sense of accomplishment and a sense of measurement.

Your centre has been in action since 1984, so I would be grateful if you could tell us how you measure your success. How do you measure your outcomes, and how can we report back and say this is what this agency has done to make things better?

Ms. Diane Redsky: We have been moving towards a reporting framework around looking at how people change and how the types of programs, opportunities, and things that we offer have made a difference in their lives. That always starts with a strength-based approach. So when people walk in, we're not checking the boxes: this is how many alcoholics we have, how many criminals, and how many people who lost their kids to child welfare. We have boxes that say this is how many people are carpenters, this is how many work well with children, this is how many are a Mr. or Mrs. Fix-It, and this is how many play music.

So we're looking at the strengths, and that's one of the key shifts we've made from really a deficit-driven kind of reporting. We find that kind of reporting harder to do than the capacity-building, strength-based approach. Collecting that data, we value every person who comes in because they're a human being with something to offer, and as we value people with their strengths, they feel they have the confidence and the self-esteem to do that.

What we do is monitor the programs and services that they're accessing and their role in the community. While everybody does it, some people do it faster and some people take a little longer. We report on people's activities and how they end up being involved in the community, how they end up doing things for themselves to better their family, whether it's going back to school or whatnot, and we create those opportunities within the organization.

So when people come in, they volunteer for a bit, and then they work part-time for a bit, and then they're going back to school or they're working full-time. Our organization is made up of all those people who have come in at one point in time for service. So it's documenting those. For us, it's not how many alcoholics we served and who may have changed or not; it's how many people have come in, were honoured for who they were, the types of opportunities they accessed, and then how they gave back.

● (1245)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: If there were more time, I'd ask a little more, but I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you to all of you for your unique insights into this problem. We're going to be preparing a report probably over the next couple of months, which will hopefully address at least some aspects of organized crime, and you provided a unique perspective on that whole very pressing problem.

So, again, thank you to all of you.

We're adjourned.

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