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Chair

Ms. Irene Mathyssen

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP)): Welcome to the committee.

We welcome today Jane Stinson, director of FemNorthNet Project, and Brigitte Ginn, board member from the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. We also welcome, via video conference from London, Ontario, Claire Crooks, board of directors member for the Canadian Women's Foundation.

Thank you very much for being part of our committee and for bringing information and wisdom so we can indeed have a superlative report and present it to the Parliament of Canada.

I would like to begin with CRIAW. You both have ten minutes and then we'll go into question and answer. Please begin.

Ms. Brigitte Ginn (Board Member, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women): Hello. My name is Brigitte Ginn, a CRIAW board member and recently elected chair of the communications committee. With me is Jane Stinson, the director of the FemNorthNet project. We welcome the opportunity to speak with you today about improving economic prospects for young women in Canada.

I would first like to acknowledge that we are on Algonquin territory and say *meegwetch* to them for sharing their land with me today.

CRIAW, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, celebrated its 35th anniversary this year, building on our long history of documenting the economic and social situation of women and young women in Canada through groundbreaking research.

I will begin with a story about myself that tells you of the struggles and the challenges I faced growing up as a young woman. My mother raised me and my two siblings alone at a young age. She was forced to work as much as she could just to make ends meet. We were always well fed and had a good roof over our heads because she worked so hard, always putting her children first. By doing so, she neglected her own needs and health. This is a common story faced by many women. We were part of that high percentage of single-mother families who lived in poverty in Canada.

When I was 18 years old I decided to go to university in women's and aboriginal studies. During those four years I realized that injustice, racism, and sexism were still well alive in Canada. During that time I survived an abusive relationship and violent, racist, and sexist assaults from male students right here at the University of Ottawa because I was of aboriginal ancestry and a young woman studying in both these fields.

Today I am 22 years old, a feminist, and recent graduate who is in debt because I chose to attend university, and who cannot find a job in my field because of cuts to research and public services. I'm a young woman who's left wondering about where I fit in within this current economy. This story is one of many examples of the constant struggles by young women. One just needs to look at the unemployment rate for young women as an example.

Our government and its policies regarding young women have a negative impact on our education, health, and employment. For example, high tuition and job cuts to public services and research harm young women and exacerbate their social and economic inequality. Therefore, we continue to struggle for recognition of our right to be part of our growing economy, shaping policies, programs, and laws that directly affect us.

The story I've shared with you today is just one account of how many young women are still struggling with poverty, violence, and injustice, undermining their self-worth and potential. Many women today are left to reclaim their heritage, identity, culture, and land. This is especially the case for aboriginal women.

We recognize that we need to revitalize our traditional ways that were lost because of colonization. In order to better our people and our communities, and regain the equilibrium we once had, our government needs to provide space and funding for women to develop their leadership potential and build specific skills necessary in our communities, careers, and our personal lives. Promoting the participation of these women in economic, social, and cultural life across Canada is needed. Our future depends on it, because women are at the heart of the community. If you want a thriving and stronger Canada, then young women must be fully involved.

We cannot but emphasize how important it is for our government to continue to fund national research and action on gender equality. For example, a group of young women have come together at CRIAW as a youth caucus, focused on reaching out to other young women and encouraging them to get involved. We refer to this committee as the engagement, communication, and outreach team—ECO. This team has accomplished many things, with the main focus on introducing social media tools to promote youth and indigenous engagement to CRIAW. I am now chair of this committee. Our team has provided me with an opportunity to develop work-related skills, leadership skills, individual and collective work, and decision-making.

ECO Team shows the important role that CRIAW plays as a women's organization to help improve economic prospects for young women in Canada. Our ideas and the caucus continue to grow, but the lack of funding makes it difficult for us to respond readily to current issues faced by young women.

To create a balanced economy benefiting from innovative input and solutions, it is of utmost importance to have an organizational refuge where young women can speak freely, comfortably, and safely, where women can share their experiences, ideas, and dreams, all in the hope to better women's lives. CRIAW is exactly that place that creates spaces for developing women's knowledge and actively working together to promote and advance social justice, equality, and a sustainable economy for all.

● (1535)

Thank you.

Ms. Jane Stinson (Director, FemNorthNet Project, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women): I'll carry on for the remaining time. My comments will focus on the needs of young women in northern communities, drawing on findings from CRIAW's FemNorthNet project, of which I am the director.

FemNorthNet is a research alliance focused on three northern communities: La Loche, Saskatchewan; Thompson, Manitoba; and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador. We are working closely with women in Labrador West, as well.

The network includes municipal officials, community-based organizations, national organizations, and researchers from universities across the country. It is supported primarily by SSHRC, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which CRIAW turned to for funding when Status of Women Canada stopped funding research. As well, we have funding from Status of Women Canada for the leadership development we are doing with these community partners and with women in these northern communities.

Our research here in FemNorthNet is revealing a desperate need for investment in a range of social infrastructure to support young women and improve their economic prospects, especially those in northern communities. The federal government has a key role to play here, both in providing leadership in investing and in encouraging other levels of government to invest in the range of social infrastructure that will support the economic prospects of young women in northern communities.

We're particularly wanting to focus on the need for federal investments in affordable housing, post-secondary education, child care, and health and social services to provide the supports young women in northern communities need to improve their economic prospects.

I imagine that it's no surprise to you that there is a crisis in terms of a lack of affordable housing, especially in northern communities, and especially in booming northern communities, where we're engaged. House prices are skyrocketing, and homelessness is also increasing alarmingly. This particularly hits young women, right? It's a particular concern for young women, leaving some of the people we work with calling for improved services for youth as a top priority. For example, in Thompson, the crisis centre has found that women who use their crisis shelter routinely have to return to their abusers, as there is no housing available to them.

How are young women to escape violent relationships or move out of their family homes and become economically independent and start families without affordable housing? Our recommendation is that the federal government really needs to get back to playing a role and to directly providing affordable and accessible housing so that young women can stay in their communities and improve their economic prospects there.

Post-secondary education is also extremely important. We all know how important it is for improving the prospects of young women. In the north, there are particular problems. Often you cannot get post-secondary education in your community, or if it is offered there, there's a very limited range of programs. Young women in northern communities normally have to leave their communities and travel great distances to southern locations, where they are really cut off from family and friends and both emotional and financial support. In some cases, such as the community of La Loche, Saskatchewan, which we are working with, which is primarily Dene-speaking, it's also about aboriginal students moving to a community where the language is totally different and where there are very few supports.

A really positive model we've uncovered, or that has come to our attention through our work, is the University College of the North, in Thompson, Manitoba. There, there's an expansion of the program. It is not only providing education for people in the north, it's providing good employment rates. It's also helping to diversify the economy, especially as Vale is closing its smelter, and 400 jobs will be lost in that community.

We recommend that the federal government support the establishment and expansion of post-secondary education in northern communities.

Child care is also extremely important for young women to be able to work for pay or get training or go to school. In a recent study in northern Manitoba, seven out of ten women said that the lack of child care was their number one obstacle to getting a post-secondary education. It's clear. Providing child care is really important if we want young women to be able to get post-secondary education and move on to better jobs.

● (1540)

Health and social services is a final area I want to touch on. There are certainly others that demand attention in northern communities, but this is another area where there is a strong need: a need for health, social services, and particularly mental health, addiction services, and supports to the disabled.

The Chair: I'm so sorry, Ms. Stinson, but could you wrap up?

Ms. Jane Stinson: Yes, definitely.

The federal government needs to work with the provinces and territories to invest, and ensure that health and social service needs are being met in northern communities. Where possible, through the environmental assessment process, they should be requiring that there be this broad, gender-based, socio-economic analysis of new economic developments to ensure that those social needs are also being met.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll turn now to Ms. Crooks, for ten minutes, please.

Dr. Claire Crooks (Board of Directors Member, Canadian Women's Foundation): Thank you, and good afternoon.

My name is Dr. Claire Crooks. I'm a board member of the Canadian Women's Foundation, Canada's public foundation for women and girls. Thank you for inviting us to speak to you today.

We work in three areas: helping low-income women move out of poverty; preventing violence against women and girls; and building strong, resilient girls who grow into productive adults who enjoy safe, healthy relationships.

Through our girls fund, we fund research-based programs for girls that build their protective factors and engage their bodies, minds, and spirits. The programs we fund provide a supportive all-girl environment for girls aged nine to thirteen to explore science and technology, develop healthy relationships with peers and adults, get physically active, learn financial and media literacy, and above all learn to think critically, take on leadership roles, and build strong social connections.

Here I would echo what Ms. Ginn said, in that with our programming for aboriginal girls there's an added layer of promoting cultural connectedness and strengthening ties to elders and other female mentors in the community, which is a really critical piece of programming for that group.

We currently fund 14 programs, operating in 22 communities across Canada. Thanks to some generous donors, we are in the process of doubling that number. Even with that additional funding, however, we are only able to fund 10% of the requests we receive for funding.

In addition to funding front-line community programs, we study and share the best ways to address root causes and create long-term change. We work to build the capacity of community organizations working with women and girls.

Since 1991 we've raised almost $65 million from individuals and corporations, and have invested in over 1,100 community programs around Canada. We are now one of the ten largest women's foundations in the world.

The foundation has asked me to speak to you today as a board member and because of my expertise in the area of risk behaviours in adolescence.

At the Canadian Women's Foundation, we believe that Canada will only reach its full potential when women and girls reach theirs. The corporations and individuals who support our work believe this too. If we are to have a healthy economy, we need all of our human capital. It is timely and urgent that you are looking at ways to improve the economic prospects of girls.

The message I'm going to deliver today reinforces what Ms. Stinson has offered, but looks at the earlier developmental stage of younger girls. I will make three key points and recommendations regarding the economic prospects of girls in Canada.

First, despite women's progress over the last few decades, girls in Canada still face unique and significant barriers to their long-term well-being and economic prospects.

Second, research shows that if girls are supported to build specific protective factors at the specific developmental stage of ages nine to thirteen, they thrive and grow into productive adults.

Third, we urgently need a significant investment in our girls and greatly increased funding for girls programs. We need to support what works, and it must include a gender analysis. There is an important role for private philanthropy, but to do it on the large scale needed for Canada's future economic prosperity, governments must step up.

In terms of barriers facing girls, I'll touch first on the challenges. It's true that when girls start school, they do better than boys in reading, writing, and forming friendships. But as girls move into adolescence, this early advantage far too often becomes overshadowed by challenges, with serious implications for girls' long-term health and economic prosperity.

Girls today face pressures that we adults can barely imagine. According to Dr. Blye Frank from Dalhousie University, "The challenges that a 14-year-old girl faced 20 years ago are the challenges faced by 9-year-old girls today." Every day, girls see thousands of images of women in advertising, video games, TV shows, music videos, and movies. These women are overwhelmingly thin, tall, beautiful, and white. The emergence of social media has amplified these problems.

Today the widespread and rapidly growing sexualization of girls and women has sinister undertones that go far beyond the pressure to look pretty. When girls are sexualized, their intelligence, their creativity—who they are—becomes secondary. This has serious implications for their future economic prospects.

Is it any wonder that by grade 10, girls are three times more likely than boys to be depressed, and only 14% of girls say they feel self-confident? Sadly, more than half of girls in Canada say they wish they were someone else.

Living in poverty, as almost one in ten children do in Canada today, limits the potential of all children. As well, the high rates of violence that girls in particular experience is a major challenge.

● (1545)

If you are a female in Canada today, you are mostly likely to be sexually assaulted when you are between the ages of 13 and 15. Teen dating violence is a serious and common experience all over Canada.

Today, teens in romantic relationships have a one-in-three chance of being abused emotionally, sexually, or physically. According to police reports on dating violence, over 80% of the victims are female. Dating violence is one of the strongest predictors of violence in adult relationships, which we know is a major barrier to women's economic security and participation.

Research clearly shows that the triad of risky behaviours for adolescence—drugs, alcohol, and violence—co-occur. If teens become entangled in just one of these issues, they are more likely to experience the other two. For example, girls in an abusive relationship have higher rates of substance abuse. They are more likely to run away from home, drop out of school, develop an eating disorder, engage in suicidal behaviour, have unsafe sex, and become pregnant. Clearly, the repercussions and the limits on their ability to contribute to the economy can last a lifetime.

Aboriginal girls in Canada are especially at risk from violence and poverty. Incredibly, about 75% of aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have been sexually abused. To address the very serious challenges to their future economic prospects, we must invest in programs that help them to finish high school, increase their safety, and reach their full potential.

So in meeting this challenge, how do we help girls navigate through this minefield of sexual assault, dating violence, hypersexualization, and poverty?

We must reach girls before they enter the minefield. Our research has shown that with the right kind of help at the right time—between the ages of nine and thirteen—girls can learn to challenge these messages, improve their self-esteem and safety, and successfully navigate adolescence.

We must invest in programs specifically designed for girls. Girls repeatedly tell us that this is the only way they feel safe enough to speak up and take on leadership roles. If we can teach a girl to think critically, to feel confident, and to develop strong social connections, we can change the course of her life.

Girls who think critically make better life choices because they understand what influences their decision-making. They learn to recognize the powerful role played by media and peer pressure and learn to weigh these influences against what they actually want for themselves.

Girls who are confident have the courage to take on new challenges. We need large-scale investment in programs where girls explore science, technology, and trades, opening their eyes to new possibilities. We need to prepare girls—half of our human capital—for careers with higher incomes, careers that meet our country's need for skilled workers.

Girls with strong social connections—those who are connected to schools, pro-social peers, and a caring adult or mentor—feel more of a sense of belonging and safety. They consistently perform better academically than their less connected peers, which sets the stage for further academic and career attainment.

Social connection is one of the strongest protective factors against a wide range of negative outcomes. Connected girls demonstrate lower rates of teen pregnancy, substance use and abuse, suicidal behaviours, and dating violence, all of which significantly interfere with future academic and job success.

Eighty percent of the girls who attend our funded programs increase their skills and knowledge in these three protective factors: critical thinking skills, confidence, and social connection. One girl told us: "I feel different about myself. I know that I'm not totally worthless. I used to think I wasn't very valuable and stuff. I learned I'm worth more than I thought I was." Another said, "In this program, I feel like I'm treated like a person, not just a girl."

We recommend that the Government of Canada make a significant and large-scale investment in girls, supporting programs with a gender analysis that build protective factors and skills. We recommend that you work in partnership with other levels of government and with private philanthropy. This is how we will unleash the potential of half our population and have a healthy society and a thriving economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Crooks. We appreciate very much hearing from you.

Now we'll go to our question and answer portion of the committee meeting.

We'll start with Madam Truppe and Madam Bateman, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank our panellists today too. It was very interesting to hear all your thoughts on everything.

I would like to commend the Canadian Women's Foundation for raising $65 million—since 1991, I think you said. That is really good.

My question is for the Canadian Women's Foundation. As you know, the focus of our committee study is prospects for Canadian girls with regard to economic prosperity, economic participation, and economic leadership, and what changes can be made by Status of Women to their approach in improving them.

Can you reiterate what recommendations the Canadian Women's Foundation would offer the committee on how Status of Women Canada could actually directly improve economic participation, prosperity, and leadership in girls?

Dr. Claire Crooks: There's obviously not a one-size-fits-all or only-one-time approach, but I think what we need to look at is what girls need at relevant developmental stages. Our research shows that between nine and thirteen, you just see this significant dip in confidence, in taking on leadership roles, in a lot of the things that you would recognize are necessary for successful academic and career attainment.

I should add that our programming really targets marginalized girls in particular, so girls who face other barriers, and these challenges are further amplified for them. A specific example is supporting programming that really connects marginalized girls with strong adult female mentors. One of our programs works up in a first nations community near Fort McMurray. There are all kinds of community challenges there.

In one of the girls groups, they asked girls at the beginning of the group to give the characteristics of a leader. When they were asked, "What's a leader?", they said a leader was male, and probably old, and white—a very narrow view. By the end of the group, what had really shifted for them was recognizing that they could be a leader in their community, that the leaders were their aunties, and their elders, and their moms.

So shifting that view of what's possible for girls at that age has really significant implications for them as they move into high school and beyond. They need to at least see those paths that are available to them.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Great. Thank you.

I have one more question, and then I'll turn it over to Madam Bateman.

The minister for Status of Women Canada was here, and we learned from her that the approach we're always addressing has three pillars: economic security, violence, and democratic participation. In your work, do you find there's a link between addressing violence against girls and improving their economic prospects with some of the programs you have?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Absolutely. And you can look at it from different angles.

From a basic needs point of view, one of our most fundamental human needs, obviously, is to be safe. You see this if you're working with women who are in shelters, for example. It's very hard for women who don't have safety in their relationships, who don't have a place for themselves and their children to live, to be thinking about what program they're going to access to go back to school or upgrade their skills. It needs to happen in sequence.

So anything that promotes safety is critical in terms of the long-term prospects and in terms of the short-term prospects. Adolescent girls who are in abusive relationships with a controlling partner are going to have a lot more challenges having a part-time job or volunteering if their partner is very controlling over how they spend their free time or very jealous about them possibly working with other boys.

You see it in adults. You see it in adolescents. So going back a step, giving girls the skills they need to navigate these relationships as adolescents in a safe way and in a way that maintains their own integrity is a really important starting point.

● (1555)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

Madam Bateman.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all for your presentations and being here today.

I particularly want to thank Ms. Stinson for her comments about University College of the North, based out of Thompson, Manitoba. I come from Manitoba, and it is a huge success. This is in no way to take away from the successes of Athabasca University, which is equally outstanding.

I think both of those institutions—thank you for knowing about them—would be so grateful to serve more of the community that you have all spoken of so eloquently, because they have a track record of actually tailoring the needs to certainly the community. They serve the aboriginal community. They are sensitive to serving the needs of young women, many of whom are also young mothers. They have tailored that and made that possible.

To me, economic security comes with an education. If we can give these young women an education, on their terms, with their babies, which is what those online universities are doing, often in person, but often online, and very respectful to the needs....

Could you talk briefly about how you have reached out? To me, that's a very cost-effective way to reach out, to serve the economic security requirements of our young women. Could you speak to how you're doing that with your community?

Ms. Jane Stinson: Perhaps I just need to clarify that it's our research, with our community partners, so we're not reaching out directly—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: But you're working in partnership with...?

Ms. Jane Stinson: We certainly want to encourage and promote the model of a university like the University College of the North and call for that model elsewhere, because, as you say, it's a successful model. What we're encountering in—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I'm just curious. If I could go back to that, why are you calling for the model elsewhere? Because they would be happy to serve.... I mean, Athabasca University, for example, serves the needs of Canadians all across the country, and their capacity to serve augments with each client they have.

Ms. Jane Stinson: Yes, okay. Thank you.

I think part of what we're learning through our work with women in northern communities includes the challenges they also face with distance communication. They've made it really clear to us in our research alliance that working through Internet, webinars, and conference calls, etc., falls far short of the value of face-to-face communication. So while I agree that distance education is useful, and while more students might be brought to a place like Thompson to expand their program, if you're in Labrador, you need to have a facility there that—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Has your research—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Oh, okay.

Well, I'm fascinated with this. I thank you so much for starting the journey of discovery.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Madam Freeman for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

My questions are for Ms. Stinson and CRIAW.

I think research and advocacy are the key to moving forward to achieve women's equality in Canada. Given that you, according to your website—and this is a quote—"are the only women's organization in Canada focused exclusively on nurturing feminist research and making it accessible for public advocacy and education", you're well placed, I think, to describe to this committee the direct links between feminist research and political advocacy and then to women's equality.

Could you talk a bit about why Canadian women need strong advocacy and strong research to represent them in the political context, so that politicians such as ourselves can make good decisions about how we can get to women's equality?

● (1600)

Ms. Jane Stinson: Sure. I think research is really important to be able to bring forward new information, to bring forward the factual basis, and to bring forward new discoveries and new information. Sometimes it takes the form of quantitative data, and sometimes it's in the form of voices, such as the stories of young women like Brigitte or others.

CRIAW has a long history of doing research on issues concerning women. For example, years ago we did a project called "The Body Image" that had young women write in and talk about their experiences as a young woman with their body and body image. It's all part of a process for them; I think of their change, their consciousness-raising, and bringing about change. For CRIAW, which partnered with *Chatelaine*, it was also advocacy. It was to say that there's a problem out here and there are things that need to be done. One is that we need to start talking about it as a society and whatever other actions need to be taken.

That's one example of what CRIAW has done with young women, but yes, generally I think that it's just very important to do the research, to bring forward new information, to bring forward voices, to point out what's not working—

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Exactly.

Ms. Jane Stinson: —and what can work better, and to be able to advocate alternatives, things that will make improvements, which this committee is seeking to do around looking at young women.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Right, and obviously all the research we need to do on women's equality isn't done. Otherwise, we'd be equal, right? I feel there's still a lot to do.

Do you consider research important in us being able to provide economic prospects for women specifically? There's the fact that Status of Women Canada doesn't fund research and advocacy—is that going to have an effect? Could you could speak a bit about that?

Ms. Jane Stinson: I think it does have an effect. It certainly had an effect on CRIAW. We went through and are still sort of going through some very difficult years as a result of the change in the funding criteria for Status of Women Canada. We were lucky in getting funding from SSHRC to be able to carry on some of our work in this area. But in our view, there's a need for Status of Women Canada to go back to funding research and advocacy. It should be, in our view, part of the mandate of that organization.

But there are a lot of organizations, women's organizations, that don't have the advantages of CRIAW in terms of a network of researchers who could still do useful research, and certainly useful advocacy, and who need that funding from Status of Women Canada.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Did you receive funding in the past from the independent research fund that Status of Women Canada had?

Ms. Jane Stinson: I'm not sure about the early days, but I do know that CRIAW's whole creation and early strength relied very much on funding from Status of Women Canada. It, like many other national bilingual women's feminist organizations, really got started through Status of Women Canada. We've also received funding from other sources over the years, including individual and institutional donors.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Of course. It's important that the government participate, but of course we all understand that other partners become involved.

Could you talk a little bit about what happened to CRIAW after the Status of Women funding started being cut in 2006?

Ms. Jane Stinson: We went through a very difficult time. We had to lay off our full-time executive director. We went from a staff of five to a staff of two who were part-time. So we really struggled. The board had to step up to the plate, and volunteers really had to take on trying to run the organization. We focused on finding alternative sources of revenue and, as I said, on having some success with that, and we've started to rebuild.

But we have nowhere near the strength we had when I got involved in the board about ten years ago.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: So that very much influenced your capacity to advance women's equality.

Ms. Jane Stinson: Totally. Even now, for this project, we're starting to get findings for research on women in the north.

We've been wanting to update fact sheets, like the fact sheet on violence against women and the fact sheet on immigrant and refugee women, for a long time. Just recently we have been able to get resources to do that. But it really set back our research agenda, absolutely.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: What would you recommend that Status of Women Canada do to improve the economic prospects of women? I know that research would probably be one of those elements, as we've been talking about. But what else can we do? What is the number one thing we should be doing so that girls will be able to look forward to equality in the future?

● (1605)

Ms. Jane Stinson: What's the number one thing? It's always hard to say.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: More than that, what are the first steps we should be taking?

Ms. Jane Stinson: For Status of Women Canada, I think that continuing to fund research and advocacy is important, as is the funding of national women's organizations or women's organizations.

Part of what Status of Women Canada has done, as well, has been to continue to dispense a lot of money. For a lot of community organizations, they have provided front-line community service, which is different from the original mandate. So we think that returning to funding women's organizations and feminist organizations, as its main focus, would be important.

Brigitte has talked about the importance of that and about how those organizations contribute to women's leadership and growth and development.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Right. So maybe not in words but in actions Status of Women Canada's mandate has changed, essentially in the way it funds now.

Ms. Jane Stinson: Definitely.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: How were you able to pick yourselves up and look for alternative funding? I know you fund more community-based projects now. Was that an adaptation to the way Status of Women Canada does funding now?

Ms. Jane Stinson: No. CRIAW has a long history of working with community partners and of bridging that gap between academia and community. We started to look at SSHRC funding and we're having success there.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: And that itself isn't exactly expansive.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Madam James, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our panel of guests today.

Ms. Crooks, in your speech you mentioned something about $65 million. Did you say that was funding you had received from individuals and corporations?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Yes. In the past year, Status of Women Canada funded a particular piece of work that the Canadian Women's Foundation did, but typically we do not go after government funding, so it's individual donors and corporate sponsors.

Ms. Roxanne James: What kinds of organizations or corporate sponsors do you find are interested in the issues that you cover?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Who is on our big money list? It's very wide-ranging. We have a tremendous group of volunteers right across the country. One of our biggest partners has been Rogers Media and *Chatelaine*, and all of their different offshoots. There's a range of banks and of different groups. We have very skilled people in that fundraising area, who work with partners to find some kind of signature event they want to do or some kind of process. Most of our money comes from individual donors.

Ms. Roxanne James: So it's individuals.

Dr. Claire Crooks: Right, it's individual donors.

Ms. Roxanne James: And the private sector as well?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Yes. One of our campaigns was “Women Moving Women”, and we found 2,500 women across the country to commit $2,500 over five years to help move another woman and her family out of poverty.

So there are different campaigns.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you, Ms. Crooks.

To CRIAW, this is just a quick question. I'm hearing from our one witness today that they were able to raise $65 million from individuals and the private sector. I'm just wondering whether your organization has also tried to do the same thing to help fund the areas that you say are lacking.

Ms. Jane Stinson: Yes, definitely, and we've not had nearly the success. Maybe it's a different focus—

Ms. Roxanne James: Do you know why you're not having success? Is it the issue you're covering, or is it...?

Ms. Jane Stinson: I think partly because we focus a lot on issues relating to poverty in women and marginalized women, our constituency doesn't have the money to donate that amount.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

Ms. Crooks, you mentioned something in your speech about “protective factors” for the age group of nine to thirteen, who then become productive adults. I'm not quite sure what you meant by “protective factors”. What were you exactly talking about?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Sure.

Actually, I'd like to clarify one previous comment. If I put on my researcher hat, I certainly have not had access to $65 million in research funding. I think it's a bit unfair to compare the Canadian Women's Foundation with a research outfit, because—

Ms. Roxanne James: No, Ms. Crooks—I'm sorry to cut you off—I wasn't comparing. I'm just wondering why your organization was successful and what the barriers were for the other organizations.

● (1610)

Dr. Claire Crooks: Okay. Right.

Ms. Roxanne James: To get back to my question, when you talk about "protective factors", what does that mean?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Protective factors are the opposite of risk factors. What it means for a developmental researcher is that if you look at two groups of youth who have different outcomes of interest—adolescent girls who were successful in school versus those who weren't—you can identify risk factors. Protective factors are essentially the opposite, things that even in the face of poverty, even in the face of maybe experiencing violence, serve an important role.

In my own research with adolescents—

Ms. Roxanne James: I'm sorry, I'd like to ask you another question.

We heard from another witness in a previous session that girls, when they become a certain age, would actually rather be called stupid, I believe they said, than ugly. I'm not sure if I have that exactly....

A voice: Was it "fat"?

Ms. Roxanne James: Right: fat.

A voice: That's how middle-aged women feel too.

Ms. Roxanne James: I actually found that quite alarming.

In your speech you mentioned that girls are actually performing better in public school, but once they hit that age of nine to thirteen or fourteen years old, they tend to start to drop behind boys. It kind of ties into that other statement—I'm just trying to get your opinion on this—that girls mature physically faster than boys do. Do you think this has anything to do with the fact that at that particular age, girls take a step back and are not necessarily trying to overachieve with the boys as the opposite sex, in particular with education and so forth...?

It's been a long time since I was that age, but I know that at a particular age girls become more interested in the opposite sex, in boys and dating and so forth. I'm wondering if you think that has anything to tie in with the fact that girls start to fall behind a bit at that age.

That's just a "yes or no" curious question.

Dr. Claire Crooks: You know, I think you're missing a piece, which is about the hypersexualization of girls. Girls that age aren't talking about not doing their math homework because they want to look pretty for a boy; they're talking about this massive pressure that is driven by multi-billion-dollar marketing that you have to look and be a certain way. It's a very sexy way compared to what it used to be.

That's why I was saying it's not just about having to be pretty; it's about these very confusing messages for girls who are nine, ten, and eleven years old. Why are we selling lingerie to them? Why are nine-year-old girls able to buy push-up bras? What's that image? Rather than that they get interested in the opposite sex, they're fighting off this bombardment of media messages, and that doesn't leave a whole lot of time and room for other pursuits and development.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

Recently Status of Women Canada did a call for proposals, and it had to do with rural and remote communities for girls and young women. I'm just wondering whether you think there is a definite difference between the barriers that face girls from remote or rural areas versus girls who might be in urban centres.

Again, this study is based on economic prospects of young girls.

Dr. Claire Crooks: Absolutely. In my research role I'm involved with a program called the Fourth R, which has developed school-based prevention programming that's in 2,000 schools around the country. As well, I have a Public Health Agency of Canada innovation strategy grant to work with communities in the Northwest Territories in particular, so I have been able to spend time in Yellowknife and Behchoko, and I've seen first-hand how different the barriers are. Certainly poverty is a huge barrier. Certainly in some of these communities, the rates of sexual abuse experienced by girls are much higher than what would be the national norm. There are also some of the things that the other witnesses spoke about today. For example, when you have to make a decision to leave your community at a certain age to get further schooling, there are obviously big barriers associated with that as well. Obviously there is also the question of economic prospects in general.

Ms. Roxanne James: I have just one—

The Chair: No, sorry. Thank you.

Ms. Roxanne James: I'm cut off? Okay.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Madam Sgro, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I thank you all for being here. Both organizations have provided very valuable information.

I'd like to give Ms. Ginn an opportunity to comment a bit.

You certainly have had your share of challenges for the young and beautiful woman that you are. What do you see for the next five years as far as the roadblocks that are affecting you today go?

Ms. Brigitte Ginn: Definitely there are debts. There's tuition debt. That's a huge roadblock for me. There are also the unemployment rates for young women, as well as the cuts to public services that I mentioned.

I just graduated from a double major in women's studies and aboriginal studies, so those cuts kind of limit my options with regard to the kind of job I can get in my field. Right now I'm actually thinking of going back to school just to get another degree, hoping that it will help me with finding a job in my field.

What do I see for the next five years? I'll probably still volunteer at CRIAW, because I definitely understand the importance of the research. To be more specific—

● (1615)

Hon. Judy Sgro: I would hope you would continue to be involved with CRIAW, just because it sounds like an excellent organization—

Ms. Brigitte Ginn: It is.

Hon. Judy Sgro: —and it can use lots of volunteer help.

Just based on what you're saying, given where your studies were, where did you expect to find employment? Were you thinking that you would be a natural for employment within the governments of the country somewhere along the line because of the fact that you took your studies in those particular fields?

Ms. Brigitte Ginn: I was hoping to be working in shelters or research organizations that focus on bettering women's lives. That was my hope. But as I mentioned, the cuts to public services obviously target many of those women's organizations or more specifically feminist organizations.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you.

Ms. Stinson, have you done any work on the kinds of barriers that are facing women in the law enforcement fields?

Ms. Jane Stinson: I'm afraid I haven't. CRIAW may have in its history, but I don't know of it.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Have you done any work with regard to the culture that's emphasized in those organizations? You haven't done any kind of research in those areas?

Ms. Jane Stinson: Personally, I have not.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Okay. You pointed out the issue of housing and child care being a significant challenge. There is the whole issue of the social needs. Do you want to elaborate a bit more on what you see as the social needs that aren't being met, which are holding women back?

Ms. Jane Stinson: We refer to it as social infrastructure. The federal government has recently invested a lot in infrastructure, but that's more roads and bridges and physical bricks and mortar types of infrastructure. We want to call attention to the social infrastructure. It is just as important.

My focus recently has been on economic development in the north. We see this government investing a lot in helping companies exploit resources in the north and develop the north, but we're not seeing the social infrastructure investment that's also needed. So we're seeing very big problems emerging.

Through our local partner, Mokami Status of Women Centre in Happy Valley—Goose Bay, we participated in the environmental assessment hearings about the building of the dam in the Lower Churchill River. Nalcor, a big crown corporation in Newfoundland and Labrador that's spearheading this, actually claimed in front of the environmental assessment panel that there will be no social impacts on the community of Happy Valley—Goose Bay resulting from their economic development. We, and the I think the environmental assessment panel, were quite astounded to hear that. There is also a lack of recognition about what the impacts of economic development can be, and particularly in northern communities. So you need investment in social infrastructure as much as in any other form of infrastructure when you're talking about economic development.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Just quickly, how is the FemNorthNet program coming? Where are you with that particular initiative now?

Ms. Jane Stinson: We're starting year three of a five-year project, and things are getting quite interesting and exciting. We're starting to get some interesting results. We're also really starting to work with women in the communities and engage them in identifying the challenges and addressing them. There's also leadership development.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you.

Ms. Crooks, many of us, or perhaps I'll speak for myself, represent very high-needs areas. In my particular area, there are very high-needs young women. I see a lot of them at nine and ten years old engaging in activities that clearly are taking them in a negative direction.

I applaud the work your organization is doing, and I'm wondering if you can tell me how you are reaching out to some of these more marginalized young women and communities.

● (1620)

Dr. Claire Crooks: The part that the Canadian Women's Foundation does well is raise the money and identify the programs. It's the community partners and programs that really do the work.

To go back to that example of the girls program in Fort McMurray, to echo what Ms. Stinson was saying, there's been a huge and profound impact from the economic development in Fort McMurray, where girls of nine, ten, and eleven are ending up being sexually exploited by men who are working in the community, who are very transient and who have money on their hands. The community identified that need.

So this is about working through the people who are already connected in a community. Most of the success comes from having that strong local partner. It's not having an external group come in and tell people what programming to do. In our programming with first nations youth, it's very much working through those pre-existing relationships in the communities, with people who are already connected, who have the traditional and moral authority, I think, that you're looking for in the community, versus coming in as the economic authority.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Does your organization do any work when it comes to the media in terms of communicating with them on behalf of women—i.e., the images and so on that we continually see and that are such poor examples—when you're trying to set aside opportunities for young women to move forward? All you have to do is look at one minute of television; they're being exploited everywhere.

Dr. Claire Crooks: Yes, we do a lot of work on that.

To go back to the question earlier on the role of feminist research, I would add to Ms. Stinson's comments, which I thought were excellent, and just say that a lot of people don't understand that research, especially quantitative research, isn't just uncovered like an archeological dig—i.e., here are the numbers, and they are what they are. In the process of research, quantitative or otherwise, the way the questions get framed, the questions that don't get asked, the voices that get heard—every step of that is shaped by the researcher's lens.

When we talk about these kinds of impacts and issues, it has really been the feminist research community that has helped bring them to the forefront in a different way, so absolutely I echo the strong need for Status of Women Canada to take that role again.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Crooks. We appreciate that.

We'll now go to Madam Young for five minutes.

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Thank you.

I'd like to commend absolutely the work that all of you do. It's completely valuable and very important to Canada, obviously, and incredibly important for the future of Canada. I just wanted to say that to begin with.

I need you to know that I have been a foster mother for 18 years, and have raised seven children in my own home from the downtown eastside, from refugee camps overseas, etc. So in terms of working with teenagers and youth, having been a native youth counsellor in the downtown eastside of Vancouver as well, I'm quite familiar with those issues. In addition to that, I'm a stepmother and also a mother of twins who are 14.

I've lived through it personally, then, in terms of raising children, and also as a professional—I'm a sociologist, and I've developed programs, etc., in this area—as well as sitting on the board of the YWCA and helping establish the longest-running breakfast program in Canada, etc., in the downtown eastside.

I'm laying all that out as a foundation for my questions, which you may find a little challenging. I'm not wanting to be challenging, but I'm wanting to push you a little bit because of your expertise in this area. We're here, obviously, to try to get from you as much information and ideas, etc., as possible. So I want to just give you that as a backdrop.

Number one, there's been a incredible amount of work done by the Resilience Research Centre in Halifax, and I'm wondering, Ms. Crooks, if you've heard about that. As well, what kinds of studies have interlinked young girls with the Resilience Centre, and how can we blend that kind of research with programs?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Yes, I'm obviously familiar with Dr. Ungar's work in the centre there. Really, we're talking about the same thing: that protective factors lead to resilient outcomes. I think there are assets or resiliency factors or protective factors—whatever you want to call them—that operate at different levels, so there are things you can do with the girls themselves, and then absolutely you need to have resiliency for protective environments. So we need to work with schools and communities, right up to your colleague's last point about the media. We can't just work with the girls themselves when we're working in a system that doesn't value them or that is bombarding them with these sexualized messages, or in which they're experiencing tremendous levels of violence just because they're girls. We need to work at all those levels, because resiliency comes from all of those.

● (1625)

Ms. Wai Young: So are you saying then that this is something that is built into all of your programming?

Dr. Claire Crooks: The Canadian Women's Foundation is strongly committed to research-based practices, so when they began the Girls' Fund, they hired researchers to do a scan of work such as that coming out of the Resilience Research Centre and to look at what the factors are.

The factors are leadership skills, strong critical thinking.... Those are all resiliency factors that have been identified and well documented in research. My own research with first nations youth has been focused on cultural connectedness. There's not as long-standing a research base there, but the importance of that is starting to be better articulated. That's where I'm doing some work.

So when we do a call for funding, it looks like a best-practice guideline. It asks questions such as how you get parent involvement and how you do these things that are recognized as best practices, and that's how we adjudicate the hundreds of applications we get for funding.

Ms. Wai Young: Given how important modelling is, particularly for young children, have you ever done studies to correlate that with the average norm? For example, in Canada we have a 50% divorce rate and homes that have blended families, etc. Have you correlated that with the impact that has on our youth and how they're doing?

Dr. Claire Crooks: The other area I do research in is domestic violence, and particularly the overlap of custody and divorce. So I think when you look at research—and this goes back to my point of it being socially constructed—you can look at it and see that divorce appears to be bad for kids and that would lead to the implication that we should try to lower divorce rates. When you start to break that apart and look at the role of poverty in single-parent families and the role of high conflict and the role of domestic violence, it's not divorce per se. This is debatable, but my reading is that it's not the divorce, it's all these other pieces. When there's a divorce and it doesn't send somebody into abject poverty, and they're free from violence, all those effects on kids tend to wash out.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go now to Madame Brosseau for five minutes, please.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Thank you very much.

I really appreciate the time and the information and personal stories you've shared with us. I find they're very important.

Since I have only five minutes, I'm going to ask quick questions.

We know that Status of Women Canada has maintained funding. That's great, but it has kind of changed the way it is funding and doing things. Canada used to be kind of a front-runner when it came to women's rights and how women are in Canada. That's gone down over the past few years. I think we really need to identify the root causes, which could be poverty, child care, education, and housing.

What can the federal government do soon? What practical steps can we take to make women's lives better? Would those be research, gender-based analysis, pay equity? I'll ask both of you for a quick answer.

Thank you.

Ms. Jane Stinson: We have tried to call attention to a number of things.

Research continues to be important. Certainly we support pay equity, and I think the federal government does have direct abilities. Brigitte emphasized the importance of not having an austerity budget but rather continuing to invest in public services and public sector jobs. We've talked about child care, post-secondary education, getting back into the housing field to ensure that there's affordable housing, and working with provinces, particularly around the social programs and social services. It's a joint responsibility. Federal transfers to the provinces are really important, but maybe also, actually, the government should work to develop innovative programs that begin to address these needs.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Claire Crooks, do you have an answer, like practical steps we can do?

Dr. Claire Crooks: Sure. I like the point Ms. Stinson made about when we analyze opportunities or decisions or any kind of policy, not just doing it on an economic basis and whether you're talking about development in Goose Bay or whether you're talking about a whole new strategy or policy, really putting the social impacts on par with the economic impacts and realizing that if you ignore social impacts they usually end up having very negative and expensive long-term financial ones.

As an example, I know lotteries aren't federal, but what you see is that you can say adding a bingo or a lottery or a race track will bring this much money into the community, and that sounds great. Then you look at some of the analyses around what that actually costs in terms of increased addictions and problems with child care supervision.

It depends where your analysis starts and ends. I would say, for any of these policy decisions being made, to look at both sides of that equation.

● (1630)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Okay. I'll hand it over to Marjolaine, because we're sharing five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you, ladies, I congratulate you on all your work. It is quite exceptional.

Ms. Crooks, on your website, you say: "Improving gender equality improves economic and social conditions for everyone."

Can you give us more details on this subject and tell us whether, in your opinion, gender equality has been achieved?

[*English*]

Dr. Claire Crooks: First, to the second part, no. That's an easy one. If you look at pay equity—lots of people have articulated it better than I do—no.

I think the point that women are still the heart of their families and of their communities shows that when you lift them up in terms of economic and social prospects, they will also lift up their families, their partners, and their children. That's where it's not just about funding or programming for women for women's sake; it is about increasing the prospects of the whole community.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

Ms. Stinson, earlier we talked about the obstacles to the education of young women up north, but this problem also exists in the south. In your opinion, what could the federal government do to help solve this problem?

[*English*]

Ms. Brigitte Ginn: Okay.

Definitely some of the most obvious barriers would be being a single mother, high tuition fees—obviously that might make people not want to go to university, for sure. As well, a lot of universities are not culturally sensitive. Jane kind of spoke a bit about that in terms of the north, in terms of language and not honouring the culture or traditions much, and I guess I'm speaking more toward aboriginal people.

The Chair: I'm so dreadfully sorry, but our time is up.

I want to say thank you very much to Madam Crooks, Madam Stinson, and Ms. Ginn. It was our pleasure to have you here today. Thank you so much for the information you've provided to this committee. It will be invaluable to our study.

I'm going to suspend briefly now so that our guests can leave and we can proceed to the second part of our afternoon study.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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