HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women

IWFA • NUMBER 008 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, June 13, 2013

Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

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● (1800)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to the eighth meeting of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. Ms. Marie Sutherland is here with us. Ms. Bridget Tolley is also here with us, and by video conference from Prince George, British Columbia, we welcome Mary Teegee and Wendy Kellas.

Ms. Sutherland, perhaps I could ask you to begin our meeting today.

Ms. Marie Sutherland (As an Individual): Thank you.

You'll have to talk up a little bit; I could hardly hear.

The Chair: There is a bit of ambient noise right now, but it will settle down. You also have an earpiece, which I would recommend that you use when you're listening. It helps out a lot.

Before we begin, do you have a comment, Mr. Goguen?

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Madam Chair, on a preliminary matter, could the clerk, when he gets the witnesses, try to make some determination as to their willingness to come personally or appear via video conferencing. I know that in some instances it's difficult for the witnesses to pay for the expenses up front and then be reimbursed. I don't want to take away from their ability to testify, but if it's easier for them financially to testify via teleconferencing, I think all efforts should be made to determine whether or not that's really better for them.

The Chair: That seems reasonable to me. I'll ask the clerk if that's okay with him, and I think it is.

Thank you. That's a very good suggestion. I appreciate that.

Ms. Bennett?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): I don't think we can have two tiers of witnesses, so that the people who can afford to put the money up ahead of time get to come, and the people who can't afford to put the money up ahead of time don't get to come.

The Chair: I think the suggestion was more about up-front costs. The witnesses who travel to Ottawa are reimbursed. The comment that I heard was more about giving the option to the witness. Sometimes people don't know that they have the option of appearing by video conference. I have no issue with giving them the option or letting them know that this is an option.

Mr. Robert Goguen: I'm facilitating their testimony, not impeding it.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): With respect to both my colleagues, I think we had agreed to take such matters to subcommittee so that we can respect the witnesses' time.

The Chair: That's a good idea.

With that, we'll begin.

Ms. Sutherland.

Ms. Marie Sutherland: Thank you.

My name is Marie Sutherland. I'm known as *Waseskwan Biyesiw Iskwew*. That's my Cree name. I work for the Native Women's Transition Centre, and I also work for two different high-risk groups. I am here to voice, as an elder, the violence against aboriginal women and girls, and the missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls, and to address the root causes of the violence against aboriginal women and girls. I have a few examples.

One is women who are leaving abusive relationships on the reserves and coming to the big city to start a new life. Some come with their children, while some have to fight to get their kids back from their ex-partners. These women are very vulnerable. Some come to the city without money when they're leaving abusive relationships. They're tired of getting beat up and abused, and the abuse is not stopping. Some become addicted to drugs and alcohol and are controlled. Women and girls are forced to prostitute themselves. They get raped and beaten. They go missing and they are murdered.

Every day, there is a woman or girl who has been raped and beaten. I hear those stories every day in the kind of work I do. As aboriginal women, we need help from the government to enforce more police services to protect aboriginal women and girls from violence and murder and from going missing.

Every day, I hear stories about girls being raped and girls being beaten—every day—and instead of the government spending millions of dollars in hearings over the next couple of years, we need your help now, today, to hear us as aboriginal people, and to put some money into the police forces to find who's responsible for the violence, for the missing and murdered women and girls.

We need funds and resources to develop awareness and education programs on the reserves and in schools, programs about violence and the missing and murdered women, because some of these women come from the reserves. They have really big dreams of starting school, but they get grabbed by a pimp and the next thing we see is that they're in the newspaper because they've been murdered.

What I'm asking for most is the protection from violence for the women and children and to find who's responsible for the violence and the murdered women. The government and the police services have the responsibility to provide justice for victims and end the violence.

[*Witness speaks in Cree*]

That's it: no more violence against aboriginal women.

That's all I have to say. I don't have all the documents because this was given to me as I was leaving from Winnipeg for a different meeting.

Thank you very much for paying attention to me.

● (1805)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you for being here. We appreciate your remarks.

Next we have Families of Sisters in Spirit.

I believe, Ms. Tolley, that you are sharing your time with Ms. Cardinal?

Ms. Bridget Tolley (Co-Founder, Families of Sisters in Spirit): I am.

The Chair: Welcome. The two of you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Bridget Tolley: *Kwe*; hello.

I would first like to acknowledge the territory we are on. We are on Algonquin territory, the territory of my ancestors. *Meegwetch* for inviting me here today to speak on behalf of Families of Sisters in Spirit.

It breaks my heart to be here again. I was invited to speak two years ago by the Committee on the Status of Women and here I am again, two years later. I started this journey for justice in 2001 when I lost a very important person in my life, my mother, Gladys Tolley. Tonight I'm here to speak as a family member on behalf of all our families.

As a family member for almost 12 years, I have not seen any change for our missing and murdered women. We know that so many of our sisters, so many—I don't want to put a number here because there are too many different numbers so I'm saying "so many"—of our sisters are missing and murdered and it continues even more today.

I know this because I post these women. Almost every day I post two or three, sometimes five or six, during a week. Today, I'm here to ask you to hear from the families. These families have been left out. The same voices are being heard all the time, but with no result and with very few families involved. So many people are speaking out on our behalf, but nothing is coming out of these meetings except another meeting.

We don't want to wait any longer. They had a national aboriginal summit in Winnepeg in 2012. They had an AFN-NWAC assembly in April. We haven't heard anything. All we know is that there's going to be a meeting in 2014 for the missing and murdered women. Well, families don't want to wait that long. We want action, and we want action now.

Enough studies—here's all the studies and even more. Recommendations, if you guys want recommendations they're all here. Books and books and books are here. Is this what we need, more reports, more recommendations? How about starting right here with Amnesty's "Stolen Sisters"? There are so many recommendations. We don't need any more recommendations. We have them all here. All we have to do is come back and look at these. We don't need to make any more recommendations, there are so many here already.

What we need are financial resources to assist families. We need resources for anti-violence work, prevention work, grief and counselling, community safety, programs for men and women and children, for families going through trial. We need billboards. We need front-line workers. We need so many services and we need them now.

How much did this committee cost? We could have used those resources to help families. I also wonder what the RCMP are doing to help indigenous women and families. There was also a national database. What is it doing to help families? We don't need any more studies. We need action.

In one of the interviews with Prime Minister Harper, he said the issue has been studied extensively and "it is time to pass to action." I think it's time to pass to action, too. This is why we shouldn't have any more studies.

● (1810)

No one has the right to condemn you on how you repair your heart, or how long you choose to grieve because no one knows how much you're hurting. Recovering takes time and everyone heals at their own pace.

Meegwetch. I'm going to pass it over to Colleen Cardinal.

Ms. Colleen Cardinal (As an Individual): How much time do I have?

The Chair: Five minutes.

Ms. Colleen Cardinal: My name is Colleen Cardinal. My adopted name is Colleen Hele. I'm Plains Cree from Edmonton, Alberta. I was adopted and raised in Ontario. My family has been tremendously affected by historical colonial violence. I'm the daughter of a residential school survivor who is now deceased. She went to Blue Quills Indian Residential School in Alberta. She spent four years of her childhood there. I'm also a "sixties scoop" survivor.

I have lost two women in my family. My eldest sister, Charmaine Desa, was killed in Edmonton in 1990. She was a mother of two. She was married. I also lost Lynn Jackson, who was my sister-in-law who was married to my brother. She was the auntie of my boys. Her murder is unresolved and she is one of 35 women over 10 years who were killed outside of Edmonton in surrounding areas and left in ditches, in fields. These murders are still mostly unsolved. That's alarming.

My biggest concern is how media portrays indigenous women as deserving to die. By deserving to die I mean they dehumanize us by perpetuating racism and stereotypes in the media that somehow we are high-risk people and it's our fault that these things have happened to us. I want to know what's going to be done to challenge that. Why isn't the media being challenged on how they're perpetuating racism towards indigenous people?

Also, I'd like to talk about why our funding is being taken away from addictions, healing, and treatment centres when our people are just starting to realize the damage of the colonial violence that's been happening to them. We are just starting to heal and we're just starting to learn about what happened to us. That funding is now being taken away when it's so greatly needed. I am just learning of what happened to my family and having insight, and being able to express myself and my story.

We need that. We need more funding. We need more health-care services. We need more addiction centres, and we need more healing centres.

Thank you.

● (1815)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, Ms. Teegee, welcome. Will you be sharing your time?

Ms. Mary Teegee (Executive Director, Child and Family Services, Carrier Sekani Family Services): Thank you.

If need be Wendy will just interject if I miss something.

The Chair: Sure, no problem.

Thank you.

Ms. Mary Teegee: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the committee for allowing me this time to speak to you.

My name is Mary Teegee. I am from the Takla Lake First Nation. I come from the Wolf Clan. I am the executive director of child and family services here at Carrier Sekani Family Services. What we do is provide child welfare and health services and preventive services to 11 first nation communities here in north central British Columbia. Also we're the host agency for the Highway of Tears initiative. Of course, the Highway of Tears initiative is to really look at all of the recommendations that came from the symposium we hosted a few years ago and to implement those recommendations so that there are no more missing and murdered women in northern British Columbia.

The reason I'm here to testify today is to speak for those who can't speak because they are no longer with us, and I'm here to speak for those who have lost their spirits, who have lost their voice because of violence. When we're talking about violence, we have to look at the context of where it comes from and we have to look at the root causes. I think sometimes when you're looking at some of the research or the recommendations, I really emphasize that it needs to be culturally specific—it cannot be a pan-Indian approach—and it has to meet the needs of the first nation communities, where they're at.

We know that there have been missing and murdered women. There's also the domestic violence issue we have to deal with within first nation communities. We have to somehow figure out how we're going to break the cycle. Just recently we lost a very beautiful young woman, 22 years old, who had a three-year-old child, in one of our first nation communities. That is no longer acceptable. We have to figure out how we're going to work together. I don't mean just aboriginal service agencies. I think it's all society in Canada. We have to look at how we can collaborate to ensure this doesn't occur again.

We've had enough here in northern British Columbia. I think for probably for most northern provinces the same issues are there: the lack of services, the lack of resources, the judicial system failing our people, failing our nations. I do believe that one of those issues is around the judicial system. It has to be a part of the healing and it has to be part of the solution. In the northern communities—and I can only speak for northern B.C. right now—that isn't always the case.

When we look at some of the root causes of the violence, we think about, of course, the residential schools. It's interesting to note that while Prime Minister Harper did apologize for the atrocities that occurred at residential schools, I don't believe there has been enough action with that apology, so the apology rings hollow, especially when it comes to the issue of violence against women. I believe we have to look at what residential schools took away from our communities and our nations. That's what we must rebuild, and that is what's going to keep our young women safe, and that is around the culturally appropriate servicing.

I think when we're looking at the violence against women in indigenous communities, too many times we're just looking at the one case. We're not looking at it in its whole context. We understand the cycle of the abuse, the trauma, all of the mental health issues, but when we're looking at that, we also have to look at how we are going to overcome that. We're not giving enough credence to the traditional roles. Many times we're looking at dealing with just the women. We're not looking at the men's programming we need. Traditionally, everybody had a role in our society: the men had a role, the women had a role, elders had a role, and the youth had a role. Because of residential schools, that has been fractured; that has been broken. So when we're looking at services, definitely a key piece is to ensure that not only are we empowering our families and our women but also we're looking at what we can do to assist men who have also been victims of abuse, especially when it comes to residential schools. Sometimes that is overlooked.

I believe that when we're looking at the recommendations—and I do absolutely agree with the previous speaker, my sister Bridget Tolley, who talked about so many recommendations—we need to look at how we are going to implement those recommendations. Those implementations have to be community-specific, culturally specific. They have to meet the needs of where the women and families are at.

● (1820)

They have to be holistic types of services. We can't just look at one phase of life. As indigenous people, we are holistic. We also follow a life-cycle model. Any preventative service that we develop and implement has to take that into consideration.

We're looking at some of the issues that have occurred here in B. C. over the last few years and at some of the report recommendations that we've provided in British Columbia to deal with the issues. We also had, just recently, a Human Rights Watch report entitled "Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada".

We also have the case in northern British Columbia of Judge Ramsay. Judge Ramsay was a predator who beat and sexually assaulted young girls who'd been in front of him at court. Yet, to date, we still do not have any assurance that this will never happen again. There have been no changes to the judicial system or to any system to ensure that we are going to keep our young women safe.

In Manitoba in 1991 there was an aboriginal justice inquiry, the Sinclair inquiry, that talked about the failings of the judicial system. There was also an implementation committee or an implementation body that was tasked to oversee that those recommendations were brought to fruition. To this date, that still hasn't occurred.

There should be the same thing in British Columbia—some type of an inquiry into northern British Columbia, into the treatment of our young women, into the missing and murdered young women, into the Highway of Tears. We need to ensure that there are changes within the judicial system to ensure that nothing happens again to our young women and to our families.

We have other recommendations. I do believe we're supportive of a national commission or an inquiry into the murders and disappearances of indigenous women and girls. I definitely think that has to happen. We need to ensure that there are independent civilian investigations of reported incidents of serious police misconduct, including incidents of rape and other sexual assault, in all jurisdictions. If you have a young woman who is afraid and is running away, in northern British Columbia there's very little trust right now in the RCMP or in the judicial system, given the history we've had to date. That has to be changed. We also recommend that a public inquiry has to take place into the violence experienced by indigenous women and girls in northern British Columbia. This inquiry could be part of the national commission of inquiry or a stand-alone inquiry from the province.

From these inquiries, we could really see where the gaps in service are and what needs to occur immediately and in the long term. I believe it has to happen in a specific way. One of the things that happened within northern British Columbia, and I'm sure across the province, was that there was more concentration in the bigger urban settings. Everybody hears about eastside Vancouver, yet all of the violence and everything that's taking place in the north has not really been concentrated on. There hasn't been enough concentration on that.

When we're looking at funding, we need money to provide prevention programs to make sure our girls are safe, to have community awareness. Look at something as simple as the AANDC funding, the aboriginal affairs dollars. They have family violence dollars of, like, a couple of thousand dollars—if you're lucky—for first nation communities. That needs to be looked at. We need to ensure that first nation communities have enough dollars so that they can figure out what they need to do in their communities to keep their women safe. Right now the family violence program that is federally funded—I don't believe it will be helpful when it's so minimal.

When we're looking at isolated communities in the north, there are no services where we are. There are maybe two or three safe houses in the small rural communities. I'm not talking just first nation communities here. I'm talking about northern British Columbia. I'm sure some of the other provinces share the same thing. There are hardly any safe houses, so where do young women go? I don't care if they're aboriginal or non-aboriginal, where do they go? It's no longer acceptable that we have no place to keep them safe. I do believe this is across northern Canada.

● (1825)

My isolated community is about six hours from the closest urban setting where they have a safe house. In Fort St. James, for example, they have one little safe house, and they serve quite a large area. So those are the issues that we're talking about in the north, never mind the lack of mental health therapists, or the lack of any kind of preventative programming.

We also have to look at safe, reliable transportation. Some of our young girls have gone missing because of hitchhiking, or they have been on the highway. Yet there still is nothing concrete that says here is the transportation system that we have worked together to fix. I believe in a simple fix. We have many recommendations in the Highway of Tears recommendation report. We now have the Oppal commission and their recommendations. I agree with the previous speaker that we need to ensure we have an implementation plan that is absolutely funded.

There is another thing that I strongly believe we need to do, and I look to our southern neighbour. The United States has the Violence Against Women Act, and that's for all women. But specifically, they have a new section that meets the needs of native women in the United States. Obama recently reauthorized this act, which came into being in 1994. Within that act, there are specific policies and things that we need to be a part of. I believe that Canada needs an act like that to show that it is doing something. Right now in the broader sense—the UN, the international human rights cases, all of these issues that are going on in Canada—we are all failing our families and our children, especially our women. Our young women are the most vulnerable and the most marginalized in our nation.

I think Stephen Harper could learn something from Obama and look at developing that act. If we had an act, ministers of the provinces and federal ministers alike would have to designate dollars to deal with violence against women.

My closing comment is that this is not just an aboriginal issue, and I think that's what needs to be mentioned. It's not an aboriginal issue; it's a Canadian society issue. That is the only way we are going to deal with it, by coming together and collaborating in every aspect of our society.

With that, I would just like to thank you for your time. Thank you. *Meegwetch*. *Mahsi*.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Teegee, for your time.

Ms. Davies.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson.

First of all, to the witnesses, thank you for coming. But more than that, I want to begin by acknowledging the tremendous sense of frustration, maybe anger, maybe a loss of hope that you have, Bridget, when you tell us that you haven't seen any change in 12 years. You went to the status of women committee two years ago—and you hold up your stack of reports. Mary, you tell us that you're still waiting for some of the basic recommendations from the Highway of Tears report to be implemented.

I want to say on behalf of the NDP members on the committee that we get that, we understand it. This is not an issue we need to keep going over and over. There are so many reports.

Mary, I really like it when you say we need an implementation plan that is funded. This links the problem directly back to the services that all of you have spoken about—whether it's the police services Marie talked about, or the grief counselling and the healing centres that Bridget mentioned.

I'm the MP for Vancouver East. That includes the downtown eastside. Our whole community is in grief, and the amount of time that people spend trying to find money to get a healing centre up and running is just mind-boggling. So I value what you say when you talk about needing services that are culturally appropriate and locally sensitive. It isn't one thing that fits all communities. There are differences, whether it's urban, rural, different nations, different experiences. Northern B.C. is very different from the downtown eastside. There are commonalities, too.

It's hard to ask a question, because it's all been said. I just want to say that we know it. So what do we do? We want to focus on an implementation plan. We want to focus on solutions. I will give you a simple question. For the services that are needed, how many funding sources would you have to go to? How frustrating is that? How much time do you spend on it?

I think this is a universal issue for all community services, but it's particularly difficult for aboriginal services. It's a patchwork. You're going here and there, trying to get another $5,000, or this or that. If any of you would care to share a little bit more about that, I think it would help us match this up to the solutions in these recommendations and emphasize that these services have to be provided as part of an implementation plan.

Would any of you like to respond?

● (1830)

Ms. Colleen Cardinal: I'll speak to that from my personal experience when I've had to seek counselling.

I'll self-disclose, I suffer from complex PTSD. That's from tremendous child abuse and then a history of violence, and then witnessing violence, seeing my dead sister's body in the media and on the front page of a newspaper, and also going to her funeral.

Finding healing centres and services that are culturally sensitive was nearly impossible in the community I lived in. First, the counsellors had no insight into colonial historical violence, and I kept having to explain what the sixties scoop was. A lot of people still don't know what the sixties scoop is, and that it's just a continuation of the residential school. Finding culturally appropriate services in the mainstream is really hard, and then getting funding.... I'm only funded for 10 sessions a year through Aboriginal Affairs. Ten sessions is barely digging.... It's just scratching the surface of trauma. Thousands of indigenous people out there don't even know, have no insight into what's happened to them, and then you're trying to get them to talk about it in minimal sessions. There's not enough funding for that. I have to keep reapplying for funding so I can heal from my trauma, so can function in the world today.

So, yes, funding's a big problem: more funding, more funding per person, more healing centres that have culturally appropriate counselling, and also the mainstream. The mainstream needs to know more about this too. We have so many indigenous people moving to urban centres that if there are no culturally appropriate counsellors who have any insight into that, how can they help? How can you help somebody if you don't even know what they're talking about, or how it has impacted them, or even how they're implicated in it?

Ms. Libby Davies: Would anybody else like to...Mary or Bridget or Marie?

Mary.

Ms. Mary Teegee: Yes, I would like to speak to that.

You asked the question, how many funding sources are out there? If you're looking at what we do, we have to look consistently for a call for proposals, and you think about the time that takes to do the proposals. Then it's a very narrow scope so you're doing patchwork funding and consistently lobbying different levels of government to say what we need. If it's not a priority for them, it's not a priority.

A lot of the work we're trying to do is off the side of our desks, because we're not fully funded to try to get the services out there, and if you start looking at the root causes they impact the residential schools, the colonialization, and the issues of poverty. You're looking at, say, northern British Columbia, where there's 90% unemployment in my community. We know that's a root cause of violence.

When you're looking at the holistic method of healing, which is what we believe, there are many funding sources, but they're just patchwork. There are no comprehensive wraparound services to deal with all the issues that take into consideration the traditional roles of men and women, the culturally specific family structure we know. When I talk about culturally specific, Libby, you also have to understand it's not only the past culture. We have to look at the culture of the day and what is going to meet the needs of those women and men to ensure they are not in that cycle again.

● (1835)

The Chair: Now we'll move over to you, Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you to all of the witnesses.

Given the breadth of witnesses here, it's a bit difficult for me to organize some of my questions.

I think I'll focus my questions on the Carrier Sekani Family Services. I've had an opportunity to review the work you do—programs, services, and research—and I have some specific questions along the lines of things I have been personally and professionally looking at on this committee and in my role as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

That's not to detract at all from the important contributions that the other folks have made here today.

First of all, I want to say that I agree, to some extent, with the notion that the calls for proposals, specifically with respect to the federal government, can be onerous. In our own way, we have to some extent worked to reduce that within Aboriginal Affairs. The friendship centres, which were formerly under Canadian Heritage, have been brought back into Aboriginal Affairs so that there's some continuity, if you will, around the important work they do, and some synergy there in moving to kind of a one-stop shop. I think that's an important part.

I'm going to get into my questions here, Mary and Wendy. Part of the goal, as it was framed by you, is to have evidence-based community knowledge. I accept this notion as well that, as you said, a pan-Indian approach may not be the best, particularly with regard to this issue. You've done some work in family preservation. I want to focus on the men's programming, as we did last week. Having lived in isolated, remote first nation communities for a considerable amount of time over the course of my life, I firmly believe this is one of the areas that a lot more attention has to be paid to.

I know you've done some work on helping new fathers be strong fathers. I'm not sure if that was a study, Mary, or whether it was a project. You say on your website, in fact, that there are too many to list. I'd like to leave the back half of this time period, then, for you to describe and tell us about some of the evidence-based community knowledge and exercises, projects, studies, etc., that have been effective on this issue, with respect to men in your communities. I think that will take us a long way, in terms of ideas around implementation.

Can you tell me more about those specifically related to men, Mary and Wendy?

Ms. Mary Teegee: There's a large body of work we have been doing and continue to do.

One key thing we did—and you referred to the research around young parents, young fathers—was to have a young fathers research group. We had a questionnaire, and from that a handbook was developed, really, to empower young fathers.

Another thing we did, which is key to men's programming, was cultural competence research, which we did for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The premise of that study was that if a child knew where they were coming from, if they were culturally competent and knew who they were, they were less likely to engage in self-harm activities. Our belief at Carrier Sekani Family Services is the same. If you have that cultural knowledge and that self-esteem...those are very key to any kind of programming. We have gender-specific culture camps. We have a young woman's culture camp and a young man's culture camp. After five years, we're finding that these young men actually have better outcomes and more self-esteem.

We talk about the respect. We talk about those traditional principles we live by, which somehow have been eroded due to residential schools. We have very successful culture camps for young men, through which we bring them back to the land. They go hunting. They're in the bush. They go fishing. Those are really important because there is role-modelling. We have very strong male elders, strong male leaders, strong chiefs, who come in and role model how to treat a woman, how to treat a family, and what is key. That has proven to be very successful.

Within the urban setting in Prince George, we also have Young Warriors—a bunch of young teenage men who are speaking out against violence. They're doing these activities and they're bringing that message forward. That has proven to be very successful.

As well, the key part within family preservation is to ensure that the men, the fathers, also have a voice, and that there are also services for them. As you know right now the AFN and first nation communities are looking at a human rights court case involving the disparity in funding for on-reserve versus off-reserve child and family services. The key thing is that you need to ensure those programs within Canada, within first nation communities, are funded to provide prevention. That is where you have the men who are part of the society. They're not looked down on with disdain. We have to re-empower our men as part of the solution.

● (1840)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mary, it would be great if we could—or I'd like to—understand more about this handbook. I think I would benefit from it. I don't know whether that's something that's submitted through the committee. I believe firmly in this notion of programs and services when right now thematically we're looking at root causes. It strikes me that what you're framing here goes to those root causes. What might not be obvious to some folks is very clear to me, and even more clear now, when you're saying that there are a number of ways—through handbooks, through cultural competency forums, if you will, of various types, and cultural camps—that issues around self-identity, cultural awareness, and the guiding principles of the traditions of a specific community can be more focused on, as they are or have been in the projects and research that you've done.

I'm not sure if my colleagues are interested, but I think I would benefit from taking a look at that because in terms of my role here in the committee, I am, as I said earlier, more preoccupied with the men's programming, which I see as a deficit area. I think you're confirming or concurring with that.

Ms. Mary Teegee: There's one thing too, Mr. Rickford, that you mentioned around looking at the one-stop shop and the friendship centres and whatnot.

You have to understand that in each province it's very unique, and each region of the province is very unique. For me, for us, we are Carrier Sekani-specific and that's why we're able to do the good work that we do. There has to be a continuum of services between the first nations and the urban setting. We provide services to our families, children, and men regardless of residency, wherever they are. Absolutely the one-stop shop may not necessarily be the friendship centre. The friendship centre does not, in our area, in the province of B.C., speak on behalf of my people, nor do they speak on behalf of our chiefs. I think—

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mary, I do understand that. I was just using it as an example of some efforts that have been made on a bigger scale.

The Chair: Thank you. Over to—

Ms. Mary Teegee: I just need to really emphasize that it has to be culturally appropriate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to you, Ms. Bennett, for seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you, all. That has been very helpful to our work.

As you know, this series of hearings has been on root causes, then we'll be talking about front-line services, and then the third area will be prevention. I know that all of you have thoughts on probably all three of those areas and I would hope that you would feel comfortable sending us your ideas on each of those three things, particularly in terms of what's probably already in a lot of those reports, Bridget, that you've brought to us.

The first thing I'd like to ask you is how you would help us organize our work in terms of what is going to be ahead of us. I think the first thing that I need to know is what you think would be the best way for us to hear from families. The families, I think, have pretty good instincts, intuition, and personal stories on each of these three areas in terms of what happened in their own situations, why it happened, why someone wasn't found when maybe they were still alive—or found, period, in terms of being missing—and what we could put in place to prevent that and have people and their families feel better looked after.

I know that there will be on October 4, here on the Hill.... Do you have a suggestion as to how we would best hear from families?

● (1845)

Ms. Bridget Tolley: I wanted to invite the committee to meet with the families on October 3, which is a Thursday night. I would like to invite all of you to come and meet with the families that will be here. We brought in 15 families last year. We're hoping to bring in more. We would like to sit down, and I would like the committee to hear from these families because you don't hear from most of these families. Some of these families live so far away that they can't even drive in. You have to fly in to some of these communities, and how do we help these families over there?

We invite them to come here and share their stories, and then they have to go back to their communities. This is where my problem is. It's really nice to all be together, but then you have to go home alone. This is where the services come in, where the help comes in. What we need, I think, is a national action plan. Within that national action plan we can call this public inquiry, but we need to do something now. The families need help today. We don't want to wait another year or two years for another meeting or more recommendations.

When people go missing, they need help right away. They need services, they need posters, and they need a search party. It was really hard for me because in my community we did lose two girls. We have two missing girls from 2008 and still they're not found. We lost a little baby lion on the reserve two years later. We had a search party. We had the police. We had helicopters. We had game wardens. We had everything. When these two human beings went missing, we had nothing. There were no dogs, no search party, no police, no media. What do we do when this happens? Who do we go to?

I'm very lucky that I don't live far and I'm very determined to come here to meet with you, but a lot of families are not like that. I'm here because I want you to hear from these families. You have all been listening to members of Parliament and national aboriginal organization leaders. You've been hearing from everybody else; why not listen to us? Listen to us, listen to her, and listen to the other families here. There are a lot of other families here. You don't hear from them. This is what I'm asking today.

When I go back home, I'm alone, you know. Nobody helps me. Nobody supports me. I have to come back here again to see a doctor, for counselling. I have diabetes. I'm just about on insulin. All these little things add to the stress and everything. We don't have any money. Families of Sisters in Spirit started with nothing, just a sheet and a name. That's all. We're alive and well two years later, fighting for our missing and murdered sisters, giving them a voice, giving the families a voice, giving the families the support they need. We can't give them much support; we don't have anything. But we give them the love and whatever else we can, and this is still important to all families.

● (1850)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We are hearing from RCMP witnesses later this evening. What questions would you like us to ask them?

Ms. Mary Teegee: With the RCMP, I would like to see what its response is to the report that just came from Human Rights Watch and know what some of its efforts are. Some of the recommendations in the report, “Those Who Take Us Away”, were that a national commission of inquiry be established into the murders and disappearances of indigenous women and girls; that terms of reference be developed with leadership from the affected communities and from those families; and that independent civilian investigations of reported incidents of serious police misconduct be established, including incidents of rape and other sexual assault in all jurisdictions.

Would they be interested in developing that independent body? Also would they be interested in having aboriginal women on that independent body, an oversight committee to look at the practices of the RCMP? It's not only needed federally, but we also need to do that provincially.

I also wanted to make note that I am also part of the Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women in British Columbia. I believe every province should have an advisory council to really talk to the ministers, to make change in each province. At least we have a voice there to bring up the voices of those who can't speak. That was another one of the recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

It's over to you, Ms. McLeod, for seven minutes.

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

I, too, would like to thank all the witnesses here. As you can imagine, these are going to be very difficult hearings as we hear the stories and hear about the very difficult lives and challenges that people have had to face and experience. I can't say that I've walked in your shoes, but as a nurse who has worked in a number of communities in British Columbia, I certainly have felt some of the very difficult circumstances over time.

I'm just going to make a brief comment about this. I really appreciate, Ms. Tolley, the fact that you have that big stack of binders and recommendations. We're going to be doing a study, and I truly hope that out of the work we do, we're going to have some important recommendations that move forward.

I appreciate that many people are saying that they want to have a national inquiry, but I think all the information is probably in those books you have in that stack. In my opinion, being a nurse—and I think nurses like to have action—I much prefer to think that we can move forward and make a difference in these lives, rather than spending a lot of time and money in terms of another process. I do know that there are a lot of people who feel strongly about that, but I think we have some very valuable recommendations and it's up to the wisdom to say what.... Obviously, I don't think anyone has the capacity to move forward on everything at one time, but I think the key pieces that we can perhaps move forward on are very important. I just wanted to make that comment.

I know that we do talk about resources, but I also have to say that one of the most powerful events I've attended was an angel walk, and it was with one of the local aboriginal communities. It was led by a husband and wife who beat the cycle of abuse, addiction, and violence. We heard from the elder, a gentleman who spoke to the children. It was a community event. It was organized by the people in that community who cared. His message was as powerful, I think, as any that could have been given. He talked about his past. So I think we need to also reflect on where some of the strengths are that we can help to draw on in terms of those kinds of issues.

I would like to talk to our friend from Manitoba.

You talk about living on reserve and about people often having to leave. Can you talk a little more about the dynamics of having to leave the reserve, as a victim or otherwise? I understand that you had some band council leadership aspirations at one point and you chose to not act on those. Could you talk a bit about that transition? It sounds like a very critical transition for those people who leave the small communities up north and end up in Vancouver, or Kamloops, or Winnipeg.

● (1855)

Ms. Marie Sutherland: Yes, in my workplace at the Native Women's Transition Centre, I work with a lot of abused women. I include myself. When I moved from my reservation and was running away from my abusive husband, I didn't have any money. I didn't have any place to go, so it was very easy for me to.... A man picked me up. I am so confused in the big cities. That's what I've experienced with some of the clients I have worked with.

They come from abusive situations on the reserve, where there is no help for them, so they choose to leave to find a safe place. They meet a man who is very nice to them. The next thing you know, they're using drugs and alcohol, being raped, and being beaten.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I know that you did come to speak on matrimonial and real property rights. As you're probably aware, this week it finally moved through. I know that there were various opinions, but I understand that you believe it's another tool in the tool box to keep women safe in their homes. Is that...?

Ms. Marie Sutherland: Yes, it is. For an aboriginal woman coming from the reserve, it would be really great and safe for them to get help from the band before they even move from the reserve. Even our youth who come for their education, it's easy for them to fall into drugs and alcohol when somebody is nice to them. Then the next thing we know, we see reports of them in the newspaper being beaten, being murdered.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: If you were going to say to us, as a committee, that there are many recommendations.... I think you were feeling that resources for support for moving from rural to urban were important, and also support for the police to do the work that they need to do. Could you talk a little more about why you feel that's important?

Ms. Marie Sutherland: In the first hour when somebody hasn't come home, some child or woman hasn't come home, or if some daughter hasn't come home, if the police reacted within that hour... because the first hour is the one that counts. If they were to support us, if we were able to trust them—remember, the police have broken our trust in many ways—and let them do the work, let them help us to find our sisters, our daughters, our mothers, our grandmothers, and the list goes on.... We need the police to work with us. We need them now, today, not tomorrow. We need help today.

The Chair: Thank you. The time goes by quickly.

On that note, on behalf of the committee I'd like to thank all of you for being here, Mary, Wendy, Marie, Bridget and Colleen. We really appreciate your time and your insights into this. Thank you so much for being here.

We'll suspend for a few minutes to get the next round of witnesses set up.

Thank you.

● (1900)

(Pause)

● (1910)

The Chair: All right, we're about to start so everyone please take your seats.

Thank you everyone for being here for the second hour of meeting number 8.

Welcome to our witnesses. We've had a very productive first hour, I think, and so we're looking forward to hearing from all of you as well.

First we'll hear from the Caribou Child and Youth Centre. It's my understanding that Jamie Crozier will be sharing her time with Ruth Proulx.

Welcome to both of you and you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Jamie Crozier (Coordinator, Caribou Child and Youth Centre): Thank you.

My name is Jamie. I'm Métis, originally from Manitoba, and have been working out of northern Alberta for the last 16 years. I've worked at PACE, which is the sexual assault and trauma centre there. It's a grassroots, non-profit organization that's been in existence for about 30 years. We service the entire northwest region of the province. We have some therapists that drive out to Peace River, Valleyview, and in the past to Grande Cache, which is a pretty large area to cover—

Ms. Ruth Proulx (Therapist and Community Outreach Coordinator, PACE Sexual Assault and Crisis Centre): And High Prairie.

Ms. Jamie Crozier: —and High Prairie, High Level.

Ms. Ruth Proulx: High Prairie and High Level.

Ms. Jamie Crozier: Okay.

This is why I have her, because we can feed off each other.

A voice: In Alberta we get confused—

Ms. Jamie Crozier: Well there are too many high things.

A voice: And prairies....

Ms. Jamie Crozier: Yes.

I'll let you introduce yourself.

Ms. Ruth Proulx: I'm Ruth Proulx. I'm originally Métis from Quebec, but I was born and raised in the Northwest Territories. I'm also a second-generation, former residential school student. My father also worked in one of the last residential schools closed in Canada, after he spent his childhood in residential school. I also grew up in foster care so that is a big connection.

Ms. Jamie Crozier: In my introduction, I forgot to mention a little bit of what my roles are at PACE. I'm a little nervous here, I have to admit.

For the last 10 years I have been a therapist. I worked with victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence, as well as working with sex offenders. Over the last more recent year here or so, I've been coordinating the Caribou Child and Youth Centre, which is a child and youth advocacy centre for children who have to testify and go through the judicial system. I work with the RCMP and child welfare with child witnesses.

What we are here to speak to is that in 2009, Heather King, who is the child prevention and family violence specialist in northern Alberta, and Jacquie Aitken-Kish, who is our executive director, did a research project that included 24 different women from the High Level area. They did a qualitative study over a seven-month period to find out what the climate was, what's happening in these rural remote communities, what suggestions the women who are actually living there and working there have for change, and what they would like to see as possible future outcomes.

Some of the things that were identified as the current crisis that they're experiencing were that victims are afraid to speak out, either from the ramifications coming back from their offender or other community members. There's the appearance of an inadequate sentencing that happens. There's a lack of transportation. I know that was mentioned by one of the other individuals. There's isolation, a shortage of resources and access to professionals and support, and there are high levels of poor health and dysfunction. This is across the board, not just for the individuals who may be victimized or the perpetrators. They're seeing this also in all the strata, including their council and band.

Some of the risk factors that were identified were the ongoing normalization of abuse, whether it be childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, or just violence in general. This is just something that is commonplace. People grow up with this as being just a part of life, therefore it's easy to fall into the role of victim or perpetrator.

Other risk factors are addictions. We know that addictions are often a result of different types of abuse and trauma. It's a way that people cope. We see a lot of low income and poverty, high dropout rates, low education rates. There's a very transient population in northern Alberta, as well as extreme isolation. A lot of these communities are very difficult to get in and out of. Some of them are fly-in only. There's a lot of easy access to weapons, which also increases the risk when domestic violence is involved.

● (1915)

Ms. Ruth Proulx: All right, I will go. I also forgot to mention that I've been in Alberta for the last 10 years, and I'm also a therapist and community outreach coordinator and FNMI—first nations, Métis, and Inuit—specialist at my agency.

Obviously we know from what Jamie said and from what all the other speakers said that trauma is all-encompassing. It impacts every facet of life, which means that if it impacts us as individuals and impacts every facet of our lives, it also impacts the community in every facet and stratum. So we know that we have to address trauma. Our work is based on healing and addressing the healing process for individuals. We know that individuals heal in their own time and at their own pace, so it doesn't mean mandatory therapy sessions for individuals. It means creating an environment of therapy, an environment of community, an environment of identity. So when people are able and ready, in their own time, to come and seek support in their own ways, it is available to them.

We know that everybody heals in their own time and through their own measures. Not everybody needs to go to therapy. That's because everybody has different access to resiliency factors in their lives, and the more resiliency factors we promote in society and in communities, the more access to a higher level of health people will have later on in life.

We know that if we promote resiliency in communities—decrease vulnerability factors and increase resiliency factors—we're going to have healthier communities. Our agency, PACE, is really a grassroots organization that just promotes resiliency factors in communities. We don't focus on all the negative parts. We go into communities to see what's working. We get people to tell us what's working and we promote that, because that's their identity that's working. It's not something we've come in and created. Then we ask what's needed and how we can help, how we can help them identify more resources and services they haven't thought of and how we can help create this in their communities. When there's no funding, we find funding. We try to find ways to create therapeutic opportunities for people. It's more than just sitting one-on-one with somebody. It's sitting as a community, sitting individually, and sitting within our systems.

The study that Jacquie and Heather did also taught us that we really need to go in and engage communities. We can't just go in and tell people what they need. We ask communities what they need, what they think is not working, and what they think is working. I think that's one thing we forget, that we don't have the key to open every lock. Some people have their own keys that already work or don't work, and they just want support in how to recut a key, if we need to give that to them.

We also recognize that we need to have checks and balances within services, within all levels of community, with all representations from community. We can't put something in place and then leave the community to run with it. We should have community advisory committees as was mentioned earlier by some of the other speakers. Those things really need to be in place, and this qualitative study identified that need.

One other thing we recognize is the need to engage and support community leaders and natural helpers within communities. As professionals, we try to encourage people to be 100% healthy, regardless of their mental health level. But we know that healing is a process that starts at some level and that every community has natural helpers. Sometimes they're not in leadership. Sometimes it's one of the moms who lives on the street or one of the males who has just come forward about his own experience of sexual abuse. We need to take those natural healers, those natural helpers, and the leadership within the community, those who have some form of health, and promote and support them, so they can give services within their communities.

One thing we're very proud of as an organization is that we go into communities and find helpers and find out how to support them in making their communities healthier. Sometimes it's just going in and teaching paraprofessionals how to do crisis intervention, or teaching community leaders who are natural helpers how to run groups and facilitate different programs within their communities. It's not always rocket science.

● (1920)

We don't say we're the experts and we need to come in and do this. We can tell them how to do it, to run with it, and to call us when they need help. We'll be more than willing to come back and help. We'd love to give that opportunity.

With that is about breaking down the barriers of isolation and no relationships. We know that relationships and connections are the biggest healers of trauma. Regardless of talking about your trauma, having a relationship with someone who can empathize with your trauma is one of the biggest realities of healing and of healing shame. So breaking down that isolation and building honest relationships are important.

We know that historically relationships have been broken down and slandered and hurt. Coming in and building an honest relationship is very important in addressing resiliency, because connection is one of the biggest birthplaces of healing shame. We want to promote healing shame. We want to create a medium, a space of healing, and that starts with a relationship, whether or not it's with the most qualified professional with the biggest degrees behind them.

What else do I need to cover here?

The Chair: You can cover it in your answers to the questions, because we're a bit over 10 minutes.

Now we go to our next witness and we'll start with Assistant Commissioner Brosseau. I understand you are splitting your time with Superintendent Cuillierrier?

Assistant Commissioner Kevin Brosseau (Commanding Officer, "D" Division, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): That's right, Madam Chairperson, I will be sharing the time with Superintendent Cuillierrier.

Good evening, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee. My name is Assistant Commissioner Kevin Brosseau, and I'm the commanding officer of the RCMP in the province of Manitoba.

I'm joined this evening by my colleagues, Superintendent Shirley Cuillierrier, the director of partnerships and external relations for the federal policing sector of the RCMP, and Superintendent Tyler Bates, the director of national aboriginal policing and crime prevention services. Both are currently based in Ottawa, but as you'll find out, have had long, esteemed careers working in a number of communities throughout the country.

I thank you for inviting the RCMP to discuss the critical issue of violence against indigenous women.

The safety and security of aboriginal communities is one of the RCMP's five strategic priorities; the primary goal of which is to contribute to healthier and safer aboriginal communities. The RCMP strives to deliver culturally competent police services, providing the foundation necessary for our officers to build relationships with the more than 600 aboriginal communities we serve. Fostering mutual trust and respect within these communities is critical to advancing our common objectives of increasing personal and community safety. Through consultation and collaborative initiatives, we develop policing approaches to address local priorities, and we tailor our services to meet the distinctive needs of each community.

The RCMP is engaged in prevention and investigative initiatives that are ever-mindful of the prevalence of violence against aboriginal women, and it has instituted training for our officers and a number of policies that focus on this very important issue.

Recognizing that education and prevention are key to eliminating and dealing with many of the root causes that lead to violence in our communities, the RCMP has national policy and procedures that provide the overarching framework and direct our units to participate in multi-agency, community-based initiatives or programs. This policy also directs actions to be taken when violence happens. If evidence exists, charges are pursued. Further, and very importantly, victims must be kept informed of the progress of the investigation. Officers are required to take a proactive and collaborative approach to promoting and managing victim safety. All reports of missing persons, regardless of their background, are given investigative priority and oversight at a number of levels throughout the organization.

Starting at our training academy, training is provided in cultural sensitivity, aboriginal awareness, and in investigating and handling domestic violence situations, and is provided to our members throughout their careers. Very importantly, as we've talked about with my colleagues, is the training that happens on the ground in a community, in conversations with elders, on the trapline, in kitchens, and around kitchen tables. That's very important for our officers as well.

As a partner to the federal government's family violence initiative, the RCMP funds a number of RCMP detachments and community-based organizations to support, last year, 29 projects that respond to relationship and family violence, victim issues, and training for sexual assault investigators.

One of those projects took place last year in Paulatuk, Northwest Territories. Under that funding initiative, 10 workshops provided a forum for women to safely and openly share their experiences with domestic violence. The workshops focused on identifying risk factors, early intervention, and healthy relationships. The women were given the tools and information to work on self-esteem and exercises to strengthen self-confidence. This wasn't an RCMP-led initiative at all. We were a participant.

The RCMP's approach to violence against aboriginal women also includes a clear focus on missing and murdered aboriginal women. The RCMP continues to improve the quality of our investigations by committing personnel, resources, and tools to investigate and analyze these incidents when they happen. Dedicated teams of investigators continue to investigate these cases in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and in Manitoba, the province I represent.

To address the absence of reliable statistics on the exact number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls, the RCMP recently conducted, across the RCMP, a file review of missing and murdered women and girls. The Commissioner of the RCMP has also engaged other Canadian police services and police chiefs across the country to conduct similar file reviews. Superintendent Tyler Bates can give you further details about that.

● (1925)

In furtherance of a collaborative approach, the RCMP regularly liaises with aboriginal leadership, and aboriginal and grassroots organizations, and have a member dedicated in fact to communication and integrated prevention initiatives with the Native Women's Association of Canada, NWAC. This partnership has led to the development of a community education tool kit called "Navigating the Missing Persons Process". It's actually on NWAC's community resource guide on their website. Recently as well we created a hitchhiking poster addressing hitchhiking and trying to give some information and be an advisory, if you will, aimed at reducing incidents of missing, and in some instances, murdered aboriginal women and girls.

In addition, the RCMP and the Assembly of First Nations signed a joint agreement, a work plan, that aligns the two organizations to work collaboratively on issues related to missing and murdered aboriginal persons across the country. These two important national initiatives and the extensive more localized work being carried out every day are key as the RCMP of course values the collaborative approach, and is intent on doing all it can to ensure the safety and well-being of aboriginal women and girls in all of our communities.

I look forward to answering your questions, but I will turn it over now to Superintendent Cuillierrier.

Superintendent Shirley Cuillierrier (Director, Federal Policing Partnership and External Relations, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you.

Good evening, Madam Chair, and committee members. My name is Shirley Cuillierrier and I'm the officer in charge of the partnerships and external relations team for federal policing.

[*Translation*]

I would first like to thank you for inviting me to discuss the RCMP's role within the national anti-drug strategy and the important links it has to Aboriginal communities across Canada.

I would also like to touch upon the RCMP's Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre.

[*English*]

I'm especially pleased that the special committee is focused on violence against indigenous women.

An important issue, which is impacting the safety of all Canadian communities, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, is the prevalence and the use of drugs. The national anti-drug strategy, also known as NADS, is assisting the RCMP to take on those who produce and push drugs on our streets and in our communities. The RCMP, through its connection to over 600 aboriginal communities, is supporting the objective of the national anti-drug strategy in helping families and local communities, and steering vulnerable youth away from a life of drugs and crime.

NADS is a horizontal initiative led by Justice Canada, and includes 11 other federal departments and agencies. NADS is based on three pillars or action plans: prevention, treatment, and enforcement. The RCMP is actively involved in the strategy's prevention and enforcement action plans.

The RCMP's federal policing public engagement team supports the prevention action plan to prevent youth from using illicit drugs by enhancing their understanding of the harmful social and health effects of illicit drug use, and to develop and implement community-based interventions to prevent illicit drug use.

● (1930)

[*Translation*]

Collectively, these actions are contributing to increased awareness and to safer and healthier communities through coordinated efforts to prevent drug use, as well as to reduce production and distribution of illicit drugs across Canada.

[*English*]

The national anti-drug strategy has assisted the RCMP to expand its dedicated anti-drug teams to help locate, investigate, disrupt, and shut down organizations involved in the production and distribution of illicit drugs, and to help law enforcement stop the flow of money that organized crime makes from this illicit drug trade.

Collectively these actions are contributing to increased awareness and to safer and healthier communities through coordinated efforts to prevent drug use, and reduce the production and distribution of illicit drugs across Canada. The aboriginal shield program, and the drug abuse resistance education program, are two examples that fall under NADS and have been implemented in communities across the country. They provide information, tools, and skills on how to recognize and avoid bad situations and make healthy decisions.

The RCMP's Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre works with domestic and international agencies to develop an extensive network of partnerships, monitor investigations from a national perspective, facilitate requests from international law enforcement partners, and provide intelligence analysis to law enforcement partners.

The Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre has developed human trafficking awareness tool kits for the public, youth, and police, as well as an online police training resource and an advanced police investigators course offered to senior investigators. The RCMP has distributed human trafficking awareness materials to aboriginal communities and organizations in an effort to educate and support increased community engagement.

I'd be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much to all of you.

We'll begin with questions, starting with Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you very much to all of the witnesses for coming from across the country to speak to us tonight.

I do want to register that we find it passing strange here that the RCMP contribution here tonight hasn't been entirely focused on missing and murdered aboriginal women. We certainly appreciate hearing about the anti-drug strategy, but our interest here is missing and murdered aboriginal women and the direct issues. I believe we can all safely say, gauging from all of the reports, including most recently the Human Rights Watch report, that the RCMP's actions directly to do with missing and murdered aboriginal women are under question. So we'd certainly appreciate a sustained focus, and if perhaps that decision was made elsewhere—perhaps if the government side suggested witnesses from the RCMP—we find it very problematic that the full scope of this issue is not being presented here in our committee.

Commander Brosseau, certainly in our province, as you know, the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women is extremely serious. I know the RCMP has been involved with Project Devote and a real focus on the local reality of trying to find solutions. I'm wondering if maybe you could briefly speak to the importance of investing resources into the RCMP in local task forces, but also perhaps the importance of cooperating with first nations and Métis people on the ground in our province. Perhaps you could give just a brief answer, so that I can make sure we have time for others as well.

A/Commr Kevin Brosseau: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Yes, it's hard to overstate, frankly, the importance of focusing and prioritizing our efforts on the missing and murdered in our communities. Undoubtedly Project Devote, I believe, is a clear manifestation of that commitment, as are the 20 investigators chosen specifically based on their highly skilled investigative abilities from the Winnipeg Police Service and the RCMP to look at and examine clearly a number of those tragic circumstances.

Also, very importantly, in addition to the prong on investigation, is the community outreach aspect of what Project Devote is about as well, where we have dedicated personnel who in fact work with people in the communities, work with grassroots people, whether on the streets of Winnipeg or in small towns or very remote communities, as you know, in the province of Manitoba. Clearly the resourcing is my bailiwick, to ensure that those investigative teams and those investigators specifically targeting or looking at that issue are properly resourced to be able to do what they can.

Your second question with respect to working with, and the collaborative approach, I attempted to deal with that a little bit in my earlier commentary. One of my priorities since coming to the province of Manitoba was to in fact energize community engagement in a meaningful way, recognizing that issues, the underlying causes, if you will, leading to violence are complex and multi-sectoral, and in fact need everyone to be standing shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm to deal with them.

I'm very happy to say that my commanders in the 52 detachments that we police in that province embrace that concept and get it. One thing about police officers is that they're for the most part action oriented. They want to see results. They feel the frustration and want to improve the work in their communities. My members live in the communities that they police, so it's very important for them to work with the community members who they live with.

● (1935)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Perhaps just as a quick follow-up in terms of the importance of the community connection, I understand you work with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

A/Commr Kevin Brosseau: I do. I'm very fortunate to have wonderful relationships with the leadership of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs; MKO, a northern Manitoba organization; the Manitoba Metis Federation. As well, I have an aboriginal advisory committee, not chosen from official or political organizations but made up of grassroots community members—all women, in fact, who give me advice on key issues.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Commander Brosseau, you've mentioned a number of aboriginal organizations that advocate on behalf of families. I was wondering if you're familiar with AMC and MKO having their funding cut by about 45% as of this fiscal year, in Manitoba. I'm wondering if you've heard about some of the people who have been let go from these organizations.

A/Commr Kevin Brosseau: I have not, in fact, and I should have, I suppose. I have liaison officers who work with both organizations. I've committed to having people working directly with those organizations, which do contribute significantly to the well-being of our communities. I was not aware of that.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I will point out that I certainly appreciate the collaboration. I've heard from people first-hand that many people are very concerned that, as these advocacy organizations lose funding and capacity, it's actually the communities and the families who are going to suffer very much as a result.

I do also want to put on the record, Superintendent Cuillierrier, that we in the NDP—and we made this very clear when it first happened—are very concerned that NADS' fourth pillar, harm reduction, was removed in 2007 by the federal government. We heard from previous speakers that the cycle of addictions and violence is a very serious one. We believe that losing that fourth pillar of harm reduction is extremely problematic and flies in the face of supporting people through a cycle of healing that needs to take place.

In my time remaining, I want to speak to Ms. Proulx and Ms. Crozier. You obviously do very important work in northern Alberta. I'm wondering, when you're visiting first nations and northern communities, if the lack of capacity on the ground, perhaps the lack of funding in communities, particularly first nations, comes up at all with regard to the challenges they face in providing services, training personnel, and housing people who might be able to provide services. Is that an issue?

The Chair: You're over time.

I'm just going to ask for a very quick answer, if you could do that.

Ms. Jamie Crozier: This is a large issue we are seeing. We've actually, most recently, started an initiative at High Prairie, which I was talking about. They were doing some really good work. Mary up there was up and running and had an amazing program, which now has been cut. So we're looking at how our non-profit can house that. It is an issue.

● (1940)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll go over to you, Ms. Truppe, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Actually I think it's Ms. Block.

The Chair: Okay, it's Ms. Block.

You're sharing your time, I believe.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): I am, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, Ms. Rempel.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. This is turning out to be a very interesting and intense study, and we haven't been at it very long. That's for sure.

I did have the opportunity a number of years ago to travel with the status of women committee to Nunavut and Labrador and New Brunswick, and heard first-hand some of the testimony of women. It was a study on violence against aboriginal women, and certainly, the challenges that are faced when living in rural and remote first nation communities.

Obviously, we've heard from other organizations, and it's obvious that each of you has highlighted some of the tensions that exist with regard to identifying the root causes, which is our first focus in this study, and building capacity in communities yet needing to address immediate and often urgent situations as they arise in communities. There are these three things going on for many different organizations and folks who are providing support to individuals in these rural and remote communities.

I'm going to ask a question of Commander Brosseau. In your opening remarks you spoke of a joint agreement between the RCMP and the Assembly of First Nations, and you highlighted a work plan that aligns your organizations in working collaboratively on issues related to missing and murdered aboriginal persons. I wonder if you would be able to speak to any particular initiatives, any on-the-ground projects that are happening as a result of that work plan.

A/Commr Kevin Brosseau: Thank you.

I will speak briefly about the work plan more generally and then turn it over to my colleague Tyler Bates to give a little more granular information.

At my level, how it really works, the key aspect of the work plan from my perspective is building mutual understanding and communication so that when an incident happens in a first nation community I'm in direct contact with a leader of the AFN in the province of Manitoba and/or nationally to talk about the implications of that on the community. The supports for the people, family, if you will, if it's a tragedy, someone who fell victim to homicide and such, those resources are mustered immediately and provided to those people. That's one tangible way this work plan is working in the province of Manitoba.

I'll turn it over to Superintendent Bates to flesh that out for you.

Superintendent Tyler Bates (Director, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): To further answer your question, when a traumatic incident impacts a first nation or aboriginal community, it's important that the proper supports are put in place for the family that's affected. We recognize that we're one level of that support, but other levels of support are critical to assisting the family in crisis, assisting the community that has been victimized in a regrettable way.

Following through with our commitments in the work plan, our commitment is to engage the Assembly of First Nations as early as possible, so they can liaise with their regional contacts and they can reach out to the families and communities that are affected.

That is the most tangible aspect of the work plan—open and transparent communication about incidents that are transpiring, as much as we're able to without compromising ongoing investigations. We need to involve our partners early so they can intervene and provide for the support of those affected.

I should comment as well, further to that, that the work plan is under further dialogue. We had discussions most recently with AFN and our commissioner that we're going to review the work plan and its work, and commit to further engagement and further initiatives.

● (1945)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

I'll turn it over to Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Very briefly in the time I have remaining, Ms. Proulx and Ms. Crozier, I looked through some of the recommendations you had in your brief. A lot of them had one common element, and that was working closely with the leadership within first nation communities.

I wonder if you could comment on how many leaders you work with in first nation communities right now who are women, and if you think that potentially looking at strategies to enable more women to seek leadership positions within first nation communities would help to get some of your work done more effectively.

Ms. Jamie Crozier: I think the leaders we are currently seeing are not necessarily designated leaders. Yes, the vast majority are going to be women, but they are whom Ruth referred to as the natural leaders. They're the stronger, healthier pillars of the community, the matriarchs everybody goes to.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: They're not formally in band leadership, in elected positions.

Ms. Ruth Proulx: Not necessarily.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Do you think that impacts some of these outcomes you guys are looking at achieving?

Ms. Jamie Crozier: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I find that very interesting. I wanted to tease out our previous witness groups as well. In talking to some of these women you deal with in non-official leadership positions, what could we do or implement to try to get them into more formal governance roles, to seek office?

Ms. Jamie Crozier: That's a really good question. From our perspective, some of the suggestions have been not necessarily changing who's governing, but more of making sure the people who are in those positions are healing themselves. Then you will experience the trickle-down effect.

If you have a healthy healer or a healthy individual at the top, in that position, it's going to impact all others.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I'm a woman in office myself, and I think it's great when women have voices at the legislative table and implement these things. If that's something you're recommending this committee look at, I think you'd have a lot of voices around this table on both sides who would support it.

Ms. Ruth Proulx: There is another thing I want to point out, and I pointed it out to Jamie. I was looking around the room to see how many men were at the table. We know that domestic violence is a male-dominated crime and we need men to hold men accountable, as well. Just as much as we need women to stand up for themselves, we need men to stand up to other men and say it is unacceptable. I want to point that out.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Over to you now, Ms. Bennett, for seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you very much.

Thank you both for your really clear message around the bottom-up and the need for natural healers and helpers to actually be identified as a way forward.

I've been asked by the previous panel to ask about the Human Rights Watch report, “Those Who Take Us Away”. I assume you thought that was coming.

Of the five recommendations in the report to the Government of Canada, three actually relate to policing. First was around the historical relationship between police and indigenous women and girls, the problems with incidents of police misconduct, and the socio-economic marginalization of indigenous women and girls that predispose. The second was around the accountability and the coordination of government bodies charged with preventing and responding to violence; and the third was the need for independent civilian investigations of reported incidents.

I think what we're hearing is that there has been a breakdown of trust. If people don't feel they can come to the police with a situation, then things get worse. If it's not a trusting relationship.... I think we've seen that, even within the status of women committee in terms of harassment. If even women within the force don't feel they can report things or else they will become a target, then how can you expect a young indigenous woman to think it's a safe place to go and tell her story?

We are hearing time and time again about sexism and racism within policing as being a root cause, that it's not a safe place. You've seen this report. There were people who asked why these individuals didn't come forward. Well, we know why they didn't come forward. I guess I'd like to know where you think this committee should go in terms of finding out what the next step should be, and how we get this fixed.

There are people who think the force is 20 years behind the Canadian Forces in terms of sexism and racism. How do we deal with this so we can get the respect back, so that people can feel that at the earliest situation they can report it fairly to the police and have something done about it, instead of saying, “What did you expect?" because it's an indigenous girl or woman?

● (1950)

A/Commr Kevin Brosseau: It's a question I could probably reflect on for some time, Ms. Bennett. You've said a lot, undoubtedly. Perhaps Superintendent Cuillierrier can also provide her thoughts.

Let me, first of all, speak to the Human Rights Watch report. You've read it, and you know what it says. The RCMP did respond and met with the Human Rights Watch authors and discussed some of these horrendous allegations. We asked if we could help get some of these folks to come forward. I don't believe anything like that has happened.

Importantly, this past May, the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, an independent civilian agency, initiated a public interest investigation into policing and alleged policing abuses across northern British Columbia. This was in direct response, I think, to the Human Rights Watch report and the allegations that were made. I think that's exactly what was being called for, and it will be an important process. The RCMP will collaborate and cooperate fully with that investigation. This will be an independent civilian agency, where I hope people will feel enough trust to come forward and talk about some of the things that have happened.

I paused when you asked the question because this is not lost on me. I'm a small-town person, a small-town guy, and many of the communities we police are small towns where my perhaps naive belief is that I'd like to see young people running to the police car when it pulls into the school as opposed to running away from it. That's really what I'd like to see. Will that ever happen? It happens. It happens today in some communities. I'm proud to say that my members feel this sense of belonging. They are coaching hockey teams, soccer teams, Girl Scouts, Cubs, you name it. They are helping to bring healing to many communities across the country.

But this isn't taking place everywhere, and it needs to. Much work remains to be done.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In any organization there are bad apples. How does your organization deal with bad apples? I think the recent legislation may sometimes give perpetrators power over the complainants. I think people know and are concerned that whether or not people like yourself....

My dad was a policeman before the war. He was a nice guy and he spent a lot of time dealing with domestic violence. I know there are great people who choose to do this. But what we're hearing from the families is that there seems to be some people who choose this work because they're already bullies and somehow the training builds the bullying presence up, and we don't know how to take this back down.

Is there a screening to make sure that we get the right people doing these jobs? If we have the wrong people in certain positions, we should be able to move them out.

● (1955)

The Chair: Please give a short answer, if you would.

A/Commr Kevin Brosseau: Yes, there is screening. Yes, there are efforts to be more representative. I believe recruiting through a window as opposed to a mirror is critical. We represent the communities we police. We'll be far more effective and more trustworthy if we look like and represent the various cultures and genders in our communities. That would be a short answer to your question.

My position—and I'm directly accountable for this—is to ensure that when misconduct occurs in my workplace, I will deal with it swiftly and effectively.

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to you, Ms. Truppe.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just get right to some of my questions since we don't have a lot of time.

Thank you all for being here. I have a few questions for Ruth from PACE. I think you've done a great job on the reserves on some of the programs, who you are trying to work with, and what you're trying to achieve. You mentioned that you teach crisis intervention, and I believe you said you were teaching volunteers so that they could teach others. Is it easy to get volunteers?

Ms. Ruth Proulx: You bet it is.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: How do you get them?

Ms. Ruth Proulx: Through advertising, e-mails, technology, and Facebook—any way we can.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: So they just take on this leadership role on their own as a volunteer?

Ms. Ruth Proulx: Some people naturally take that on. Sometimes you have to say to them that you see something really great in them and you think this training would be fantastic for them. As you know, there are wounded people in your communities who have that natural helping link inside of them, so you just say, “Here, come.” While they're there, they're also healing their own wounds and they're becoming healers themselves.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: You also mentioned that when you don't have funding, you find funding. How do you find funding?

Ms. Ruth Proulx: We have a woman who works for us who is the brains of finding funding. Jacquie is....

Ms. Jamie Crozier: Our executive director is really good at writing a funding proposal. She's out there writing them all the time, trying to get whatever she can to sustain any programming we have.

Ms. Ruth Proulx: Another thing is that Jamie came back from a workshop recently. She told me about the percentage of people who write funding proposals and who actually get one. How many...?

Ms. Jamie Crozier: Only 17% of those who submit a first-time funding proposal are funded. It's not a huge amount.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Right. Thank you.

You also said that if you decreased the resilience factors, the community would be better. Can you give me some examples?

Ms. Ruth Proulx: Of increasing resiliency within a community?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: I think you said if you “decrease”.

Ms. Ruth Proulx: If you decrease vulnerability and increase resiliency—

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Do you have some examples of that?

Ms. Ruth Proulx: Of increasing resiliency? Community centres, cultural events, training, and opportunities like education, sports, and cadets—there's a multitude of different things people can join that increase friendships and decrease isolation. There are so many. The list goes on.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

I want to say before I move to my next question that you are right when you say we need to be doing something with men as well, so that they can let other men know that it is not right to do what they do. Status of Women has funded a program similar to that with the don't be a bystander program. I really love that program. It's in B.C. It involves the B.C. Lions going to 40 schools. At least it's a start, where they're engaging young boys.

My next question is for the RCMP. I probably don't have a lot of time.

I think you mentioned—I'm not sure who it was—that you implemented some policies in regard to the murdered and missing aboriginal women. Could you elaborate on a couple of the policies that you've implemented since then that would be helping?

A/Commr Kevin Brosseau: Yes, certainly we have a national policy to deal with missing persons. Historically, I think, there was a mindset that if someone's not missing for 24 hours, don't call us. That is in fact not the case.

The national policy directs that all missing persons complaints calls are treated as a priority investigation and will be addressed as such, with accountabilities throughout the process, including supervisors and managers in that accounting, which is significant. This means that immediately, no matter what, if a young person lives in a group home or whatever, the disappearance is treated seriously. We get a number of those. Of course, the large majority of them are found very soon or shortly after they were reported missing.

That's I think the key policy piece from a missing persons perspective. That has been rolled out into each division—we call our provinces and territories "divisions"—and localized into policy as well, so that senior officers review and are briefed on every missing persons complaint. When foul play is suspected, the investigative team is mustered immediately, including serious crime and major crime investigators, who of course are very seasoned and have the experience to be able to deal with this. One of the previous witnesses spoke about those critical early hours, and that is absolutely the case in policing.

● (2000)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Great. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Truppe.

Thanks to all of you for being here today. We very much appreciate your perspective and your being here to talk to us about this very important matter.

Again, thank you very much. I declare the meeting adjourned.