



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 068 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, June 13, 2017

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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We're going to resume our study of the economic security of women in Canada.

Today for our first panel, we have with us from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Corinne Prince, who is a director general; Stephanie Kirkland, also a director general; and David Cashaback, director, temporary immigration policy and programs. Then we have, from Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Amanda Deseure. From the Canadian Federation of Students, we have Charlotte Kiddell.

We're going to hear comments from them, beginning with Corinne for seven minutes.

Ms. Corinne Prince (Director General, Settlement and Integration Policy Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As you said, my name is Corinne Prince. I'm the director general of settlement and integration policy at Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada.

[Translation]

I'm here today with my colleagues Stephanie Kirkland, director general of the Settlement Network, which is responsible for the operations of the settlement and resettlement program; and David Cashaback, director of the Temporary Resident Policy and Programs.

[English]

We are very pleased to appear before the committee this morning, and we hope that our testimony will help you as you undertake your study on the economic security of women in Canada.

Let me begin by saying that my department takes the issue of economic participation and empowerment of immigrant and refugee women very seriously. We recognize the tremendous contributions that immigrant women make to the Canadian economy, and both the human and social capital that women bring to this country.

[Translation]

Despite our best efforts, the reality is that some immigrant and refugee women continue to face challenges achieving economic security. We're working in partnership with all three levels of government and with settlement service provider organizations to

ensure that the needs of immigrants, including women, are being addressed.

[English]

For the past 10 years, Canada has welcomed approximately 255,000 new permanent residents each year. In 2017, with increased levels, we will reach 300,000, and over half of all immigrants who arrived in Canada in 2016 as permanent residents were women. As you can see, women represent a large immigrant population to Canada and because of this, we want to ensure that they are afforded the opportunities and supports they need to succeed.

Immigrants come to Canada for different purposes: some to join family members, some to escape war or persecution, and some to improve their economic outcomes, all with different backgrounds and at different stages of their lives. The research tells us that the labour market participation rate and employment rate of immigrant women are lower than those of immigrant men and Canadian-born women, and that they are more likely to be living in a low-income situation than Canadian-born women.

Immigration can bring opportunities for immigrant and refugee women. However, we know that many women continue to face settlement and integration challenges on account of their gender.

[Translation]

Research and consultations tell us that issues include low official language proficiency; lack of economic independence; and challenges associated with housing, transportation and childcare.

[English]

For refugee women in particular, these settlement-related stressors are further exacerbated. We are seeing this with many of the Syrian families that have arrived. Economic stability for refugee families is important, and we have been collaborating with federal partners, including the Canada Revenue Agency, to increase awareness among refugees regarding how to obtain the Canada child benefit, which has proven critical to many Syrians.

The federal Canada child tax benefit and the HST/GST tax credit are available to resettled refugees during and beyond their first year in Canada, and will provide ongoing support to families with children of eligible age. In Ontario, for example, this could equate to over \$48,000 per year for a family with six children—the highest amount for a province or territory because it's combined with provincial benefits. The lowest amount would be provided in Nova Scotia, albeit it would still equate to almost \$43,500 for a family with the same six children. You can see that an additional \$40,000 a year is a significant benefit, and it is not clawed back for either federal or provincial social assistance.

• (0850)

[Translation]

We've made reforms to caregiver programming. These reforms support Canada's efforts to reduce caregiver vulnerabilities, reunite caregivers sooner with their families, and improve their long-term economic outcomes.

[English]

In 2015 the department raised the minimum age of a spouse or partner in all temporary and permanent immigration programs from 16 to 18 years of age. This was done to discourage foreign nationals from entering into a marriage before the age of 18 for the purpose of obtaining immigration status in Canada. It was also intended to decrease the number of potentially vulnerable young spouses immigrating to Canada.

These changes are informed by a gender lens, and the dedicated GBA+ unit we have in the department helps us to examine the differential impacts of policies and programs on immigrant populations.

[Translation]

The department is committed to GBA+, and we integrate this across all lines of business. To my knowledge, IRCC is the only federal department with the legislative requirement to do so under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

[English]

In the settlement program, considerations for gender, age, diversity, and circumstances of migration are included in the design and delivery of settlement program policies. Once in Canada, immigrant and refugee women have access to the full suite of IRCC settlement supports. Through the settlement program the department provides more than \$600 million in funding annually to over 500 service provider organizations across Canada to deliver pre- and post-arrival settlement services to immigrants. With the additional funding this year, including the money for Syria and levels plan money, this amount will be over \$700 million. Women are taking up those services at a higher rate, at least at 55% of the whole.

These services are targeted for women-only language classes, conversation circles, family-focused workshops, information on women's rights and legal responsibilities, as well as the very important employment preparation.

Foreign credential recognition is also an important component. Preparation for licensure, job bridging programs, and job search workshops, including blended or women's only workshops, are an

important component of our programming. We provide services both overseas and in Canada to provide early access to employment before the individuals even land on Canadian soil, as well as to get their credentials in order.

I will be happy to add other components to my comments through questions and answers. On behalf of the IRCC team, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Amanda Deseure for seven minutes.

Ms. Amanda Deseure (Manager, Socio-Economic Development, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, members of Parliament, chair, co-chairs, guests, and, of course, staff.

My name is Amanda Deseure. I'm the acting manager of the socio-economic development department of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada.

I also want to send greetings from Pauktuutit's president, Rebecca Kudloo, who sends her apologies. She wishes she was able to attend today.

The socio-economic development department has a mandate to cover a broad range of social, economic, and political issues as they pertain to Inuit women. This includes work on education, housing, political equality, business development, and much more.

Pauktuutit is the national representative organization of Inuit women in Canada and is governed by a 14-member board of directors from across Canada. It fosters greater awareness of the needs of Inuit women, advocates for equality and social improvements, and encourages their participation in the community, regional, and national life of Canada. Pauktuutit leads and supports Inuit women in Canada through work that ranges from advocacy and policy development to community projects, to address their unique interests and priorities for the social, cultural, political, and economic betterment of Inuit women, their families, and communities.

Inuit women's economic participation in the Canadian economy is inextricably linked to their access to child care, proper, violence-free housing, food security, and empowerment. While I do not have the time today to explore all of these intersections, it is imperative that the committee keep them in mind while we continue.

The Inuit consistently experience lower economic participation levels than the Canadian average. In 2012, the national average unemployment rate was approximately 7.3%. For Inuit, the average unemployment rate was more than double, at 16.5%.

At first glance, Inuit women across the north appear to be more successful at securing employment than Inuit men. Despite similar participation rates, the unemployment rate for Inuit women in 2012 across Inuit Nunangat was 16.2%, compared to a rate of 23.5% for Inuit men. This means that Inuit women and men are actively seeking employment and entrepreneurship at roughly the same rate, but Inuit women are more likely to succeed.

This greater success is likely tied to Inuit women's higher educational achievements as compared to Inuit men. However, their education rate is still significantly lower than that of other Canadian or indigenous women. The aboriginal peoples survey shows that Inuit women in Canada are more likely than Inuit men to complete secondary school or the equivalent. Still, in 2012, only 46% of Inuit women aged 18 to 44 years had completed the requirements for a high school diploma or equivalent. The primary reasons for leaving school were pregnancy and/or the need to care for children.

Furthermore, the labour market participation rate of Inuit women in Inuit Nunangat is about 60%. This means that approximately two out of every five Inuit women are not working and not looking for work. There is serious cause for concern around the participation of Inuit women in the Canadian economy and their ability to build strong careers and futures for themselves.

The economy of Inuit Nunangat is far more concentrated than in southern Canada. The regional economies are reliant upon governments, resource development, transportation, and a small private sector for the vast majority of employment. The Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CanNor, indicates that the northern economy is predominantly driven by the natural resource sector and the public sector. Employment in federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments remains the single largest source of jobs in the region.

Natural resource projects often are the highest paid employment in the north, and disproportionately employ Inuit men rather than Inuit women. This means that while Inuit women have a higher employment rate, on average their income is substantially lower.

In addition, recent census numbers suggest that while most Inuit live in Inuit Nunangat, a growing percentage live in southern urban centres. Indeed, in 1996, only 17% of Inuit lived outside of Inuit Nunangat, compared to a 2011 survey that indicated 27.9% of Inuit live outside Inuit Nunangat.

To better understand these trends and the needs of urban Inuit women, Pauktuutit just completed a comprehensive five-city research report on the needs of urban Inuit women. Most participants stated that urban centres brought economic opportunity through employment, training, and formal education. In contrast, women also highlighted that lack of options and opportunities were a major push factor for many Inuit women leaving their communities.

To begin addressing much of the research, feedback, and needs that were highlighted, Pauktuutit has developed numerous programs. Today I will be narrowing in on two of our programs. We have mentorship for Inuit women, and the Inuit Women in Business Network.

The Inuit Women in Business Network was created in 2011, through a three-year project jointly funded by Status of Women

Canada and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, to foster a sustainable local network of Inuit businesswomen to rely on for guidance and support, as well as to encourage entrepreneurship as a viable career option for Inuit women and girls. The IWBN was developed because of feedback that Pauktuutit received from Inuit businesswomen that they felt unsupported and socially isolated, but also that the barriers to entrepreneurship were overwhelming.

The Inuit Women in Business Network pilot began with face-to-face meetings in Iqaluit led by a Pauktuutit staff member, to get feedback, needs, and issues that the businesswomen in Iqaluit faced. Taking this feedback, Pauktuutit developed business resources, including a trilingual Inuit-specific guide to starting a business, and developed a website to house an electronic copy of this guide, in addition to a suite of plain language resources on banking, accounting, registering your business, and more.

Following the initial contact and networking, many of the women in the IWBN began meeting on their own for support and guidance. They are still meeting today.

● (0855)

The IWBN was granted new funding for the 2016-17 year, and Pauktuutit has just completed an expansion of the IWBN network and website to stretch across Inuit Nunangat. The process included developing new resources, outreach, and face-to-face meetings in Iqaluit, Kuujuaq and Rankin Inlet. Today, the IWBN has over 90 members.

In addition, Pauktuutit also has a mentorship for Inuit women pilot project, funded by the Status of Women Canada, that works to pair Inuit businesswomen at different stages of business with each other for support and guidance. This project is currently entering its third year and has been a complementary project to the IWBN. While the majority of these projects are conducted in Inuit Nunangat, Pauktuutit plans to expand the IWBN to the rest of Canada to ensure that urban Inuit women are able to participate and feel supported.

Our recommendations moving forward would be that all programs and services must take into consideration the context of Inuit women's lives. The accessibility and availability of child care that is affordable, reliable, safe, and culturally relevant must be increased; it was the number one demand when we spoke to women. Service providers and stakeholder organizations must strengthen partnerships to share expertise, resources, and knowledge around the needs of Inuit women. Service providers must be innovative in their communications strategies to engage Inuit women locally, regionally, and nationally. Opportunities to build Inuit women's leadership capacity and empowerment must be developed and promoted. Targeted public investment in infrastructure is required to reduce the costs of doing business and seeking employment. Entrepreneurship services and programs must aim to provide a continuum of support to Inuit women, from pre-start to aftercare. Employment environments, services, and training programs must seek to accommodate the specific responsibilities, needs, and challenges of Inuit women in the workplace. Mentorship and networking opportunities must be developed to connect Inuit women with each other, elders, and topic experts for ongoing guidance and support. Finally, educational institutions, programs, and services must seek to engage youth and to accommodate their needs to support the development of future leaders, businesswomen, and executives.

For more information, I have brought a few hard copies of a strategy developed by Pauktuutit on how to engage Inuit women in economic participation. It's very nice, and I'm very happy to also provide an electronic copy for anyone interested. You're welcome to grab these on your way out as well.

Thank you very much.

• (0900)

The Chair: That was excellent.

Now we'll go to Charlotte Kiddell from the Canadian Federation of Students for seven minutes.

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell (Deputy Chairperson, Nova Scotia, Canadian Federation of Students): Thank you, and good morning, members of the committee.

My name is Charlotte Kiddell, and I am the deputy chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students. The federation is Canada's oldest and largest national student organization, representing over 650,000 college, undergraduate, and graduate students from coast to coast.

I'd like to start by thanking you for inviting me to present today. I'm here to discuss how improving access to post-secondary education can be used as a tool to improve the economic status of women. I believe that post-secondary education is one of the best ways to raise people out of poverty, but only if it is accessible. Any strategy that aims to strengthen women's economic security must address the inaccessibility of post-secondary education in Canada. The federal government is in a unique position to take bold action to make this a priority.

Today, the average student accumulates \$28,000 in public student debt during a four-year degree. While Canada's post-secondary education system is publicly assisted, many students cannot afford the high up-front cost of tuition fees and end up paying more for

their education than their counterparts who are able to pay up front. As I will explain, the negative effects of our current post-secondary education system are gendered.

Today, Canada ranks among the top countries for its proportion of citizens with post-secondary training. Since the 1990s, women have also made up the majority of students enrolled in college and undergraduate university programs. There is much to be proud of. It has been shown time and time again that higher levels of education drastically improve employment rates, and as a result, economic security. However, to develop an effective strategy to strengthen women's economic security, it is important to explore what is currently required to pursue post-secondary education in Canada.

As we have seen a decline in public funding for post-secondary education since the mid-1990s, costs have increasingly been downloaded onto students. In fact, the revenue generated by tuition fees in post-secondary institutions has tripled since 2001, and average tuition fees have reached \$6,373 this year. As some form of post-secondary education is now required for 70% of new jobs in Canada, students who cannot afford the high up-front cost of tuition must incur life-impacting levels of debt.

Student debt is disproportionately a women's issue. Today, women account for 60% of Canada student loan recipients. This reliance on student loans is further intensified for women from marginalized communities, including racialized women, indigenous women, and women with disabilities. In this inequitable, debt-based model, women who must take out a \$30,000 student loan to finance their education will pay \$10,318 more over 10 years than a student who can afford the high up-front costs.

After receiving their diplomas, women are also disproportionately forced to rely on the repayment assistance program to pay back these loans. To qualify for the repayment assistance program, you must earn less than \$25,000 per year. Today, 66% of repayment assistance users are women. There are a number of reasons for this higher usage. First, while women continue to be more likely than men to pursue post-secondary education, this has not resulted in higher salaries. Women working full-time continue to make on average 87 cents for every dollar that a male full-time worker earns. Second, Statistics Canada data shows that women continue to be more likely to be precariously employed than men, including taking on part-time positions or temporary contracts. In 2014, the number of women in involuntary part-time positions was nearly double that of men. This feminization of precarious labour has also impacted women who pursue graduate degrees. A 2016 survey of sessional instructors in Ontario found that 60% of contract faculty are women, and on average, they make less than \$20,000 per year for this work.

When discussing women's participation in the labour market, it is also important to acknowledge the experiences of members of trans communities. A research project conducted in Ontario between 2006 and 2010 found that though 44% of respondents had a post-secondary education, the median income of respondents was \$15,000 per year as a result of employment barriers and discrimination. A strategy to strengthen the economic security of women must address the experiences of trans women across Canada.

• (0905)

Because of massive debt and an unfavourable labour market that underpays women and favours precarious, underpaid, and even unpaid work, many graduates struggle to fully participate in the Canadian economy. The pressure to pay back loans can impact career choices and result in graduates finding themselves underemployed and outside of their field, living pay cheque to pay cheque.

Higher education alone is not an adequate solution to women's economic insecurity. As long as women must take on these high levels of debt to pursue post-secondary education, we won't be able to truly address the gendered effects of this inequitable system. To strengthen women's economic security, the federal government must make post-secondary education accessible to all. High-quality, accessible, and tuition-free education may seem like a pipe dream to some, but luckily students have developed a comprehensive plan for the federal government to make this a reality. This includes restoring federal transfers to provinces and territories, and developing a fifty-fifty cost-sharing model with the provinces and territories to eliminate tuition fees for all students. This plan is laid out in the federation's most recent lobby document, which I have copies of here.

Lastly, a strategy to strengthen the economic security of women must also address barriers women experience once they are on campus. A significant barrier to both accessing and succeeding in post-secondary institutions is the prevalence of sexual violence, including sexual assaults, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence. Studies show that one in five women will experience sexual violence during their time on campus. Most sexual assaults occur during the first eight weeks of the school year. This is a significant barrier to learning, as all students on campus must feel

safe in order to succeed in their studies. This discussion on women's security must include a strategy to combat sexual violence.

Am I at seven minutes? I'm almost done.

While I am encouraged to see the strides being made in some provinces and the recommendations put forward by this standing committee, students will continue to call for the federal government to be bolder in its commitments to combat sexual violence on campuses across the country, calling for a strong national action plan that mandates participation at all levels of government.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Very good.

I appreciate everybody's adherence to the seven-minute rule.

We're going to start our seven minutes of questions with my colleague, Ms. Ludwig.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for your presentations this morning.

I'm going to start with Ms. Kiddell on the subject of tuition.

The average tuition debt would be roughly \$6,073 a year. I just want to put this together. I know we have provinces in Canada that are now offering free tuition. The road from high school to college or from high school to university is not an easy one for those who do not have role models, mentors, or people that they can follow or have for support. As a parent who has just put two kids through post-secondary education, I wish that all we had to pay was the tuition. The living expenses far exceed the actual cost of tuition. It's something that concerns me. I think offering free tuition is an important first step, but I'm not sure that's going to answer all the issues because there are so many other factors associated with that. Maybe you could speak to that and also to how someone is going to manage all the living costs once they arrive there.

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell: Thank you. That's an excellent question.

First, I'd like to clarify the free-tuition piece. Ontario and New Brunswick now have models of upfront student grants that propose to eliminate tuition fees for students from families that make under a certain income threshold. However, these aren't models that actually eliminate tuition fees upfront. They are like student aid bursary disbursements.

Your question about the cost of living is an excellent one. We advocate, alongside the elimination of tuition fees, for increased investment in the Canada student grants program. There are, as you say, significant costs of living associated with pursuing post-secondary education and, of course, these are amplified for folks from marginalized communities who may not have family support. We have a vision of the elimination of tuition fees alongside robust, upfront, needs-based grant funding.

• (0910)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Okay, thank you.

We've heard from witnesses before regarding the repayment assistance program. I think it's currently six months. The recommendation from a previous witness was for up to a year. Is that something you would be looking for, as well, or you would recommend?

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell: Yes. Any increase to student assistance is welcome, but, ultimately, this is just pushing the burden of paying the debt down the line. Whether students are paying their student debt six months in, a year in, or five years in, ultimately, they are accumulating much more debt in order to pursue their post-secondary education than those who are able to pay upfront, which is why the number one thing we ask for is for upfront barriers to be addressed.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Okay. Thank you.

I have another question for you.

We've heard from a previous witness regarding not only the cost of post-secondary, but also the issue of unpaid internships. Again, for a parent, it is a little concerning where a full tuition is charged for an internship period, and the student who is out working still has the cost of going to school but also the additional cost of working. I wonder if you could speak to the concern regarding unpaid internships and paying full tuition during that term.

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell: Absolutely.

We also call for the elimination of unpaid internships. We welcome the first step that was taken in budget 2017 in terms of eliminating unpaid internships here on the Hill, but we think that the federal government has a much larger role to play in terms of eliminating unpaid internships for all programs across the country.

That's something again that is disproportionately relevant to women. The programs that tend to feature unpaid internships are often female dominated: child and youth studies, education, nutrition, and that kind of thing.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: I have one last question for you. In my previous role, I was the associate dean of faculty and I oversaw about 84 sessional instructors. Certainly the income of \$20,000 a year could be reflected, but did you also dig into the fact that so many sessional instructors teach at multiple institutions?

Sometimes they're putting together a full salary, which even makes it more difficult if they're earning \$50,000 to \$60,000 and they're teaching six or seven courses at different institutions. Did you look into that as well?

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell: Absolutely. I'm not an expert on that issue, but I will say that it reflects what we recognize as the overall

deterioration of quality with institutions being underfunded. It's not just about the high cost of education; it's about increasing reliance on contract faculty who are sometimes splitting their time between schools, and increasing class sizes, all of these things.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell: Thank you.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: My next questions are for Ms. Prince.

On the IRCC settlement supports, one of the things I see said too frequently online, and I would like you to provide me with a response on this so I could share it with others, is that refugees receive more income supports than seniors in Canada. Is that the case?

Ms. Corinne Prince: That's a very good question. I do not have with me a comparison of the federal and provincial packages of support for seniors versus newcomers to Canada.

I know there has been some narrative, certainly since the Syrian cohort, that with 45,000 Syrian refugees coming to Canada, there are special supports for Syrians even versus other refugee-source countries. I can assure you that, in terms of settlement and integration programming, the department provides the full suite of resettlement services for all refugees coming to Canada and a full suite of settlement services past the six-week point to both refugees and immigrants.

There are distinctions in the refugee class between government-assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees. I don't know what the knowledge level of the committee is, but government-assisted refugees do receive income support from IRCC for the first 12 months that they're in the country, while privately sponsored refugees receive supports from their private sponsors.

The child tax benefit that I mentioned in my opening statement is, of course, available to all refugees and immigrants to Canada, and as I explained, it is an important and significant federal contribution.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you. Maybe that's where some of that myth is.

The Chair: I will go to my colleague Ms. Vecchio for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you.

Ms. Prince, I want to continue with you. We have heard from the citizenship and immigration minister that the unemployment rate for Syrian refugees is sitting at about 90%. That has been confirmed. You also talked about 55% of the people taking part in some of your workshops being women. If we can look at some of those stats and disaggregate them, when we're talking about 55% being women, are we looking at 55% of the whole or is it 55% of so many?

What I'm looking at is, what is that finite number? Are all the refugees being considered in that, or have you taken into consideration the number of families that are not participating in these workshops? It is just so that I can get a clearer picture, if you don't mind.

Ms. Corinne Prince: Sure.

I believe I said in my opening statement that over a half of the newcomers to Canada are women. We know from the take-up rates of our services that approximately 55% of the clients are women. The statistics we're using are from the year 2015-16; the last year's are being finalized.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Can you delve a little deeper into that?

We have 45,000 new Syrian refugees. How many of them are participating in these supportive programs? Let's look at the whole number first, because breaking it down to 55%. If we're looking at one out of one, that's still 100%. What are those actual numbers of people, not percentages, because I want to know what the gross number is?

Ms. Corinne Prince: Sure.

There are two things I can provide you with off the top of my head. I'll provide one other additional piece post-committee.

We know that in 2015-16 we served approximately 400,000 newcomers. I don't have the breakdown of refugees versus immigrants. We can see if our research and evaluation team can get that to you.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I would greatly appreciate that.

Ms. Corinne Prince: Okay.

The second thing I would provide is this. The department did a rapid impact evaluation of the operation Syria and that is a very important report that really does break it down for you, and it's the clearest we have to date. It shows that 100% of Syrian children are in the education system. It shows the percentage of Syrian refugees who have been assessed for language training as opposed to the percentage of Syrian refugees who are actually taking language classes. The employment rate is in there. I actually think it's higher. You quoted a 90% unemployment rate.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes. The immigration minister stated that.

Ms. Corinne Prince: That may have been early on. The report shows better findings than that.

I think it would be fabulous for us to get that to the committee.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That would be great.

I think the date that he proposed those numbers was in March of this year. We're talking about just in the last few months.

Ms. Corinne Prince: Okay, thanks.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: We can talk about women but when we're looking at the family as a whole, part of my role as a critic for family, children, and social development is seeing what's working and not working in communities. In the City of Medicine Hat, they have over 50 Syrian refugee families now using the food bank. One of their biggest issues is the language barrier because there is not the proper

training for English as a second language, or even French as a second language.

What can we do better there? The bottom line is that if we know this is one of the greatest barriers, why are we not driving all of our resources into the first barrier that will then help with employment, with integration, and a variety of things.

I want to know a bit more about the language training because I think whether we're looking at men or women, it's a family issue and it's an issue for them to be able to do better in Canadian society.

Can you give me more detail on that?

Ms. Corinne Prince: Absolutely, Ms. Vecchio.

I want to try to unpack it a little for you, because it's a multi-layered issue in terms of certainly refugee integration, but immigrant integration overall.

Refugees coming into Canada are eligible for the full suite of services. We know that.

In terms of language, there are many Syrian women and Syrian families whose language level is at the very lowest literacy rate. The way we manage language classes, they run from literacy to Canadian language benchmarks 1 through 10. We're finding that our Syrian families are at the very lowest levels, from literacy to CLB 4.

What the department did, and my colleague Ms. Kirkland might want to comment on it, was increase the number of language places, certainly since operation Syria, to respond to the intense pressure we have encountered.

I was very honest in my opening statement. We are not able to provide every single newcomer to Canada with every service they need. They're all available, but they're limited. Even though Canada is spending more than \$1 billion a year on settlement and integration services across the country, we can always do more.

In the first instance, we have looked to increase language spaces. We have also looked to address the issue that Syrians are asking for: they don't only want to learn language; they want to work. We've put in place very creative and innovative programs, such as the one in place at The Prince George Hotel in Halifax. The hotel has agreed to hire Syrian housekeepers and pay them for eight hours a day under the supervision of a bilingual manager who can speak both English and Arabic. We call it the "pod" system. The manager can take direction from the hotel staff and translate it into Arabic down to the housekeepers, and can translate any issues, questions, or concerns back up to English from the housekeepers to the hotel staff. In addition, from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., the hotel gives its boardroom for a language class. The local settlement agency sends the language teacher into the hotel and provides the housekeepers with English-language training.

● (0920)

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Malcolmson, for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. We heard from groups in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith that they spend a phenomenal amount of staff time applying for project-oriented funding that they might not get and live in a precarious situation from year to year, relying on project funding. They keep saying to me, “We just wish the government would admit we’re delivering services that no one else will deliver, and why not give us operational funding instead of project funding?” This will mean funding that they can count on.

When Tracy O’Hearn was at the status of women committee in October, she said that was Pauktuutit’s situation. It was relying on project funding from year to year, which was uncertain.

Is that still your situation? Can you describe the impacts of that?

Ms. Amanda Deseure: Yes. Thank you so much. It’s a really important question at Pauktuutit.

By way of a little background, under the Harper government administration, Pauktuutit’s core funding was reduced by 10%, from \$440,000 to \$396,000. Our core funding is still \$396,000; however, we do receive a top-up of approximately \$90,000 on an annual basis.

We are currently costing, though, what a reasonable annual operating budget would be for Pauktuutit, and it’s conservatively estimated at \$1.5 million. We are definitely under capacity. We do rely heavily on project funding. It definitely does affect our ability to retain staff and our ability to deliver projects consistently and sustainably.

For example, the IWBN was a three-year funded project. Then there was a break in our funding. We just regained funding for the 2015-16 year, and we’re hoping again to apply for new funding.

Definitely, funding is a problem and it does sacrifice and compromise the quality of our programming.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Ms. Kiddell of the Canadian Federation of Students, thank you for your work.

In the brief that they submitted to our committee, the BC Federation of Students noted that many young women find themselves in precarious work while they’re going to school and after they graduate and that they become trapped in cycles of precarious work, leading to lower pay and problems with economic security. Is that a pattern that the Canadian Federation of Students has observed as well?

● (0925)

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell: Yes, absolutely. I’ve lost the number now, but I think a disproportionate number of women are taking on precarious work and unpaid internships as well, so we see the need to invest both in making post-secondary education more accessible but also increasing the number of high-quality jobs available to women.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: In my riding we also heard from women at Vancouver Island University that they have trouble affording the child care spaces they need when pursuing a degree. We had an announcement on child care yesterday by the federal government, which was a nice small first step, but it does look again as if it’s a bit of a patchwork that will be implemented in different ways in

different provinces. We heard from Lisa Kelly from Unifor that this targeted approach won’t work. Universal child care is needed.

Can you talk a little about the impact of the high cost of or even lack of access to child care at all. What’s the personal impact on the women students you talk with?

Ms. Charlotte Kiddell: Absolutely. We endorse the calls from our coalition partners in the labour movement for a universal system of child care. I don’t have the best expertise in this, but it’s part of our holistic vision for accessible post-secondary education, recognizing that women and trans folks experience a disproportionate number of access barriers, whether financial, sexualized violence on campus, lack of access to child care spaces, etc.. That is why we call for a robust system of investment in universal public services.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Pauktuutit, your organization in the past has identified housing as one of the most pressing issues facing Inuit women. Overcrowded and poor housing has been identified as having a negative impact on the ability of Inuit women to pursue employment or training.

Can you talk a little more about how those issues intersect, and what you’d like to see the federal government do?

Ms. Amanda Deseure: Of course.

Housing and overcrowding and lack of infrastructure is a dire crisis in the north. I can’t underline that enough.

There are issues of overcrowding because there is a lack of housing. A lot of families choose to stay in the north. Then there is a lack of child care in the north, including because of a lack of infrastructure for child care spaces. Unfortunately, that means that everyone is in one space all the time. Poor housing also deters a lot of women from being able to leave violent situations if there’s no place for them to go, so we do end up having a lot of communities with cycles of violence because of lack of space and independence.

Also, there's the issue of the ability to even start a business. In the business network, we have a lot of wonderful, talented Inuit businesswomen who are unable to have storefronts, one, because of the cost, and two, because there is no place for a storefront. So they're operating businesses within their homes. But if you already have your partner, two kids, and maybe an adult child with their own child in a two-bedroom house that's not even meeting standards that would be acceptable in the south, operating a business from those spaces is very difficult. A lot of them are starting their businesses in their kitchens, or perhaps in a back bedroom, and sometimes in the summer they might be outside working. They might have a shed that they're working out of, and I think that points to their extreme resiliency and wanting better for their communities and families and themselves as well.

I would definitely recommend immediate higher investments in infrastructure. Also, there are a lot of other barriers. We just had a gender-specific session on child care led by Pauktutit, and one of the things we heard from some child care providers is that the stipulations and regulations around child care spaces are very southern. A very specific example is that when trying to build a new building, you have to have three contractors give you an appraisal, but in a community of 800 to 2,000, where are you going to find three contractors to give you those appraisals within a very specific time limit to meet regulations proposed by the government? We definitely need to review the funding regulations for infrastructure and increased investment in housing.

• (0930)

The Chair: Excellent.

Now we'll go to Ms. Vandenberg, for seven minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you.

I want to thank all of you for your interventions, but my questions are going to be specifically for Ms. Prince.

This week marks exactly 18 years since Canada took in 7,000 Kosovo refugees. In fact, we're having an event on the Hill later today to highlight the success stories. There are leaders in business, in the arts, in sports, and in the media. A number of the refugees today are running businesses that have employed hundreds of Canadians.

I'm interested in what you said about your evaluation of the operation for the Syrian refugees. In response to a question about what the minister had said previously, you implied that things had improved since then.

Are there longitudinal studies? Are there evaluations that follow refugees over the course of a number of years, or even decades, to show the economic impact they have had, their success stories, and their achievement levels in education? Can you comment on that?

Ms. Corinne Prince: Yes, absolutely. That is a huge success story.

The department does track refugee and immigrant cohorts over time. I'm very pleased to share that the settlement program evaluation is just being completed, and will provide data on outcomes and outputs of the program over the past five years. That

evaluation is the largest one the department completes. It's coming to an end very quickly and will be published and available publicly, I believe, in August of this year.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Does that evaluation include gender disaggregated data?

Ms. Corinne Prince: I believe it does.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Good. We look forward to seeing that.

I have another question for you. Right now, we have legislation before Parliament that would allow spouses to get permanent residency the moment they arrive in Canada. It's usually a female spouse who is being sponsored. Of course, one of the reasons for that is to make sure that they don't have to remain in a marriage in order to maintain their immigration status in Canada, particularly if that marriage might be violent, or if it's detrimental to the spouse to stay in the marriage.

I'm also interested, given our study, in what impact that might have on the economic security of the spouse arriving in Canada.

Ms. Corinne Prince: I will pass that question to my colleague, David Cashaback.

Mr. David Cashaback (Director, Temporary Resident Policy and Programs, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

Thanks for the question. I'm pleased to announce that on April 18 of this year, the government repealed that requirement.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Good. They did.

Mr. David Cashaback: It had been in place for spouses who had been in a relationship for less than two years, with no children in common. There had been a period of so-called conditional permanent residency, which really only required the spouse to cohabit with their sponsor for a period of two years.

This speaks to your second question. One of the things that we realized was that there was the potential for staying in an abusive relationship out of fear that the person's immigration status could be jeopardized. Even though there were mechanisms to address that, that fear and power dynamic is something we saw operating. With the repeal, we're confident that someone will be able to get out of a dangerous or abusive situation, let alone assure their economic stability.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

I'll pass the rest of my time to Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I want to thank all of you for being here.

I wanted to start briefly on child care. As you probably know, there has been a lack of federal leadership on child care for a number of years. We have committed \$7.5 billion over the next 11 years towards child care.

Yesterday, our minister signed a framework with most of the provinces and territories. There were a couple that weren't part of that, but there is a will to have a framework around child care.

Could you perhaps speak to some of the guidance you could give to the federal government as those bilateral agreements are done, and as we move forward on those investments in child care from our side? It is something that has been lacking for quite some time.

• (0935)

Ms. Corinne Prince: Thank you for that important question, particularly with regard to immigrant and refugee integration.

The policy of the department is that if we don't provide child care, transportation, and interpretation services, we likely won't be able to get the clients, particularly the female clients, to the language classes, employment services, or the full suite of services we offer.

Child minding and child care is an inherent component of the settlement program. When refugee or immigrant mothers or women—any clients—want to come to a settlement agency in their community to access programming, a child care facility is provided there to care for the children while the client is in the class. There is transportation funding available to help get them to the class, and while they are there, there are interpretation and translation services, should they need them.

Now, I must admit that with 45,000 Syrians arriving in Canada—many of the Syrian families are very large, with six, eight, 10 children—this has put an immense pressure on our settlement agencies when the family arrives at the door. The settlement agency may have 25 child care spaces, but a mom arrives with eight children, and there may only be two vacancies in the day care. This has required the department to quickly react and add additional funding to increase the number of child care spaces.

The Chair: Very good.

I want to thank all of our witnesses today for their excellent work. We certainly could talk at length, but what I want to do is squeeze in committee business here to try to maximize the number of questions for the next witnesses.

We just have three little things to talk about.

The first one is the order in council appointment. You, I think, received a notification that this appointment is happening. We have an opportunity as a committee to call the appointed person before us if we want to interview or ask her questions. I don't know if the committee's interested in doing that.

Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Can you tell us more? I don't have that with me.

The Chair: Okay. Let me just pull it out.

The memo says that Gina Wilson of Gatineau, Quebec—who previously, I think, was with Public Safety—as an order of council appointment is now coming over to Status of Women. I don't know why people would want to interview someone once the appointment has been made, but apparently in the past it's been something that has been offered to the committees.

No? Okay. I didn't think there'd be huge interest in that one. That was easy.

Oh, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I was just going to say that with the year-end coming down, I think I'd rather continue with the study.

The Chair: We can do it until October 7, so we could do it in the fall.

Ms. Pam Damoff: She's well into her job then.

The Chair: I know. I agree.

The second thing is the Bill C-337 letter. If you remember, there was a letter that we were going to provide to the justice minister on that bill, that she could then give to her provincial counterparts. The draft was sent. Are there any changes that you'd like to see to that?

Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'm very grateful that our previous changes were all incorporated, but in reading it again I have three suggestions.

One is that we should say who the letter is to, because it doesn't. I think we're directing it to the Minister of Justice, but it should say that at the top of the page.

I'd also suggest in the second full paragraph that instead of “the Committee would like to invite the Minister”, we change it to, “the Committee encourages the Minister”. We want to be, I think, a bit more active about this.

At the very end, partly because what we're asking the minister to do is fan this out to her provincial counterparts, I'd like to see a very final sentence saying, “Will you please let us know if you do relay this to your provincial and territorial counterparts”, so that we have some kind of feedback about whether the message was delivered or received.

The Chair: Ms. Damoff.

• (0940)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I like those additions to the last sentence. I wonder if we could not just inquire if she reached out, but add “if you could advise us on the outcome of your conversations”, or “the outcome of your...”.

The Chair: “Communications”?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: It's like a team effort, super.

Are there any other changes? Those are excellent, thanks.

The last thing is regarding our work plan. We have Thursday's meeting and witnesses coming. Then for next week we were uncertain about what would be happening. Many of the next witnesses—we have two or three panels left—are not able to appear at that time and can't come until the fall. We had said that at the end of the study we would recall all the different departments that we had at the beginning of the study. The idea was maybe to plan that for Tuesday because those people are local people, and then depending on if the House rises or not, we have something to do there.

This leaves us with one other meeting, which is the Thursday, if we're still here next week. I thought perhaps we would devote the time to figuring out what we're going to study next.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: I know, don't cry.

I thought we should have a conversation about what we're going to study after this because when we come back in the fall, there are really only two or three meetings to continue on this study before our analysts will be able to start drafting a report, and we'll be able to call other people.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Could I get a time frame? We're still going to continue with this study in the fall. It's not that I don't want to work on Tuesday. I'm just saying that we're going to be calling them back. How many meetings have we actually had to date on this, before we start calling them back?

The Chair: I'm winging it here, but I think that initially 24 sessions were scheduled and we have about four left, so we've probably had about 18 or 19.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I just didn't know whether we want to do it more as a true wrap-up, because this is a kind of three-quarter wrap-up, that's all.

The Chair: There are 12 witnesses left to call, and three at a time makes four panels, which is two meetings. Then there is a list of people we would call if we couldn't get the other ones to come. That's really all that's left to do, other than the departmental witnesses.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: The reason I'm indicating this is that we know we'll come back to finish this study, but we may also want to consider what some of the other studies are that we want to start in the fall and early winter as well. Because we know there's a good 50-50 chance the House will adjourn on Thursday, maybe this is something we could do on Tuesday, so that we can start preparing this summer so that we're ready for the next study as well.

I'm just thinking that I don't want the officials to be called too soon, because I prefer it to be an actual wrap-up. From looking at all the testimony we get from the individuals, there may be questions from these last 12 witnesses that we really want to ask the departments about.

That said, we also have the opportunity to discuss what we want to do in the fall, following this report.

The Chair: Could I recommend that we do one panel and one hour of discussion about what we're going to study next?

Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: After we hear those panels in the fall, if we want to call the department back again we always could.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes, my take is that this would mean calling them back three times; that's all. I'm just looking at efficiency.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes, I think it would be great to have the department come in on Tuesday, just because they're here and we don't know what the schedule is going to be next week.

The Chair: It would also give us more time to think about what we want to study next, all summer long.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Well, yes.

The Chair: Is that okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll go with the departments, then, for Tuesday, and if we're still here Thursday then we'll talk about what we'll do in the fall. Very good.

We'll suspend while we get our next panel going.

● (0940)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (0945)

The Chair: We're ready to begin our second panel as we continue to study the economic security of women in Canada.

We have with us by video conference, from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, Wanda Morris.

We also have in person, from the Island Crisis Care Society, Violet Hayes, the executive director; and Ronell Bosman, the programme director.

From my own Sarnia—Lambton riding, we have Bob Vansickle, from the Sarnia and District Association for Community Living. He is the manager of employment services and is world-renowned for promoting disabled people in employment and leveraging that model around the world.

Welcome to all of you.

We're going to begin with the Canadian Association of Retired Persons for seven minutes.

Ms. Wanda Morris (Vice-President , Advocacy, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): Thank you very much.

We are a member organization, with 300,000 members across the country. Primarily, our members are retired, but not exclusively so. While our members tend to have above-average education and income, they are very concerned about the plight of other seniors who may not have enough to live on in retirement.

I'm going to address some general factors contributing to low income in retirement for women, and then, time permitting, I'm going to talk specifically about issues related to caregivers and new Canadians.

Starting off, one of the issues for Canadians in retirement is that their retirement savings are too low, and there are a number of reasons for that. The panel will have already have heard about the traditional low wages of women in certain sectors, but there are things that can be done. One thing that CARP would like to point to and support as a model is the recent pension plan that was introduced by the SEIU, called My65+, which is a plan specifically targeted at low-income wage earners, to give them some financial security in retirement.

Another issue we see that affects low-income earners is that many of them who do save end up being advised to save in a registered retirement savings plan, an RRSP. You are probably aware that it's one of the worst things for low-income earners to do, because that directly impacts their ability to access programs later on in retirement. Perhaps the committee could make a recommendation to have an amnesty so that low-income earners could transfer their RRSP amounts to TFSA's so they wouldn't be penalized.

Another thing that CARP would love to see is the elimination of mandatory RRIF withdrawals. These made a lot of sense in a previous environment, where we had high earnings and lower lifespans. But now, particularly for women, who have such longevity, in a low interest rate environment many people are outliving their savings, and many more are losing their peace of mind for fear that they will do so.

Another issue affecting women in retirement, but really affecting both genders, is the lack of investor protection. That's something that we at CARP have talked about. Frankly, Canada is a bit of an international laggard when it comes to protecting our investors. We see that in the fact we pay some of the highest investment costs in the world. So that should be addressed.

Another related issue is elder abuse. Women are particularly prone to that. Financial elder abuse is the most common type of elder abuse, and that can, of course, directly impact the financial security of individuals in retirement.

Moving on, I'd like to talk about government programs to support people in retirement. Let's start with the CPP. We had a recent increase in CPP coverage, or we're moving towards that, which is a good step. But on behalf of our CARP membership, I would say that it's not enough. We need to do more for our lowest income earners, and the new CPP coverage of 33% of income isn't sufficient.

But the bigger issue with CPP and OAS is when we have two individuals, let's say a husband or wife or two individuals, living together quite comfortably on two OAS payments and a combined CPP. Then when one of them dies, typically the man because women do tend to live longer and marry slightly older, the other find themselves single, widowed and, all too frequently, impoverished. Are there some things that can be done to address that situation? In private pension plans there's often an election that the pension earner can make about spousal sharing of the pension. Perhaps we could provide that, so that the pensioner receives less CPP on retirement, but on their death the survivor pension increases because of the election that's been made.

• (0950)

With OAS, we look at OAS irrespective of the marital or the living arrangement of the individual. Two people, both getting the maximum OAS, can live very comfortably. It's harder for one individual, particularly in centres like Vancouver or Toronto, to live well on just the single amount. So perhaps it's time to look at OAS on that basis. Perhaps we could save a bit on the amount paid to couples, and use those savings to provide a bit more for the lowest earners and singles.

I already spoke about the importance of increasing the overall CPP contributions.

I'd like to touch on a new survey that we've just done. We haven't yet released it publicly, but I want to share it with the committee, because I think it's critical to what you're talking about here, which is the idea of a universal basic income. With the many things that have happened in our economy, with increased outsourcing and automation, I think the assumption that people can obtain good paying jobs as a matter of will alone is being challenged.

One of the ways to support people now and in the future is through the introduction of a universal basic income.

When we asked our members if they were in support of it, 29% were against, and 49% were for it, with the balance either being neutral or not having an opinion. Just to encapsulate that, for every CARP member polled who opposed a universal basic income, one and a half members supported the idea. Clearly, that's something that doesn't just impact women, but because women are disproportionately represented among the poor, it would be a measure that would help women, both through their working lives and then through retirement.

Finally, we can protect women in retirement, not simply by raising the income they earn during their working lives or in retirement, but also by controlling the expenses they face during their working lives and in retirement. Housing, for example, is usually the highest expense that anyone pays, so I would urge the committee to consider tangential solutions, because the provision of housing options would do very much to increase the financial security of women and their ability to live in retirement with dignity.

We hear many of our members talk about the fact that they want to live in a more financially sustainable way, but the options they're looking for just aren't available. For example, this could mean people cohabiting together to share expenses but not being quite room mates.

• (0955)

The Chair: That's your time.

Ms. Wanda Morris: That's my time, okay. I will stop there.

If there are questions, I'll happily provide the rest of our suggestions.

The Chair: Very good.

Now we're going to go to the Island Crisis Care Society and Violet Hayes for seven minutes.

Ms. Violet Hayes (Executive Director, Island Crisis Care Society): Good morning. It's a privilege to be here today. I'm here with Ronell Bosman, who is the programme director at a homeless shelter for women in Nanaimo.

Island Crisis Care Society is a non-profit society that helps people in crisis. We hope to help them stabilize and move forward with their lives, especially as we look at housing options and different things that are in place for people with multiple challenges and maybe concurrent disorders.

Today, as I say, we are very privileged. I want to speak, first of all, about the lack of affordable housing in our area. Prices of housing have skyrocketed in Nanaimo, and on Vancouver Island generally, so we're seeing many landlords who are deciding to just sell their properties and cash in. That leaves people not able to find a place to rent. People who have lived in their rental units for 15 years are calling us, because now they're not going to have anywhere to go. The possible places they can go to and afford at this time are very slim. Landlords with vacancies are able to charge extortionate rates because there's so little available.

As I said, Samaritan House is the homeless shelter for women, and it's the only one on the mid-island. We operate out of a 100-year-old building, so of course there are many stairs and many challenges. We also provide supportive and transitional housing for women, and rent subsidies. Since we added these additional supports in 2013, through a project with BC Housing, we've seen how beneficial it is to have the option to move the women—as they need more supports—in and out of these different programs. We've found the positive relationships they've built with the staff have really been helpful as they move through those transitions. When they have a change in circumstance or need more support, we find that it doesn't seem as much of a failure when they have to accept more support.

This year, we had an 82-year-old woman and a 76-year-old woman, who so far have accessed our homeless shelter for the first time. We have 14 shelter beds and six supported units in this 100-year-old building, but we're finding it extremely challenging due to the lack of space. It's so hard to turn women away, and to what alternative? To sleep in the bush, or to go back to unsafe rental conditions or perhaps a drug house?

Women often return to violence, or back to these different places, because they have nowhere else to go. These are very challenging times. We put as many women as we can on mats on the floor in our dining room, but in the daytime they simply have to leave, because we can't be all mixed up with one another. Our building is just too small.

Another concern has to do with disabilities, mental disorders, and addictions, and our ability to provide a therapeutic community for these clients. Having eight women sleep in a dormitory on bunk beds is not helpful when you might have one person who's experiencing psychosis, another who's in active drug addiction, and then perhaps a senior lady who's never been homeless before.

Persistent patterns of victimization are not only a barrier to housing, but also a barrier to opportunities for healing and for moving forward. In the last two months, we have had two different clients with terminal cancer staying at our shelter, because there was nowhere else for them to go.

In 2012, we purchased the lot next door to Samaritan House, and we've been trying to expand and upgrade the shelter. We received about \$50,000 for pre-development from the homelessness partner-

ing strategy—federal money for capital projects—but it's no longer available for us because HPS no longer supports capital funding. We are desperately trying to find ways to expand our shelter so that we can effectively serve the women with more than just a bed.

We would like to be able to offer our clients the skills and life training they need, but we don't even have a room for group meetings. There have been opportunities provincially for capital funding for affordable housing, but not for shelters, and we recognize that it's extremely important to rapidly house clients when they come in—preferably within a month—so that they have the best opportunity to stay housed. It's very challenging to do that, but we really try our best, and Ronell does an amazing job.

• (1000)

Last summer we were so excited when we heard that there was federal money available for us—\$10.9 million across Canada—for the construction and renovation of shelters and transition houses for victims of family violence. We were told to quickly get the quotes together for the needed renovations—much needed renovations, I can tell you. We did that. We got the quotes together, and that was no easy feat with the busyness of the trades in Nanaimo. We put those quotes together in July, and we still have not heard anything. So much time and effort was put in, and now the quotes are too stale to use anyway.

Our society also works in Parksville, about a half an hour north of Nanaimo. In 2014, we were successful and received funding through the rural stream of the HPS. We started a housing first initiative. We hired an outreach worker. We were able to find leases for five apartments and, therefore, house five people through this program. But then the next year we didn't receive that funding. We were faced with whether or not to evict these clients whom we had finally been able to stabilize. What did we do? I'm so happy to say that we were able to find funding just through fundraising, and now we continue that process, but every year we have that struggle of how to raise the money for this program.

On the HPS funding, I would really like to recommend that recipients not to have to make an ongoing annual application for the rural stream. We would like to see a three-to-five year application so that when you start a program, you're not having to backtrack and try to figure out how to put it together. I also would like to recommend that HPS start to fund capital again, because that is so important to us.

Investment in affordable housing is imperative, but just as important is that safe environment where women can be helped to move through the challenges. After trauma they may not be ready right away, but we want to help them to be empowered as the women they were meant to be.

I want to close very quickly with a comment from a client, who said:

I stayed in the shelter for a week to ten days. Little did I know that Sam House programs and the incredible staff and clients would be my home away from home for the next four and a half years. This includes living at Mary's Place for just over a year and for the past few months at Martha's Place. Mary's Place, a house in the north end of Nanaimo, within walking distance of Walmart, is transitional housing through ICCS (Island Crisis Care Society). Six women share this house; I was one of two people who lived in what I called the in-law suite downstairs. Martha's Place is supported housing at Samaritan House. There are six rooms. I am in one of the upstairs rooms, it's small but has a bar-sized fridge, a microwave AND an ocean view!

Samaritan House was a gift from God on a cold winter's day. Both Mary's and Martha's Place were and are ships in the storm of life. I am grateful to everyone involved in ICCS from the people on the board to the front line workers and everyone in between.... You will never know how much you change lives for the better. Thank you!

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to Bob Vansickle for seven minutes.

Mr. Bob Vansickle (Manager of Employment Services, Sarnia and District Association for Community Living): Thank you.

Good morning. First of all I'd like to thank Marilyn Gladu for her wonderful introduction this morning. It's great seeing you.

I've worked in the disability field for 24 years, spending that time assisting people with a broad range of disabilities, some with varying degrees of disability. Currently I'm the manager of employment services at Community Living Sarnia-Lambton. I am also one of the founding members of the Ontario Disability Employment Network. Maybe many of you have heard of it; it's called ODEN, and I served as the board chair for six years.

Today, I have two key areas I'd like to talk about, first of all ensuring that women with more severe disabilities have access to the services they need to escape poverty, and second, redirecting federal tax dollars to boost support for activities that are known to be more effective. Although men who have a disability are overrepresented among Canadians who live in poverty, women who have a disability often face challenges related to gender inequality and child care needs.

Based on the participation and activity limitation survey, PALS, of 2006, people with disabilities make up 16.5% of the adult population 15 years of age and older in Canada. It's important to keep in mind that it's the largest minority group in Canada, or nearly 4.2 million people.

The overall poverty rate for Canadian adults was 10.5% in 2006, comprising 2.6 million people. The Conference Board of Canada recently found that Canada ranks 15th out of 17 countries in poverty among working-age people and gave Canada a D rating on that basis. For people with a disability the poverty rate was 14.4%, comprising nearly 600,000 people.

Some 55% of adults with disabilities are women and 45% are men, compared with 50.7% and 49.3%, respectively, for people

without disabilities. Among people with disabilities living in poverty, 59% are women compared with 55.4% of people without disabilities living in poverty. It is also important to note that people with a severe to very severe level of disability are overrepresented among people in poverty.

Women who have a disability can work and have the capacity to make a significant contribution to the workforce. This is a fundamental fact that we must understand and accept. Another fact is that we in the non-disabled community, in both government and in the disability profession, have only just begun to scratch the surface in our understanding of how to recognize the capacity of the disabled and how to best exploit it.

No tool or instrument that we have today can effectively measure or assess capacity or help us determine the employability of people who have a disability. Whenever we set out to measure employability or capacity to work, we invariably set the bar too high and discriminate against those whom we deem to be too severely disabled to work.

You may be familiar with the Walgreens story. Walgreens is currently number 19 in the Fortune 50 and has become a beacon of success by ensuring that 20% of its employees openly identify as having a disability. Other corporations across the world are working to emulate the Walgreens' model for inclusion to increase corporate profits.

Of interest is a statement made recently by the retired executive vice-president Randy Lewis. Mr. Lewis recounted their early hires when they embarked on this journey of hiring people with disabilities. He talked about a young woman with severe autism and significant behavioural problems who was to be their first hire. Mr. Lewis was asked if he deliberately started by hiring someone with very significant challenges. Was that intentional? Mr. Lewis responded that they did because they thought if they could get that first difficult one right, the rest would be easy. What they learned, though, is that they didn't go low enough, because the capacity of people with disabilities was far greater than they had ever imagined. This is a very profound statement.

Indeed, perhaps the most effective measure of employability is more properly gauged by each individual's motivation to work. Having said that, it is important that services and supports that each person needs be available, and in a way that makes sense regardless of the level of disability.

There has been a shift within Service Canada and its partners in Ontario to refocus programs to aid individuals who are more job ready or requiring light-touch services.

• (1005)

The federal government must ensure that its programs and services and those of its partners in the provinces and territories provide necessary services and supports to ensure that all Canadians, including women who have more severe disabilities and who are overrepresented among people in poverty, have access to services to ensure their successful attachment to the workforce to escape poverty.

The federal dollars that are invested by way of wage subsidies, or, as they are often termed now, “training incentives”, could be better spent. At a time when the federal government and provinces are struggling to spend the Canada job grant, I would suggest that a portion of these dollars be redirected to remove barriers for women who have severe to very severe disabilities. Labour market agreements for persons with disabilities and the federal opportunities fund for persons with disabilities should transition dollars away from wage subsidies and boost support for the wide range of activities that are known to be more effective, such as employment counselling; career planning; pre-employment preparation, including time-limited curriculum-based workshops; post-secondary education; skills training; self-employment assistance; technical aids; and other accommodation supports such as job coaching. Assistance in accessing job opportunities and support for transportation and child care needs are also critical.

Business people are experts at running their businesses. They do not have the expertise or the capacity within their operations to understand specialized technical aids, workplace modifications, and other accommodations that may be required across a broad range of disability types. Employers also need post-placement support, which has the greatest impact on job retention and career growth. Employers need to see the employment agency as a specialist or as a disability consultant. One employer once told me that he was an expert at making tire rims, not at understanding disability.

Workplaces evolve and jobs change. Often retraining and revisiting and revising accommodation are necessary. Wage subsidies or training incentives for people with disability could be better spent by providing businesses with the specialized support they require to include women who have disabilities.

In summary, we need to invest in women who have a disability and ensure that all Canadians, regardless of gender or severity of disability, can move out of poverty and become successful contributors to our economy.

Thanks so much.

• (1010)

The Chair: That's very good.

[*Translation*]

We'll start with Mr. Serré.

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here and for taking the time to prepare their presentations on their work in this field.

Obviously, all the witnesses spoke of the housing issue. I encourage them to follow the work of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, in September and October. The committee will hear presentations on the development of the national housing strategy with Minister Duclos. A great deal of important information will be provided.

I also want to thank Ms. Morris, from CARP, for her support for M-106, my motion to conduct a study on the development of a national strategy for seniors.

Ms. Morris, your association and a number of your members supported the motion, which Parliament passed on May 17.

[*English*]

I want to switch over.

Madam Morris, can you provide the committee with a copy in English and French of your “2017 Impact Report & 2016 Annual Review” from CARP—good job.

Ms. Wanda Morris: I'd be delighted to provide it in English and, hopefully, you have somebody who can translate it into French.

Mr. Marc Serré: Okay, thank you.

I know of a lot of the advocacy you've done over the years for seniors, and I'll just cite one line from the document: “In a typical year we've been excited by one big win, but in 2016 we saw us score five major victories.” When we look at increasing the CPP, you mention in that document you're looking at restoring the OAS eligibility to age 65. You also mention the \$3 billion in home care, and the acknowledgement of caregivers, so I appreciate your summarizing this in this document that looks at what we've done in our first two years, but much more is needed.

Ms. Morris, one of your documents talks about elder abuse, and in a CBC article of June 1, you were quoted on the seriousness of elder abuse. We've heard, and I've heard from other committees, that police forces are grappling with the reported cases of elder abuse. Can you comment on that a bit, please?

Ms. Wanda Morris: Thank you.

I think that elder abuse, whether it's in long-term care, as in the recent situation, or just generally among the population, is far more widespread than we realize and has caused incredible damage to individuals.

CARP has been calling for a public inquiry particularly into long-term care. We have heard so many incidents from our members or from their adult children that we believe what's going on in long-term care today could be something akin to what used to happen in residential schools, with widespread neglect, abuse, and disinterest.

• (1015)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

Also, Ms. Morris, in one of your documents you mentioned older workers and some of the barriers they face. Could you in about a minute or so outline some of those barriers that older workers face for employment, in your experience?

Ms. Wanda Morris: Some older workers face no barriers, but certainly what many older workers face is ageism. For example, if there's a downsizing, companies often look to let go older workers, perhaps to protect the wage-earning of younger workers with families or because the older workers are at the top of the pay scale, so that it's a better win financially.

Unfortunately, what has happened for many of our members is that they haven't retired when they wished but rather had retirement thrust upon them. Typically, they planned their financial lives to buy a house, put their children through school, and then save for retirement, and when that last piece is truncated they end up living a much less financially secure retirement than they had hoped.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

In the document you also gave indications about caregivers. We've heard in the past from witnesses about how many hours seniors are getting in caregiving and home care, and seniors want to remain in their homes.

You praised our government for the tax credit, but you wanted us to go a step further. Can you explain a bit about the caregiver's rebate that you are proposing?

Ms. Wanda Morris: Absolutely. There are two things we would like, and while we commend you for the work done to support middle-class caregivers, it's really a large opportunity left unmet to look after our poorest caregivers.

By creating and extending a tax credit that is refundable, that only is accessed if you have taxable income, we really leave without support those low-income tax earners whose income is not sufficient, or who have had to leave their employment to do full-time care, or who are out of the workforce because they're frail and elderly. We have thus advocated for a non-refundable tax credit.

Secondly, we look to the jurisdictions of the U.K., Australia, and Nova Scotia, which has dipped a toe into this, in providing a means-tested caregiver allowance. I think that would go a great way to help caregivers.

Let me also add a third piece. We know there's a provision in CPP for people to have coverage when they opt out of the workforce to raise children. Why not having something similar for people who are primary full-time caregivers?

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

I'll switch over to Mr. Vansickle.

Thank you so much for the advocacy you do on the disability front. I have about a minute left, and so I want to ask you for two specific measures you would recommend the federal government undertake as two main priorities to help individuals with disabilities—you mentioned severe disabilities, but also general disabilities—to reintegrate into the workforce.

Mr. Bob Vansickle: I talked about moving away from wage or training subsidies and moving to accommodation supports. I think that definitely would be one.

I also think that to address another barrier in particular for women who have a disability, we should look at more support for child care needs as well as transportation.

The fact is that we have women who are working at entry-level jobs, and those entry-level jobs often are not Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. They could be working overnight, evenings, weekends, and sometimes transportation as well as child care can be very difficult to access.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Ms. Kusie for seven minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to all of our witnesses here today.

I'll start with Ms. Morris, please.

You talked a lot about the absence of funds as being a challenge for many reasons for senior women. I wonder whether you have noticed a trend or whether there are any studies related to trends that would indicate a generational change?

Certainly, I see with my more senior constituents the problems you are referring to, but I feel very fortunate to have grown up in an era in which we've seen a real emphasis on financial education for women. I've had an investment adviser since I was right out of college, and I'm very grateful for that.

As well, we've seen a significant redefinition of the family. My mother grew up in a time when you relied on one individual as the sole breadwinner for the family. I'm not young here, but in my mid-forties, and certainly grew up with the idea that I had the option of having my own career and had the opportunity as a result to make my own choices regarding investments and saving for my future, options that simply weren't as prevalent in a previous time.

With the breakdown of the traditional family, are there any positive results in terms of trends that we're seeing, and perhaps hope for future generations of women?

Thank you.

● (1020)

Ms. Wanda Morris: Thank you.

What you're pointing to is in fact documented. We are seeing a decrease in poverty among women as more and more women are working outside the home. Our senior seniors would typically not have worked outside the home. I think that situation has really reversed, such that it's now atypical to only work in the home. When we are looking at ways to support women, it's particularly our older cohort of women who are most vulnerable and most at risk.

I would say, however, that there are new challenges facing our younger women. Kudos to you for having an investment adviser and saving for retirement. That's wonderful, but what we are seeing is issues around investor protection that women seem to be particularly vulnerable to, and CARP would love to see those raised, so that when people are taking steps to look after themselves, lax investor protection isn't then robbing them of their financial sustainability in retirement.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you. Certainly I am privileged to have had those opportunities to receive education, have a career, have funds to invest, so thank you very much, Ms. Morris.

I will now turn to Ms. Hayes and Ms. Bosman.

Thank you so much. You mentioned that in the critical time when there was no government funding available you were able to survive on the will of other people and organizations with their generosity and fundraising.

Can you talk a little bit about that, please—the people, the organizations outside of government—who felt so compelled about your organization that they were moved to give? What types of groups are we looking at here?

Ms. Violet Hayes: Parksville is a very small community, so there is a great collaboration piece there that we actually don't see as much in Nanaimo, because it's a bigger centre. Many organizations stepped up. We did a big fundraiser, with people walking on the coldest night of the year in a cross-country event. The SOS is another organization in town. So many helped and pitched in, and we paid for what we could to ensure that these clients.... Island Health actually was able to provide some of the funding.

We really just work together, because as you can imagine, to have had to evict the five people whom we had just housed would have been just terrible. We were fortunate, and those subsidies are still going, but it's very piecemeal, and that's not a good way to live.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much to both of you.

Madam Chair, I think the will of humanity is so incredible when left on its own.

Finally, Mr. Vansickle, can you educate me, please? Are there any provincial or federal corporate incentives in Canada for corporations to hire those with disabilities? Does anything like this exist—perhaps committee members who have been here longer might also have more information—in respect to the types of incentives that would exist in a corporate setting to hire persons with disabilities presently here in Canada?

Mr. Bob Vansickle: Thank you for the question.

In fact, incentives have been around forever. I've been in the field almost 25 years, and wage subsidies and training incentives, whatever you want to call them, have been around as long as I've been around and much longer. When we're looking at incentivizing businesses to hire people with a disability, one of the things that we've learned in Ontario.... I think in Ontario we've become world leaders. When I was fortunate enough to attend a Zero Project Conference back in February in Austria, I had an opportunity to really glean what was going on in other countries in the world. Ontario is definitely a leader. One of the reasons, I think, is because

we've moved away from trying to pay employers and incentivize them through wage subsidies and training subsidies to hire people who have a disability. First of all, I think trying to pay someone to hire a person sends a terrible message about the value of people.

For a long time we've been hearing about corporate social responsibility. What's happening in other parts of the world, and really started in the United States with Randy Lewis and Walgreens —

• (1025)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yes, please expand on that. I'm very interested to hear about that, pardon me.

Mr. Bob Vansickle: Randy Lewis, who was the senior vice-president of Walgreens until a couple of years ago, has a son who is on the ASD spectrum and has autism. In this role within the corporation, Lewis tried to look for way to see how they could include people with disabilities. As the senior vice-president of logistics, he started with one distribution centre. As a result of including over 40% of people who had a disability, that distribution centre ended up being the most productive. It had 87% lower costs than any other distribution centre throughout the corporation. At that point, the CEO, the shareholders, and the board were on board. They then moved to a target of 10% of people with disabilities throughout the corporation. From that, they then moved to a target of 20%. Now Walgreens is the largest drug supplier in the world.

Now what's happening is that corporations from around the world—not just Canada, Japan, and Europe—are all going to Walgreens, which is very willing to share the model. They're now looking at including people with a disability as a return on investment.

I think what we need to do in our field, and I think in the federal government and provincial governments in Canada, is get that message out. Hiring people with a disability is about return on investment. There are so many stats and studies and information out there that prove that when you hire people with a disability, they take less sick time, the WSIB costs are lower, they stay in the job longer, and they are just better all-round employees. It's about moving away from that idea of charity and having to pay someone to on-board people with a disability. The fact is that you are going to see huge benefits from on-boarding people with a disability. We're already seeing this in Canada.

The Chair: Very good. I'm sorry, but that's the end of that question time.

We have to go to Ms. Malcolmson now for seven minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Vansickle. Business is stepping up again.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I'm going to start with the Island Crisis Care Society from Nanaimo. I'm going to try to fit four questions into seven minutes. We'll see how we do here.

We've heard a lot of statistics about the situation of women in Canada, elderly women in particular, who've been prevented from saving during their working life and then fall into poverty as they age. The stories that you're telling about the age of women who are seeking shelter at your facilities is disheartening. It's an embarrassment to the country that women, anybody who's worked their whole lives in our country, then at the age of 76 or 82 faces homelessness. So, I thank you for the work you're doing.

Can you describe a little bit more your observation or what you've heard about what has happened to these women in their lives that got them to that place? Did they have difficulty finding work? What impact did divorce have on them? What's the cumulated experience that puts them into that position of vulnerability just at the time of their life when they should be the most secure?

Ms. Ronell Bosman (Programme Director, Samaritan House, Island Crisis Care Society): I'll answer that question. Thank you for this opportunity.

Yes, we do see a lot of seniors. I've been six years at the organization and it's just terrible to see people coming in. We have bunk beds. It's really difficult for women with mobility issues to get into a bunk bed and be in a room where there are eight people. It's a low-barrier shelter, so it is really tough for senior women or people who have never been in that position and are not streetwise. They haven't known that type of life, to be in such circumstances.

As to what we've seen with seniors, over the last two or three years I have observed that there are people from their sixties up to their eighties, women from all walks of life, some very highly educated people. We had a psychiatric nurse. We had a teacher. We had a social worker. We had an RCMP officer there. It is usually due to trauma and violence, domestic violence, but lately it's financial difficulty. In our low-barrier shelter, it used to be drug abuse and high mental health challenges that were among the reasons people were accessing the shelter. They really couldn't function and have a stable life in their communities. However, financial distress and financial difficulty are now bringing people to our doors.

• (1030)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Is that a change in the type of female clients you're seeing access your shelters?

Ms. Ronell Bosman: Yes, definitely. A lot of people who enter tell us it's the first time they've been in a shelter, mostly elderly women, people with education. It's not just people who are addicted to some type of substance. It's not just people with mental health issues.

Mental health is another challenge that we have. For people with mental health challenges, there's nowhere to go. They don't always function well in a community, in market housing. They do get

evicted and they end up with us as the last resort, the last place to come.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you so very much, to your whole team, for your work.

I want to ask a question of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. I'm grateful for your big impact advocacy. You've really changed a lot of policies in the country by virtue of your focus on policy change.

On your website, you note that almost a million people in Ontario alone rely on defined benefit pension plans for retirement income. We're concerned that the government's Bill C-27 is trying to replace defined benefits with the less-secure target benefits plan. A witness from the United Steelworkers at an earlier meeting for this study told the committee that the elimination of defined benefits could put senior women in danger of living in poverty.

Can you describe why it's important for senior women to have access to secure pension plans?

Ms. Wanda Morris: Absolutely. What we hear from so many people is that they wish they had saved more back when they were working, that if they had known then what they know now, they would have saved more. There's a lot of research on the benefits of nudging people to do certain things, but a defined benefit pension plan goes beyond that to really mandate a secure retirement future for individuals. It's one of the reasons CARP was so pleased with the My65+ plan that came out from OPSEU in Ontario, where the really low-income workers, personal support workers, would have some retirement security.

Defined pension plans are the gold standard, and CARP is a huge supporter of those. We are also aware of the economic realities and the bleeding that is happening from defined pension plans. We want to be realistic about supporting alternatives that will increase the coverage for individuals. Ultimately, for private corporations, it's the businesses that are footing the bill, so we need to find a program that works for businesses and still provides benefits for individuals.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: You have a campaign through CARP to support the eight million Canadians who provide unpaid care to aging parents. We've heard a lot of testimony at this committee about women who are in the sandwich generation of simultaneously looking after their children and their senior parents, which pushes them into precarious work. Then they lack access to unemployment insurance and a pension. It's quite a calamitous series of policies that collide.

Can you tell us what the government could do to better support those people who are providing unpaid care for family members?

Ms. Wanda Morris: Sure. There are three things. One is to change the caregiver tax credits to make them refundable so an individual doesn't have to be earning an income to be able to access them.

Second would be a means-tested caregiver allowance at a minimum of \$100 a week, which is the Nova Scotia rate. That is an allowance. We've seen similar programs in the U.K. and Australia.

Third would be some provision in the CPP similar to, or perhaps even better than, the provisions for individuals who take time out of their working lives to provide child care. If somebody is a primary caregiver with a very onerous burden of caregiving, that shouldn't hit that person's CPP earnings in retirement.

Finally, the concept of a universal basic income would be another way to ensure that everybody in Canada has the ability to live with dignity and peace of mind.

• (1035)

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to my colleague, Ms. Damoff, for seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today.

My questions are for Mr. Vansickle in Sarnia.

I can't tell you what a privilege it is to have you here today. I've had many conversations with the Ontario Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities, which speaks about Sarnia being the leader in the province of Ontario for employment opportunities. I applaud your efforts there. I know there's still so much more we can do.

You mentioned the example of Walgreens. I look more locally to the example of Tim Hortons franchisee Mark Wafer, who has been employing people with disabilities for over 20 years. I've spoken with him at length. He says exactly what you said, that it's not just the right thing to do, but it's good for the bottom line. The original employee that he hired 20 years ago is still with him and has just recently purchased a condo.

In my riding, Julia Hanna, a local restaurateur, has made a commitment, following a round table that I held, to employ a percentage of people living with disabilities. So, it certainly is possible. I think one of the most important things is that we're providing meaningful paid employment. I've noticed that people living with disabilities are the last segment of our society where we

consider it okay to have them work for free or to volunteer without paying them.

I also want to say that the bottom line the Ontario Partnership Council had was that everyone should be considered employable until proven otherwise. I think all of us need to hold that as a mantra when looking at this issue.

I understand that you get 60% of your funding from the provincial government. Do you get any federal funding, or do you get any grants from the federal government for what you're doing?

Mr. Bob Vansickle: We do, absolutely, through the federal opportunities fund. As part of our model in Sarnia, we have a pre-employment workshop called jobPath. It assists people with a disability to.... Because many people who have a disability have never worked, there's a certain amount of trying to figure out what they're good at, career exploration and those sorts of things.

We also really focus on employability skills or the "how not to get fired" skills. It allows us as a service provider to get to really know people in order to make good job matches. When you're working with the business community, that's really what it's all about: making a good job fit for folks.

That's funded through the federal government through the opportunities fund. It has become more difficult as of late because, for 60% of the funding, we're now required to come up with in-kind funding or in-kind donations. That's something that has changed.

What we've been able to do is to get business folks in Sarnia to sign on as partners and say they would hire people without using wage subsidies. In fact, this is where it's really difficult because the majority, if not all, of our employers tell us that they prefer not to use the wage subsidies, and that they don't want the paperwork, the hassle, and all this other business of dealing with them. On the other hand, the way the model is set up, we are actually penalized in terms of our funding if we don't use wage subsidies. That's something again. If we could move away from that....

There is also our summer jobs model. That's the one we went to Vienna with. We were at the United Nations presenting on that one, and we won an award for it. We're funded through the federal summer career placement. We hire college and university students, and the college and university students act as peer role models and mentors. They actually go out and find the jobs for these students who have the disabilities, and then they provide them with supports.

That model is now being adopted in other places in the world and the reason it's so critical is that, as two very important U.S. studies in the last couple of years have stated, the most important indicator for workforce attachment is whether someone with a disability had a summer job or student employment while they were going to school. So it is critical.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's something I've heard as well, that so often people living with disabilities don't get that early high school type of training opportunity.

We have a very successful Canada summer jobs program for students who are at school, but people living with disabilities don't qualify for that generally. Some do, but not generally, because they're not in full-time school. I wonder whether you would see a role for the federal government to play in a similar type of program that would allow for the work experience that particularly younger people don't get when they're in high school or in their early twenties?

• (1040)

Mr. Bob Vansickle: Yes, definitely I do, but in my document I noted that there are many activities currently funded by the federal government that could be expanded upon to fit into a model like that. I think that could work very well.

I would caution, however, that we stay away from work experience and wage subsidies and those kinds of things for transitioning people into real jobs. One thing I've noticed is that quite often what will happen is that a person or persons with a disability will be hired in temporary employment or through a wage subsidy or a training subsidy. At the end of the subsidy or at the end of the placement, the value is then gone and the employer then lets that person go.

We see many people who have had perhaps a lot of failures and tough things happening in their lives. After these happen a couple of times and they have rotated through a couple of those scenarios, they will simply drop out of the workforce and not try.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think David Onley called it a “perpetual depression”, whereby they have given up on looking for work.

Mr. Bob Vansickle: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have about 30 seconds left. Could you quickly tell us whether you have any advice on what we could do to educate employers about the benefits to their business of hiring people living with disabilities?

Mr. Bob Vansickle: You may want to engage in Ontario here with the Ontario Disability Employment Network. They are definitely a leader in the country in dealing with that issue.

People such as Mark Wafer and Mayor Mike Bradley and others are champions who are part of that group. Many of them were on the partnership council and have done a lot of great work in promoting to the business sector the value and the return on investment from hiring people with disabilities. I would suggest engaging with them.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I know my time is up, but I want to sincerely thank you for what you're doing in Sarnia. I'm trying to make Halton overtake you as the leader in employment of those with disabilities—no offence—but I think all of us could be doing a better job in our communities of hiring people with disabilities.

Thank you for what you're doing.

The Chair: Very good. We're out of time for today.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here and the work you're doing.

Thank you for your input to the committee. If you think of something that the committee could benefit from, feel free to send that information to the clerk.

I look forward to seeing all of you at our next meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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