



House of Commons  
CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

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HUMA • NUMBER 027 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, May 12, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**

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## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Tuesday, May 12, 2009

• (1435)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada will continue. This is meeting number 27, our fourth one here today in Moncton.

We want to thank all our witnesses for taking time out of their busy schedules to be here.

We've been looking at this issue over the last number of months in Ottawa. We were in Halifax yesterday. Today, obviously, we're in Moncton. Tomorrow we're going to be in Montreal. We're taking the opportunity to travel around the country a bit to find out what's working on the ground, some programs that may be being done or may be effective in local organizations, and also to get feedback from people in terms of making recommendations to the committee to do a better job of addressing this issue, which I'm sure you all realize is very complicated. Not one solution fits everything. People need to work together. A whole bunch of issues follow.

My name is Dean Allison. I'm from Ontario, from the Niagara region. I'm glad to be here today. My father was from New Brunswick, my mother from Nova Scotia. I feel as if I'm coming home a little bit. How does that sound?

Our first round will be seven minutes. Our second round will be five minutes. We will try to move through the questions and answers as quickly as possible.

I'll start over here, Susan, if that's okay. We'll take five minutes for each presentation, then go across. I have a timer here, just to give you an idea of where the five minutes are. If you've got more to say, you can try to wrap it up. Certainly I'm not going to cut you off. I'll let you tell us what you need to tell us. Once we've gone through everybody speaking, then we'll do the rounds of questions.

I think we've got all the ground rules out of the way. Thank you once again.

Susan Crouse, I believe you are from the Salvus Clinic. Thank you very much for being here. I don't know if you're going to talk about some of the organizations you're with. Certainly if you are, we'd love to hear a bit about what everyone is involved with. If that's not part of your presentation, please feel free to give us a few words on what you're doing.

Susan, welcome. The floor is yours.

**Dr. Susan Crouse (MD, Salvus Clinic):** Thank you.

I do have a short synopsis of our clinic and what we do there, and I've answered some of your questions in my brief.

I have been a family physician for 18 years. For 16 of those years I worked in a small town in New Brunswick, practising in family and emergency medicine. In 2005, I started offering medical services on a pro bono basis at the local shelter for homeless and street individuals and families.

In 2007, based on the need, we opened Salvus Clinic. It is a cooperative partnership between the regional health authority and the shelter. In addition, we partner with many other community agencies in the Moncton area to provide services to the homeless, the near homeless, drug addicts, prostitutes, and those suffering from mental illness who have found themselves with no place else to turn.

The thoughts I share with you today are a collaborative effort between our nurse practitioner and me.

At our clinic, the poverty we see is a lack of basic needs. In our initial assessment, we screen for issues around lack of housing—and frequently that is a lack of safe housing—lack of food, medication, and poor health that results from not having enough to meet basic needs. We evaluate services that are in place and where needs can be further met.

We believe that the key to reduction of long-term poverty is empowerment and providing people with opportunities to move out of their circumstances. This will not occur in the lifetime of one government, and policies that are put in place should not be political footballs to be changed at the whim of the government in power. This means that all federal and provincial parties need to be part of policy building and need to take ownership and responsibility for the plans when they are in power. Non-profits and municipal and provincial governments need stability in their funding so that good local programs can continue to function.

It is our sense that federal moneys are often best used by grassroots not-for-profit agencies. These agencies utilize a large volunteer basis and are able to provide a better bang for the buck. Federal support for non-profit agencies can be given on a variety of levels. Federal grants to projects need to address sustainability from the onset and provide leadership on how to make projects succeed in the long term. Federal tax policies should be modified to encourage local businesses and individuals to contribute to local solutions, thus empowering the community.

The federal government has a role in the partnership with the other two levels of government. It has already existing models of partnership, such as that used in the infrastructure program in highway construction. We have an overseas model such as CIDA, which matches donations of individuals. When implemented, strategies such as these could ensure that moneys given to other levels of government could be used for the deemed purpose.

For individuals facing poverty, is there a direct role that the federal government can play? One of the greatest struggles our clinic faces is the overwhelming cost of medication. Medication compassion programs for the working poor would provide incentives to improve their circumstances. Full deductions of medical expenses rather than tax credits would also help. The government should work with all employers to provide drug plans and coverage, even for low-wage jobs. Restorative justice programs in the federal institutions would help individuals reintegrate into the community and contribute back.

Finally, our clinic has been successful because of the partnerships it has developed with other agencies. We try not to duplicate services and we try to coordinate care. Such is the model for the various stakeholders in the fight against poverty.

In conclusion, we are successful because we allow those individuals with whom we work to contribute back to the clinic through employment opportunities and volunteer jobs. Our people see that *Salvus* is their clinic, and that gives them hope. Without hope, there is no capacity to dream of a better future.

Thank you.

• (1440)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Susan.

We're going to move to Wendy MacDermott. Wendy is from Vibrant Communities Saint John.

Wendy, thanks for being here. The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Wendy MacDermott (Coordinator, Vibrant Communities Saint John):** Thank you.

I'm actually going to ask permission to have Monica Chaperlin go first. We have a sort of tag team presentation.

**The Chair:** That's not a problem at all.

Monica Chaperlin, you're from the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative. Welcome, Monica. We're looking forward to hearing from you.

**Ms. Monica Chaperlin (Coordinator, Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative Inc.):** Thank you very much.

Both Wendy and I are from Saint John, New Brunswick. We wanted to give you a joint presentation representing our community, as opposed to giving one from a specific organization.

First of all, congratulations for examining this most important national issue of how to reduce poverty in Canada. The Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, which I represent, is a group of business leaders in Saint John who have one purpose, to help our community substantially reduce poverty.

We organized back in 1997 because at the time the poverty rate in Saint John was 27% and one in three children was living in poverty. We started with one business leader who gathered 45 of his colleagues together one evening, and we listened to people who lived in poverty—the real experts. We listened to front-line workers who were trying to help. Their stories and struggles were so compelling that they called us to action.

There were quite a few motivations for us to organize. For one thing, we were really embarrassed that so many children and families, particularly women, were suffering because of our neglect. It was clear that families were trapped in poverty, and they needed help to get out. At the time, no level of government seemed to be particularly focused on reducing poverty. This was perhaps our biggest surprise.

Beyond the obvious devastating social implications, there were serious economic consequences. Our whole city was being negatively affected. There appeared to be a lot of government spending dealing with the consequences of poverty—illness, crime, long-term social assistance, etc.—and there was a lot of charitable community spending that served to help people cope with poverty, but almost no investment in helping people get out of poverty.

As business leaders, we were also looking to the future and our needs for a skilled and ready workforce. In our own backyard were talents that needed to be unleashed. So we started in. The problem, honestly, was overwhelming. For a couple of years we kind of muddled around. We tried projects, but mostly we learned.

In 2000, we were frustrated enough that we said we had to put some focus on this. We undertook a major poverty study to help us figure out what we could do to change this poverty picture in Saint John. The study revealed that in Saint John, single-parent families—women and children—were the majority of the poor. They were trapped in an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

If we could break the cycle of poverty, we could substantially change Saint John's future. The recommendations of the study continued to be BCAP's guide. We'd focus our work on helping children, teenagers, and young families get out of poverty. We'd focus on community participation, and we'd focus on best-practice solutions.

Poverty reduction is now a Saint John priority. It took us a long time to get there, but we can honestly say that if you talk to any of the leaders in Saint John, they will say that poverty reduction is a priority. We are making progress. In 10 years, our level of poverty has dropped from 27% to 20%, but we still have a long way to go.

We've learned that it takes a whole community helping, and it takes all levels of government working in harmony with communities. We need you, our senior levels of government, to lay the policy framework that paves the way for the changes we all want and need.

We've learned that this work is hard and progress is slow, but we must refuse to fail.

Together, BCAPI and Vibrant Communities Saint John have prepared a brief for you. We didn't get it translated in time, so you'll get it eventually. In our brief, we have five recommendations. Before I turn it over to Wendy, I just want to highlight two of those recommendations for you.

The first recommendation is to make poverty reduction a national priority and engage all federal government departments to buy in and to participate.

●(1445)

As we found out, poverty reduction begins with BCAPI's interest, a commitment to begin, the will to proceed, and the leadership to mobilize action. We didn't know what we were doing at the time, but we committed. I think that's what we're asking you to do—make a commitment to make poverty reduction a national priority. We'll figure it out. And the more we work at it, the better we'll get.

Another recommendation we have for you is that we'd like you to partner with the provinces and communities who are already leading poverty reduction strategies. I sat in a little earlier and I heard that you're already aware of the provinces that have poverty reduction strategies. In our own province that's on the way, and a few other provinces are at this stage.

Vibrant Communities Canada, which Wendy represents in Saint John, has been an excellent vehicle for many cities to get on the bandwagon and understand what it is to lead poverty reduction strategies. These cities, these provinces, these communities—that's where the energy and the creativity is. So if we can join in with what's already going on, we'll just keep improving. There's no simple solution; there's no fast solution. We've just got to get going.

That's our first message to you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monica.

Wendy.

**Ms. Wendy MacDermott:** Perfect. Thank you for humouring us. Saint John always likes to be just a little bit difficult. That's how you know we're in the room.

I'm with Vibrant Communities, as Monica mentioned. Vibrant Communities is part of a national network. The McConnell Family Foundation decided a while back that if we kept waiting for government to fix poverty, then we were in for a long wait, so we decided to try something different. What's really interesting is that we're coming full circle now because government, the federal government in particular, is coming to see us.

At Vibrant Communities in Saint John, poverty reduction means that we have a comprehensive strategy that involves the business community, it involves the significant voice of people who live in poverty themselves, the non-profit sector, and government. So we've done a really great job of engaging the municipal government and the provincial government, and in fact, in the last year and a half, both of them have begun to significantly contribute to the local poverty reduction strategy, financially as well as in other policy and programming changes.

There are a couple of specific recommendations we would like to leave you with.

Look at how we can help folks who are in our communities get to a place where they're self-sufficient. How do we help those who've been in cyclical and generational poverty to transition out of that? It's taken generations to get there and it's going to take some real concerted effort to get out. We believe that comprehensive supports and programming are necessary. We have these amazing assets in our community, but they're largely untapped.

One example we're seeing in Saint John right now is that we're a bit protected from the economic downturn, and we still have new economic opportunities. But we have a large body of individuals in Saint John who are not ready to work or who have never worked. Rather than bringing migrant workers in, we want to focus energy on helping these individuals get a firm foundation so they can engage in some of the wealth and prosperity we're going to see in our community. Again, the supports and the approach need to be integrated. All of the partners need to be working together, and it's one of the key messages. We need leadership from all of the sectors and they need to be thinking in an integrated way. We can't cut off fingers to spite our hand. We still see funding decisions and policy and program decisions that work really well for one sector but actually compromise the needs of another.

One of the other important pieces—and this is a big priority for the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative—is focusing on breaking the cycle of poverty. We do that by investing heavily in children and youth. What are the supports and the programs that we need in place to level the playing field so that all children, regardless of which family they were born to, have equal likelihood of success coming out the other end? That would be a comprehensive early intervention program or child care strategy—you've probably heard that one before, a national child care strategy. How do we make sure that the early years are as productive and helpful as possible?

Once children are in school, how do we make sure that it's a learning environment where children can thrive? We don't want to just focus on their having food, which is really important, but food isn't enough to ensure success. When they're into high school, where there's lots of transition and difficulty, what supports do we have in place for youth and for older kids? And how do we make sure they can go on to further education if that's their interest?

An extension of that is that should the system fail them and they become adults who have limited levels of education, how do we eliminate some of the barriers that stop them from working? One of the issues we've seen consistently and are addressing is the GED requirement. High school or other equivalency is required for almost every job, and all government jobs at every level. But are those the skills that are really required to do those jobs? We found in a lot of cases that there are a lot of skills people have that match really well with the job, regardless of the piece of paper. So again, there are some built-in barriers that really hurt us.

The last thing I'd like to leave you with—and I think it's the contribution of Vibrant Communities Saint John to the poverty file—is the focus on neighbourhoods. We looked at our city and said, "What's happening? Where is poverty?" We found there were five neighbourhoods where there were very high levels of poverty. Forty per cent of the people who lived in these neighbourhoods lived in poverty. And what you have essentially, although it's not a pretty word, is a ghetto, with lack of opportunity, lack of role modelling. So our real emphasis is on how we can evolve and reinvent neighbourhoods that have become, over time, ghettos because of mismanagement and poor planning.

● (1450)

Most important, how do the residents and those who live in poverty drive the change themselves? We need to make sure that the voices of people who are living in poverty are heard in all that we do. They're involved in our leadership, in creating the solutions, and in informing policy-makers.

If I can leave you with one thing, it would be that the voice of people who live in poverty needs to be front and centre.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're now going to move to Sue Rickards.

● (1455)

**Ms. Sue Rickards (Community Development, As an Individual):** Thank you for being here. We always appreciate being heard. I've been heard for hundreds of years, I guess. I'm sort of the old lady in this group, and I'm a rural representative. I used to run the roads for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation. In that capacity, I got a lot of experience. I also travelled with Claudette Bradshaw in 1999, when she was the minister responsible for the homelessness file. I went with her to every province and territory to see homelessness on the street. That's a perspective that I was privileged to have. I wrote the report for her.

Three years ago, I co-wrote the report for the New Brunswick task force on the non-profit sector, which was a provincial undertaking in which we examined the state of the non-profit sector. What we discovered, among other things, was that the non-profit sector, properly supported and strengthened, could be the best vehicle for dealing with poverty and addressing issues of poverty in the community. That's a critical thing. Let's have no more direct service delivery from the top, from the middle. Let's put it on the ground. That would be my main recommendation.

I'm going to read, because if I don't, I'll rant. The two areas in which the federal government should contribute to the reduction of poverty are, first, the articulation of national poverty reduction principles, and, second, the funding of community-based programs aligned with these principles.

The current policies and programs directed at social welfare and poverty reduction are based on false assumptions. We assume that recipients of these programs are helpless burdens on society, that they have little or nothing to contribute to the socio-economic mainstream, that they want to remain passive and excluded, that they need only enough money to survive, and that they'll cheat the system

whenever they can. In fact, the majority of recipients of welfare and other assistance are capable of functioning in some productive way, of earning at least part of their income, and of being included in many aspects of community life. They long to be respected as contributing members of the community. I've never met anyone who was really happy on welfare and really wanted to be there.

Therefore, the federal government should turn our existing basis for policy and programming inside out, or upside down, and articulate a new direction that acknowledges that each person is valuable and has a talent to share. This provides a wide range of opportunities to connect marginalized and disadvantaged persons to the socio-economic mainstream—opportunities, not hand-outs. It helps build a community-based infrastructure in which the non-profit sector is the primary delivery agent of integrated services. This sector helps people to climb out of poverty and helps to integrate social development with economic development at the community level. In other words, let's look at people who are poor as assets and not liabilities, because they have tremendous contributions to make if they have the chance.

Secondly, we need community-based programs. Obviously, there will always be some people totally dependent on public support. But the majority currently receiving passive assistance, in the form of cheques, mostly, are wasting away without ever having the chance to fulfill their potential as individuals and members of communities. While there are many approaches to poverty reduction, my experience has led me to believe that two are the most productive—those that focus on housing and those that focus on employment. If people have a safe, affordable place to live from which they can launch themselves into the socio-economic mainstream, and if they have a job to do that makes them feel needed and competent, the problem will essentially be solved. Better health, more education, and less crime will flow from meeting these two basic needs: the need for being, survival; and the need for belonging, community acceptance.

The federal involvement in these approaches can be focused and powerful. In respect of housing, CMHC should take the lead, through its agreements with provinces, to strengthen the community non-profit housing sector as the primary agent of service delivery and encourage provincial governments to support non-profits, rather than deliver housing programs through their own bureaucracies.

● (1500)

We also need to focus on transitional and supportive housing so we can get people out of the emergency shelters they have been living in for years. That's not where they belong. We have plenty of emergency shelters, but we don't have the next level of transitional or supported housing.

The other approach is transition to work. The federal government should invest heavily in pre-employment and skills programs, not only for those who are job-ready, but primarily for those with low levels of education, literacy issues, lack of employment skills, sporadic or no previous attachment to the workforce, and lack of confidence.

The best vehicle for meeting this spectrum of needs is a social enterprise or training business, which has a double bottom line of making a profit while teaching its employees how to work. The so-called social economy in Quebec is the best model of this approach, but the concept of social enterprise and community-based enterprises is gaining momentum everywhere and should be strengthened, encouraged, and supported.

Finally is a third kind of off-the-wall suggestion, but it's based on some experiences I had recently. The major obstacle to employment for marginalized people is lack of reliable, affordable transportation. The federal government should establish a program that provides funding to individuals for public transportation where this is viable. Where a car is the best or the only option, create a program that buys previously owned cars and allocates them to people in transition to employment, with a mandatory requirement and support for eye examinations, glasses, and training in car maintenance and driving skills. Think of the economic benefit that would have. There are all these cars sitting there doing nothing, and all these people sitting there doing nothing because they don't have cars. It looks like there's a fit there.

In closing, it's critical to note that federal resources should not flow directly to community-based non-profit organizations. This sets up destructive confrontations between the federal and provincial governments in which the non-profits are trapped between the warring factions. This may not happen every time, but I've seen so many times where the federal money starts something and the province won't take it over. That puts the NGO in a bind.

Probably the best structural organization is to create funds for integrated services that require provincial governments to work together across their own silos and partner with community-based groups to access the resources.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Sue.

We'll now move to Bethany Thorne-Dykstra from Voice of Real Poverty Inc.

Welcome, Bethany. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Bethany Thorne-Dykstra (President, Voice of Real Poverty Inc.):** Thank you very much. It's wonderful to have the opportunity to share some of the things we've experienced in our little group.

Voice of Real Poverty is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to improve the quality of life, dignity, and the fair treatment of people living on or below the poverty line within the province of New Brunswick through awareness, education, and advocacy to the public, to government and other organizations and agencies, and to provide support to each other.

We meet at the soup kitchens and the shelters in Moncton, staying close to the grassroots. Sixty per cent of our board is required to be living on or below the poverty line to ensure our focus stays there. We have reviewed the Newfoundland and Labrador poverty reduction strategy and fully support this type of multi-faceted approach, but we emphasize the need for it to be developed and

directed, monitored and evaluated from the federal government level.

We need national standards. Currently the social assistance rates in New Brunswick rank the worst or second-worst in all categories of social assistance within this country. The lowest level requires a 70% increase just to be up to the Atlantic average. In New Brunswick we had a waiting list for low-income people of over 4,000, while low-income apartments and homes sat empty, and yet still they were being heated and electricity was being paid and landlords were receiving the same value for their rooms.

In New Brunswick we have steadily ranked the lowest in terms of minimum wage in the entire country, year after year. The working poor are growing.

In New Brunswick we do not have any regulations to operate a boarding room. Amendments were made, passed in the legislature, and received royal assent in 2006, yet they are only passed from departments. It was at Justice, and now at Service New Brunswick. We are the only province in this country that does not have boarding room regulations under the Residential Tenancies Act.

In New Brunswick we need a low-income energy rate so that people do not freeze to death in their homes, as one did last April, on April 6, here in New Brunswick. When people here are delinquent, not only do they lose their hydro, but they are removed from the housing list. We need to ensure that all people have a roof over their heads. In New Brunswick, low-income people are penalized if they try to share their expenses, if they try to share rent, hydro, groceries, child care. They're cut off or they lose their white card. This is known as the economic unit calculation.

In New Brunswick, low-income people are not encouraged to work to get out of poverty, as they are restricted to a mere \$150 or \$200 a month that they can earn over and above their social assistance amounts.

In New Brunswick, we put mentally ill people in jail instead of providing them with the care they need. We've had several judges publicly state that they are tired of putting mentally ill people in jail, that we need a plan.

I could go on, but I know my time is limited here.

With 14% poverty here in New Brunswick—that's over 100,000 people out of our small population of 730,000 who are living on or below the poverty line—we plead with you, the federal government, to step in. Help us. We need help in New Brunswick. We know that this province has just kicked off a poverty reduction strategy and has included some of our comments in their plan so far, and we hope to be part of that second stage, but we need help. There is poverty across this country, but not every province is taking it as seriously as others.

In closing, I thank you for this opportunity. Voice of Real Poverty would gladly help in any way we can to see the conditions improve for these desperate people. One of the biggest mistakes that government and organizations and agencies make, I believe, is assuming all people can take care of themselves.

•(1505)

We see severe depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, to mention just a few. We see the loss of marriage, ruined lives from children being taken away, verbal and sexual abuse, drug addiction. Often, this leaves people helpless to a point where they can't even tap into services that are there.

We trust that you will help us, and we thank you so much that you are here today and that you're listening to us. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Bethany.

We're now going to go to our last witness, Donna Linton, from the Volunteer Centre of Charlotte County, for a presentation.

Welcome, Donna. Thank you for being here. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Donna Linton (Coordinator, Volunteer Centre of Charlotte County Inc.):** Good afternoon, everyone. I want to say thank you for having us here today.

I work for the Volunteer Centre of Charlotte County. We have two staff at our agency. Our in-kind service that we put out consistently over the year is over half a million dollars worth of free, tangible services. That means if you're sitting in our parking lot, you would see these services come out through our doors.

I've been in that place of employment for 17 years. Previous to that I worked with people with disabilities in two different settings. I'm very blessed to say I haven't missed a week of work in 27 years due to my own illness, so I'm a very lucky person.

At the Volunteer Centre of Charlotte County, the main ministry on a daily basis is a food bank. We also run the Red Cross loans program, as well as about five other programs that help people living in poverty. I've come to the conclusion, quite recently, that...I know many people think of poverty as something that happens to other people, that it's something best ignored lest it be caught—as if it were some disease—and that it must be avoided all costs. What is forgotten is that we are all only a step away from being in poverty, from finding ourselves barely able to survive with some sort of shelter, food to eat on a daily basis, and medical care. If you think of prescriptions without insurance, that's quite costly for many New Brunswickers.

Many think poverty is something that has happened to people who were careless, who didn't care about themselves or their families, and who just leech off the system. Public awareness needs to be created surrounding how those in poverty do care about themselves and their families, and how giving they are, and to what extent they will go to do the best they can. I can testify to that on a daily basis.

The word has to be gotten out that organizations that help those in need can't do it alone. They don't have the resources to help everyone who is in need, but they do the best they can to help who they can. If poverty were made to be seen as something that isn't a stigma, that isn't an illness that needs to be avoided and/or ignored, but is an event that requires help to be overcome, then maybe we'd come one step closer to making things easier for those who are in poverty.

One fact that was stated recently by a public health nurse in the school system is that 27% of children are not prepared for school each day, and this is across the board. If you look at the facts, and this would be out of the hunger count from Food Banks Canada, you'll see that 33.2% of food bank recipients are children. So we could have a match there.

At my organization over the years, and this was just out of desperation.... How do you maintain between 5,000 and 10,000 pounds of food a month that needs to be distributed to 274 different families 300 times? What I'm saying is that 300 times in the run of a month, my one staff member and I feed families, and we feed them between a two-day and five-day period. About 40% of those families return; about 20% of those families come back more than once a month, sometimes four times a month; and about 15% of those families don't come every month, but they may come on a six-month basis.

We're a volunteer centre and we capitalize on volunteerism. We have 34 volunteers who give more than 600 hours monthly. Our greatest group of volunteers happen to be young people between the ages of 7 and 14. We're entering into our third year of employing these young volunteers, and they basically are learning skills. Yesterday there was no school in the province. I had nine kids show up by 8:30 in the morning, and that surpassed my amazement, because I have two children who probably wouldn't get up at 8:30 in the morning and get to the centre. We provided transportation for four of them and the others got there on their own.

Here are my recommendations. Fund volunteer-based organizations like food banks, rural transportation initiatives, and emergency shelters with core funding, so they can adequately feed, clothe, and connect those people.

Look at payments made through income assistance. Provide cost-effective education for those in poverty. I have a daughter who's paying \$300 a month in interest charges, so I'm well aware of that. Make the EI system more accessible with less wait time, absolutely. Permit these families to access emergency funds without clawbacks. If you have to go to get emergency rent, you're poor for the next six months.

Make a plan for those who choose leisure over work. There's a lot of validity in that. I know a lot who are more complacent to stay at home than go to work, and I can tell you some of the reasons why—and I understand that. Have somewhere for people to go who need to just talk to someone. Being poor is a huge strain or stress for people who find themselves having to ask for help for the first time in their lives, and I think we're going to see an increased number of Canadians facing those doors in the months to come.

Stimulate real awareness of poverty within the greater community and the business sector by depicting the real plight of more than 100,000 New Brunswickers living in poverty—that's Shawn Graham's number.

•(1510)

I would like to see a relaunching of a thing called the Poverty Game.

Thank you.



**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We are going to start the first round of questions and answers. It will be seven minutes, and I'll start with my colleague over to my left here.

Mr. Savage, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Thank you very much. Our chair, when he signs off after these meetings, thanks the people who come and refers to them as the front lines.

You guys really are on the front lines of poverty. You're sort of the MASH hospitals of poverty—Sue, Bethany, Donna, and Susan. I think, Wendy and Monica, you guys are trying to change the game a little bit, but it's amazing work that you're doing.

We're hearing some great ideas here. I like the mandate, Bethany, that 60% of your board live in poverty. So they make decisions that are impacted by their own life experience.

Susan, I am interested in your medical services for the homeless. You mentioned it is pro bono. What does that mean in our medical system? Does that mean that homeless people aren't covered by medicare?

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** Often homeless people lose their medicare card, and they're transient; they leave home without it or it gets stolen on the streets. So they aren't able to present a valid card to the hospital or the after hours clinic. They get turned away or they are looked down upon and not served. Eventually they will have coverage. But in those moments, those times when they are on the streets, they often don't.

• (1515)

**Mr. Michael Savage:** So what you do is—

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** Attached to that is the fact that they may not have any other type of identification to present to the province to prove that they're even a Canadian.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Or any fixed address?

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** Or any fixed address, absolutely.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Tell me a little bit about what you do, the circumstances in which—

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** As I mentioned, we are now funded by the regional health authority, so the nurse practitioner and I are on salary. We can see anybody right now who really walks through the door.

We are attached to the homeless shelter, so a lot of our people are in the homeless shelter. We have a lot of referrals from community agencies. There's a program here called reconnect that looks at homeless people, and they refer to us. We provide what a family doctor would: we do physicals; we see babies; we follow through on pregnancies; we counsel on addictions. Because it is just us who provide those services without medicare, we can't often refer them to other places. So we do a lot of the hands-on type of stuff.

We advocate with social services to try to get them the support that they actually are entitled to.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I would think in some cases that perhaps your clients don't want to be referred to other parts of the medical system. Maybe they haven't had a good experience.

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** Yes. Often they've had failures through the other.... It is sometimes frustrating for us when we feel they need to be seen, and they don't have the structure in their lives that enables them to get to the specialist at 8:30 in the morning. Then they get booted out of the practice, so those are the frustrations. It needs to be a flexible kind of health care for them, at least initially.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** What does Salvus mean?

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** It's Latin for safe and well, and that's what we want our people to be.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Thank you very much.

We talked a little bit and some of you mentioned that other provinces have anti-poverty strategies.

It's not just a matter of resources. Newfoundland and Labrador kicked off their anti-poverty strategy when they had the highest debt. This was before the oil was rolling in. It's a matter of political will for people to make those decisions, don't you think, as opposed to just having the resources? Governments prioritize just as people do, right?

**Ms. Monica Chaperlin:** I think it's a will of leadership. It's not just political will.

A lot of communities are looking at how Saint John's business leadership came to the table. It's not normal for business leaders to be focused on this particular issue. But it does take leadership within every sector, and that's what we're looking for from all sectors.

It does include the federal government in terms of the political will to say that we've got a problem. It's just like Saint John said, "We have a problem and we're going to fix it. We don't know how, but we're going to fix it."

**Mr. Michael Savage:** In terms of reinventing neighbourhoods, we heard from somebody yesterday who is working in my own community of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Paul Shakotko. He's part of United Way. The United Way is doing some of this, where they actually go into communities. They did it in Spryfield and Halifax and now they are doing it in Dartmouth.

Is the United Way involved with you in any way, or is that a model that you're familiar with?

**Ms. Wendy MacDermott:** I know the United Way across the country is quite involved in neighbourhood renewal; in Saint John, a little less so. But we certainly have a lot of partners who are. For example, in Saint John, the Department of Social Development for the provincial government stepped into the largest housing project in the province. It had the most units, 388 units. They said we need to transform this neighbourhood and we need to do it from the ground up. We need to completely redesign this neighbourhood in a very integrated way, where, in the end, we'll have a place where anybody would be proud to live. Right now, very few people want to live there.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** One of the reasons we do these hearings and why it's important for us to travel around the country—and we don't travel in Lear jets—is that it's part of our job to get out and see what is actually happening with people on the ground. It's a unique circumstance from place to place.

We've heard a lot today about the paltry support for people living on social assistance in New Brunswick. Somebody this morning mentioned \$294 a month. He had compared that to 1974, when I think it was \$254 a month, and then it was cut and then it was brought back some time ago. How does somebody live on that?

• (1520)

**Ms. Bethany Thorne-Dykstra:** There's no way they can.

I happen to be a dairy farmer by profession. I have made the statement on a number of occasions that I have more regulations, more restrictions, more responsibility on how I treat my cows than what I see with our people. That disturbs me a lot, to the point of being involved in this organization. I find it very disturbing, and I haven't had anyone yet explain to me, and maybe someone here could, but I've thrown it out a lot.... The \$294 that you're talking about is the single so-called employable person. We meet at the soup kitchens, and I dare challenge anyone to come along with me to the soup kitchen and pick out who you would employ in your office. Some of these people are my best friends and they know I wouldn't hire them on my farm because they have major issues. They are not employable in the world of business today. To give \$294, that is \$3,500 a year to live on. To rent a boarding room alone in Moncton, I haven't heard a rate of less than \$300 a month. Some of the landlords have lowered their rate to take the cheque in hand because they know it's coming every month. There are absolutely zero dollars left for that individual to survive.

When you look at Atlantic Canada, before the provincial government of the day got in they had a beautiful plan on how to deal with poverty. They talked about bringing up those rates to the Atlantic Canada average. That particular rate would have to be raised 70% to be equivalent with Nova Scotia, P.E.I., and Newfoundland. Someone explain to me how that is rational because I don't get it. Even if you're lucky enough to get the classification of disability as a single individual in this province, you get a maximum of \$600 a month to live on. Even to get categorized in that you have to prove you can't personally take care of yourself. It's unbelievable.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move to our next questioner, Madame Beaudin.

You have seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Thank you.

Mrs. Thorne-Dykstra, would you be a member of the committee that will work on an anti-poverty strategy here?

[English]

**Ms. Bethany Thorne-Dykstra:** No.

I submitted a presentation to them. They did meetings in different areas, so I attended the one here in Moncton.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** We have been told that about 30 partners will be involved in phase 2 of the strategy and you will not be one of them?

[English]

**Ms. Bethany Thorne-Dykstra:** I have not been invited currently.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** I come from Quebec. I am very proud to meet six very active women who are directly involved, who know the issue and who work on the front lines. Before becoming an MP, I also used to work for a community organization in Quebec. You were suggesting that we should look at the best practices used elsewhere. I heard you talk about core funding for community organizations. Is that a priority for you? When the time comes to make an important decision, how do you decide between what is urgent, essential or a priority? In which category would you put core funding for community organizations?

[English]

**Ms. Sue Rickards:** That was in the non-profit task force report, which was—we went all around the province and we heard from several hundred non-profit organizations that core funding was the top priority across the board, absolutely number one, way ahead of anything else.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** How would this funding be provided? How should it be provided to community organizations? Have you thought about what the structure should be or how it would work?

• (1525)

[English]

**Ms. Sue Rickards:** It's a very difficult question because there are so many kinds of non-profits. Some are delivering services in a contractual arrangement on behalf of a government. They should be paid a core amount they can count on every year, with increases according to the cost of living. That should be in the contract. No question. So that one's fairly simple.

As far as other organizations that operate on project funding mostly, there are several ways people suggested it could be done. For example, a portion of a project fund could be for operating costs or you could apply to a fund. There would be a central fund. We never figured out where the money would come from. Maybe from the lotteries. That was one possibility. But if there was a fund for non-profits to apply to, and they could show they were stable, they had good boards of directors, governance models, and all that sort of thing, then they could qualify for some level of core funding every year. But we really don't have a formula.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Thank you.

Mrs. Crouse, what should we do to make sure that there would be more organizations like yours?

[English]

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** In terms of how the federal government could provide more services to medical? Is that what you're asking?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** It could be through the federal government. I suppose that, when in doing your work, you see that there are not enough resources to provide the medical services required by homeless persons. I suppose that you think there should be more of you. What would be the solutions, at any level?

[English]

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** We have a huge health crisis, of which I'm sure you may be aware, here in New Brunswick. We have approximately 5,000 patients without family doctors on waiting lists here in Moncton. To provide service to people who are marginalized, who consume lots of time, who have complex needs, is very difficult. Addressing that health care component is important, to work with our medical association and different levels of government is important, in terms of that and in terms of training. The expertise is out there to manage, but everybody's restricted because of cutbacks at our provincial level. We've had cutbacks in mental health, and that has long waiting lists. It's a very slow process to get medical things seen. So looking at how to improve the ease at which people dealing with poverty get into the system is important.

As I mentioned, medication is a huge issue for us. If you're on social assistance, you can get a white card that will cover you. But if you're trying to find employment and improve your circumstances, you lose your white card or you have to go through a very complex formula of looking at your income and getting letters from your doctor and pharmacy showing exactly what you need. It is a complex system. Simplifying that or providing some type of drug plan for those who are working would be a huge gap that could be filled.

Also, someone has already mentioned looking after children. Trying to provide single mums with adequate day care so they can go out to work and go to school and help the whole family would be another big gap that could be filled.

**The Chair:** We're out of time here, but Monica, do you have a quick response?

**Ms. Monica Chaperlin:** Yes. It just struck me. I don't know if you've heard from the Canadian Council on Social Development yet. They've been advocating for a long time that social funds coming from the federal government need to be protected through social transfer activism, because money is flowing into provinces, but we have no idea if that money is really being dedicated to social needs or not. Our suspicion is that the money isn't.

Reducing poverty takes investment. There's no doubt about it. The business community is down there going "Aaah!" It's a lot of money, but it's worth it. It's an investment. We have to come up with these new investments, we have to protect the money, and it has to flow—I agree with Susan—through provinces, and communities have to work with their provinces.

• (1530)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** I just wanted to say, again, thanks for coming. It's always very helpful to hear from folks like you.

This afternoon I heard a call across the board for leadership. I heard a call for delivering programs through community-based, not-for-profit people who know the people, who know the community, who can deliver. I also heard, though, that you're running out of money and resources, so there needs to be more of those put into the system somehow.

You've travelled with Claudette across the country. I travelled across the country, about two years ago, looking at poverty. When you look at poverty, you can't help but see homelessness. It's in front of you. There are so many really well-meaning groups working 24/7, using every ounce of resources that they have to try to provide and support. They are getting tired, getting grey, and running out of money. I've heard the same message here today.

I wanted to focus on one thing that came from that trip I took, and I heard it mentioned a couple of times across the panel today. It's a question of a leadership. In Calgary, for example, there are 3,500 to 4,000 people on the street any given night. It's quite ironic actually. You have the epitome and sign of new wealth—oil and everything—but at the base of those towers you have these folks. The city council at that time, two years ago, was passing laws to make it criminal behaviour to be homeless. You couldn't sleep in parks. You couldn't sleep under bridges. You couldn't walk in the malls to get warm. There was one shelter for 1,200 people bedding down per night. There were other smaller shelters in the suburbs, where they were moving people around. There was probably a maximum of 2,000 people. So there are another 1,500 or more that are out there running around trying to find a place to sleep so they don't get picked up or whatever.

Susan, you mentioned restorative justice. If we're going to criminalize these people, we'd better be doing something or else our jails are going to be filled. You mentioned that we're putting mentally ill people in jail, which to me is absolutely unconscionable. I guess I'm looking for a response to that. How do we stop that?

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** One of the difficulties I see with the criminal system is that if people need help with things like drugs and alcohol, and those problems land them into trouble with the law, unless they get into the federal system, i.e. get over two years, they are in a provincial system where they get no treatment for their drug and alcohol problems, which is really sad, because that's really what got them into that spot in the first place.

I am a big fan of restorative justice, because I've seen it work. We have a lot of ex-offenders that come to our clinic, and I've seen it work. They're contributing back to communities, working in schools and stuff, because they can reconcile with themselves, really. I think that's what it comes down to.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Are you aware that we have a bill coming before the House that is requiring mandatory minimum sentence for smoking pot?

Anyway, that's leadership of a different sort. Maybe we'll hear from Ed on that a bit. He'll be up next. He was a lawyer at one point before we got into this.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** He'll be able to clarify the record.

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** We think we even have pot in our water, because everybody we test has pot. That's going to be a tough one.

**Ms. Sue Rickards:** Could I just comment on the general direction you're going in here? I just went to a conference last week on crime reduction strategy. Well, it sounded like the same conference on poverty reduction strategy. All of these have so many common threads, whether it's crime or education, why aren't these kids staying in school, blah, blah, blah. There are addiction problems, FAS/FAE problems that are undiagnosed, learning disabilities. All of these things contribute. Of course, poverty is the most obvious determinant of poor health, low education, and all of that stuff.

The problem we keep bumping up against always is structural. It's the silos of the government that make it virtually impossible to work holistically with people who have a range of issues, and trying to beat on every door. That's why we're tired. That's why we're played out and exhausted, because you can get this program here and this program there and this program from this level.... Oh yeah, we want training, but you can't call it training if you're talking to the feds because they devolved training to the province. So we can only talk about training to the provincial government. When we talk to the feds, we have to say life skills.

Learning all this stuff, it really wears you down when you're a volunteer—and even when you're not a volunteer, but somebody like Donna, who spent her working life on the poverty line, probably working in a non-profit organization that struggles with all these issues every day.

**Ms. Bethany Thorne-Dykstra:** If I could just say one thing, I think what's most disturbing is when you do find real issues, like the housing one I mentioned, of empty units being heated and landlords getting money and no people in the building, and you go to your government, in a closed meeting, and you go with two departments.... We've met in closed-door meetings with the departments of social development and energy about the issue. They don't take you seriously.

I don't feel proud that we had to shame them in front of the media to highlight the issue, just to get it heard, for them to take action. I'm not proud of it, but I will do it. I will do it, because someone had to address that. Within six days, 200 people in this province got housed, after we went public. They had to continually keep working on that file. Everyone dropped everything and started fixing up units and getting people in there after that point.

I hate working that way. I don't feel any of us should have to do that. I think there's something broken when we can't have a respectful meeting and deal with issues.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to move to Mr. Komarnicki, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly poverty is a most serious issue. The burden is on many of you on the ground who need to deal with that. It's not an illness, as you suggest, but an event that needs to be overcome. We appreciate the work that you do.

I do sense a measure of frustration and perhaps overtiring and overburdening that's taking place among many of you who face this head-on on the street level. I know we've heard from a number of witnesses in terms of how programs are designed, how moneys are put out there.

Sue Rickards, I appreciate your spunk and your saying that some of the off-the-wall ideas may not be so bad. Maybe we need to rethink how we're delivering some of these programs, and listen more to what's happening on the ground to ensure that we're meeting needs as opposed to funding specific area programs whether the need is there or not. I take that to heart.

Perhaps we should call this report the upside-down, inside-out report, like you were suggesting, and look at it from a different perspective. I appreciate all of your comments.

One of the specific items was how you get people out of that cycle. Some you won't, and I appreciate that. You'll need to deal with them perhaps differently. But a lot of the words that I've heard today and earlier, as well as yesterday, were about empowering many to move out of their circumstances.

I realize we need a collaborative effort from various levels of government. We need to work in harmony. We need to integrate what we're doing. What are some specific examples, Susan, that you might suggest in terms of empowering people who find themselves in circumstances to get out of them? And that's to anyone else who may want to share.

We seem to be doing well at looking at attending to the consequences of the events as opposed to preventative action. So if you have any suggestions, I'd like to hear them.

• (1540)

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** I'll can give you an example from our clinic.

As mentioned, we work with drug addicts. One of our clients came. I'm okay to share this, because she's cool with it. She was a drug addict. She was selling cocaine. She came to us for help. She is now employed as one of our part-time administrative assistants. She's recognizing people on the street who need help and bringing them into the clinic. She has actually adopted one of the daughters of a street worker and has gotten married. And now she is looking at going off and getting further training so that she can set up a women's recovery centre.

This is a lady who probably reads at below a grade eight level. We make accommodations for that in the office. When we do our computer stuff, we have to interpret what she's writing, but she now feels part of what's helping her. She can move on, and then that position will be opened to somebody else.

That's an example for us. We have people who now do some cleaning in the office and are working at setting up cleaning businesses. It is those types of things. We are giving them real jobs and paying them good money, not just \$7.50 an hour. We are giving them health insurance and things that they can invest in their own future.

**Ms. Donna Linton:** I've seen a lot of that at my place of employment too. We will hire people on temporary work contracts. Twelve weeks is usually the maximum, which doesn't do us a whole lot of good, because they get trained and off they go. I've had two adults come back and say that I've given such awesome references that it actually landed them a job.

Another thing I want to let you folks representing the federal government know about is the summer student program. For the entire 17 years we've had this placement, I've always chosen to hire somebody from an economically depressed background. It tends to be the oldest child in a single-parent family. There are five other kids. My current summer student is returning for her fifth year. Let me tell you what \$2,000 a year has done for her family and for getting this kid through school. She is now going into human services, and it's probably in direct correlation with her employment with us during the summer.

I understand that program is going.... We were one of the groups that were told one year that we couldn't have any. I'm going to go back and check on it. I'd like to see priority given to organizations such as ours that choose students from families in which there is only one income. As far as an indicator of poverty, if you're anywhere below \$20,000, you're there. If there's only one income for your household, even if it's above \$20,000, you're there. Those are the families I see. Of the 200 families and 300 kids that come in every month, we're seeing families with only one income today. It is very hard to manage.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Sue.

**Ms. Sue Rickards:** I just wanted to mention an example. I was working with some families who were living in non-profit housing in a small community. They were being persecuted by their neighbours because they were welfare bums, blah, blah, blah. They told me the only way they could live comfortably in that community and be accepted would be if they were working.

This is where I first got really keen on the social enterprise idea, because work is about so much more than money. Of course, it is about money, but it's also about how we define ourselves. The fact that you have a job means that somebody needs you. You have responsibility. It's all about responsibility.

The upshot of that was that we started a business. It was called Born Again J.E.A.N.S. We collected old clothes, and these ladies made new things out of them. We ran it for about six years. It never supported them fully, but we managed to cobble together employment programs and stuff. It was primarily funded by my mother, actually. In the end, two families exited the welfare system totally. They have never been back. They would die before they would go back. Their children went to school and finished high school. The spinoffs were awesome.

This is why I'm really so enthusiastic about this approach. It is not the therapeutic, "Oh, you poor thing, here, have this free and this

free." People have to be valued. When they're not valued, when they have no responsibility, when nobody needs them, that's when they get into trouble. That's what I've seen, in my experience.

• (1545)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Thank you.

I want to ask Monica a question. I guess my time is about running out.

I was very interested in hearing about the businesses in the community becoming involved in dealing with some of the issues, and in particular taking some ownership of what they were doing. You suggested some tax policies that may be helpful in helping that concept along. Maybe you could elaborate on that a little bit.

I know my time's up, so I'll quit there, although I have some other things I'd like to ask you about.

**Ms. Monica Chaperlin:** Did you say "tax policies"?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** That's right, for business. I think it was income tax policy that you were referring to.

**Ms. Monica Chaperlin:** You might be surprised to learn that the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative Inc. very much believes in a living wage, and that business has to share the responsibility.

However, things like a reduction in the GST or a reduction in our tax rate here in New Brunswick weren't things that really excited the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative. As I said, it is nice to have these things, but it's not helping. We're seeing severe cuts and changes now as a result of these tax cuts. They are really hurting.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** So what would you suggest for a tax policy?

**Ms. Monica Chaperlin:** Why not put back that 1% in GST and focus it specifically on social development? Why not?

We've got to invest this money. It costs money to do this, to make this change. We can't do it without it. We can't expect departments to turn themselves inside out and change, because they don't. When you're creating a new way of doing things, you need new investment dollars to be able to show how to do it, and then we will make savings down the road.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have two more questioners, Mr. Savage and Mr. Lobb. They have five minutes each to finish up.

Mr. Savage, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I am going to ask you something that I didn't ask anybody else.

The preface is that probably the most remarkable person I have met in my life is a woman named Ingrid Munro, from Denmark. She was in charge of the African Housing Fund and had retired, but a group of about 50 street beggars from Nairobi came to her and asked her to provide help. These were women who had nothing. She started a microfinance organization called Jamii Bora.

The other side of that was a woman named Beatrice, who was 50 years old and blind. She had seven children and twelve grandchildren. In the space of two years, all seven children died of AIDS and tuberculosis, and she was left with the grandchildren. She thought she would put arsenic in their porridge. She told us this in Nairobi. Alexa McDonough was with me.

Instead she borrowed the equivalent of \$20 U.S. from this microfinance organization. She now has four businesses. These are not Coca-Cola or GM. She sells fruits and vegetables. She's a landlord and does things like that.

Could a model like that work?

The other thing that Ingrid said, and Ingrid is not a soft old lefty, is that people ask how we take people out of poverty. She said, "I can't take anybody out of poverty. They take themselves out, but we have to create the conditions."

Microfinance works, and microcredit. Is there a model that could work here to assist people in poverty?

**Ms. Bethany Thorne-Dykstra:** We talked a little bit at a meeting just recently here in Moncton about social cooperatives. What I really liked about that idea was that you don't go into business alone, but with support from others, so these people who aren't used to doing business have support. They don't feel that they're taking all the risk. They don't feel intimidated by that when a group of people go together. I think that's a really interesting concept to look at.

The other thing I wanted to say is it doesn't have to be limited to people who are physically or mentally well. That's one thing I've learned from our group. We do have people who are actually disabled in our organization, and they are really contributing.

There are people who have many gifts and talents, but the way our society is designed, they just don't have the opportunities to show them. Someone may never do a 40-hour week. They may not be physically capable of doing that, but if someone can give you 10 good hours and you can find four people to do 10 good hours, you've still got a lot of work done.

There are ways to do it, but we need to do more thinking outside of the box to be able to do it. In the business world today it is about productivity. It is about watching your margins and everything else, and I understand that, so there needs to be another design where these people fit and are given dignity and quality of life.

• (1550)

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Absolutely.

One of the criticisms of microcredit was that they said it doesn't work for the poorest of the poor because you're talking about such small amounts of money that you can't track it, but this Jamii Bora organization has 170,000 clients. They've now got to the point that they actually provide health insurance for these people. They've taken over an old Catholic hospital that was abandoned by the nuns and they are now providing health insurance. It's a great model, and it has tracked....

I'm not sure, Sue, if you were going to—

**Ms. Sue Rickards:** We have a community loan fund in Saint John that makes micro loans and has been very successful in that regard.

I believe we need some sort of investment in the training business, the social enterprise. The best example is HRDA from Halifax, which you must be familiar with, which has started over 20 businesses in 20 years, or something like that; people who were on assistance or on welfare were working in the companies and then some of them spun them off. It's a fabulous model. This is what we've been trying to emulate on a very small scale, because we haven't had the resources, but we're hopeful that we will get some social enterprise policy and programming in place in the next couple of years.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** This is not something the banks are interested in doing. It's not something most financial institutions are interested in doing. It's probably too small for ACOA to be interested in doing. But it seems to me that if we set up some kind of a social economy model that invested in people and gave them an opportunity, on small amounts of money in a lot of cases—

**Ms. Sue Rickards:** Can I just warn against ACOA? Please, stay away from ACOA. We had the social economy bit with ACOA three, four, or five years ago, whatever. Don't go there. They didn't understand that there could be another kind of business with a double bottom line. They never got it.

**The Chair:** We're going to move to Mr. Lobb, the last questioner of the day.

You have five minutes.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Susan, you mentioned, just briefly, cuts for mental health. I wonder if you could elaborate a little on that and the impact you've seen on your communities.

**Dr. Susan Crouse:** We have had cuts through all aspects of the health care structure here in New Brunswick. They have impacted mental health such that just the basic services cannot be provided in a timely fashion. I think the present wait list for suicidal patients, urgent patients, is six weeks, unless you land at the hospital and are admitted under Form 1. It's a pretty bad situation here, but I think it's reflective of all the cuts to health care.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Yes, it's definitely an issue. My mother-in-law is a mental health nurse in rural Ontario, and I guess most of the issues get dealt with through there, whether it's addiction or depression. There's a definite situation and issue, I guess.

Our committee has heard time and time again about mental health and addiction, and we've also talked about the penal system in Canada. There's almost a parallel there with instances of mental health and addiction and those who are incarcerated.

Sue, if you'd indulge us with your 100 years of experience, I think you have one rant left in you, and I was hoping you could give the committee one last rant with the time remaining.

**Ms. Sue Rickards:** Well, pick a subject. I can rant on just about anything.

I think what you're seeing here is that we've all been at this for quite a while, and we all have ideas, but again, I would say, as Monica keeps mentioning, that there's the word "investment". We have to get away from this line about how there's a social side and an economic side. No, no, no: it's a socio-economic spiral and they feed off each other. If you have some success in the economy, then your social issues are changed and move to another level, but then you can deal with those. It's all sort of like an iceberg. You keep digging down.

I really wasn't expecting to rant, so I don't know where to go with this. I think we need the federal guidance. We need the federal guidelines. We need the national policies that are going to say, "This is what Canada believes in, this is what Canada wants to do about poverty, this is how we should approach it, and this is how we view these people, because they are not writeoffs." They are capable and strong, and if we give them the opportunities, we can make some

progress. After we get to that point, we have to make sure these basic needs are addressed, but not as charity. We have to get away from the charity model because charity puts people down. It's only the giver who feels good in charity. We have to give opportunity, not charity. I guess that would be my last word.

● (1555)

**The Chair:** Once again, I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

As we've said before, you guys are on the front lines. We appreciate the work you do and we appreciate the suggestions you've made to us today that we can take back for our report. Once again, thank you very much for your time this afternoon. We know you're all very busy people.

The meeting is adjourned.

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**Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes**

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