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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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•(0850)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good morning colleagues, witnesses and guests.

This is the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), we are undertaking a study of First Nations child and family services.

[*English*]

We are welcoming our witnesses here today for our continuing study on child and family services for first nations. I will draw to the attention of members and witnesses that we have APTN in the room today under the authority of the parliamentary bureau that authorizes such film productions. Of course, this is a public meeting as well. We welcome them here today.

Now to our witnesses, who I'll formally introduce in a moment. As you have done this in the past, I'm sure, we will open with a 10-minute statement. We'll go in succession, one after the next, for both opening statements, after which time we'll open it up to questions from members, for which we have a rotation. I'll explain that a little bit later.

First I'd like to welcome the Honourable Mary Polak, the Minister of Children and Family Development for the Government of British Columbia. She's accompanied by

[*Translation*]

Lesley du Toit, Deputy Minister of Children and Family Development.

[*English*]

Let's begin, then, with Minister Polak.

Minister, it's great to have you here, and please go ahead. You have ten minutes.

Hon. Mary Polak (Minister of Children and Family Development, Government of British Columbia): Thank you, and good morning to you all.

As has been said, my name is Mary Polak. I am British Columbia's Minister of Children and Family Development and Minister Responsible for Child Care.

I want to say I'm very honoured to be here today to make this presentation to the standing committee and to carry forward what I

think are some very important words from not only the Province of British Columbia but also from its first citizens.

British Columbia is a province that is shaped and enriched by the presence, the words, and the wisdom of our first nations. We pride ourselves on being a land of wealth and opportunity, but we know this opportunity does not extend to everyone. It has its limits, and those limits are too often defined by the lines that separate reserve land.

We can never right the wrongs of the past, but we stand united in our commitment to establishing a new relationship with first nations, one rooted firmly in respect, recognition, and reconciliation. We are committed to supporting first nations as they strive to create better, stronger, healthier futures for their children and their youth.

British Columbia is home to the second-largest aboriginal population in the country, fully 5% of our province's total population, and that rate is growing at almost three times the rate of non-aboriginal peoples. Almost 40% of that population is under the age of 19. Our province includes 203 first nations communities—one-third of all first nations communities across Canada—and about 38% of those live on reserve. These communities differ greatly from those of our prairie neighbours, not just in numbers but, importantly, in size, the communities averaging fewer than 300 people on reserve.

In addition, many of our first nations communities, while possessed of extraordinary beauty, are isolated and remote, and that's an environment that adds to the challenge of accessing adequate resources and support for their people, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

We are, as a province, faced with unique challenges. We know that a one-size-fits-all approach simply will not work for our first nations. We are committed to working together with our federal and first nations partners to find the kinds of unique solutions needed in British Columbia, both now and for the long term.

I'm proud of some of the successes our province has seen in forging a new relationship with our first nations and aboriginal people. That path has not always been smooth and we are, in many respects, still finding our way, but we have continued to move forward. November 2005 saw a big step forward with the creation of the Transformative Change Accord, signed by the Government of Canada, British Columbia, and the First Nations Leadership Council, representing all 203 first nations in British Columbia. The accord, which still guides us today, aims to close the socio-economic gaps between first nations in British Columbia and other British Columbians by 2015, by focusing on key areas, including health, education, housing and infrastructure, economic conditions, and the relationship between aboriginal people and the crown.

It was and is an ambitious plan, and real progress has been made in achieving the goals laid out within it. Perhaps more than anything the accord has strengthened our partnership with first nations leaders and paved the way to a more focused approach to addressing social and economic gaps.

We have moved forward. Achievements have been realized in negotiating health and education agreements, including first nations education jurisdiction agreements, which lay the groundwork for first nations decision-making about the K to 12 education of their children on reserve. The tripartite first nations health plan and proposed first nations health authority sets the stage for the transfer of federal first nations health programs to B.C. first nations. So, yes, we have moved forward, but we have a long way still to go.

That is why I'm here today. In the last 20 years, B.C. first nations have been working hard to develop their own child and family services agencies, and in the past decade governments and ministries have come a long way in recognizing the authority and jurisdiction of first nations over their own communities and their own people, specifically their own children.

We've come a long way from the colonial mentality that resulted in the devastation wrought by residential schools and the sixties scoop. We recognize that while residential schools closed in the 1980s, their devastating effects are ongoing and intergenerational, profoundly affecting the children of today. For these children, historically overrepresented in our province's child welfare system and underrepresented in our colleges and universities, we can and must do better.

• (0855)

I come to you to speak about not only the unique challenges that must be addressed to truly support B.C.'s aboriginal children and youth, but most importantly the ways in which we must continue to work together to address these challenges and move forward.

We are presently involved with more than 100 first nations communities, as well as many urban and Métis communities, each of which is working to develop child and family service approaches based on its unique indigenous identity that will better serve the children and families in its community. For example, I recently participated in the signing of a partnership memorandum that brought together for the first time the first nations communities of the Stikine to design and develop their own model of care for their children.

As a ministry, we have committed to respecting and upholding the first nations right to jurisdiction over their children and families, and thus to services that support their children. We fully support Jordan's Principle and are committed to its implementation. We know that aboriginal children and youth make up more than half of all children in care, and we know that real, long-term, effective solutions lie with first nations themselves, with adequate resources from respective governments.

B.C.'s initial first-nations-delegated agency was established in 1986 under the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations Tribal Council. We now have 24 delegated agencies throughout our province, and others are actively working toward delegation.

As you are aware, the model of funding for first nations child welfare, known as 20-1, is not helpful in our province. As a result, we have been working together to build a new framework.

As a province, we want to address these historical inequities, particularly in the area of child welfare. The B.C. first nations enhanced prevention services and accountability framework is a key part of the solution.

Created by British Columbia's first nations, the provincial government, and INAC, it establishes a funding framework that both reflects and addresses the complexities of our delegated agencies on reserve. It offers a new funding model that recognizes that operational costs and the delivery of prevention and early intervention services must be considered in any funding agreement in order to have viable and sustainable child welfare services. This framework, brought to Ottawa in September 2008, has the full support of British Columbia provincial first nations leadership.

It carves out a path in which British Columbia first nations can move forward in creating healthier, stronger communities for their children and youth. It recognizes the value and importance of prevention, early intervention, and family support rooted in traditional culture and practice. It builds on the important work done by all three partners over the past decade to improve outcomes for first nations and will offer them an opportunity to leverage this funding to create a holistic, culturally appropriate, on-reserve child, youth, and family support system.

At the end of the day, this tripartite framework makes it abundantly clear that we recognize and value all first nations children and youth, not just those who are in government care.

Each of us here today is committed to forging a new path with our country's first nations. We have had great success in working together, in acknowledging and respecting our differences, and in understanding the importance of supporting rather than leading on this long journey.

I look forward to your continued partnership as we move forward, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I'm sure that will be very helpful.

Now we'll welcome Mr. Kenn Richard. Kenn is the executive director for Native Child and Family Services of Toronto.

Mr. Richard, welcome. Please go ahead with your 10-minute presentation.

Mr. Kenn Richard (Executive Director, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto): Thank you very much.

I'm going to speak about my agency, because I think we are a pretty good example of what can be done when a community puts its mind to the care of its children and, above all, is given resources in fact to do that.

In 1985, for those of you who don't know, who are not from this province, the provincial legislation was amended to allow aboriginal communities and agencies to develop their own child and family services. Many people didn't think about the Toronto community as an aboriginal community, and it is probably not thought to be so right around this country, but indeed, we have the third largest aboriginal child population in the country. We suffered from the same social and economic conditions affecting other native communities, and like those communities, our rates of children in the care of the state were far too high and the outcomes for those kids in care were very poor.

Our community felt we could do much better and that a community-controlled and culture-based approach would result in the outcomes we wanted to achieve. By better outcomes, I should say, we meant fewer kids in care of the state, but it also meant that where they had to be in care, their placements were within their community, either within their extended families or with their community of origin.

We felt that children who grow up in their family of heritage will have a strong identity and can, with support—and often supports are needed—have natural and caring relationships with their community and families, relationships that most Canadians take for granted, but not relationships that can necessarily be taken for granted by aboriginal people.

In 1988 we developed our own service model, and it was a far different approach from conventional child welfare. In Ontario we still have an import from Britain called “the society”. These are chartered societies; indeed my agency is in fact a children's aid society under a charter with the province.

The society status allows you some flexibility, and we developed a service model that was a little different from conventional children's aid societies. It came from extensive consultation with communities, with elders, with stakeholders, if you will, including government officials, and we were given some pretty clear marching orders associated with doing something different. One was that our society, our child welfare response, had to have some level of accountability to the community we served.

The second was that they wanted us to address the circumstances that might lead to the apprehension of children, which is very different from a conventional children's aid society that focuses on investigations of child maltreatment.

The third was to wrap this all up in a culture-based approach, which is not easy when you're talking about culture in the context of provincial legislation, so we were very challenged in those days.

The accountability part was the easy part. We developed very quickly a conventional, non-profit charity with a representative board of directors of all native people, all professionals in their fields, to oversee our work. We hired an executive director. That was me.

The second was to create an agency that was not just a business plan for protecting kids but a business plan that would go beyond that. Quality of life for children goes beyond simply their protection. It is also the nurturing of those children so that they can live decent, productive lives as good citizens of their first nations and of Canada as a whole. We had lofty ambitions.

We say we are a full service agency that does child welfare instead of a child welfare agency. When you approach it that way, you leave the door open for all kinds of innovative servicing. Between 1988 and 2004, we developed over \$8 million worth of services that were not child welfare-related. These were Head Start programs, dedicated day care spaces, and extensive youth programs, including transitional housing for kids on the street. We run a high school, and we have a number of services that relate to their particular needs.

We have culture-based healing and therapy programs for adults and children. We have family violence programs. We have a stand-alone addictions clinic and we do summer and recreational programs. In fact, if you were to ask the kids who are engaged with Native Child what their favourite program is, they'll tell you it's our summer camp. That's kind of moving into the normative expectation with respect to what many Canadian children have taken for granted but aboriginal kids certainly haven't.

● (0905)

The cultural base issue is handled by having an elders council. It has no authority under formal rules but in fact has tremendous and powerful authority from the cultural place. They guide us in our training and they help us provide our ceremonies—and we have extensive ceremonies.

You wouldn't know this, but at College and Yonge there are two things today that weren't in existence a few years ago. One is a fully functioning sweat lodge on the fourth floor of our building, and the other is an Algonquin teaching lodge that is built in the atrium of our new building. Both of these, for your information, have won design awards, including one of the most prestigious of all design awards by the art design institute in the U.S., who publish the large journal related to that.

So we do more than spend time on child protection, although we take that seriously. We do cultural enhancement and enrichment, and we try to do what the elders call showing the things that glitter: show that aboriginal people are not just people who receive services and have problems, that there is, with the appropriate nurturing, an opportunity to do much more. My agency is a good sign of that.

I think we have done very successful work. Our agency is holistic in its orientation. It tends to the life-cycle needs of kids and families, and not just, as I've said, as part of the immediate and difficult realities of child maltreatment.

We have close to 200 staff, multiple locations, and an operating budget of \$24 million. On average, we interface with 1,200 aboriginal people a day.

We have more than 70 funding agreements, very few with the federal government, and of course we have a tremendous administrative burden as a result. It's interesting to note that not one of these agreements comes from INAC. In fact, I cannot recall a single dollar ever being directly funded to this agency by the federal government through INAC, although 70% of our clients are status Indians and the other 30% would be Métis, Inuit, and self-declared aboriginal people.

After 20 years of service provision to our community, we have made some huge differences in some areas and very little difference in others. Our best results, our pride, is in our work with kids who have become permanent wards of the state.

Previous to the emergence of Native Child and other organizations like us, native children were apprehended by the state and quite often—and this is a tragedy—simply disappeared to non-native places, often not just in the immediate area but out of province, and sometimes out of the country, and sometimes internationally.

We have stopped this culturally genocidal behaviour. Kids not only do not disappear; they stay within their community, many within their extended families, both on and off reserve.

We are proud that close to 90% of our long-term placements are with native families. Evidence is mounting that says that this will produce better overall outcomes for the kids involved. They are mostly doing well in our care; some are doing very well. We are having kids, for the first time, graduate from universities and colleges. Most of our kids were dropouts from the high school system. The kids we bring into our care tend to do a lot better.

The area in which we have not been successful is in handling and making a difference in the circumstances that lead to the apprehension of children. In fact we are apprehending more kids than ever, and this is a phenomenon right across the country. In Toronto, almost 10% of the children in care are aboriginal, and we

represent less than 1% of the population. We have to ask ourselves why this is so. Why, after so much effort on the part of the community and an investment of close to \$24 million annually, are these kids still coming into care?

I believe you know the answer. This is a committee that has heard from many. It has to do with a legacy of colonialism, the residential schools, and the disenfranchisement of aboriginal people from living a life that would normally be expected to be lived by any Canadian. That history has probably been articulated to you, so I will not go into it, but that history is experienced in the everyday life of the caseloads at Native Child and Family Services.

We have an overrepresentation among the families we work with of families who are in poverty. They are plagued by violence, have addictions, and are alienated from themselves and everything around them.

● (0910)

As you know—and I hope this would be a wake-up call for any concerned citizen—the migration to the city is accelerating rapidly. If you consult with StatsCan, you'll see that in Toronto alone, every census shows a 20% increase in aboriginal children. Thankfully, agencies such as Native Child and Family Services, and a similar initiative referenced here in Vancouver, have developed to receive this migration. I think we are developing an expertise and securing the resources and doing all things necessary to create agencies that will assist these kids in making a healthy transition. But there's lots of work to do, and while I was not asked, I can't help but make a few recommendations. They will be short and sweet.

One is investment in native children. There's lots of investment dealing with the problems of native kids. I can get more money to support a kid I've apprehended than I can ever get for a kid who's actually in the community. I don't think anybody would see that as a good, no matter what end of the political spectrum you might be on. We need to get at some of these fundamentals: investment in the Head Start program—and by the way, it has been an excellent program that has made a dramatic difference in the lives of some of our kids—day cares, which we have taken on; early education, zero to six. All of those investments, I think, pay off tremendously.

I don't know what the formula is, whether a buck invested saves... but I will tell you that I have kids in care, because they have not had investments in their lives, sitting in foster homes and group homes that are costing over \$200 a day. So just the business side would tell you that these investments are good.

The other is, treat kids fairly. That has been articulated in Jordan's Principle very well, and I think you've heard it before. No matter who they are or where they live, and whether they're aboriginal or not, kids should have equal services in a country such as ours. This is fundamental, I think, to our values as Canadians, whether we're native or non-native.

The Chair: Let's bring this to a wrap now, Mr. Richard.

Mr. Kenn Richard: Yes. This is the final recommendation. Thank you very much.

And finally, have the funding follow the kids. With some noted exceptions, such as Head Start, increased urbanization has not led to a corresponding federal response in resources to help kids in the city. I fear that without more for kids in the cities, a population of troubled and non-productive children will grow and simply continue the multi-generational issues we are battling today.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richard. We thank both of you for your presentations this morning.

The members of the Committee will now put their questions to you. During the first round, each member will have seven minutes. For the second and third rounds, only five minutes will be granted to each member. It is Mr. Bagnell who will ask the first question.

Mr. Bagnell, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

And thank you for coming. It's been very helpful and very informative. There is some good progress in this area.

I'd just like to ask Ms. Polak about the B.C. land claims process for the ones that have been settled and the ones that are under negotiation. In areas such as mine in the Yukon, and in some other areas, the self-government agreements allow for first nations and aboriginal communities to totally take down child and family services and deliver them themselves.

Is that occurring in B.C. in either existing agreements or ones that are under negotiation?

Hon. Mary Polak: It is occurring. One of the most notable and most recent would be in the preliminary agreements that have been signed with the Haida. I would characterize it, though, as a relatively new aspect of treaty-making in British Columbia, but one that certainly appears to be being embraced by first nations. There is a great desire on the part of first nations to have government's culture shift, to recognize that these are issues that for first nations are very holistic. As non-aboriginal people in non-aboriginal governments, we very often will separate and categorize different aspects of agreements, and that seems very natural to us. But truly, first nations wish to look at land claims, rights, and title in a holistic way, alongside the care and the forwarding of the opportunities for their children and their youth. It's not something they separate into individual actions.

● (0915)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I think Kenn mentioned that roughly 90% of their aboriginal children end up in an aboriginal environment when they are adopted.

In British Columbia, approximately how many aboriginal children would end up in aboriginal families when adopted?

Hon. Mary Polak: I'm sorry, it's not a figure I have available just off the top of my head.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Would you be able to get back to the clerk?

Hon. Mary Polak: We could certainly provide that information to you.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: That would be great.

Hon. Mary Polak: We have seen a very slight decrease in the rate at which aboriginal children are taken into care in British Columbia, although the percentage is rising as a percentage of the whole because there has been a much larger decrease in the number of non-aboriginal children in care.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Kenn, you talked about Head Start. In our area, for the last two decades, that's been a marvellous program, and there have been huge demands for more funding, which have not materialized. Do you think there should be more funding from INAC for that program?

Hon. Mary Polak: I think I will stay away from....

Oh, sorry, I thought you were—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Sorry, I was asking Kenn.

Mr. Kenn Richard: Yes, absolutely. This is the kind of program where you can deal with high-risk kids every day and get to know them well, because there is a strong element of parental involvement that you can use to engage the family in a non-threatening way. You deal with things that are significant with respect to the child's life chances, giving the child a leg up in getting into school, getting into kindergarten well prepared, like the average middle-class kid. Believe me, it goes a tremendous way in getting the child moving forward.

And the cultural element—the pride in heritage, the sense of self as a prideful thing—is something that wasn't always guaranteed for aboriginal children. And with Head Start, these little kids... You should see them; you should come for a little event here some time because it'll just warm your heart to see how proudly aboriginal they are and how socially adept they are in managing their environment.

So we graduate kids who are ready to go, most often. I think it's one of the best investments that has been made, and that comes from 40 years of child welfare.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: One last question. Could each of you comment on what you would recommend the federal government do to improve the situation? That's what our committee is meeting for. So what can we do?

Kenn, you made some recommendations, but is there anything else either of you think we should do to improve the situation for child and family services in Canada, for aboriginal children?

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Polak.

Hon. Mary Polak: Thank you.

I spoke in my introduction about the prevention framework that we are hoping to develop and finalize with the federal government. As an overall principle, though—and Mr. Richard spoke to this in his opening comments—there is something terribly wrong with the notion that in order to provide a full range of services to aboriginal children we need to take them into care. However we solve that, that needs to be the overriding principle that we adopt—that it's not good enough—and that instead we recognize far more can be accomplished, and we can provide far more opportunities for these children in these communities if we address that fundamental need for family support and prevention services at a young age and on reserve, without having to take the child into the care of the ministry.

Mr. Kenn Richard: I would concur with that. I think early investments are what we want to do. Keeping kids in care isn't what we want to do. Once they're in care it triggers a whole.... It seems to, in any case, although it's not the intent, but it's awfully difficult to get them back out of care. And the kind of family disruption that goes on through an apprehending process is such that you're spending a lot of time on the symptoms of that as opposed to getting down to the fundamentals.

So developing the capacity of aboriginal communities to manage their own children through their own agencies is a huge one, because the handing over of authorities has been a bit of a political process. I think a lot of things could have been done better had we done some capacity-building in the communities themselves.

But I think the answer lies in good-quality multi-service agencies. I don't want to sound as if I'm bragging by saying agencies like ours, but I have to say that. Out of \$24 million, \$8 million of that goes into prevention services. Now, as I said, it's one of our most difficult areas in terms of preventing apprehension, but that's where the investments have to go, and not to the \$450-a-day per diem I'm paying for a child with a behavioural disorder. That child needs care, too, but if we want to prevent these kinds of kids from emerging, the investments start at Head Start, they start at day care, they start at parental....

I have an “auntie” program called the ninoshe program, for example. Every aboriginal child, when born, is visited by an “auntie”, who goes with the nurses and assesses and establishes relationships and starts the child on his way. That's the kind of programming you need.

● (0920)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

I would now like to recognize Mr. Nadeau, the member for Gatineau.

Mr. Nadeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to our witnesses.

In a previous life, I was a high school teacher, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. A relationship was established between the French Canadian school and the Joe Duquette School, in view of cultural exchanges between youngsters from both schools, Métis and Franco-Saskatchewanian, in order for them to get to know each other better.

Ms. Polak, you are from British Columbia, and you, Mr. Richard, are from Toronto. As we saw, the perception was tangible with regard to the poverty issue, the difficulty of the situation of one versus the other. It is a concern.

Before being a teacher, I was an educator in youth centres in Quebec and, as educator, I was responsible for the young people who came to us from Rapid Lake and Maniwaki, in Quebec. These were juvenile delinquents subject to judicial control. I did the follow-up because I spoke better English than my colleagues, in particular, and because I had been trained as an educationist. The work was very difficult. It is difficult at the outset when dealing with delinquents. Despite their small number, they unfortunately account for a good proportion of the residents of our social transition institutions.

I would like to ask a perhaps somewhat more targeted question pertaining to persistence in school and drop-outs. What are you doing, both in British Columbia and in the Greater Toronto, to motivate these young people to pursue their education? We know that there is the issue of the education scheme per se. Who teaches? How is it done? Is it in the city or on reserve? Indeed, these are two different worlds.

I will invite you to respond, Madam Polak.

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Polak: That is a very complicated issue.

I too have an education past; I spent ten years in governance over the largest school district in British Columbia, so it is something I've had the challenge of wrestling with for many years.

We have not, I think, in British Columbia or anywhere else, succeeded very well with our aboriginal children in terms of improving their educational outcomes. There is still a very large gap. While there are programs that we can note and say, well, this pocket has been positive and this one hasn't, we nevertheless are still really on a quest to find those things that will trigger greater success.

But we are learning some things, and we know some key things. We know that the transition years are the most risky. We know that if we can keep a child in school between grades 7 and 9 or 10, even if we provide them with very little else in the way of additional support, just making sure they continue to attend school during that transition increases their chances of graduating significantly.

In many cases, you see that even very simple programs... For instance, an aboriginal support worker might make direct contact with a family when a child is absent, just to say, "Hey, Joe didn't come to school today. I wonder if I could stop by and see what's going on." It's small pieces of outreach. It's direct human contact. It's caring.

Again, it's a very complicated issue, and one that we have still not successfully addressed, I think, in virtually any of our provinces.

● (0925)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Richard, what do you think?

[English]

Mr. Kenn Richard: I agree that the issue of success in school is complicated. It involves so many variables that we could be here all day. But I will tell you that a solid family life, with parents who are productive themselves and providing role models to the children, and accessible and sensitive schools, sensitive to who you are as an aboriginal person, would go a long way in improving the situation.

Our agency has taken on education because we were told to—by the youth themselves. We had the benefit of a youth group that worked with us. Their strong message to us was that they needed two things. They needed housing supports and they needed educational supports. We followed through on both of those.

We run, in conjunction with the Toronto District School Board, a "native way" high school that is graduating some kids who have been given up on by the conventional system. We intake about 40 of those kids a year. We graduate about 15. Another 15 don't necessarily graduate that year, but they come back and they do better. A few we lose along the way.

So these kinds of special programs for those kids who are failing have been working very well.

In terms of the overall thrust, I agree, it's complex, and it needs all kinds of other considerations.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Do I have two minutes left, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: There is the school proper, but there is also young people's identity. Adolescents, for example, ask themselves who they are and what environment they find themselves in. First Nations members, be they Ojibway, Cree, Algonquin or Abenaki, have an identity that is specific to their nation. It is somewhat like the two political nations we have in Canada, that are recognized by the House of Commons, namely Quebec and the rest of Canada.

In the case of the First peoples, this identity issue is very present for young people. I mentioned nations that are mainly found in central and eastern Canada. In the case of the First Nations that you have in British Columbia, what approach do you have in order to allow these young people to identify proudly with their heritage and to move forward in this regard?

[English]

Hon. Mary Polak: One of the most powerful ways that we can improve that aspect of a young person's life—that identity, that pride,

that feeling that they have a place in this world—is by connecting them with their elders. We have seen huge success in areas where young people previously were getting into all sorts of trouble, having all sorts of problems. When they are attached to the work of elders, they regain their pride. They regain their confidence in their identity.

I have seen many examples. For example, there was a young man who had the typical challenges that young men can get up to, along with a group. The elders in that community wanted to have this structure on their camp rebuilt. At first the young people weren't all that interested in it, but when they got to work on it and the elders started telling them the stories, these young people rebuilt the building, did more than they were asked, and took great pride in the result.

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there.

Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

Let's go to Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to our guests, particularly Minister Polak. I'm glad to see somebody from British Columbia here.

I'm going to reference a couple of documents. The first document is by the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates, a report they did for June 23, 2010. In the report they're critical of the data-gathering. In fact, estimates vary because of incomplete or inadequate reporting in information systems. They go on to talk about the number of children in care.

In this same report, they cite British Columbia and they say:

In British Columbia, Aboriginal children are six times more likely to be taken in care than non-Aboriginal Children, and as of March 2010, represent 54% of the province's In-care child population.

I have a question related to this. The fact that the data-gathering is inadequate likely means that more than 54% of the children in care are of aboriginal ancestry, because the identification processes aren't all that accurate.

When the B.C. Auditor General came before us he said:

Specific to the issue of funding, the audit found that the ministry had not identified the needs and resources required for aboriginal child protection services. It lacked sufficient data on the level of child protection services needed by aboriginal children and their families. It had not been able to determine the staff resources required by aboriginal children and their families.

For these reasons, the ministry was unable to determine the cost of delivering culturally appropriate child welfare services. Nor was it able to develop a persuasive business case to negotiate for both provincial and federal funding. Thus, the ministry was facing funding gaps within these critical labour- and resource-intensive services.

You've indicated that there has been some progress. Has the ministry been able to identify what it costs to deliver culturally appropriate services, and are you confident that your data-gathering reflects an accurate number of aboriginal children in care?

• (0930)

Hon. Mary Polak: I'll deal with the data-gathering first. We're confident in terms of the numbers of our aboriginal children in care. Some of the challenges in data-gathering in British Columbia—in fact, most—are related to a very outdated legacy system of technology, one that we are in the second phase of replacing. We anticipate that we will have much better ability to gather and cross-reference information in the future, and that will certainly improve our planning capacity.

I'm glad you raised the Auditor General's report. We were very pleased to work with him on it and found that his recommendations were those that we agreed with as well. That report has helped to guide much of our work in terms of improving our services to aboriginal people.

Part of the framework in which we're operating, including our work with INAC, is to produce the appropriate costing around what those services would look like. There is an additional challenge in British Columbia given that rather than a homogenous system of governance for services for first nations in British Columbia, we have instead moved, with the urging of our first nations, to a situation where our work with individual first nations allows them to direct and guide the way in which they will interact with us. For example, while some first nations are interested in pursuing the delegated agency route, there are others who are not interested in pursuing that and wish to pursue other means of working with us. To a certain extent, that also adds to the complexity of addressing the cost issue.

Nevertheless, we continue to work with the Auditor General's recommendations and with his office in terms of ensuring that we meet the recommendations he made.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Have you done work specifically around delivery of culturally appropriate services or comparable services? I know they're two different things.

Hon. Mary Polak: In terms of the cost?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes.

Ms. Fraser, the Canadian Auditor General, said that INAC needs to define what is meant by “reasonably comparable services” and find ways to know whether the services that program supports are reasonably comparable. INAC has always argued that the work hasn't been done around “reasonably comparable”, but in the “Wen: de Report” back in 2005, INAC, in fact, participated in a national policy review around federal funding.

Again, back to costing. Has the province done the work around the costing for comparable services on reserve versus off reserve, and have you actually costed “culturally appropriate”?

• (0935)

Hon. Mary Polak: The new costing framework we have developed doesn't address whether the services are on reserve or off. It looks at an overall community in a culturally appropriate response.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Just on that point, are you saying that people on reserve get exactly the same funding—

Hon. Mary Polak: No, I'm not. What I'm saying is—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Because there's up to a 30% difference.

Hon. Mary Polak: Yes, but what I'm saying is that if you're asking for detailed work that we've done to compare the cost of services on reserve versus off, we wouldn't be able to give you a direct comparison. What we have done is looked at what culturally appropriate services look like and what they cost, but we haven't, in our work—I don't know if INAC has—created a comparative that we could look at and say that it's this per cent or that per cent different.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So you don't know, then, the difference between the cost of delivering the services on reserve versus the cost of delivering the services off reserve?

Hon. Mary Polak: We could take a look at individual budgets, but as an overall comparison, I wouldn't be able to tell you that across British Columbia it's always this percentage different or that percentage different. It depends on what types of services. If I think of an individual community... For example, some of our delegated agencies actually deliver services to non-aboriginal people as well. Again, it's the differences between communities. I wouldn't be able to give you a provincial number. We would have to take a look at an individual community and we'd have to ask what the comparable services are. In some cases these services delivered by the delegated agency may be expanded, may be different, and in some cases they may be fewer than what are provided in the general community. Now, some of that may be a result of what they are allowed in terms of funding, but in other cases it may be a result of decisions they've made as to which services they think are appropriate in their community.

I hope that explains it sufficiently.

The Chair: We're out of time.

Ms. Jean Crowder: It sounds awfully confusing.

Hon. Mary Polak: I'm sorry.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

We now move on to the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Rickford, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses, Minister Polak and Mr. Richard.

I have some degree of familiarity, coming from the great Kenora riding out in northwestern Ontario. I appreciate your coming so far to speak with us today.

I did a bachelor's degree at the University of Victoria in nursing and worked at the Arbutus Society for Children, and subsequently in Klemtu, B.C., as an outpost nurse. It's beautiful country out there, and I'm well aware of some of the challenges you face in these regards, and certainly the broader perspective with a health and legal background working in these capacities.

I want to talk to you first, Minister, for just a couple of minutes, about the enhanced prevention-focused approach and the difficulties you alluded to in your speech with respect to 20-1, I guess we'll call it. Just briefly, by way of review, we have the 20-1 model, we have the enhanced prevention-focused approach, and we have the 1965 welfare agreement. The objective of the federal government, of course, is to have, by 2013, all jurisdictions participating in one funding model that obviously puts its focus on prevention.

In my own briefings and my own understanding of it, certainly from working in health as well, when we start to transition into prevention, we do see a little bit of a spike in the need for services, because, similar to health, we're involved in a more robust process of identification of some of the challenges and issues we face.

As a federal government, we take a look at a broader set of statistics. In fairness to my colleagues in the official opposition, over the past 10 years, the federal government has doubled its investment in this area. The only quantifiable statistic, I think, that we can gain some measure of hope from is that 5.3% of children are in care on reserve. That statistic has stayed steady for the past four years, and I think you said you've actually seen a little bit of a dip in British Columbia.

That should never make us very comfortable. That statistic is still too high. But it suggests as well that at least it's not growing.

From an investment perspective into this agency, I guess we concern ourselves with the idea that it may not just be a question of resources. I know that Grand Chief Atleo applauded the investment, and we've heard testimony from other witnesses this fall, as I understand it, that looked at some of the structural challenges agencies face at the community level with respect to the provincial government and the federal government.

To my question, you mentioned that 20-1 was not helpful for the strategic objectives of the province. I'm sure resources may be part of your concern, but I'd be interested in your discussing a little bit more your involvement in the tripartite discussions and perhaps how they look at two things: one, the broad question of resources; and two, a concern that I hope to get to Mr. Richard about, that I'm not always convinced it's a question of resources from the outset when our departments do so many different things and make investments in so many things. They're just not sufficiently integrated. As federal departments, we don't look closely enough at our superordinate goals.

Can you speak to those two ideas? I appreciate that they are difficult and different ideas. Maybe you could speak to that for a couple of minutes.

• (0940)

Hon. Mary Polak: There certainly have been large investments made over many decades. I think we can all agree that the situation we find when we look at reserves and see the grinding poverty, in

many cases—poor housing, poor access to drinking water, and all those kinds of things. We all want to solve those challenges. Over many decades, people have invested, governments have invested, large sums of money to do that.

I agree that it's not all about resources. However, in some cases the manner of the distribution of those resources can incite certain behaviours. With respect to 20-1, the resulting behaviour has been a disproportionate number of aboriginal children being taken into care. It can happen that a social worker, being faced with a child with huge needs on reserve, is unable to access the amount of support that this child needs to stay in the home. Thus the social worker is faced with the decision to remove the child from the home in order to be able to access services for the child.

Yes, it's important to have resources and to have a well-resourced set of programs and initiatives, but it is equally important to consider in what way the provision of those resources might affect the behaviour we are seeing out in the field.

Mr. Greg Rickford: So in your tripartite discussions, with the enhanced prevention-focused approach, perhaps you developed a plan similar to what we did at Health, with the provision of services in the community. We developed a cluster model. In this case, it would be operations, maintenance, and prevention. The agency has more flexibility in focusing on those things.

Has that been a substantial part of the discussion? Minister, perhaps you could speak to it.

Hon. Mary Polak: That has been a significant part of our discussions with the federal government. We recognize that in British Columbia, because of the number of first nations, it becomes more challenging. Their relative size becomes more challenging when compared with the agreements the federal government has made with other provinces. They can implement those in different ways.

Our challenge in British Columbia is to ensure that, as we come to a final agreement we can sign off with the federal government, there is recognition that small communities require at least a base level of funding for general operations, as opposed to merely making calculations based on the size of the population.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to each of you, and thank you for taking the time to be with us.

Ms. Polak, my question is somewhat similar to the one the parliamentary secretary has raised. With respect to the framework agreement you say you brought to Ottawa in September 2008, can you give us an idea of its present status? Has it led to negotiations, and can you give us a sense of how these negotiations might be progressing? As I understand it, you're still operating under this 20-1 model.

The government is saying they want to move to a prevention-based approach. But testimony here at committee has indicated that there may be some problems even with that approach, given the preliminary evidence coming out of Alberta, where the first agreement was signed. With the aboriginal population growing three times faster than the non-aboriginal population in B.C., there's still some urgency here.

As Mr. Rickford says, there might be cold comfort in the fact that we remain status quo at 5.3% of kids in care, which is still eight times higher than the Canadian non-aboriginal population. Can you give us a sense of where those negotiations are? It's been two years since this has come forward. Are we anywhere near some kind of an agreement?

Hon. Mary Polak: I first want to just acknowledge what you said about cold comfort. For British Columbians to know that between 53% and 54% of our children in care are aboriginal tells us all that what we're doing is not good enough. That's a shame, and it shouldn't be that way.

When it comes to where we are in negotiations, we actually had the opportunity to meet with Minister Duncan yesterday. I believe we are very close to signing the final arrangement. I know there is a commitment on the part of INAC to continue to work with us to finalize that agreement. I agree with you that there is urgency. You look into the faces of these folks who want to do something better for their communities and you know there is urgency.

Mr. Todd Russell: Would it be fair to say that your negotiations—of course, maybe you can't get into all the details, government to government—are based right now on the Alberta approach, a prevention-based approach?

Hon. Mary Polak: There are some variations, and I've mentioned some of the unique attributes of our first nations communities, in particular, the vast array of them, but there is also the relative size. Ours are much smaller, or I should say we have very many that are much smaller, and the average size of them tends to be smaller. That presents a challenge if we were to adopt an identical model to Alberta. We would see very many communities that would not receive sufficient funding through that arrangement even to have a base of operations. So there are some variations.

Mr. Todd Russell: On your statement that you fully support Jordan's Principle and are committed to its implementation, can you just expand on that? It's no use to be supportive of a principle and committed to its implementation without a sense of what that implementation looks like. Is there agreement with the federal government on this particular matter?

Hon. Mary Polak: We were in fact the first province in Canada to adopt Jordan's Principle. We do have agreements with the federal government. There is right now, though, a very narrow definition, and I know these things are up for dialogue and discussion as we all

grow and learn about them. But it's our feeling that the definition currently utilized is too narrow to really respond to the overall intent of Jordan's Principle. I think we also believe and have the confidence that it is the desire of the federal government, and it's certainly ours, to work together to effectively broaden that definition.

● (0950)

Mr. Todd Russell: So right now it's just basically on the complex, multiple needs. Is that the definition you're using?

Hon. Mary Polak: Not from our perspective, but of course we have to work in agreement with the federal government, and the definition utilized by the federal government is, in our view, somewhat narrow.

Mr. Todd Russell: So it's still possible to have a jurisdictional debate over who pays the bill if an aboriginal child deserves a certain amount of care. Is that the way it exists?

Hon. Mary Polak: It is possible that the debate will ensue, but I can tell you that in British Columbia the child will receive the service.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

I now give the floor to Mr. Dreeshen.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And welcome to the witnesses.

With my five minutes, I think what I'll do is shift gears a little and move in a different direction and speak to the training that is provided to your case workers. Like Mr. Nadeau, I was also a teacher, and I know there's been a lot of change, and it's very difficult to keep up with some of the new training methodologies that are there. I know in the past two and a half years since I left the profession, there have been amazing new developments and new delivery systems, not just for students but also for educators.

When we speak to culturally appropriate child and family services that take place throughout the country, I'm curious whether you could talk about some of the modifications that have taken place in training caseworkers so that you can ensure they're actually achieving that goal.

Hon. Mary Polak: One of the most positive examples of success in this regard is the Touchstones of Hope curriculum that we began using in our northern region, and now we are expanding that. It takes a culturally appropriate model of healing involving our workers in understanding what it is that first nations have dealt with in terms of intergenerational trauma. And it really is a matter of having our front-line workers understand the experience of the people with whom they are going to be dealing.

Certainly we have had great success when we allow aboriginal people—I shouldn't say “allow”. I apologize. That's actually very inappropriate to say that. Together with first nations...they are the ones leading the development of various curricula that we use, but also the kinds of dialogue that need to take place to build trust. Certainly, though, you are correct in that the world is changing rapidly, has changed rapidly, and if there is an area of concern, it's that in some cases our universities have not kept pace in terms of changing their training practices.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

Perhaps to go to the universities, Mr. Richard, you do have the opportunities then to address university students, and I'm just curious if in your discussions you're able to cite some instances where you've been able to help new recruits so that they understand just what the problems are and perhaps some new types of solutions to those problems.

Mr. Kenn Richard: I would agree that the Touchstones of Hope approach is promising in terms of affecting relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people around the problems in child welfare. They do not necessarily promote cultural competencies. The best practices that come out of working in the aboriginal context are not being taught at the universities. I don't think the universities really know how to do it. So what we're faced with are new graduates, and we have standards at our agency that require us to hire BSWs—with the minimum child and youth work—from colleges, and they are ill-prepared, aboriginal or not, for the realities of what they see in their caseload on day one.

The schools have a tendency to go where the flavour of the month is, to some extent, and have spent an inordinate amount of time working on middle-class best practices associated with therapy and healing for people with everyday problems.

Drilling down to the complexities and issues that we confront on an aboriginal caseload has been elusive to them. The students don't necessarily want to do it, so you have those who are educated in this world tending to find their educations through serendipitous kinds of ways. They go through some training at our agency, which we do. They find their own path.

In my world, the only ones who are actually doing anything to increase cultural competency are some of the native-based BSW programs. Laurentian University, for example, has one. The Saskatchewan federated college had one at some point. I'm not sure about the status of that. There is the northern program at the University of Manitoba, and I think there are some efforts at the University of Calgary. But these are beginning efforts, and the capacity of the helpers.... I am glad you raised that because it is a huge issue.

• (0955)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: So if you had a prescriptive lesson plan, then, the next time you're going to the university to talk or talking to other universities, where would you focus the attention?

The Chair: Just give a brief response, if you can, Mr. Richard.

Mr. Kenn Richard: My brief response would be to “conscientize” the students such that they understand what they're getting into from a broad historical perspective, so they can meet that client in a

way where there's a kind of mutual understanding of what's in front of them—that level of thinking.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

Mr. Lévesque, you have five minutes.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Forgive me for being late. We should go on strike, on Parliament Hill, in order to obtain adequate transportation services.

I live in an area where First Nations account for a third of the population. We have a vision in Quebec. I represent the riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, that extends all the way to Labrador. My riding neighbours on that of my colleague, Todd. We have aboriginal populations that are rich. However, there is something of a vicious circle. We invest money and we see the department realize that the fact that it put money in did not make things move forward. The situation remained the same and the provinces are practically accused of having intervened in such a way that the money served to increase costs rather than direct services to children.

In our neck of the woods, in rich communities, at 4:30 or 5 o'clock, we see young people with a beer bottle in their hand and a joint between their lips. We ask them what they are doing there, we tell them that they will not be able to go to school like that, and their response is to ask us why they would bother going there.

I am talking about a vicious circle. It is fine to hand out money, but are we creating a vision for the future for these children? We have to begin with the parents. We have to give them a job, create industries in their communities. They need a model, because they have none. In Quebec, it is difficult to talk on behalf of the other provinces, because our model is that of integration, compared with the model in the rest of Canada, which is one of multiculturalism. To my mind, that makes a difference.

For example, we have native friendship centres. There are day-care centres and we decided to integrate First Nations children with non-Aboriginal children, and the result is unbelievable. However, there still remains the problem of a vision for the future for young people.

Ms. Polak, I would like you to explain to me the cost increase for your province. You probably encountered that as well. Mr. Richard, you mentioned the follow-up to funding for children. I would invite you to explain that, afterwards.

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Polak: Let me first acknowledge that... We have to remember that when non-aboriginal people came to North America, what they found was a people who were proud, who were very strong, who were very self-reliant. These were not a people who were cowed in any way. Our goal has to always be to see them return to that and for them to be the ones leading it.

I think that's where the challenge lies to the greatest extent. I can only speak to British Columbia, but I think what we have learned is that traditional approaches, where we simply create dependence on systems such as welfare, do not provide the kind of inner confidence and identity and community development that needs to happen. There needs to be investment in the kind of infrastructure and support that truly is community development.

We often talk about programs, not that there is anything wrong with a program—that's how governments function. But we need to be thinking about our design of programs and our design of funding in a community development model, not in a welfare-social assistance type of model. I think therein lies the source of the problem you've described: young people who don't feel they have hope to achieve what their neighbours in non-aboriginal communities may wish to achieve.

That means we need to build up those young people and build up their leadership capacity. If we want long-term change, we have to remember how large a population of our aboriginal folks are young people and recognize that it's that generation who will be the future leaders. If you think about someone like a Shawn Atleo, it becomes clear to you just how much positive influence one person can have when he or she is a leader with significant capacity. It can cause so much positive change.

● (1000)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Lévesque, there is unfortunately no time left for another question. Perhaps Mr. Richard could provide a short answer.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Yes.

The Chair: Perhaps in 30 seconds.

[English]

Mr. Kenn Richard: Just briefly, I agree with early intervention, working with youth such that they feel empowered to create their own programs, sports and recreation for smaller communities that don't have those options, lots of good mentors, and leadership that is nurtured and developed—and sometimes that can be expensive—such that they can work with their own people.

Again, it's back to a life-cycle approach, where we've learned a few things about what works. We know Head Start works. We know that social recreational programs for kids 14 to 15 work very well.

The investment in those communities, allowing all children access to them, is going to make a difference. You're always going to have that percentage that have sufficient trouble in their lives that they're going to have to have special considerations. That's where the social workers can come in. But if you develop your community appropriately, I think your reliance on social service interventions, apprehensions, is going to reduce accordingly.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Kenn Richard: But it's long term.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Weston, you have five minutes.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Minister, Madam Du Toit, Mr. Richard, we are happy to be meeting with you here on Parliament Hill.

[English]

I have three comments, Minister, and two related questions.

First, over the last two years, your cabinet colleagues and you have worked very hard in engaging with the Government of Canada in the economic action plan, and there have been tremendous results across British Columbia. We thank you for that.

Second, it's great to see a minister with a related background. Clearly, you're dedicated to your task, and your experience is animating much of what you do.

Third, it's great to hear the candour with which you address the problems and the challenges. Thank you for those things.

My questions relate to governance. We're hearing that there will be possibly new governance models that you intend for your ministry, and it's unclear to me how those might affect first nations children and families on reserve. Here are my questions. As you develop those new models, how will they likely result in better outcomes for first nations children and families? Second, can you tell us how these models might differ between the way delegated agencies offer their services and how the ministry might offer those services directly?

Hon. Mary Polak: I will start with the last part first.

You can begin to understand some of the challenges with the delegate agency model by just looking at the name. The fact that we would consider having first nations deliver services to their children and families is something we have the inherent authority to delegate; it's something we have to offer. That, in and of itself, is not a concept we would support in British Columbia. It is the system we have. I completely accept that it has been developed with the best of intentions, but the best of intentions have followed us all the way along this process of working with aboriginal people, and they have not always materialized in the best possible way for aboriginal people.

What we envision is a circumstance in British Columbia where we have government-to-government discussions with first nations. So as the Ministry of Children and Family Development or the Government of British Columbia, will not design an overall British Columbia/aboriginal approach. As the Government of British Columbia, we will, for example, have discussions with the Government of the Haida Nation and ask them, government to government, how we are going to move to the point where they have full jurisdiction over the children and families in their community. Between our two governments, how would that best find its way into appropriate legislation, into appropriate regulation?

I'm sure you realized as I spoke about it that this is a very long-term look, but that is what we eventually need to get to. We know that when communities look after themselves in all manner of ways, not just in child protection and prevention but in a very holistic manner, the outcomes are better, not only for their children, but for their communities overall and their economic well-being.

It is the same reason why the Prime Minister has been anxious to move forward on a maternal and child health agenda internationally. We know that is the key to changing everything else about those communities.

• (1005)

Mr. John Weston: Are you anticipating a core curriculum or something that will guarantee some consistency, so whether you're in the north, the centre, or the south of our wonderful province you may have something unique that reflects your first nations culture, but there will still be some consistency...and then driving back to the equality of outcomes we hope for?

Hon. Mary Polak: Do you mean specifically in the K to 12 sector, or do you mean in terms of training our workers?

Mr. John Weston: I mean in the models you're talking about, which I guess really focus on K to 12.

Hon. Mary Polak: In British Columbia we have such a broad range of first nations. Many are urban and from other places outside of British Columbia, so it's difficult to have a specific culturally based program of aboriginal culture in all schools across the province.

On what has happened in on-reserve schools, or even reserve schools reaching out to non-reserve schools, there are first nations that have assisted in developing curricula around their language, for example. In British Columbia we have quite a powerful selection of courses on first nations in our secondary schools. We have indicated our intent to try to enhance language instruction when it comes to the younger grades. So it's perhaps not a standard that you might envision across the piece, but it responds very much to local circumstances, and it certainly tries to infuse the understanding of aboriginal history in British Columbia across the curriculum.

[Translation]

The Chair: We now come back to Ms. Crowder, for five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Chair, I have a couple of comments. One is that there are some really great examples out there of universities that are doing very wonderful work around first nations. I have to mention Vancouver Island University. They've got the first nations

child and youth care program, and they integrate. They've got elders in residence, and the University of Victoria does as well, and I know the minister would be well aware of that. I just wanted to be on record that there are universities out there doing fine work.

The second comment I have to make is on something that I know you as witnesses are really well aware of but people who may be listening to this may not be. There's a very real consequence for us not dealing with the issues around child welfare.

I'm just going to read one stat here. It's a Manitoba stat, but I'm sure B.C. has something similar. In Manitoba, for example, aboriginal youth represented 23% of the provincial population, aged 12 to 17 in 2006, but 84% of youth in sentence custody. This is out of the report from the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates. But we also know, and Mr. Richards referenced it, about underachievement in education, we know there's a direct impact on health, and sadly, there's also a direct impact on violence against aboriginal women. Although this may have nothing to do with the child welfare system, of course, we had a young woman in Cowichan murdered a week ago, an 18-year-old girl, and the community is still in shock. But there's also that whole problem that Cowichan and I know other places have with youth gang violence. So there's a real cost for us in not doing this. It's a loss for generations.

I want to just come back to Jordan's Principle for a moment. I, of course, was the mover of that motion, working closely with Norway House Cree Nation, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, and many others when I brought the motion forward. And in Ted Hughes' report of April 2006, he specifically referenced the jurisdictional issues causing unnecessary problems, and he talked about how an inordinate amount of a small agency's time and energy can be taken up with dealing with gaps and overlaps.

I just want to clarify this, Minister. I understood you to say that Premier Campbell, shortly after Jordan's Principle was announced, endorsed it in principle, but to my knowledge no agreement has yet been signed with the federal government around the implementation of Jordan's Principle. In Manitoba there was a very narrowly defined implementation agreement. In Saskatchewan there is an interim agreement with the first nations in Saskatchewan. In British Columbia...I understood you to say two things: you have endorsed the principle, and if there are jurisdictional disputes, the province will take the lead and argue about the money later.

Have I got that correct?

•(1010)

Hon. Mary Polak: We have what you might call a working agreement. We do not have a formally signed agreement as to what you're outlining, so I apologize for not explaining that accurately.

The reason we have not reached the position where we have actually signed off on a formal agreement is the issue of the definition. So we have an agreement such that we have a working agreement, and yes, in British Columbia, if there is a question about who ought to be providing the service, we will provide the service. We will argue about the money later. That is the approach and understanding that we have attached to Jordan's Principle.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Great. That's really positive news, and that's what we're hoping will happen across the country. I think you may also be aware that the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and the chiefs of Manitoba, on the anniversary of Jordan's death, have relaunched the campaign around Jordan's Principle, because it's just not happening very quickly across the country and there are still jurisdictional disputes over kids who need access to services.

On the government-to-government issue, it's great news that you are saying that you're operating on a government-to-government basis with these agreements, but I guess what you would also need is for the federal government to come to the table with money. We're talking about first nations on reserve, and you have the provincial responsibility around child welfare, but the federal government is the one that's funding the on-reserve delivery. Is that correct?

Hon. Mary Polak: That is correct. We need to have the partnership with the federal government. That is certainly our hope, in terms of what will come out of the discussions around the prevention framework. There is a cultural change that needs to take place on the part of those of us who are non-aboriginal, and this is all part of that process. But from where we stand, we continue to work in good faith with those first nations, and we very often have very positive experiences with the federal government in terms of the work to come to agreements, be it Haida, be it Maa-nulth, or in other areas where we've been working with them. We're hopeful that we'll see some more of that, but 20-1 is certainly the area that concerns us most greatly in terms of our on-reserve role.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

Now we'll go to the final question and back to Mr. Rickford for five minutes.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Let me take the opportunity to develop this discussion around a broader sense of or a more comprehensive approach to prevention.

I'll preface my remarks as briefly as I am capable of by saying that I share your view, Mr. Richard, about the investment in children. Again, I don't want to make this a discussion or a debate about not enough money being invested, because I think in the process of certainly where we're at—and it varies from one health authority to the other—we see this cluster model in the EPFA model, which I talked to the minister about, giving more flexibility between operations and maintenance and prevention.

This is not a phenomenon for the federal government. In the cluster model that it developed with Health, Mr. Richard, there was an allocation of resources to programs like FASD, aboriginal head

start, and maternal and child health, programs that could, if implemented well, be determinants to the identification of or the prevention of some of the issues that give rise to a child eventually going into care. So the flexibility is the same there.

I've had private experience doing this, in looking at aboriginal head start and the flexibility to put it into other programs. I have a real passion for aboriginal head start and early childhood development. My concern has simply been that across the departments—and I think I got some agreement from the minister—perhaps even provincially, we don't do a good enough job of taking a look in the aggregate at how all of this is turning out for important statistics like children in care. There's an unprecedented investment in schools. HRSDC has invested more money than previously in youth internships specifically for first nations communities, and I've been involved in those.

I guess my question is, Mr. Richard, do you think this is a good way to go? To provide the flexibility of health authorities to prioritize and move resources out of those programs is a great first step. I think we can then more fairly and objectively assess the resource question, and then, further to that, work with Child and Family Services. They operate in the same community on the ground. Can you comment on that?

•(1015)

Mr. Kenn Richard: The funding arena in aboriginal child welfare is very chaotic. It changes from one year to the next and is very difficult to figure out. What we do on the front line is.... I'll use a metaphor: if the funders drop a nickel, we'll crawl towards it, fight each other for it, and try to get it to the kids.

One of the things that we have found to be very effective—and sometimes it skirts the rules a bit—is to leverage one funding to another. If they all want to fund the same kid, and maybe they all want a little piece of that kid, well, we assemble that kid into a whole and we get everybody to participate in that whole—

Mr. Greg Rickford: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Richard. I guess what I'm talking about is more to a point you raised earlier with respect to that pre-emptive work, the investment in children and youth outside of the area that you're clearly highly specialized in. Let's focus the discussion on that for just a minute, if you would.

Mr. Kenn Richard: I'm not sure how clear I was about how extensive my agency is. I mean, we're everywhere. We have—

Mr. Greg Rickford: I appreciate that.

Mr. Kenn Richard: Certainly we disseminate envelopes of funding: we have it at three levels of government and across different departments within those governments. That is a challenge for us. I mentioned the words “administrative burden” in terms of putting that together in a fashion that does not compromise the rules—because funding comes with a lot of rules—and at the same time makes it work for the kids in an integrated way.

We've gone through plenty of machinations associated with hiring people for specific funders to do their specific job. We're moving beyond that and trying to do something that is much more integrated and much more cost effective, in fact. That would leverage a health-funded worker with a Ministry of Community and Social Services worker and a recreational worker from the City of Toronto, all working on the same team, working with the same community.

We find with this that we can also handle our administrative burdens more easily, and we can in fact give a complete experience to a child who otherwise might be confused about it and say, “Well, you're my worker for this program, but oh, she's coming over here from that program.” We're trying to get away from that because we don't find it effective, it frustrates the staff, and the outcomes aren't really as promising because of the confusion built into the programs.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you.

• (1020)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rickford.

We have time for one more question.

Let's go to Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, and my apologies as well for arriving late. The transportation system here is leaving much to be desired today.

I have just come back from a lengthy tour with another committee, travelling primarily in western Canada on the issue of violence against aboriginal women. We certainly saw an underbelly of Canada that is not one we would be proud of.

There seems to be a very definite relationship between the apprehension of children and violence against women. Women are frequently fearful of reporting violence for the very real concern that their children will be apprehended.

Both of you have spoken about prevention and the need for support to keep the children in the home. It's such a complicated issue, but my question—to each of you, from your very different vantage points—is on what your recommendations would be in relation to supports for mothers, primarily, and children in their homes. What we heard clearly on the trip was that if a child is apprehended, a foster parent gets a significant amount of resources made available to them that a natural parent does not.

I would welcome your thoughts.

Hon. Mary Polak: I first want to thank you for raising this issue because I think, again, it goes to Ms. Crowder's point of recognizing that there is an urgency and a consequence when we don't deal appropriately with this.

Let's imagine that we are in a family situation where there is abuse, where there is violence. Interestingly enough, instead of responding by removing the violent perpetrator, what we tend to do is remove the mother and the child. Why, from the child's perspective, would we be punished for the fact that our father beats our mother or beats us? Yet that is the system in which we largely operate.

I want to address something that is, I think, of overarching importance. It again comes back to the theme of integration, to the theme of a holistic approach. It isn't a foregone conclusion that a child who is taken into “care” will have terrible outcomes. Certainly, the child is more challenged. What we need to address, though, is the fact that for aboriginal people, we can have a child successfully reintegrated into a community to have positive behaviours normalized when we have done community development, when the placement of that child is as part of a whole community system, and when the cultural makeup of that community is supported and the means by which they are addressing the needs of that child are in concert with that.

It really is about breaking down the old ways we have thought about this and asking what the outcomes are that we want for that child, for that family, and what are the things that we do, again, out of good intentions, that in fact exacerbate the very problem we're trying to solve.

The Chair: Just give a short response.

Mr. Kenn Richard: In apprehensions, 80% of them involve a combination of either alcohol or drugs and violence. Child-witnessed violence is now recognized as a form of maltreatment. As you know, as a society we are obligated to respond to that, and we often have to apprehend these children.

In the program response to that, we have developed two transitional houses. They're not shelters per se, but they are places where moms can go with their kids that are free from violence. They can start building on a number of issues confronting them.

Family violence does not operate in a vacuum. Usually there's poverty, unemployment, a whole number of life challenges facing that mom. With the apprehension of the child and the mom together, and their removal to a safe place with a program to get her on her feet, or some kind of reconciliation with a previously abusive husband who is taking therapy or culturally appropriate kinds of interventions, a whole combination can ensue so they can eventually in fact return.

But it takes special practitioners. It takes a little bit of money, though not as much as many other programs. It's certainly something you must handle very carefully because the lives of people are at stake, including the little kids involved. It's a tough one.

• (1025)

The Chair: We're out of time, Ms. Neville. Thank you very much.

First of all, I want to thank our witnesses today for the clarity and thoroughness of their responses, and I thank members for their questions as well. This has been very helpful to our study.

Members, we're going to suspend for about five minutes. We do have some business items to take up before we adjourn formally for the day.

We'll suspend momentarily to bid goodwill to our guests.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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