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—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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•(0815)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP)): Good morning. I'm Irene Mathysen. I'm the vice-chair of the committee for the status of women.

I would like to welcome Karen Kuzemczak and Darlene Angeconeb. If I haven't said your names exactly right, please correct me.

Thank you so much for being here.

We are hoping that Chief Angus Toulouse joins us shortly, but because time is important, we want to get started.

I'll begin by introducing the committee and explaining our purpose in being here. We have Madame Michelle Simson, a member of the Liberal Party and Her Majesty's loyal opposition; Madame Nicole Demers, a member of the Bloc; for the Conservatives, Mr. Greg Rickford; and I am a member of the New Democratic Party.

I'm very, very glad to see you. I want to say thank you to the hotel and the people of Sioux Lookout for the very kind welcome.

Our purpose here today is to pursue a study in regard to violence perpetrated against aboriginal women. We began the study last spring and have had the privilege of travelling across the country to talk to the people who know, the people who can give us the best advice.

The parameters, the mandate of our study, involve the root causes of the violence that women and their families experience, the nature of that violence, what happens to families and to women, the extent of the violence, how far it has spread, and who suffers. Finally, what we really want is your advice in regard to solutions. This is something that our communities have been grappling with for far too long. There is a real sense that we can find real solutions for people. So we are looking for that guidance from you.

Just one technical bit of information. Madame Demers will be conversing in French. We have translators, and we have the translating device here.

Again, thank you very much. I'm going to give you seven minutes.

Darlene, are you the spokesperson, or Karen, or are you both participating?

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak (Community Wellness Facilitator, Equay-wuk (Women's Group)): We're both going to do it together.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Okay. I'll give you a signal when we're about halfway, and at the end of seven minutes I'll ask you to conclude your remarks in order to give our committee members a chance to ask questions. I'm sure they will ask lots and lots of very good questions of you.

Please begin.

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb (Coordinator, Building Aboriginal Women's Leadership Project, Equay-wuk (Women's Group)): I'll start with our biographies.

Karen Kuzemczak was born and raised in Sioux Lookout. She is a single mother of two children. Karen has worked with aboriginal women at the First Step Women's Shelter, which is located here in Sioux Lookout. She currently works as the community wellness facilitator for Equay-wuk (Women's Group), where she provides community wellness workshops in remote first nations communities.

She also presently works at the Meno Ya Win Health Centre, the hospital, as a personal support worker, and as a lab technician for the Shibogama First Nations Council.

Outside of her workplace activities, she is also the chairperson of the Sioux Lookout community policing committee. She's a very busy person.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: Darlene Angeconeb is a member of the Lac Seul First Nation and she lives in Sioux Lookout. Her family participated in a government Indian relocation program to Elliot Lake in 1966. At six years of age she attended the Pelican Lake Indian residential school from 1969 to 1977 and completed high school in Sault Ste. Marie in 1983. Post-secondary studies include fine art at the Ontario College of Art and Design and political science at Algoma and Laurentian universities.

Darlene started working for Equay-wuk in 1999 as a project leader for the Nishnawbe women and self-government projects. She empowers women in remote northern communities by facilitating workshops on self-government, starting women's groups, women's leadership, and cultural sensitivity. Darlene currently works as the project coordinator for the Building Aboriginal Women's Leadership project, with the goal of increasing women's participation in leadership roles.

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: That's who we are.

Our Equay-wuk program director, Sandra Bergman, is back there, so there are three of us here.

On the topic of violence against women... Equay-wuk (Women's Group), first of all, is an aboriginal women's organization, and we serve women, youth, and families who reside within the north-western Ontario first nations communities. We are a non-profit organization, provincially incorporated since 1989, serving aboriginal women from 31 of the first nations in the area. We are independent from other women's groups in Ontario or nationally. We don't really belong to ONWA or the Native Women's Association. We don't have membership there, and we do not receive core funding.

The main activities of our organization...we have two training programs. Job readiness training prepares aboriginal people, men and women, for employment. This program teaches life skills, writing, and computer training, and students work toward their high school diploma at the same time. They also participate in job placement at a business or an organization in Sioux Lookout. So that gets them ready for the work world.

We also have an early childhood education diploma program. This is done through distance education. Students don't have to leave their communities; they can study from the north. That's done through St. Lawrence College.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: We have three projects. The community wellness program provides workshops to first nations communities on self-esteem, bullying in cyberspace, health and sexuality, teen pregnancy, alcohol, drugs, and solvent abuse, family violence, healthy relationships, and physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse. Nishnawbe Women's Wellness is a short-term project to develop holistic and culturally appropriate resource materials on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness. Building Aboriginal Women's Leadership provides workshops to first nations communities to increase aboriginal women's participation in leadership roles.

When funding is available, Equay-wuk (Women's Group) will host conferences and workshops on domestic violence, parenting, starting a home-based business, starting women's groups, and cultural sensitivity training.

• (0820)

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Our catchment area, the area we serve, consists of approximately 26,632 aboriginal people on and off reserve, with females making up over 50% of the population. It is fair to say that 8,000 to 9,000 are aboriginal women.

Aboriginal women in northwestern Ontario are the poorest of the poor in Canada. They are isolated because their communities are so remote. They have very little income and they live in conditions of poverty. We've heard in the news about all the different issues.

Aboriginal women experience abuse in many forms, and yet they are expected to be the main caregivers of the children and the elders and to somehow hold the household together. Aboriginal women become victims of violence and are virtually powerless to contend with some of the policies that do more harm than good.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: Some of the root causes of violence against aboriginal women are learned behaviours that find themselves rooted in colonization, assimilation, cultural genocide, residential schools, and children's aid services. Colonization and assimilation changed the roles of women within the community.

Women were held in high esteem, but the imposition of the Indian Act only recognized the male as the head of the household and in a leadership position within a community. Government policies have been discriminatory against aboriginal women, and we have seen this with the ruling of Bill C-31, where women and their children have had to have their status as aboriginal people reinstated.

The loss of culture or breakdown to the extended family structure resulted in a lack of parenting skills in most aboriginal communities. A good example of this is the generations of people who attended residential schools. They were placed in a situation where they no longer learned the roles of women, men, or grandparents. When they left the schools to return to their home communities, they did not know how to parent, and this created many dysfunctions within the family structure.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): We're just past seven minutes. If you could wrap up, then we'll proceed to questions.

I'm sorry it's so short.

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Okay.

We know about the residential schools and the violence and the abuse that happened. This was carried on and brought home to the communities.

In our recent interview with the Ontario Provincial Police... domestic violence is still occurring, and most of these incidents are related to alcohol. We figure that one out of every seven women has suffered violence, and these are reported incidents. For the unreported incidents, the number is even more—one out of every five or maybe one out of every four women suffer from violence.

As to the extent of the violence and who suffers, we know that the male usually goes to jail. We're saying it's male and female. There are also same-sex relationships, and some of those incidents are also part of these numbers, but not too many.

Women end up going to a shelter out of town—this is the scenario—and when they come back home, they are either with their kids or sometimes without their kids, because the kids will get taken by the children's aid services. That's what they're saying. Sometimes when the woman has to leave the community because of violence, the children are taken into care by Tikinagan. When this happens, sometimes the extended family gets involved and sometimes even the chief and council get involved. It affects the whole community.

The children basically have no support, and the spouse may also have relatives on the chief and council. So this happens....

● (0825)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): I want to thank you. I'm hoping we can get to the rest of your presentation in the questions.

Right now, I need to welcome Chief Toulouse.

Thank you very much for coming. We'll give you eight minutes to give your presentation, to be fair.

Chief Angus Toulouse (Ontario Regional Chief, Chiefs of Ontario): I'll probably take six and I'll give my colleague the other two.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): That would be marvellous.

Chief Angus Toulouse: Good morning, committee members.

[Witness speaks in Ojibwe]

I'm here today on behalf of the chiefs in Ontario. I thank you for the invitation to appear before you on this important matter.

I'll begin by making some general comments on the issue of violence against indigenous women. As you know, first nations women are the most at risk group in Canada for issues related to violence. This situation, however, was not the case pre-contact, when our nations were healthy and our cultures were practised without interference. Our women enjoyed incomparable respect and even reverence from their families and from their nations. For example, the Haudenosaunee maintained a system of governance whereby the women held unprecedented political and social powers. They owned all the property of their nations. They maintained their own political councils in a clan system and had the power to remove their chiefs from office if they failed in their duties. Everyone had specific responsibilities to their families, to their nations, and to the Creator. Interwoven with these responsibilities was an essential principle that our collective existence depends upon our ability to demonstrate respect and to provide safety and security for the women of our nation.

It's important to point out how things were in the past in order to understand the full horror of the context in which we, and in particular our women, now live. Research has shown the alarming rates of violence experienced by aboriginal women within Ontario and that they are being targeted based on their ethnicity and gender. I believe these facts illustrate the deeply ingrained discrimination and broadly held racism in Canadian society that first nations women endure every day.

With the recent endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Canada should now be taking concrete actions to address its shameful record in upholding the rights of indigenous peoples. Such action should be based largely on the recommendations provided to Canada by indigenous peoples themselves. The problem of violence against indigenous women is reflective of Canada's failure to meet the minimum human rights standards of indigenous peoples.

I will remind you of article 22.2 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states:

States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

Article 23 of the UN declaration states:

...indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

Again, unfortunately, the standard is far from being met within the province of Ontario. As the aboriginal healing and wellness strategy points out, there are only nine women's shelters within Ontario—where 133 first nations communities are located—that provide culturally relevant programming for first nations women and their families. In areas such as Manitoulin Island, only one women's shelter is available to service over 50 communities, including seven first nations communities. Programs and services should be developed at or with direct input from the first nations community level and should be funded based on need. This may seem like a difficult task, given the number of indigenous communities within the province, but it's necessary in order to respect the diversity of our communities.

With regard to missing and murdered first nations women, the large number of cases in Ontario illustrates that this issue is of national concern and should not be thought of as an isolated occurrence in the west. The most alarming outcome of recently gathered information by the Native Women's Association of Canada indicates there are higher rates of murder cases in Ontario than the national average.

In 2005 the Native Women's Association of Canada started the initiative, Sisters in Spirit, to address and raise awareness about the high number of cases of murdered and missing aboriginal women in Canada. The Sisters in Spirit initiative was mandated to conduct research and raise public awareness of the higher rates of violence against first nations women and girls. Sadly, in October of last year, the Government of Canada denied the renewal of funding for this initiative. Instead, an announcement was made that \$10 million would be committed over two years to improve community safety and to ensure that the justice system and law enforcement agencies can better respond to cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women. This funding is not specific to first nations women and girls or programs and services in Canada. Instead, the money will go to law enforcement agencies that have no knowledge or capacity to address either the issue or the victims and their families in a culturally sensitive manner.

● (0830)

Further, the new federal program excludes Ontario first nations from accessing funding. The problem of violence against indigenous women is an issue of considerable complexity. Colonization has forced foreign ways of living on our people. As noted by the Native Women's Association of Canada, "Colonization remains the constant thread connecting the different forms of violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada."

The traditional and life-affirming roles of our men and women have been forgotten or lost. The basic foundations of our culture have been destroyed and replaced. Generational grief, widely unrecognized and unaddressed, continues the process of erosion of our healthy family structures. In order to address the issue of violence, one must understand the history and impact of colonization on first nations people in Canada. There is much work to be done. It cannot be done by one government alone, nor can it be done without addressing the entire picture.

In conclusion, I ask you to adopt the following recommendations in your final report to Parliament: one, that the Government of Canada re-establish its support for the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Ontario Native Women's Association in their efforts to ensure that missing and murdered aboriginal women are a national priority, and includes first nations women in Ontario; two, that the Government of Canada ensure that proper facilities within communities, such as women's shelters and services, are available for those people who are victims or who have lost their loved ones through acts of violence; and three, that the Government of Canada jointly establish an independent public commission of inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada.

Meegwetch.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathyssen): Thank you very much, Chief Toulouse.

We'll now go to our first round of questioning. It will be a seven-minute round, which will include the question and the answer. I would ask all involved to have succinct questions and answers so that we can hear from everyone as extensively as possible.

We'll begin with Madam Simson for seven minutes.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for appearing.

It's been a very interesting study. Part of the committee's challenge has been.... We did opt to go across Canada to the degree that we could, fully understanding that there are differences in the aboriginal community. There are differences among reserves.

As we've travelled across Canada, I've been trying to get an understanding regionally. What would you see as being specific to, say, Sioux Lookout, this particular area, the area that your organization services, that maybe we wouldn't have seen in our travels across the country?

• (0835)

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: I think it would be the services available; for sure we're isolated.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: More isolated than perhaps other communities.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: Than a larger centre, yes.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: So that is definitely a huge challenge.

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: In terms of the number of shelters, there's one here in Sioux Lookout, but there are two in the first nations in the north. A lot of times the first nation ends up using the

shelter as a multi-purpose building. It's not really a shelter then, because the women are not safe in those places.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: At the women's shelters here, would she typically take her children with her as well, if it's possible?

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Yes.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: If she's able to bring her children out of the community, for sure she would.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Typically, in this particular shelter you've referenced, what would the capacity be? Is it full capacity all of the time, or are there certain times when it would be...?

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: What has happened is that due to the lack of housing in the remote communities, this shelter, the one I think you're talking about, has become another building in the community—

Mrs. Michelle Simson: It's like a community centre, as it were.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: —for the overcrowded homes. So it's not really just a women's shelter anymore. Now it's like more of a safe house, and it's more about the lack of housing. It provides extra beds. So it's not providing the service to the women, and it's not providing the safety and security to the women.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: So now you don't really have a sense of how many of those women there would be, since the shelter is now being used for various reasons—though its express purpose was to be for women who had to escape domestic violence—and everything has all been kind of wrapped up into one.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: That's right.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Would that be the biggest priority in terms of what you would like to see, that the federal government would provide more shelters, or would it be a way of funding more affordable housing that didn't involve shelters?

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: I think there are more issues to worry about than just the shelter and the housing. I think even just providing resources and education and promoting awareness for these women are really big things.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: It does seem to me that we have to somehow break the cycle. We heard yesterday, for instance, when we were in Winnipeg, that we—and I'm referring to the government and not to your organizations—are not necessarily doing enough to break the cycle. We heard from some very young people, and I was appalled that once they have to go to high school at the age of 14, they're moved down from remote communities, virtually ripped out of their homes, just to get an education. To me that isn't an ideal situation. We're used to having university-age students. The failure rate in first-year university for a lot of them is horrendous, just because they leave home. Doing that at 14 seems crazy.

So how can we best help break the cycle, in terms of funding or services that the federal government could provide?

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: There need to be more services within the first nation for everybody, not just for the women. The women suffer, and they return home eventually, and then the men go to jail, and then they return home. Then everybody ends up back in the same situation. So as far as resources go, the men also need to be treated. We also have an addictions problem in the north. So that's another factor that comes into play.

But for our organization, we do the workshops. We visit the communities. We develop resource materials, kits. We do the training for prevention of family violence. So we do a lot of this kind of work, but for the community to break that cycle you have to treat everybody.

• (0840)

Mrs. Michelle Simson: I imagine you do see things repeating. As you say, the women maybe go to a shelter and then they come back. The spouse has gone to jail, and you end up right back where you started. It's a bit of a revolving door for a lot of these families.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: And it starts at the top. It starts with the chief and council, and it just falls down. So it really needs to focus in up at the top as well, in the communities, with the chief and council, because of the political pull in the communities, with the family structures—

Mrs. Michelle Simson: So they have to be at the table as well?

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: For sure.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): I'm sorry. That's seven minutes, but we'll have a five-minute round, I hope.

Madame Demers, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you for allowing me to express myself in my own language. As you know, language and culture are essential parts of identity.

Chief Toulouse, Darlene and Karen, thank you very much for being here this morning. I am very moved by your testimonies. During our tour, we've seen that problems are the same everywhere. However, solutions cannot be the same because situations are very different.

You were saying that some of your organizations are not subsidized and do not receive core funding. You also said that you are not members of the Native Women's Association of Canada. Could you tell me why you don't receive core funding and why you are not members of that association?

I would like to talk about organizations. Most often, there are no roads to serve aboriginal communities. How do you manage? Do these communities have access to drinking water, quality food staples, basic school and medical services, core services that every community should have access to? If they don't have access to these types of services, violence can become more prevalent. It's even

worse when people live in grinding poverty; violence is even more prevalent.

You talked about shelters and you said that we should also keep in mind the perpetrators. Are you referring to holistic centres that care for the entire family, both victims and perpetrators? Could you tell me more about that?

Chief Toulouse, I understood your first two recommendations, but I couldn't understand the third one because you were talking too fast. Could you repeat it please? Thank you for making clear recommendations. That's crucial.

Could you also go back to the policies that are doing more harm than good? You talked about bills and I would like you to go back to them.

I have a lot of questions and not enough time.

[*English*]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: In terms of the first one, we don't belong to the other women's organizations because we have different needs for our women. Our women are isolated in the north, and there's also the language. The way of living is different from that of somebody who lives in Sudbury or in more urban areas. That's why there was no need to join up with the other women's organizations.

There are so many questions there.

• (0845)

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: With regard to your question about the resources for medical treatment, proper food.... There is medical treatment. There is a nursing station in the community. A physician visits once a month for a week, for sure, possibly two weeks. They often utilize the medevacs to bring people out of the communities to Sioux Lookout. If they can be treated there, they're treated there; if not, they're referred to a larger centre.

In terms of food, it is available in the communities. It's extremely expensive, very expensive. It costs \$10 for a jug of juice this size and \$6 for a carton of milk. It's extremely expensive. Fruits and vegetables are not fresh. Nothing is fresh. It costs \$8 for a tray of grapes this big, and they're old; they're getting shrivelled. That is not adequate at all.

I'm trying to think of the other questions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: What about drinking water?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: Yes. Some communities have a water treatment centre, and that is available to them.

I think Pikangikum does not have running water at this time.

Do they? I don't think so.

So some communities need to boil their water and it's not safe to drink, and other communities are fortunate and have a treatment centre.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: We were also talking about policies that do more harm than good.

[English]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: I mentioned children being in care. It takes a long time for a woman to get her children back, and a lot of times she can't. If she tries to go for legal services, the chief is usually a member of that board, so she can't go for legal help that way. A lot of lawyers in the area sometimes service that community, so most of the time the woman won't be able to do anything. That's what I'm saying about the....

Then there are the policies around the children in care. They want to keep the children in the community, and that's where the leadership gets involved. But it means that the women who may have to leave, or who want to leave, can't take their children with them.

So a lot of times the laws get in the way of children being able to be with their mothers.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you. We're at seven minutes.

Perhaps we can get back to you, Chief Toulouse. I know you had some things to say. I promise you, I will give you an opportunity.

Monsieur Rickford.

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

Before I start, I'd like to acknowledge that we are on Lac Seul First Nation traditional territory. I thank you. And I'd like to thank our witnesses for coming today and for the important work they do.

Chief Toulouse, obviously you've had an opportunity to visit the great Kenora riding on a number of occasions for some exciting projects, which, by your own admission, represent important steps forward on some files that needed to be addressed. I appreciate your leadership and I thank you for that.

I'd like to welcome my colleagues to the great Kenora riding. At over 326,760 square kilometres, we're almost the size of Germany. We have 25 isolated first nations communities that have to be accessed by air. We have an additional 17 first nations communities here that lie in and around four municipalities along the Trans-Canada Highway, here in Sioux Lookout and Red Lake.

I would like to provide a little bit of personal history, which I think is important in the context of why I was looking forward to coming here. I have in fact been a nurse who has worked for more than eight years of my life in isolated first nations communities exclusively across Canada, six of them right here in the Kenora riding. I have worked in almost all of the nursing stations in the isolated first nations communities as a nurse, and subsequent to that as a lawyer actively involved in health policy, physician services, early childhood development, and maternal child health programs, which I continue to work on in my work as a parliamentarian.

So I have a deep appreciation for the structural issues and the definite things that make it different here as a region, as opposed to some of the bigger city centres that my colleagues have visited prior. Certainly, there are some similarities, especially with respect to the

Winnipeg region, where I worked. I know that a number of people, for various reasons, have relocated to the city of Winnipeg, where some of those issues would also have arisen.

I appreciate, Karen, what you're saying. Having reviewed the literature that guides this committee, it appears to me, in a general kind of way, that there seems to be a preventative proactive piece to this that decreases the vulnerability of women. And that arises through programs, government, and interns. In the second round, I may speak to some of the other superordinate kinds of things that we've been working on here in the Kenora riding that go to education, health, police, and the Indian residential schools. I was a lawyer for more than 900 survivors right here in the riding just prior to being elected.

Indeed, we've set up a couple of programs in Women's Place Kenora, for example, including an intern. I believe you received some funding for an intern as well through our Status of Women program.

I'm just wondering what your comments are on the success, particularly, of the leadership project you run. We've funded different variations of that here and in other parts of the riding, Darlene, and they've been tremendously successful. I'm not prepared to say that these programs are the reason we're starting to see more and more women chiefs in our isolated and remote communities, but in fact we have seen a growth in that. I think that's important.

Could you take a minute or two to speak to the success of the women's leadership project?

● (0850)

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Deciding to work on women's leadership in the communities came out of the self-government workshops. We didn't want women's voices to be left behind in the self-government negotiations that the men were doing. When we did the workshops, leadership came out as being a very strong issue. We decided to see who was in leadership and how many. At one point, when we started, it was around 12%. The number now is 24%.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Did they do mentoring through this program, Darlene?

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Yes. In the last couple of years we have done mentoring. The older women work with the younger women.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I just want to get at the second part of it, Karen. I know seven minutes doesn't do it justice, nor would an extra five, but the second general thing I reviewed in the literature was family care, the focuses Darlene alluded to, the problems of sending the man to jail, and the woman having to leave, in instances.

I've worked in Mishkeegogamang, obviously. Over a span of more than 15 years, I have gone in and out of that community. I've seen that women's shelter go from being a legitimate women's shelter to a multi-purpose building.

Of course, during my time in Shamattawa, in northern Manitoba, I've had direct contact with what a women's shelter does, in a more traditional sense, in an isolated community. It still can give problems, and there is some value to getting relief by having at least one of the family members leave the community, for a variety of different circumstances. But I share your concern, Karen, that family care is something we should look at.

I'm just curious. We have a family violence initiative program, which is a long-term commitment from the Government of Canada. Are you aware of this program or have you accessed it at all?

•(0855)

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: No.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Okay. Maybe I'll take the opportunity in a follow-up visit here in Sioux Lookout—obviously, you know I'm here quite regularly—to see if we can access this. This goes more to the core funding piece that you guys had identified as being problematic. You said earlier, Karen, that you offer certain kinds of forums when funding becomes available. And I can appreciate that, because there are women's places in different cities and towns in the riding that haven't always been able to consistently offer important programs. I know in Kenora we funded a great program.... Oh, sorry.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): We're at seven minutes. Thank you very much.

With the indulgence of the committee, I'll take seven minutes, because I'm the only New Democrat and I would like to ask some questions on behalf of my party.

I'll begin with you, Chief Toulouse. I promised you some time. I know that Madam Demers asked about the third of your three recommendations. So perhaps you could start there with whatever it was you wished to say and didn't have the chance to say.

Chief Angus Toulouse: Thank you. I'm going to leave my notes with you, but I'll read that third recommendation again, which is that the Government of Canada jointly establish an independent public commission of inquiry into the missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada.

As I said, I will leave my notes with the clerk, if that's okay.

There's just so much interconnectedness within the current infrastructure—let me just call it that—or lack of infrastructure in many of the first nations communities in the north. As you've heard, there may be one or two women's shelters in a first nation community, but when you have such a need for housing, this gets overtaken by that need. When you have anywhere from 15 to 18 people sharing a house, how can you see and allow 10 beds to not be occupied? All by itself, if you know what I mean, there's a dilemma for these communities when they're dealing with a huge housing crisis.

Then, of course, there is everything that is associated with this. When you talk about some of the issues related to poverty, and when you don't have any services, there is more likelihood of violence taking place. These are real situations, and I don't know how first nations can be heard. I don't know how women are going to be heard.

One of the suggestions...I know it's probably too late in the game, but it would be good for this committee to go to one of the remote communities. Anywhere in Canada, it's going to be the same. Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, you name it, you're going to see the same challenges, and probably more so, I would guess, only because I've seen it myself, in Ontario. I think Greg can certainly vouch for that. I also hear about situations in the remote communities in Manitoba that are just as horrendous. There's much to be said about the visual, about being there and actually seeing the challenges that face the women who are in need of such services—and there is much need.

As was stated, there has been learned behaviour from residential schools. There has been much experience that people have had as they've been removed from their homes and in going back to try to parent.... Those multi-generational problems are there. Services need to be available to these women who are in need. Again, as was suggested, obviously these men require services, too, in order to begin some of the healing, but it's really about talking about trying to provide these kinds of resources so that communities can begin a lot of the healing journeys they talk about. I think there's a recognition that there's a requirement to plan for that healing, but it's not going to happen overnight.

This is essentially what happens a lot of times. There may be a spurt of money that is available, but they can't sustain...you have to remember that it has taken so many years to get us into this state, and it's going to take us just as long to get out. But we need the proper services. We need the mental health services. We need the facilities so our women can feel secure that when they are in crisis, they can stay at home—I mean in their home community, obviously, not in their own homes, but in their home community.

•(0900)

These are the multiple challenges we see in many of our first nations communities. There's the lack of infrastructure, the real need for services, and the real need for these services to be equipped with the kinds of competencies that the victims are going to need. Many times, first nations are left with a resource, but they can't really utilize it to hire the kinds of experts they need...because they would get less, then, than what may be available from other facilities or services, if you will. They're stuck with having to purchase services or hire somebody who may not have the accreditation to really provide the kind of service that's needed. I'm not trying to suggest that there's incompetence all around. No—it's a lack of resources that really limits how far they can go and the kind of service they can offer. It's the lack of resources that really limits how far they can go and the kind of service they can offer.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Chief, we've heard here and in other communities that the lack of housing—good, safe, and decent housing—is a significant problem. I can understand how that can create stresses. If you have several families in one residence, that creates real problems.

You identified the shortage of housing, and I'm wondering if the federal government has not stepped up to the plate in regard to social housing, affordable housing, whether we need a national housing policy that looks at urban, rural, and remote communities. Is that an answer? Is that a good beginning step?

Chief Angus Toulouse: What many of the first nations communities have said is that the government has made market housing available, which does not work in many of the remote communities. It may work partially in southern Ontario when they're right near a major centre or city where there is a lot of activity, but market housing in remote communities in the north, CMHC kinds of houses, really are struggling. They have a difficult time making that work.

I think what the first nations leadership have recognized is they need some kind of social housing that is subsidized for first nations communities much more than is that offered by CMHC and that kind of a program. CMHC has set aside so many units, but when you look at some of the criteria—and many of our first nations communities in the remote and north are in third-party or some kind of co-management—they can't access that.

Those are some of the challenges there.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you. I appreciate that.

We'll begin our second round, again with Madam Simson, for five minutes.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

I'd just like to thank Mr. Rickford for his background as the MP for a riding, number one, geographically this size, and for the challenges he faces in representing all the constituents. In a private discussion we had, I was taken aback at the number of communities that have no access by road.

I guess my question—and I'm not being facetious, but I'm just racking my brain—is how do we successfully provide services to communities like that? It would seem to me that there are certain issues—and in this case maybe geographical—that inherently can't be easily solved.

For instance, there is the issue of women in leadership roles. I was always an advocate of getting women involved in politics. The reality is that there's a certain period of time, when they're maybe raising children, during which we just can't attract them. It just isn't in the cards.

Chief—or any one of you—how do we overcome that? Would the people in these communities be happy remaining there if the services were there or would they want to be closer to the services if they had a decent standard of living? I don't have a sense of that. Is this geographically a place where they'd like to be?

• (0905)

Chief Angus Toulouse: I won't take up too much time. I'll let others speak.

The cultural relevancy is really important for the organizations to offer the kinds of services they have, and it has to come from here. To parachute somebody in to help with the solution is not the answer. I think the experts have to be culturally sensitive to help, especially when you talk about mental health and those kinds of healing issues, and it is really difficult. But I guess what I'm trying to say is there are organizations.... You have Nishnawbe Aski who are trying to assist the communities. We have tribal councils that are working with communities. There are native women's...even though they may not

be registered with the Ontario association, who are trying to help with that. What I'm trying to say is they have the answers, and they just need to be resourced. They need to be assisted in terms of some of the evaluations or the assessments maybe that need to be ongoing. But the bigger issue is that there's just no recognition, and there are no resources available, or there are very limited resources that really don't do justice to the victims who are out there.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: But let's assume that we had some kind of strategy in terms of affordable housing, or a package where we could provide the housing. I guess I'm trying to get a sense, to my colleague Madame Demers, that....

Poverty, obviously, is one of the root causes, and that \$8 jug of juice. If we have something like co-ops, with some form of ownership through CMHC, which I happen to believe is a good resource, how do we get past the jug of juice? How do we break the poverty even if we can provide the housing in these remote communities that, as I was stunned to hear from Mr. Rickford, cannot be accessed by road?

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: I think it's the isolation and the costs of flying these resources to them. It's to cover those costs that everything is so highly priced.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: No, I understand that, but how do we get past that? We can't build roads.

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Yes, that's the big question, I think, for the leadership, for the chiefs, to get together and talk about. I'm sure there are some communities that are involved with mining and forestry. People are getting jobs through those sources, but for a lot of communities—

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Would these jobs be geographically located in these remote areas?

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: They're kind of nearby, I guess.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Sorry, your time is up.

We now have Madame Demers for five minutes....

Pardon me, it's Mr. Rickford. I'm sorry; I'm a creature of habit.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you.

Just to fill in a little bit of space very briefly, there are some very promising developments, economic partnerships with first nations communities, that we believe will drive...in that vast region, including the Ring of Fire, where there's an exciting mining project. Farther out, in the most westerly section, there are forestry initiatives that are fully integrated with first nations communities as limited partners or majority owners. That will drive much of the change for improving the energy sustainability of those communities and the access.

It's worth pointing out that I've never been in an isolated community where the people aren't proud of their heritage in that region and the historical life they've led there. Certainly we have just recently introduced a program, in cooperation with the private sector, specifically with the Northern Store, that affects a large part of the communities here to reduce the costs of these foods. It is, and remains, a significant challenge. I know: I've purchased milk at \$16 a carton, so I can appreciate that.

I want to talk a little bit more, for the last few minutes here, Karen and Darlene, about something that's very near and dear to me. Just before I was elected, I was working ambitiously with Pikangikum, Mishkeegogamang, and KI, and had spoken, after being elected, with Muskrat Dam about maternal and child health. As you know, there's core funding for those programs. One of the challenges we faced there was that although there was an allotment for education, it was difficult to get programs that trained people to work in the maternal and child health program, which can identify some of the things this committee is preoccupying itself with around homes where there's the potential for breakdown, which may lead to some violence.

Early childhood development is a diploma program that you offer. Of course, I've worked closely with Oshki and Confederation College to develop the precursor courses for people to do maternal and child health and early childhood development. When it comes to governance for women, as my colleague rightly identified, having an opportunity for families to have day care facilities in their communities.... A number of ours do, and they're actually quite nice facilities, I might add. But the training of these folks is key, and it remains one of the biggest challenges.

Despite our investments in first nations training and a variety of other skill sets, and the great work you're doing, we still have some challenges that we're trying to address in these regards. Can you talk about the number of people who are in your program, some of the specific challenges they face, and some of the tools they use to be educated in those isolated and remote communities? I believe this is fundamental. It gives women an opportunity to work in their communities and take up jobs. It also increases the prospects for governance, as that sort of intellectually evolves as an idea.

Can you speak to that, Darlene, specifically to early childhood development?

● (0910)

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: That's why we decided to put in place the early childhood program; women wanted to work and they wanted to go to school, but there was no place for them to leave their children. We started that.

Currently there are eight students in that program. They study in their homes, but they can always contact Equay-wuk for support. There's a student support officer who works out of the office. We have an 800 number. They can e-mail or fax us their assignments. It's all based on assignments. They get a training allowance of \$700-and-something to do this full time. They can also go part time. We have different intakes in the spring, in the summer, in the winter.

That's how that works. It seems to be working. There are graduates; I don't know how many right now.

Do you know?

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: There are actually ten students.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you.

I probably have about a minute left, or less, and I should just take the opportunity to share with my colleagues that in the important work this group is doing, and Oshki college, we have an interesting situation. The reserves are, for many purposes, federal jurisdiction, and we've built buildings that are early childhood development buildings. Some of them are absolutely fabulous. But this lack of training has brought the provincial government in, and they've done the duck test: it looks like a day care centre, acts like a day care centre, but doesn't have the trained people to deliver the "licensable", if you will; pardon the nomenclature. That is why I've raised that and support the work in these regards.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I realize that I may have slipped a few seconds over.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Okay.

Madam Demers, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Having someone here who is quite familiar with the territory is very helpful. Chief Toulouse, you have to invite us. It's never too late to be invited. We cannot invite ourselves to communities if we are not sure that we'll be welcome. We invite ourselves to the area, but if you invite us, I am sure that we will do our best to get to where you want us to go.

If you don't receive core funding, what are your sources of funding? How do you operate? How does your group operate?

A little earlier, my colleague Mr. Rickford talked about a Status of Women Canada program. It had to do with an intern at Status of Women Canada. Could you please expand on this a bit more? It would be interesting, because Status of Women Canada has programs that work very well. If you have an intern, I would like to know about it just so that we have your confirmation.

I would also like to know if you have prevention programs for fetal alcohol syndrome. If there are alcohol problems in the communities, then there probably also are problems associated with fetal alcohol syndrome in young pregnant women.

● (0915)

[*English*]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Well, we used to have the fetal alcohol syndrome program, but we no longer have it. It's kind of moved off into its own office, so away from Equay-wuk. The fetal alcohol spectrum disorder moneys are given to the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. That's a bigger organization, and they look after most of the same communities that we look after.

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: Regarding the FASD, for the community wellness programs I have a model that I take into the schools. We have 31 communities in our catchment area, and there's only enough funding to visit 10 to 15 communities in a year. What happens is that I fly up to the communities with my resources and try to see as many individuals as I can.

Regarding the FASD, I do have a model that I take into the schools and talk to some of the youth about. As well, during the drug, solvent, and alcohol abuse workshops, I do talk about the FASD.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: So you have about half the money you need to provide support, is that right?

[English]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Not specifically on FASD. We usually tell people who call us to call NAN because they get funding for that program. As for the Status of Women funding for the intern, that person...there's no such person with us. We don't have Status of Women funding.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Where do you get your funding from?

[English]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: The funding is project funding. Each project or each program that is happening within our organization is able to fund a part-time bookkeeper and a program director, for the time being—

Ms. Karen Kuzemczak: Coming from the ministry of health promotion.

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Well, it comes from the different programs. Each program might put in, I don't know, 15% into the admin.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: So you work six months a year writing proposals.

[English]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: We don't even have a person who is hired within our organization to write the funding, but I usually end up doing it as an extra duty.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Is that a lot of work for you?

[English]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Do you also have to prepare reports on the projects you carry out?

[English]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Yes, some of them.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes?

[English]

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: Overworked.

But there's another person who looks after the training proposals, so it's not just me doing the whole thing, no.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: You are a role model for the women in your community. Is there a mentorship program in place in your community?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): We're at five minutes. Very quickly, your response.

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: No.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you very much.

I have two questions, and I will try to be very succinct.

The first question has to do with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. That has been defunded. It's winding down. I'm wondering if the loss of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation support is problematic. Does it impact the community?

My second question is—and it was alluded to by Madam Simson. We were in Winnipeg and we met some young people who had travelled to experience their secondary education. They were 13 and 14 years of age. Once they got to Winnipeg, the support worker said that immediately they were identified as innocents in the city by predators and were victimized. They ended up in some very serious situations.

So going back to this question of taking children, very young children, out of their safe home communities and transplanting them for the purposes of education, it sounded very much like a repeat of the residential school experience.

Darlene and Karen, you talked about long distance education, and we've also talked about the fact that stores do try to reduce the cost of food as a partial solution. Is distance education another possible solution, allowing these young people to stay here longer and get their education here? Is that another possible solution? Feel free to answer.

• (0920)

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: It's happening now within the high school. They have Wahsa Distance Education, and that's done over the radio. So it is possible. They have video conferencing facilities now that are available for meetings, and also for classrooms and workshops. It's possible to have more distance education, yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): And is it as available as it should be or needs to be?

Ms. Darlene Angeconeb: I think there needs to be more funding, because I know the facilities they have within the communities might not be up to par with whatever's happening in the towns or cities.

Chief Angus Toulouse: Just a quick comment on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the resources. There really is still a need. I think to say that all of a sudden, boom, you're healed...that's not happening in our first nations communities. There is the real need to recognize that once those resources dry up for groups of first nations or organizations that are developing those healing programs and services, they're going to be at a loss. There's still a need for it, and I think that is where it's going to be really challenging, to see that some of the good work that has gone on is sustained.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): One of the things we've heard in every place we've been this round is that there are problems in regard to the justice system, the relationship between people and the judiciary, police, and social services. Are those problems that you face in Sioux Lookout and in the more remote communities?

Chief Angus Toulouse: Can I just say that a number of reports have been made recently, I know, in terms of the policing end of things and some of the inequities that are there. It captures, I'm sure, the need for services for first nations women.

MP Rickford talked about some of the good programs and services that have been provided to some of the communities, which is good. The problem is that there are not enough. These are good,

but you've got 26 communities that are isolated. There should be much more consideration for all of them, not cherry-picking one area or one community but rather looking at an overall plan to service all of the area.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you.

I'm close to my time, so I'm going to leave it at that. We do have to travel; we're going to do a site visit.

I want to thank everyone for being here.

Thank you to Equay-wuk, to Sandra, Darlene, and Karen. We appreciate the expertise you have brought to the committee and we're most grateful for the advice you've given.

We're certainly glad to see you, Chief Toulouse. It was very good of you to take time.

I know all of you are very busy. We appreciate the effort you've made in order to help this committee do its work. Thank you to MP Rickford for joining us, to the other members of the committee, and to the staff.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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