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Chair

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc

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•(0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP)): Welcome to the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Pursuant to the Order of Reference of Wednesday, October 1, 2014, and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, October 30, 2014, the committee is resuming its study on promising practices to prevent violence against women.

It must be said that it is quite fitting that we are meeting to discuss promising practices to prevent violence against women because this week we are observing the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, which is held on December 6 every year. I just wanted to mention that.

I would also like to thank our witnesses who are taking part in this very important study. I would also like to thank the committee members for ensuring that we can conduct this very important study.

This morning, I would like to welcome, from the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, Bonnie L. Brayton, the national executive director, and Carmela Hutchison, the president.

We also have with us Alia Hogben, the executive director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women.

Joining us by video conference from Calgary, Alberta, is Rekha Gadhia, manager of the Family Services Department, and Beba Svirig, chief executive officer, of the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association.

Each group of witnesses will have 10 minutes. The presentations will be followed by a question and answer period.

I would like to begin with Carmela Hutchison.

You have 10 minutes.

[English]

Ms. Carmela Hutchison (President, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada): *Merci.* Good morning.

I want to thank everyone for having for having us here today.

I would like to acknowledge the Algonquin people on whose traditional lands we come together here today.

We're here to talk about the very important and serious issue of violence against women with disabilities. We talk about violence

against women; I think we should talk about it as a public health issue.

I would like to open with a quote by Ms. Fran Odette from her paper "Ableism – A Form of Violence Against Women".

Ableism permeates our society; it is a form of violence against self-identified women that occurs at both individual and systemic levels. Ableism defines a woman by her disAbility and focuses on her deviation from the "norm," rather than on recognizing her individuality and specific sets of experiences. Ableism, sexism and other forms of oppression put self-identified women with disAbilities at increased risk of experiencing a range of violence and create barriers to accessing the very responses that can increase safety and facilitate healing. Policies and procedures need to include ableism as a form of violence and to address it through program audits, supervision, training curricula, and public education campaigns. While concerned about the impact of ableism and autism on men and women, the goal of this paper was to name ableism as a form of violence against women, to increase awareness and understanding about its existence and serious impacts, and to ensure it is on everyone's agenda.

Violence against women affects us all. Even if we are not directly affected by violence, as women we are certainly taught to fear it. It affects every aspect of our society, from the missing and murdered aboriginal women to the events occurring in our own government.

In our talk today we will explore how violence against women is both an effect of being disabled and a cause of disability. Abuse takes many forms.

Women with disabilities are abused more often. Rather than go into all the facts behind it, we need only look at article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which highlights women and girls with disabilities as being at specific risk for poverty and violence. The abuse is magnified because of the number of people who interact with women with disabilities, the nature of the disability, by the greater number of types of perpetrators we are exposed to, and to more forms of abuse.

Some people's disabilities put them at greater risk because their socialization emphasizes greater obedience to authority. I hear all the time about how only the lowest form of humanity would ever abuse a disabled person. At this point, I wish to highlight several examples of how the intersection of women, violence, and disability creates a perfect storm of pain and death.

I would like to begin first with the woman with intellectual disabilities from Winnipeg who was brutally sexually assaulted while her caregiver was completely oblivious to the situation because she sat a few rows ahead listening to her iPod.

Victoria Shachtay was a paralysed mother of a six-year-old girl. She lived in Innisfail, Alberta, and was killed by a postal bomb sent from her financial adviser when the family discovered that her money was used up and started to make inquiries. The use of a community mailbox could have proved deadly to several people in the neighbourhood. There is great concern that the elimination of home mail delivery in favour of community mailboxes will become an extra target point for perpetrators of violence against women with disabilities.

Betty Anne Gagnon was a woman with intellectual disability who went to live with her sister. Her sister and brother-in-law fell into addiction and violence. In response to their inability to meet Betty Anne's needs, she was subjected to a range of beatings, having her mouth forcibly washed out with household cleaners, and made to live in inhuman conditions: a cold school bus, and a cage in the garage with nails sticking out of it. When she died, she weighed 69 pounds. The charges against her family were pled down to failing to provide the necessities of life.

Misty Joy Franklin was living in Prince George when she was stabbed in the neck by her boyfriend Trevor Fontaine, who had a history of violence and was later declared a dangerous offender. Misty became a quadriplegic in 2003. She was 24 years old at the time of the attack and had two daughters. Paralysed and on a ventilator, Misty was living in long-term care, and she elected to stop the ventilator. She died January 28, 2014.

On the first day Bonnie and I began our work together, we had a wide-ranging discussion about many topics relevant to violence against women with disabilities. Of particular concern was the issue of sexualization of young women, cyberbullying, and Internet pornography.

Rehtaeh Parsons died on April 7, 2013, as a result of a suicide following vicious cyberbullying that followed the circulation of a video of her being allegedly raped by multiple perpetrators. Amanda Todd died by suicide on October 10, 2012, when she was lured into exposing her breasts on a video chat that was later circulated on the Internet.

• (0855)

Yesterday on Facebook there was outrage in the women's community about Grand Theft Auto, which depicts women as sexual objects, which players can have virtual sex with and ultimately murder sex trade workers.

Honour-based violence and the missing and murdered aboriginal women are yet another intersection of violence, poverty, and women with disabilities.

Abuse is both a cause as well as a risk factor of disability. Brain injury is also being identified as an emerging issue associated with trauma and abuse, both due to head injury from direct blows to the head and, as flagged by the executive director of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the sexual practice of strangulation. At DAWN-RAFH Canada we have received reports from women's experiences about detached retinas and hearing damage in association with brain injury and blows to the head.

Some disabilities are actually causes to exclude people from mental health treatment and other rehabilitation programs. For

example, you cannot have brain injury rehabilitation if you have a major mental illness. I stand before you as one of those people.

People in mental health saying that one cannot catch mental illness once countered a discussion that mental health is becoming endemic. In reflection, I still hold the belief that you can indeed catch mental illness through violence and abuse. That is the vector of transmission.

The effects of trauma and mental health needs, its relationship to addiction, and interventions needed to assist women with disabilities in these clinical areas, this is only in its beginning stages. In a recent presentation by the provincial chief mental health officer, Dr. Michael Trew, he indicated that trauma-informed mental health care begins by asking "What happened to you?" rather than "What's wrong with you?"

People with disabilities need safety, encouragement, accommodation, and kindness in order to tell their stories. Dr. Trew also talked about a need for patients to teach their doctors about the situation. Sadly, the time it takes to do this is often more than the patient has before they're in crisis or they die. Often, busy doctors do not have time to listen. At best, the disconnect between the mental health needs of people with disabilities and health care providers creates new barriers to forming trusting relationships essential to transforming trauma into empowerment. At worst, the disconnect creates new trauma, new rejection, and new shame when someone has summoned the courage to tell their story one more time, only to be turned away again.

People who return from military service experience operational stress injury and, a term I only heard yesterday, military sexual trauma. Yet women who were abused are diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, dissociative identity disorder, and very occasionally are given the respect of a PTSD diagnosis. Women's experiences of violence and abuse that did not occur within military operations are viewed obviously in a very blaming and discriminating way, both from a feminist and ableist perspective. Women who were sexually harassed in their workplace are seldom assisted with appropriate response and after care.

We need to learn from the experience of the military to view the injuries suffered by women with disabilities, and indeed all women, in an equal light. There's a paper entitled "Torturing by Non-State Actors Invisibilized, A Patriarchal Divide and Spillover Violence from the Military Sphere into the Domestic Sphere" by Jeanne Sarson and Linda MacDonald that explores this very topic. DAWN-RAFH Canada has endorsed this paper and encourages adoption of its recommendations.

One important stride that was made towards the equality of women with disabilities was the R. v. D.A.I. decision, in which DAWN-RAFH Canada was an intervener, which placed people with mental disabilities on an equal playing field with all other witnesses.

Health equity has to be achieved for people with disabilities. One common area of mental health need that is overlooked is sexuality. Indeed, even its obliteration from women's medical care deepens the level of distress and increases the mental health need. Ableist attitudes surrounding sexuality perpetuate sexual abuse and a lack of proper treatment follow-up amongst women with disabilities.

People with developmental disabilities and mental illness are often forced to choose what services they will have at age 18. If a person with a developmental disability has a mental health need, they may often be excluded from PDD services. Exclusion of women with disabilities from mental health resources actively prevents them from recovering from their injuries.

Society's ableist views on people with disabilities and their portrayal in the media have tremendous impact on the mental health needs of people with disabilities.

• (0900)

It's hard to maintain the struggle to survive, when people constantly view a person with a disability in a negative or shaming light. Unmet needs create sadness and depression whether they're related to the provision of disability supports, such as incontinence supplies or wheelchairs, or the crushing poverty that the majority of our people face.

Ableism, as a form of violence, is seen in decision-making surrounding do not resuscitate orders, euthanasia, and assisted suicide. The current debate on assisted suicide and euthanasia, whether you're for or against, has had a significant and harsh impact on both the individuals with disabilities and our community as a whole.

Alberta Network for Mental Health has been receiving a significant trend of increased calls related to this issue especially in the wake of Robin Williams' suicide.

Ableism, as a form of violence, occurs when someone living with a disability comes to the decision, as Ms. Franklin did, to end one's life and that decision is not considered a suicide that we would otherwise work hard to prevent. Every mental health resource should be aimed at recovery and suicide prevention.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hogben, you now have the floor for 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Alia Hogben (Executive Director, Canadian Council of Muslim Women): The Canadian Council of Muslim Women is grateful for this opportunity to address the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Violence against women is a complex, yet, simultaneously, a simple issue. If as a society and a country we believe in human rights for all, including equality under the law, then it is a matter of political will to ensure that any violence against women and girls is addressed.

It is complex because the underlying causes are embedded in the pervasive values of patriarchy, which in turn, underlines so many cultural and religious norms.

CCMW is an organization of believing women whose values are based on Islam and on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We believe that equality, social justice, and compassion are shared values, and we try to implement these in all the work we do. We know that a concerted and cohesive action plan is required and that no one group, whether it be the government or a community organization, can accomplish much alone.

We also know that organizations such as ours are essential, as we implement the government's policies and programs in the communities, and should be seen as partners in addressing violence against women. It has at times been difficult, when public funds are curtailed and community organizations are unable to implement their projects.

VAW is alive in our world today, not only in faraway places but here in Canada and the United States. We should not be shocked by the recent findings reported by the media of alleged sexual assault on several women by two public figures: Jian Ghomeshi and Bill Cosby. These incidents prove our point that violence is not limited by class, race, poverty, or culture.

In a recent project funded by Status of Women Canada, CCMW addressed four facets of violence against women: domestic violence, forced marriages, female genital mutilation or cutting, and femicide.

Further along, I will discuss our strong commitment to the use of language when we identify certain facets of VAW; for example, the terms "femicide" and "gender-based violence".

As Professor Asma Barlas, Islamic scholar, states in our publication:

The heinous practice of "honor" killings is considered Islamic since some of the perpetrators are Muslims but, as the CCMW notes, such murders also take place in other cultures even if we call them by a different name. On that note, I commend the CCMW for opposing the term "honor killings" on the grounds that it amounts to describing a woman's murder "by the rationale provided by the murderer." Instead, the CCMW advocates that all murders be categorized "as femicide—the killing of women and girls simply because they are females.

She also notes:

What is also distressing is that although citizenship confers equal rights and protections under the law on women and men, the onus is on women to document their own brutalization...by the violence and by having to find effective ways to secure their own well-being.

In answer to the questions you posed regarding the promising practices and what can we identify as other practices in different programs, I will start with some self-evident truths: the universality of violence against women and girls.

In our publication, we define VAW:

Violence against women exists in every culture, every country, and every community in the world. No one is immune; no one is protected by virtue of their race, skin colour, nationality, religion, age or class. Violence against women can be physical, psychological, and sexual. It can happen in the home, in the workplace, and in the community. It can be perpetrated by intimate partners, parents, children, schoolmates, work colleagues, religious leaders, and governments.

Another self-evident truth is the influence of cultural and religious teachings and practices.

We say that cultural relativism has no place in any discussion of violence against women. However, this is not to deny or dismiss that there may be distinct cultural norms of specific communities that still have a stronger framework of patriarchy. Our organization has, over the years, tried to address the various types of abuse under the rubric of VAW. While we firmly believe in the universality of VAW and its destructive effects on all women and girls, at the same time, we know that there are specific issues within Muslim communities.

The role of religious teachings may not be as pervasive for others as it is for many Muslims. In every project we have done, we have had to ensure an understanding of Islam that is egalitarian and compassionate, and insists on the equality of men and women. This is education at its best, as we try to dismantle the norms of patriarchy within families and communities.

• (0905)

Canadian Muslim women face barriers when they consider leaving an abusive relationship. Some of these barriers are internal and some are rooted in the community, but some are systemic. These women face unique barriers: concern about losing their cultural or religious identity, significant barriers to accessing services, racism, and a lack of cultural competency on the part of service providers, including the police and the courts.

By focusing on patriarchal norms CCMW is not specifying that these are only present amongst Muslims or other minority groups. We strongly oppose the inflammatory language that is too often used by individuals who should know better and whose support is so essential in fighting against this disease of violence.

It is dehumanizing and degrading to label certain forms of violence as barbaric when all of it is so. Why are some politicians labelling some practices as barbaric and linking it with immigrants only? Polygamy, femicide, and forced marriages are all present in our Canadian society with one significant example of the Mormon community of Bountiful, which has been practising all of these since the 1950s. Why the blame and targeting of immigrants or visible minority groups? CCMW pleads with all of you to please use the terms gender-based violence and femicide as distinct from honour killing or honour-based violence. These are more accurate and carry no racist baggage, while the others are racist, discriminatory, and make those of us who belong to these communities feel less than you.

Would you please follow these promising best practices. First, ensure that VAW is a priority for Status of Women and not allow it to go below the other priorities that they are setting. Second, ensure that Status of Women works closely with community groups and views them as essential partners in the development of a national plan of action, for example. Practitioners and activists have a vast wealth of experience regarding VAW and methods to address the issues.

Third, ensure that the partnership with community organizations includes women's organizations that represent various Canadian communities, and that close attention should be paid to the elimination of racist and discriminatory language, labelling, or cultural relativism. Fourth, ensure that the government allocates adequate, ongoing financial resources in the fight against VAW. Fifth, ensure that education is a high priority in each community, in schools, in immigrant communities, with the police, and with service providers.

Sixth, ensure that VAW does not remain a separated issue only for women and girls, but includes men and boys so that whole families are educated about the harm of VAW. Seventh, explore the researching of other models from other parts of the world. This will allow us to showcase our successes internationally. Eighth, explore the CCMW model of local chapters and the "train the trainer" model to provide workshops across the country for women, service providers, and other professionals in the field.

Thank you and I look forward to a discussion with you.

• (0910)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Svigir, you have 10 minutes.

[English]

Ms. Beba Svigir (Chief Executive Officer, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The premise of our presentation is that violence against women is a gender issue rooted in power imbalance between men and women in society, globally and historically. It is triggered by inequalities and discrimination and is not limited to a specific group of women. However, expressions of violence and particular forms of violence against different groups of women tend to differ based on social circumstances and environments. Generally speaking, the predominant form of violence against all women is physical violence by a spouse or intimate partner.

We will argue that within the broader context of gender violence, there are unique circumstances that trigger violence against immigrant women. These are related directly to integration challenges and overall lack of social supports for immigrant families.

Immigrants move to Canada predominantly for one reason only, to provide a better future for their children and their families. They are screened by the Canadian government for their language abilities, employment skills, health and well-being, educational levels, and criminal records. However, despite meeting Canadian immigration requirements, and many never having experienced family violence prior to coming to Canada, more than 50% of families served by child and family services in Calgary are immigrant families.

What are the reasons for violence against immigrant women? Based on our experiences at CIWA, there are two main reasons for the violence against them: lack of integration support in the communities where they live, and differences in perceptions of gender equality in Canada and their home country. Immigrant families face integration challenges related to employment, equitable pay, cross-cultural parenting, language barriers, isolation, poverty, and access to community resources and supports. These place stress on marital and family relationships, and cause reversal in roles between husbands and wives and dependency on children.

We find that immigrant women and girls whose first experiences of family violence occurred in Canada, do not have the strategies to cope with settlement and integration challenges; were unaware of laws, rights, and responsibilities in Canada; live in poverty; do not know where to go to access supports; are isolated from the community; struggle with the family reunification issues; and experienced violence or trauma as refugees prior to coming to Canada.

Many clients come from male-dominant cultures, where women are not seen as equals and are treated differently from men and boys. Some women may have experienced violence in their lives, but did not realize that until coming to Canada. Other women may have been aware that they were being abused and that it was wrong; however, there were no supports available for them in their home country.

Conflict arises when the family arrives in Canada because there is a difference between their home country's perception of women's rights and the rights offered to them in Canada. Immigrant women become informed about their rights and challenge their spouses regarding gender equality or inequality. Women take a more active role in maintaining the well-being of the family because of the integration challenges of their spouses, which in some cases impact the family's ability to move ahead in a positive way.

I'll now turn to Rekha to talk about the nature of violence.

Ms. Rekha Gadhia (Manager, Family Services Department, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association): Thank you, Beba.

To put it in perspective, women and girls receive unequal treatment from their own fathers, husbands and brothers, simply because they're not seen as equals. Without family or friends to turn to for help, women are choosing violence rather than becoming homeless. In addition, women are exposed to spousal abuse not only from their partners, but also their in-laws who stay in the same house, and this abuse can be physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, or sexual, to name a few.

CIWA counsellors have seen cases where their client is abused equally by their husband and in-laws who live in the same home. In

May 2014, a Calgary woman and her friend were killed by her husband who she recently separated from, while trying to retrieve her belongings.

Recently, in the news we have seen a growing number of honour violence, femicide cases, against immigrant girls. A Calgary mother from Chechnya killed her daughter because she did not have the ability and support to handle the parental stress in a new country. We're all aware of the Shafia family case. As well, in the early 1990s an immigrant man killed his sister and her husband in a Calgary mall parking lot, simply because the sister had secretly married a man the family disapproved of and deemed her actions as a disgrace to the family name.

Forced marriages are yet another immigrant-specific example that leads to family violence. We are well aware of girls being sent back to their home country by their parents to be married to an older man because the family found out the girl was dating or was having a relationship with a boy. We also know of instances where girls are tricked into going back home for a visit and the family in their home country takes over the marriage arrangement from there. We have coordinated with police to have them intervene and stop the parents at the airport from taking their daughters to their home country.

Finally, the last example that we wish to shed some light on is the hidden violence against women. Hidden violence is due to shame, family expectations, traditions, etc. The best example of this kind of abuse is abuse against senior women who come to Canada as caregivers, homemakers, to help their own children be successful very fast. That leaves them with no money for their own resources and they end in as the most affected segment of the family, specifically when they do not receive any respect from their own grandchildren because of the cultural differences.

Another example is the physical and emotional abuse against immigrant girls by their own mothers, fathers or brothers for wanting more independence and to fit in their schools. They are being perceived as behaving in a manner that is not acceptable by their culture, such as not wearing the traditional clothing or head scarf in school, dating, having a boyfriend, or hanging out with friends.

Many immigrant women do not report abuse because women who ask for assistance from agencies or supports outside the family face ostracism.

Over to you again, Beba.

● (0915)

Ms. Beba Svigir: We would also like to share some promising practices that we have implemented and evaluated over the years.

The Calgary Immigrant Women's Association is the only immigrant-serving agency in Calgary that has been providing culturally sensitive, customized and clinical services to address family violence in immigrant families. Our programs work in collaboration with all other service providers in the city, the provincial government, and shelters. Over the decades and years, we have enhanced and improved our services to ensure our response is effective and in line with positive integration support. The success rates for immigrant families that come to us are extremely high, due to the fact that our services are holistic and customized for each individual family that comes to us. We are excited and proud to say that the majority of our families have no repeated instances of family violence after they go through interventions provided by CIWA.

This holistic approach includes supporting the whole family, not only women but husbands, children, fathers and grandparents; addressing intergenerational conflict in immigrant families; involving men in the process of parenting and in finding solutions to violence, including boys in gender violence education and similar instances.

CIWA provides 40 different programs and services to immediately address root causes that impede integration, including family violence as it relates to poverty, unemployment, homelessness, isolation, and language barriers.

We provide first-language and culturally sensitive support for families. We collaborate with community partners to provide access to clinical supports on top of what we can afford, to enhance the cultural understanding of front-line staff of other agencies that work with immigrants and to provide accessible programs in the neighbourhoods where immigrant families and women live. We provide programs in 120 community locations in Calgary. We provide the reunification support for families that need that kind of support.

So within the range of customized and holistic supports for immigrant families we distinguish intervention and prevention services for immigrant families.

Under the intervention services, we provide family counselling, in-home counselling—

• (0920)

The Chair: Ms. Svirig, could you go to the recommendations that you would have for the committee in conclusion? You have about one minute left.

Ms. Beba Svirig: Okay.

In line with the experiences, supports, and best practices we have introduced, we believe that the following recommendations for the policy-makers would provide a more successful integration and higher level of functioning for all newcomers in Canada. We recommend increased investments in preventative services for immigrant families coming to Canada and increased investment in pre-arrival orientation to parenting and family laws in Canada. Currently, pre-arrival services are more focused on providing employment and language support than family supports.

We recommend a more streamlined process to accessing family support service for all newcomers. Less than 30% of our own numbers of newcomers to Canada every year access settlement

integration services, yet newcomers don't know what they don't know when they come to Canada. Every immigrant family with young children coming to Canada from anywhere in the world should be advised to access parental supports upon arrival to Canada because that lack of support is the number one predominant reason for instances of family violence for immigrant families in Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Madam Truppe, you have seven minutes for questions.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome. Thank you for coming and sharing your stories.

I have several different questions. My first one is going to be for Alia from the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. It sounds like your organization is doing a fantastic job. I'm from London, Ontario and I know. I work with a lot of different Muslim organizations in London and they do just great work. You know, I love them to death for all they do.

You mentioned that you received—I think you said you received funding from Status of Women Canada for focusing on four facets of violence against women, and you described the four.

How much funding did you receive? Do you recall?

Ms. Alia Hogben: About \$300,000 for two years.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: About \$300,000 for two years. Was that recently?

Ms. Alia Hogben: It just finished in October.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Oh, good. So from your initiatives that you did, do you have a best practice that came from it?

Ms. Alia Hogben: As I mentioned, first of all, we always make sure that, because we are addressing the needs of Canadian Muslim women, we educate them—as the people from Calgary were saying—that patriarchy is not acceptable either in Canada or within Islam, so we stress that by having an Islamic scholar always work with us. We usually, of course, choose someone who's going to agree with us.

The other thing we do is go out and do workshops. We do them with Muslim women but also with service providers and so on. We've develop a tool that we use. We were in London quite often doing these workshops across the country, Vancouver, and so on, as well.

What we learned was that we do have this tool. Unfortunately we don't have any money left because the project ended, but we would love to have used it across.... It's a very good tool developed by an activist who's a lawyer as well.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Actually, my second question for you, when you talked about the workshops, was about some of the workshops. You just answered one of the questions I had: was it for Muslim women only?

From all the workshops then that you had across Canada, and hearing different feedback, is there something you'd like us to take away from that as a best practice as well?

Ms. Alia Hogben: I think the best practice is that these women—these are all volunteers who provided the workshops—have to be supported by some paid staff, and unfortunately, that's where the funds come in. We didn't have enough. For example, we have this tool. It was tremendous. We said we would do, I think, eight or ten workshops, and we ended up doing 25 or 29 across the country. So we were willing to work, but I think you can only depend so much on volunteers. As an example, when those workshops were held in different communities, we only gave them \$200 to \$300 for snacks or a room rental, and so on and so forth.

It would be wonderful... We asked, and Status of Women wouldn't give it to us, for money that would allow us to do this properly. So we have a tool. We'd love to provide more workshops, and the chapter women are willing to work with it, but they can't do it completely on their own.

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

It sounds like you did a great job if you did 25 to 29 workshops. Good for you.

• (0925)

Ms. Alia Hogben: Thank you.

Yes, we did.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Next question is for DAWN-RAFH in regard to the DisAbleD Women's Network.

You talked about the physical abuse and sexual abuse of women who are disabled. Have there been measures put in place? Can you describe the best practice that might address the different abuses that they received?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton (National Executive Director, DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada): We gave our time over so Ms. Hutchison could frame the issue, but I would say that we also circulated our brief to everybody on the committee. In the brief is a very detailed outline of a project we're currently funded for under Status of Women Canada.

Again, in terms of what's in here I would say that it's really important, particularly for people who aren't familiar with women's disability issues, to take the time to review the brief because you get a very strong sense and understanding of the different types of experiences, because there are many shared perspectives in here, and I think that's really key.

In terms of recommendations, you'll find at the end that we have some very particular recommendations. I'm happy to say the project

is still in progress. We're in 13 locations across the country at this point.

In terms of next steps, there are some obvious next steps beyond the project. But I will say that in terms of the particular recommendations, we have program development for women with disabilities and deaf women around information and education sessions, peer groups, family and caregiver support groups, individual and family counselling, a volunteer roster, resource development, and services for immigrants and newcomers, because, again, the intersection of being a woman with a disability and being an immigrant or a newcomer is very significant.

Program development for the broader community becomes really important because, again, in terms of women with disabilities not being in a silo, it's extremely important to understand that how the work becomes effective is in engaging the broader community in addressing the issues of women with disabilities. Supporting women with disabilities at the local level to come forward and participate in that process is quite critical. We're having great success with these projects across the country.

We need policy and funding reforms on a very significant level. Again, in terms of understanding the particular needs of women with disabilities, I will just speak to what deaf women go through on an ongoing basis simply to have their basic needs met because of the lack of available accommodations for them.

I could go on, and there is a very long report here.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: That's okay, and I have other questions too, so that's great. Thank you.

I did want to thank you also for sharing your stories of Victoria, Betty Anne, and Misty Joy Franklin. Those were horrible, tragic stories.

I think you mentioned 13 locations across Canada. When you say that, what do you mean by that? Is it an office set-up, or what is it that you're—

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: No, these are pilot community development projects because this is a community development approach.

One of the things we know at DAWN Canada, and I think most people in the VAW sector recognize, is that change happens on the ground in communities. This is research with a purpose, where we're in 13 locations across the country now—northern, rural, urban—and we look very closely in terms of the kind of work we're doing.

The South Asian women's group in Saskatchewan, for example, has two social planning councils, one on the east coast and one on the west coast, and three YWCAs.

It's a very important piece of research to understand how that change happens and how it happens differently in different communities, to come forward with clear recommendations around best practices, going forward.

This project we're doing through Status of Women Canada, I'm pleased to say, has in fact been recognized by Handicap International as one of the most promising best practices globally. We just learned that earlier this week, so we shared that with everybody yesterday, and given that tomorrow is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, it was quite exciting news.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: That's great, thank you.

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Thank you.

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup*, Ms. Brayton and Ms. Hutchison. We'll make sure the brief is translated and distributed to members. We couldn't distribute it at this moment because it has to be in both official languages. We'll make sure the members are aware of the recommendations you put in the brief. Thank you very much.

Now, Ms. Ashton, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for presenting today, and thank you for sharing very important feedback.

I'd like to begin with Ms. Brayton and Ms. Hutchison, from DAWN. Thank you very much for really expanding our committee's understanding of the barriers that disabled women face. While we've heard from other witnesses in this study around the importance of the intersectional understanding of violence against women, hearing from you directly is obviously very important as well.

One of the recurring themes in the presentations we're hearing is the need to address systemic barriers and looking at the need for comprehensive and systemic answers. One of the pieces that's been called for increasingly by many voices in the violence against women community is the need for a national action plan to address violence against women that also understands the barriers that disabled women face.

Would you support the call for a national action plan to address violence against women?

• (0930)

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Yes, absolutely. I think the other thing that really needs to be built into that plan—because it's a theme we have talked about amongst all of us—is the importance of funding for intersectional inclusion. Intersectional practice is looking at women's experience. The term originated in the black feminist community to address race, poverty, and violence against them, and it's the intersection of those barriers. Over time women have come together and researched this issue, and there has been a more fulsome discussion of inclusion. Our colleagues both here and in Calgary have talked about the fact that they had only \$300 for a workshop. We tried to do a workshop in Calgary for which we had a similar budget and we could not have interpreters for deaf people because those cost \$1,500 for the three hours we were planning and needed to be booked three months in advance.

The need for staff support just cannot be underscored. The need for staff assistance for our executive director is huge as well. We also

know, even with regard to shelters, that one woman actually left a shelter early because she didn't have access to halal foods. So that intersectional budgeting is extremely important and must be built into the funding envelopes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Last week we heard from West Coast LEAF, which talked about a report they were involved with—and I believe you were as well—called “Able Mothers: The intersection of parenting, disability and the law”. We had an opportunity to hear briefly about the crippling lack of legal aid available to women living with disabilities. Obviously the responsibility for legal aid has been downloaded to the provinces, but do you see a federal role in this area specifically around accessing legal services for women with disabilities?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: One of the most critical things we need to understand is that women with disabilities are not even disclosing.

I think really, Niki, that your question is important, but one of the things that DAWN Canada is doing for the 16 days to end violence against women is a campaign called “We can tell and we will tell”. That's because many women with disabilities do not disclose or do not understand that what's happening to them is abuse, because they have been abused so much in so many different ways that it simply feels as though that's the way it's supposed to be.

Having said that, I totally agree with you and I would certainly say, based on the work that DAWN has been doing and as part of the national action committee on access to family justice, I can confirm that in terms of what we know is going on in the family court systems that something like, I believe, 80% of people in the family court system are self-represented litigants. Among those, perhaps 1% or 2% are people with disabilities. We are not represented in the court system. We are not supported.

One of the important pieces of work DAWN Canada did—and it's available on our website—was our recommendations on the victims of crime bill. We worked with Sue O'Sullivan very closely on all of that work with respect to recommendations for how to support people with disabilities in the justice system. It becomes extremely important in this conversation around violence against women with disabilities to understand that this is an absolutely critical issue. It is an enormous gap. Women with disabilities are not making it to the court systems, and when they do they experience all kinds of different discrimination. The D.A.I. decision that Carmela refers to is very specific to a woman with an intellectual disability who had been questioned on her ability to know the difference between the truth and a lie.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Ms. Brayton.

Just in my remaining time, I'd like to turn to you, Ms. Hogben. Thank you very much for your presentation as well.

In recent months there's been a lot of talk about forced marriage. There was a conversation that you referred to, and in fact there is a government bill before us. I'm wondering if you could reiterate some of the messages that you brought forward, particularly on the racialized and targeted tone of these conversations, and whether you could share your thoughts on behalf of your organization on that front.

Ms. Alia Hogben: Just on forced marriages...?

Well, I'm going to be presenting next week to the Senate committee on zero tolerance, as they're calling it. We're very upset, very disturbed. It's very discriminatory, but we'll talk about that another time. It's how the government is dealing with such an issue. It doesn't help to be discriminated against doubly or triply.

However, with regard to forced marriages, that's been going on for quite some time, and as I mention in my paper, I don't think it's happening only with immigrants. I think that's what our concern is. We are concerned about forced marriages, just as we are concerned about early age marriages, and just as we are concerned about domestic violence. But to single out forced marriages, what is happening is that it's not such a huge problem, but that's not to say even one isn't too many.

We've been working with SALCO for the past four or five years, and we've looked at other models, like the one in Britain, which has criminalized it now. They have a fabulous network in other countries where these young women are being taken. We've been presenting to the federal government that what they need to do is to build links with countries where these girls might be taken. The British model is mostly with Pakistan, where they have a very good system protocol. I think it's one of the Norwegian or Scandinavian countries—I don't know which one it is—which also has a very good protocol with the other countries. Canada could do that to protect girls being taken from here. We would also suggest that raising the age of marriage might help, but child welfare needs to be involved.

There was an incident about five or six years ago of a younger girl under 16, and all of us got together and brought the girl back from where she had been taken. There's a lot that needs to be done, but again, I think we should make sure that we don't keep focusing only on immigrants. It's happening here. I think we should universalize all this. Don't pick on one group, please.

• (0935)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your answers.

Ms. O'Neill Gordon, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to welcome all the witnesses here today. Thank you for your words of advice, which provide lots of food for thought as we work on this study at the status of women committee.

My first question is for Bonnie Brayton. You mentioned earlier when answering another question that you had just received notification that a Status of Women project was recognized as a best practice. I was wondering what was the name of the organization.

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Handicap International, it's the name of the organization that's recognized our work.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Is that the one that's recognized right across Canada?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: We're a national organization and Handicap International is an international development agency focused on people with disabilities. They have recognized our program, the one that we're currently funded for through Status of Women Canada, as one of the most promising best practices globally.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Oh, that's nice. How much funding did you receive?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: A little over \$500,000.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: \$500,000...?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Yes, it was one of the most well-funded projects for last year from Minister Leitch. She committed that funding because she understood that what we needed to do was to go across the country to understand what those different intersections are for women with disabilities. It allowed us to do this, as I said, in the 13 provinces and territories across the country. It was a significant investment by her, and we're very grateful. In fact, the project goes through to December of next year, and based on some of the feedback that we're getting, we're speaking with her about the possibility of an expansion of the project because it is going so well.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Yes, our minister has a great understanding of the need and would certainly—

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Yes, she's been tremendous.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Yes, that's great to hear.

My next question is for the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association. In the course of the conversation you mentioned it and I was just wondering, does the hidden violence, immigrant girls being abused by parents, continue today?

Ms. Rekha Gadhia: Yes. As I mentioned earlier in the speech, in some of the families, some cultural traditions, there are issues that we see. For example, the mothers feel it is just from a protection standpoint. The culture was very different in their own home country, and here, they feel that the girls are very much immediately exposed to a very different culture. The girl is just trying to be part of the school, part of the cool group. The parents, specifically the mothers, being at home, being more protective, feel that the girls no longer belong to their own culture. We have seen cases in our counselling of that from the parents. Sometimes, it's because the mother is at home and is more concerned about the security of the girl. That is where we see some cases. Yes, in our parenting programs we do come across some cases like that.

• (0940)

Ms. Beba Svigir: I'll just add that we typically see one component of a huge misunderstanding and lack of preparedness for women with families when they come to Canada.

There is a very fine line between the opportunity that Canada provides for them, to come and provide a better future for their children, opportunities for education, and to reach their goals and dreams anywhere in the world they want. The problem is that sometimes immigrant parents have a problem understanding and anticipating that when they come to Canada, there will be no distinction between that family life and particular requirements that parents might have in terms of preserving their original culture to the extent that they would like to. Children integrate faster. Children become Canadians faster than parents do, and that's when the discrepancy between parents and youth come in.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Yes, and that makes a lot of sense.

Ms. Beba Svigir: And that triggers family violence.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Yes. So probably in the next generation, we'll hopefully see less and less of it, in that case.

Ms. Beba Svigir: Yes, but there will always be the first generation of immigrants and the second generation.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Yes, okay.

Ms. Beba Svigir: That's why that orientation and education and providing reasonable expectations for immigrant families when they come to Canada play a role in that preventive component of support for immigrant families.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Okay. Thank you.

My next question is for Alia Hogben. I was impressed by the objectives. It is my understanding that the common ground project ran from December 2011 to May of 2013. It was the objectives that I thought were very important, where you were trying to increase "knowledge about citizenship responsibilities and civic engagement" and other things such as "positively upheld responsibilities of citizenship", and trying to increase "interfaith and intercultural understanding". Along with that was gaining skills that "increased their employability"—which is certainly a very important aspect—and you developed tools "others can use to promote civic engagement".

My question was, how successful was this? What were the best practices that you put in place to achieve these goals, and how did you feel about them?

Ms. Alia Hogben: Thank you so much. I'm very impressed by the preparations some of you have obviously done. Thank you so much. It helps us to have a conversation on the common ground project.

We called it "common ground" because we were trying to explain to our young people, particularly young men, that they have to go beyond belonging to only the Muslim communities. You could be a Canadian and this could be a thing to be very proud of, and under the heading of being a Canadian, you can have multiple identities. You don't need to give up one to only belong to another. Some of our young men in particular were very keen on being good Muslims but not really getting beyond that to being good Canadians or working with other religious groups.

What we did with that one was at the end of it, I have to tell you, I felt that none of these young men and women—particularly the young men—would ever turn to animosity between their religious groups. There were Jews, Christians, atheists, some native Canadians, and so on. So what we learned from that is that you

have to reach beyond your religious or ethnic community to do these works, particularly for youth. We learned that.

The Chair: Thank you. That's a very good point.

Thank you. Did you have something else to add? You seem to be on a.... I hate to cut you off.

Ms. Alia Hogben: That's all right. That's about the gist, thank you.

The Chair: The feeling of having people going beyond, that's very good. Thank you. It's very positive.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Just one thing, I was taken by the name of the project as well. I thought it was very—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam O'Neill Gordon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Duncan, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of you for coming. We're most grateful.

I'm going to begin. I'm just looking for a yes or no answer. To the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, were you consulted in the formation of the minister's action plan for family violence?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: No.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

I ask the same question to Ms. Hogben.

Ms. Alia Hogben: We didn't even hear about it.

● (0945)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

To the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, I ask the same question.

Ms. Beba Svigir: No, we were not consulted.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you all.

To the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, I held a stakeholder meeting just this past Friday with 11 organizations, largely in my riding. There is real upset and anger concerning zero tolerance. I was repeatedly told that this will dissuade women from wanting to come to Canada. It will dissuade women from wanting to come forward to disclose violence. In the words of one participant, and I quote, it is "racist policy masquerading as protecting women".

I wonder if I could have your comments. What would be your recommendation to the committee regarding that bill, please?

Ms. Alia Hogben: I guess I'm so depressed and disappointed that the Government of Canada, which is my government as much as it is yours, would use such language. It doesn't go with the tradition of Canada.

We have a charter of rights. We have a Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Why the heck—sorry—would we talk about immigrants being barbaric, as if we're so pure and pristine that none of this happens here? Why do that? I don't understand the rationale for it, unless it's to develop hysteria among people, to divide people, to make it more difficult for immigrants, for visible minority groups, living here. What is it, and why roll it up to do with immigration law?

Why haven't we dealt with Bountiful? I checked, and they've been practising all of these things since 1950. My answer back, which is what I will be presenting next week to the Senate committee, is on whether it is because they're white or because they're Christians.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: What would be your recommendation to the committee regarding that bill?

Ms. Alia Hogben: I think it should be dumped.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Ms. Alia Hogben: I'm being honest, aren't I?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

I have another question, Ms. Hogben.

You've discussed the unique barriers that Muslim women face when leaving an abusive relationship. What specific recommendations would you make to this committee to alleviate those challenges?

Ms. Alia Hogben: I think I will share it with the group from Calgary.

Muslims have been here since the 1800s, by the way, so it's not just immigrant Muslim women that I'm talking about. I know the Calgary group are talking about immigrant women, but it's any woman. Again, I'd like to universalize it and say that any woman who leaves a relationship, I mean who ends up having a bad time....

With the Muslims, it is also that living in a community is very powerful for us, so when you leave a relationship, are you in a sense leaving your whole community? How do you counterbalance that? Women are leaving, but as I think Bonnie said, Muslim women don't come forward very easily. They always put themselves behind or after their family and their children.

Again, I think it's how the services are provided, the kind of care that can be given by our court systems, the police, the social workers. I think it's an understanding kind of attitude that is required.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Again, to Ms. Hogben, one of the things we've heard is the difficulty in partnering with government due to lack of access to funding, but also to decision-makers.

Would you like to comment on that?

Ms. Alia Hogben: I would love to comment on that.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: What recommendation would you like to see in the report?

Ms. Alia Hogben: It follows up with your question about whether we're part of a plan.

I'll talk about the Status of Women as an example, because multicultural has a closed shop, it seems to us. We're not getting any

funding at all from the multiculturalism department. With regard to the Status of Women, we have no problem with the government setting its priorities as to what is needed. The Status of Women is now focusing on economics and jobs and breaking down barriers. Good for them. Fair enough. However, don't then close the door, close the financial help, the resources that you can give us, to fight violence against women. There seems to be no funding being put in there.

Again, I am not denying that you need to do something about employment—it's very important—but for heaven's sake don't lessen the priority of violence against women.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So the recommendation to the committee would be...?

• (0950)

Ms. Alia Hogben: This is a huge subject.

When you think about violence against women, people don't realize what comes under that heading, that rubric. You heard from DAWN about what's going on. You heard specifically about immigrants, and you've heard about us. Muslim women come from every strata of society, every nationality. There aren't Muslims who aren't coming in from.... Also, it's any other woman. We'd fight for the right of an Amish woman, or the Bountiful women—anyone. How can you say that violence against women shouldn't be a high priority all of the time?

We've just had all of this attention, and honestly, to tell you the truth, I wish we didn't have all that attention in the paper just now. There's a little sign in the cloakroom saying, "What do you do about a man who says your skirt is so short?" How do you deal with that? For goodness sake, this is all part of violence against women. It's how do you deal with women as equals?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

To the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, I want to really thank you for highlighting the violence that women in the disabled community face. When I was at the university, I had young women I worked with who had been raped not once on campus, but twice.

What specific recommendation would you make to improve accessibility to our services and housing for disabled women who have experienced violence? What's the number one recommendation?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: It's that larger discussion again, I think, because we all feel we need to do this, to come back to the idea that what we need to do is to develop a national action plan that's inclusive of all women with disabilities, that understands that each woman has an individual need, and that her supports need to be built around who she is as a person, where she lives. Those intersections become critical, rather than saying I want specific things, because the depth and the breadth of the issues for women with disabilities is enormous.

As the largest minority group in the world, at more than half a billion, that's the number for women with disabilities. It's the largest minority group in the world with the highest rates of violence. I don't think there's any question that, obviously, disability supports are critical.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: May I add one thing?

The Chair: Very briefly.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Yes.

The one thing I would also like to add to this is that we're especially compromised when it comes to shelters, transitional housing, and housing. Housing has to accommodate families: parents with disabilities, where the mother may be disabled and also the children may be disabled. Housing is mostly geared as single one-bedroom apartments, and a lot of our women and their children come into care because of it. That is one huge problem.

Also even in addictions kinds of settings, in our homeless shelters, women cannot stay as long as men. There are fewer beds. Those kinds of things are absolutely crucial in the housing area.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that precision.

[Translation]

Ms. Ambler, you have five minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of our guests today for such informative presentations.

I was particularly taken by your talk of ableism, Carmela and Bonnie, because that's something I honestly hadn't.... I'm not sure I've heard the term before. I don't think so. I feel like I've learned a lot from your presentations, so thank you for that.

I'm trying to see the issue of violence against women from the perspective of disabled women who are clearly at greater risk, as possibly are immigrant women. I'd like to ask you to elaborate a bit on a couple of the comments you made with regard to sexualization of young women, cyberbullying, and portrayal in the media.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: We were very concerned, as I said, when Bonnie and I were first getting to know each other and developing our working relationship, about how the media was portraying young women. When you look at the current music

videos and see younger and younger women who are more and more scantily clad, and that young girls are emulating these moves and these behaviours and those sorts of things, it's very concerning because we see people are getting into situations that are not readily apparent.

I had a call from one woman who had engaged in a sexual interaction with someone online, and then when that person referred to the video she didn't realize that her web cam, if video goes out on it, could video capture. A lot of this is that parents, women, and girls, are unaware at how quickly a photo could be taken and transmitted. Very sadly, that led to the two young women who committed suicide as a result of the bullying that happened around that, and the bullying that continues to happen.

When the father of Rehtaeh Parsons went on Facebook.... You know, he's getting comments a year later that are absolutely despicable. That kind of bullying simply doesn't let up. It happens even to our public figures. It happens to ordinary citizens.

That's one thing that we really see as one of the dangers—

• (0955)

Mrs. Stella Ambler: No, that's okay; we want to hear from you.

It's a challenge, I think, because we want our young people to have healthy attitudes and healthy relationships, and we want that all to start young. But the societal pressures seem to be different today from what they were 20 or 25 years ago. They're more magnified, I think, because of social media.

I'm wondering if you could perhaps tell us how we can help disabled women, what programs there are to help them cope, or even just what advice we could give.

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: I think the important thing to understand is that young women with disabilities want to be included like everyone else. Young women with disabilities definitely want to be included. They're not doing anything any different from other young women out there.

Coming back to my inclusion message, Stella, the inclusive practice message is the one that I carry. Carmela has been very good about pointing out the specific needs of women with disabilities. I keep coming back to inclusive practice, because really we need to see that all women are part of a community and that the larger community understands individual needs. I keep referring back to our colleagues from an intersectional perspective.

Specifically for young women with disabilities, we need to see, for example, the partnership that I described coming out of these projects. One of them is with YWCA Canada. YWCA Canada is an important partner for DAWN going forward, obviously, because if we can support YWCA Canada having inclusive programs for young women with disabilities, then we realize full inclusion while addressing a larger issue for all young women.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: In fact YMCA did come and speak to our committee. They told us about their #NOTokay program, and I think another one, “we can tell and we will tell”.

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Actually, “we can tell and we will tell” is ours.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Yes. Those are all great.

I think they tie in with some of the things happening today that you mentioned, Alia, with respectful workplaces, sexual harassment in the workplace—

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: We have a positive campaign right now on Twitter, on Facebook, and on all social media. I think that's an important way that DAWN Canada is addressing it—through social media, directly, out there in that conversation.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you.

The Chair: That's great.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Ms. Ambler.

Mrs. Sellah, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

First, I would like to thank all the women who came to give us their presentations.

As you said, we are all women, and we have something in common: violence against women.

My question is for Ms. Hogben.

I know that you are doing outstanding work in the community of Muslim women. In recent weeks, we have heard about the need for education on gender dynamics that at the same time emphasizes violence against women. As we know, women experience violence at a very young age, even in school. We have also heard testimony from female students who spoke about the violence they experienced on campus. This is a security issue.

With regard to Muslim women, aside from the training you provide, do you think a program would help you round out that training? Indeed, I've also heard that you have given training to female Muslim leaders so they can train other women and educate them on violence against women in that community. Could you tell us more about that?

• (1000)

[English]

Ms. Alia Hogben: First, if I may address this, although we are concentrating on Canadian Muslim women we don't do this alone. We feel very strongly that no one group can manage it. We always

work with sister organizations whatever we do. We're partnering with.... I could mention all the other organizations that we work with. That's the main thing I want to put forward, that nobody is doing this by themselves.

The other thing is that if we got more money—and we've asked for it and did not get it—we'd like to continue doing some more workshops. We did a program some years ago now with young women in high schools. We had to focus on a few because of the lack of funds. We did it around the GTA area. We went into schools and worked with young women there to build their self-confidence. What had happened at that time.... This is now seven or eight years ago. I don't know if you all remember but in one particular school the young boys were sexually assaulting and picking on young Muslim girls. It was a big horror story at that time. We wondered why they were being picked on. The answer from the young males was that they don't tell. We thought we would go into the schools. We went to seven schools and talked to the young women about building their self-confidence so they could stand up and say that this was happening to them. I don't know how successful it was but we certainly gave it a try.

Any funds to go on working on building self-confidence, particularly in younger women, we all share the need for that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Do I have any time left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Actually, Ms. Hogben, you've already answered my question.

Personally, I'm wondering about cuts to the NPOs, non-profit organizations. These organizations help the communities, regardless of their specific nature. How do you get by with fewer resources? What could the federal government do to help you do your work? God knows how diverse and complex it is.

[English]

Ms. Alia Hogben: Very simply, I think all of us would say to you that we would like to be treated as if we were partners in any of the work we're doing. One of the things I've been saying ad nauseam for years and years is that we really carry out what you set as your mandate to the government. You say we're going to work on this and this project and then you turn to us and we do the actual work, and it's a hell of a lot of work. We're out there in the community. You don't know the communities, I'm so sorry to say. You know the communities but not the same way that we know the communities. We go out and do the actual work with the communities. So treat us as if we were together on anything rather than as if we're something apart. We're all together in it. I'm a great one for "inclusivity"—Bonnie used that word—and universalizing things. That's what I think we would all agree with. Also, listen to us. Sometimes you feel you're not being heard.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your answers.

Ms. Young, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Hi. I just want to say thank you so much for the information that you've brought us today. It's been extremely helpful and extremely insightful.

To address your point, since you were just there—may I call you Alia?

•(1005)

Ms. Alia Hogben: Please.

Ms. Wai Young: I've actually spent 25 years working in the immigrant settlement communities so I do feel I know the communities a little bit.

Ms. Alia Hogben: Yes, you do.

Ms. Wai Young: I founded the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, which is the umbrella group for all the immigrant settlement agencies across Canada. I have developed and implemented many different policies and programs in my previous work.

Ms. Alia Hogben: So you're a good combination?

Ms. Wai Young: Part of the reason that we're here today is to look at the best practices and to try to learn from them. There are so many, such as the work that you're doing, which has just been acclaimed by the international organization. That is phenomenal. I think that investments of half a million dollars are substantial. As you know, immigrant settlement funding has tripled since 2006 when this government took over. I know that there's been funding being poured into this sector from all the different departments. Perhaps in your area we need to look at sharing those best practices, which is why we're here today.

I want to focus on a couple of questions that I have. One of them is surrounding our people in Calgary. Thank you so much for the incredible work that you do there. I know about Calgary a little bit because I have a very good friend, Fariborz, who runs the Calgary immigrant settlement sector. There's a settlement agency there, which you probably know about.

Just to clarify, did you say that you've now expanded and you now do work in 120 different locations? Did I get that wrong in my notes?

Ms. Beba Svigir: That's it, exactly.

Ms. Wai Young: Has there been an expansion of your services and programs over the last however long you have been in service?

Ms. Beba Svigir: It has been 32 years.

We had a huge expansion through our head office downtown. But it is really in line with the mandate of the agency to ensure that no immigrant woman stays behind without access to services because of lack of resources to travel to downtown Calgary with three or four children, or any kind of mobility—

Ms. Wai Young: This is amazing

May I just ask you, in the interest of time, because I only have five minutes and I have six different questions...?

Please, feel free to send us more information, because I'm very interested to know, because this is a sector that I've worked in for more than 25 years across Canada and it's very near and dear to my heart.

Can you share with us how much your programs and services have grown in the last 10 years in terms of budget, as well as staffing and also locations?

Ms. Beba Svigir: In the last 10 years we've had a growth of 800%. In the last 10 years we went from a \$1.6-million budget to \$10 million. We quadrupled our space, we tripled the services in the community, and we increased our staff numbers by three times. In terms of client service, we went from 3,000 clients served in 2005 to 18,500 clients served last year.

All of them are immigrant women. Our primary client is always an immigrant woman; however, that holistic support to immigrant families includes serving the whole family. That has seen an amazing increase in employability outcomes for our clients, in the outcomes that relate to family cohesion, and a huge impact on the outcomes that relate to school readiness for immigrant children and school success for youth in high schools in Calgary.

Ms. Wai Young: May I just ask, then, to your knowledge, have agencies and organizations like yours across Canada experienced similar growth and similar growth in funding—?

Ms. Beba Svigir: They have probably not seen similar growth, but they must have experienced growth.

I can talk to you about Alberta, because I am a member of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies. We have seen reasonable growth just because the number of immigrants coming to Alberta annually has increased by quite a large margin in the last few years.

Ms. Wai Young: Absolutely, and that's because the Department of Immigration has sustained quite high numbers of immigration, even though we've had an economic downturn and the fragile economy and all of that.

Can I just quickly ask these other agencies to also submit to us their lists of programs and services, funding levels, and growth in the last 10 years?

Thank you very much.

•(1010)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Barlow, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow (Macleod, CPC): Thank you.

I also want to speak to the ladies in Calgary.

Reading through some of the information and listening to some of the things you spoke about today, you talked about our always having that first generation of immigrants, about its being something we'll always have to deal with. I think that something we really want to focus on is how we break that cycle. How do we stop this from continuing from generation to generation?

You talked about the success you've had with your holistic approach. When I was looking through your information, I came across a program called SMILES, the "small multicultural immigrants learning early strategies" program, and I was interested in it.

Could you explain a little bit more about that? I know that it focuses on young children. I'm wondering whether gender-centred sensitivity education is part of that program. If you don't mind, just explain a little bit about SMILES for me, please.

Ms. Beba Svigir: That's a very good question.

In line with this holistic approach and the community programs and services, this program provides child care support for all of the 120 community locations where we offer programs outside of the main office. This means that all women who attend those programs in different locations also have access to child care. Their children receive language support, cognitive support, peer support, and they work with curriculum. They receive full integration support while the mother is attending whatever program CIWA is offering.

This program is famous for one unique thing. Many children in this program actually speak their first language, English, in one of those locations. That's how the program impacts the ability of an immigrant child and an immigrant mother and the whole immigrant family to slowly start pacing their way in integrating into Canada and in knowing what they need to prepare their children for success.

Mr. John Barlow: You were talking about how, when immigrants come to Canada, they don't necessarily know the laws and culture of their new country. Is that part of the education process as well?

From my perspective, I really want to focus on how we also have to include men and boys in this type of education. Is there some

training? Is part of that SMILES for young boys that things are different here?

Ms. Beba Svigir: Yes. In the program boys and girls are attending together, so yes, the boys are included.

However, for immigrant boys between the ages of 12 and 16, we actually offer gender education sessions in high schools and junior high schools in Calgary. We have parallel groups with boys and girls, and then co-educational groups with boys and girls, for exactly the same reason: to ensure that immigrant boys are well prepared and educated to take ownership and responsibility for the elimination of gender violence in immigrant families.

We believe in educating brothers, sons, and future husbands of immigrant women who live in Canada, assuming that some of those girls will marry somebody from their culture. It's very important that they take ownership of the process.

They are very active. Their attendance rates in those gender violence education sessions are extremely high, and we have had amazing success on that ownership level for immigrant boys.

We also provide men's support groups as part of our family violence program. We provide support for women who report family violence to us and seek support, but we also work with their husbands. We also provide men peer support groups as a preventative option for immigrant men to talk about family violence rather than discuss instances of family violence. It's really orientation and proactive engagement of immigrant men in making sure, as a preventative option, that they know what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and do not engage in those behaviours.

•(1015)

Mr. John Barlow: Perfect. Thank you.

Can I...?

The Chair: A little question with a little answer, yes....

Mr. John Barlow: Just lastly, if you can do it quickly, what is the message that we can take from those programs for boys at the junior high school and high school levels? Is there a best message we can take from those that maybe other organizations or programs can follow?

Ms. Beba Svigir: Yes, in terms of best practice, it's a full-fledged program with different components of the curriculum. It's a program we have started together with the Canadian Women's Foundation. That program has been reciprocated through the network of the Canadian Women's Foundation's services, and I believe they're in all provinces and territories.

We have annual conferences where we share best practices with all the service providers in that particular network, and they are being accepted. We share curricula and best practices. We also share the evaluation results and experiences through the program.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Duncan, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before I begin, I'd just like to take a minute and say thank you to all of you for the work you do each and every day. It is tremendously difficult work to support women and families through some of the hardest days of their lives. I know many people who work in the line of work you do often develop PTSD from hearing the stories. I know all my colleagues would like to join me in saying thank you for the work you do.

While I'm very glad to hear that Calgary has seen an increase in funds, we want to ensure that we have sustainable funding for organizations across the country and in all areas. We haven't always seen that in Ontario.

To the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, can you discuss your thoughts on the DCO list and on conditional permanent status, please?

Ms. Beba Svigir: Our experience with the concept of conditional permanent resident status is that we would like to see permanent status being considered a tool to support immigrants to develop their ability to be successful applicants to stay in Canada.

So from that point of view we are working with our colleagues in the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies to provide the response based on our overall experiences with the clients who would come to us through that particular stream and how that would relate to the services we provide, the nature of the clients we see, and the number of clients under this category who would be accessing our services.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Is there a recommendation you'd like to make to the committee?

Ms. Beba Svigir: On this one, probably not, because for any new idea and for any new concept, we like to discuss it as the provincial body to be sure our recommendation comes from the overall Alberta immigrant group and that we provide a recommendation that will serve the agency best but also the clients who would be coming through that area. We're in the process of having meetings to discuss this.

•(1020)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you very much.

To the DisAbleD Women's Network, you've talked about how it's very hard for women to come forward. Are there changes we could make? Are there recommendations you would like to make to the committee that could change that?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Consistent funding for the work around violence against women is absolutely critical. The possibility of

continuing to do the work we're doing is one of the important ways this happens. Because we're talking about something systemic and long-standing, long-standing and systemic things don't change overnight. We need a long-term vision to end violence against women with disabilities and deaf women in this country. It doesn't happen during the course of one project.

We have a vision at DAWN Canada. We know some of the instruments the federal government could be using to work with us and with other partners across the country to begin to develop a really clear strategic plan. One of the envelopes I think of is the enabling accessibility fund, which Mr. Flaherty was instrumental in developing here in Canada. Because if the enabling accessibility fund, for example, were targeted to shelters and transition houses as part of a coordinated call from Status of Women and the Canadian Women's Foundation, as an example, these kinds of strategic approaches, looking not for one year, not for two years, but over 10 years to see us build a national network of shelters, transition houses, and supports for women with disabilities are doable. They are doable if we make the commitments today, and if we understand it's not about what happens today, but it's about making this long-term plan so things change.

For 30 years DAWN Canada has said what the issue is and understood what the issue is and made recommendations. In order for us to move past the recommendations to concrete plans, this project, the one DAWN Canada is currently doing with Status of Women Canada, coupled with some of the other things I talked about, including using instruments the federal government has in its power now, could make that difference. In 10 years from now we could have what we need in this country, which is a national network of accessible shelters and transition houses for women with disabilities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

There is enough time left for two more committee members to ask their questions.

Ms. Young, you have five minutes, followed by Ms. Ashton, also for five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you again, and I'd like to thank my colleague for the extra time, just because there is so much rich information here.

Ms. Brayton, thank you so much for bringing up the disability fund and how that's working in alignment, obviously, with the Status of Women fund, along with some of the other ones we talked about earlier—

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: It isn't aligned now, but it could be.

Ms. Wai Young: Hopefully that is something you are working on, because you're obviously very good in your role as a national organization looking at helping us work on this.

Can you tell us a little bit more about this \$500,000 study you're doing right now? What are the top outcomes you hope to achieve out of this?

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: As I said, it's a community development project. The costs are definitely related to the geographical scope of the project, so it's important to understand that \$500,000 is not a lot of money when you're talking about 13 sites across the country. It is again, as I said, what we were doing, and it's a stepped process. Through that process of convening at the community level and through these research projects—as I said, community research that has a purpose is the best way to describe it—what we've been able to develop are.... The next stage of this project, which is what we're rolling out now and begins over the winter, will be workshops that are, again, at the community level, working with service providers and people who work with people with disabilities and women with disabilities, specifically, but also, of course, working with women with disabilities, themselves. It's a convening process to bring people together around the common objective of making change.

Also, education at the service and policy level is critical, along with educating women with disabilities about their rights.

I talked about the fact that women don't feel safe to disclose. Well, we have to put in place at the community level the resources so that they can disclose safely and know that, if they do choose to disclose, they'll be supported to follow through.

I really appreciate the fact that this opportunity through the community fund is allowing us to start to demonstrate how change happens. It isn't the answer, it's the beginning of the answer, and that answer lies with curriculum and education across, as I said, all the stakeholders.

Ms. Wai Young: Absolutely.

I was really very heartened to hear that you're working with other partners on this, like the YWCA of Canada, etc. I assume there are going to be some in-kind costs, and all of those kinds of things, where you can possibly meet in a meeting space. Being embedded in the local community is a very good thing.

• (1025)

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: The mantra at DAWN Canada is “leadership, partnership, and networking”. That's because we're one agency serving millions of women in this country and the only agency that's focused on women with disabilities and deaf women in Canada. It's one of the few in the world. I think that speaks to something.

I said earlier to this committee, we're the largest minority group in the world, at half a billion. We are the poorest, with the highest rates of violence, the lowest rates of education, the lowest rates of employment, and the highest rates of poverty. So you're looking at and you're listening to the most underserved group in the world today.

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you so much.

In the very few minutes I have left I want to just turn to early, forced and child marriage, because as you know this an issue that's close to all of our hearts. It's certainly happening in Canada, as you say, Alia, as well as internationally.

Canada is in fact one of the leaders in pushing this at the United Nations. I was fortunate enough to be at the United Nations this summer and to meet with our team that is leading this. They've now received dozens of countries that have signed on to this initiative internationally, and we are leading this internationally.

I would like to ask this to our Calgary friends who are doing such great work in this area. When I was involved in immigrant programs and services, learning about our laws in Canada was one of the things we embedded into the language training, as well as any training that we provided across Canada in the different courses that reached out to those tens of thousands of women and families who came through our doors across Canada to receive settlement training in what coming to Canada was all about, what Canadian laws were all about. Is this something that is still being provided in your various training programs and services?

Ms. Beba Svirgic: Yes—

Ms. Wai Young: That early, forced and child marriage is not legal and is not supported in Canada...?

Please, go ahead.

Ms. Beba Svirgic: Yes, thank you.

Absolutely. Through the initial settlement program, which is the first step for any client coming to our agency, they receive individual orientation and also group orientation in family laws and Canadian laws. We have a civic engagement program that has been running at CIWA for four years now, which does everything relating to rights and responsibilities in Canada, including civic participation, voting, and understanding the system, resources, and opportunities in the system. But we're also really focused on the responsibilities in Canada and making sure they understand that when they come to Canada, immigrants need to abide by Canadian laws and that there are services to help them. I'll give an example—

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have for now.

Ms. Ashton, you can have one question, because we are pressed for time.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I want to preface my question by clearing the air a bit. There's been an attempt to bring forward the greatness of the Status of Women department and this government vis-à-vis funding for women's organizations. We all know in this room, and those of us tuning in, that a lot more is left to be desired. There have been deep cuts in this department. They've affected all of the organizations that have come before us and they affect Canadian women deeply.

I do want to bring attention to one area that we haven't had a chance to discuss today, and perhaps is a reflection of the way in which women in our country and women coming to our country have been dealt a very heavy blow. I am referring to refugee women, many of whom come with disabilities, with deep trauma, and who have been not just left out in the cold by this government, but seriously have been slapped in the face. In fact, we know that Canadian courts have ruled—

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, could you put your question right away because we only have one minute?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Canadian courts have ruled that the health cuts have been cruel and unusual. I would like all three organizations to comment on that.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: We never had health equity even before the cuts. Even with respect to migration, migration for disabled women, we are constantly oppressed. We have people who try to bring their children with disabilities and are turned away at the borders. Families are separated when they can't bring their disabled members.

In terms of health equity, in terms of anything that pertains to women's issues, I cannot stress enough the fact that we were behind before the cuts. We are more profoundly behind now.

The one other point that I would quickly like to make with respect to funding is that funding for inclusion should be designated in any funding envelope. It should be adequate, so that my sisters at these tables can also accommodate people with disabilities in their programs and seminars as well, because, as Bonnie outlined, we cannot always do this alone. We also need funding to do our own work and we can't say it enough.

● (1030)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That will conclude our meeting. We have a little bit of business to take care of.

I want to thank all the witnesses from all across Canada who have come and shared their testimony with us.

We will suspend for a few minutes in order for the committee to do some future business.

Madam Young.

Ms. Wai Young: Madam Chair, in the interests of accuracy, we did have a departmental official at this committee meeting and she did outline very factually that, in fact, funding to Status of Women has increased over time. There have been no program cuts.

Can we have her come back to this committee to just clarify, since there seemed to be a lot of misinformation at this table?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Young, for the clarification. It's very much appreciated by all members of the committee and by our guests.

We will suspend for a few minutes. We will ask our guests to leave the room since we are going in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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