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

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**Chair**

**Mr. Bryan May**



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

Wednesday, February 15, 2017

• (0835)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)):** Good morning, everybody.

I would like to welcome all of the witnesses here today. We got in fairly late last night, but we had a wonderful breakfast this morning. We have our coffee. We're ready to listen and to hear what you have to say.

Given the number of witnesses we have on this panel, we're going to suggest seven minutes for opening remarks. If you have given us notes ahead of time, that's great. I can follow along and see how much time you have versus how much script is left. If you see this mike go on, it means we're either right up against the time or you're over time. I'll usually let you go on a little bit longer if it sounds like you're wrapping up. If I do have to interrupt, please forgive me. We have a full slate today, and the committee members have a number of questions that they want to get to as well.

Welcome.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is resuming its study of poverty reduction strategies. Today, obviously, we are here in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the home province of MP Niki Ashton. She's playing host to us today.

To start, we have, from the Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation, Mr. Allan Wise, executive director. From the City of Edmonton, we have Kate Gunn, director of community inclusion and investment with the department of citizen services. From EndPovertyEdmonton, we have Jeff Bisanz, co-chair. From the Right to Housing Coalition, we have Tyler Pearce, chair of the federal working group in Manitoba, and Clark Brownlee, member of the federal working group in Manitoba. Representing the University of Winnipeg is vice-president of research and innovation at the institute of urban studies, Mr. Jino Distasio.

Welcome to all of you. There are a number of you, so we're going to get started right away.

We're going to start with Mr. Allan Wise, from the Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation. The next seven minutes are yours, sir.

**Mr. Allan Wise (Executive Director, Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You have a copy of my presentation before you, so I'm going to start by reading it, and please stop me if you have any specific questions.

I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for the opportunity given to me today to speak about the Income Tax Act in considering applications for charitable status for organizations whose purpose is poverty alleviation.

In my respectful submission, this matter is very important because many organizations like mine are faced with the challenge of applying for charitable status.

Since 2009, CNDC has twice attempted to gain charitable status to seek alternative sources of funding through a charitable foundation and to move toward organizational sustainability. Our application for a charitable status has been declined both times, and we are currently undergoing a review process by CRA.

The basic reason for declining our application, we have been told, is failing to establish how our activities in the community lead to poverty relief. The challenge is that the Income Tax Act, the legislation based on which an organization is granted charitable status, does not contain a definition of charitable nor a definition of poverty. Therefore, what's deemed charitable is left to be determined through legal interpretation of common law conventions and practices derived from the 1601 Statute of Charitable Uses, or commonly referred to as Statute of Elizabeth.

While the preamble to the statute considers acts like helping humankind, maintenance of schools, houses, food banks, and highways, looking after the poor and the elderly, and many other publicly beneficial acts as having charitable purpose, it does not lend itself to the more contemporary progressive agenda of the charitable sector that has become a significant economic actor in Canada.

For example, minimizing the societal ills of low graduation rates in inner-city schools through ancillary programs offered to underserved schools, or promotion of commerce by allocating microloans to small local businesses to flourish in areas experiencing business lags are not seen as charitable activities, because empowering marginalized communities does not fit the traditional definition of charitable acts.

A positive step toward a comprehensive strategy for poverty reduction in Canada would be legislative inclusion of services offered through organizations like the NRCs, neighbourhood renewal corporations, aimed at empowering the disadvantaged population and entrenching a progressive definition of charitable and poverty relief that would include those of no means as well as those with moderate needs who certainly are at the same risk of experiencing poverty.

A constructive measure toward developing an inclusive and proactive strategy for poverty reduction could be initiated by amending the Income Tax Act or through enabling legislation.

The relief of human suffering from disaster and destitution in times of crisis is a purpose beneficial to the community and is considered charitable, so then should be the provision of proactive and preventive services to disadvantaged groups by means of examining the scope and outcome of those activities. Thus far, the act has been interpreted by CRA with an emphasis on charitable activities rather than charitable purposes that would benefit the community over the long term.

Allow me to further elaborate my point by using activities of my agency as an example.

We are a neighbourhood renewal corporation charged with delivering community economic development in three economically stressed areas here in core Winnipeg: Central Park, Centennial, and West Alexander. These areas are designated major improvement areas by the city and are selected as a designated community by the Manitoba Community Renewal Act.

We have found in the past that serving the complex needs of unique communities like these, characterized by higher than average unemployment, higher than average populations with core housing needs, higher than average instances of living below the poverty line, higher than average cases of high school dropout, and higher than average rates of incarceration, requires a more progressive approach by the act in defining poverty and charitable acts.

● (0840)

That is why I'd like to submit to the committee that an entrenched, progressive, expanded, and inclusive definition of "charitable" and "poverty relief" in the Income Tax Act would be beneficial to the community and would constitute a small but effective step towards a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy for Canada. As the French novelist Victor Hugo once said, nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wise.

We are going to move on to Kate Gunn from the City of Edmonton and Jeffrey Bisanz from EndPovertyEdmonton.

I understand that you did rock paper scissors and Mr. Bisanz will begin. Are you sharing your seven minutes?

**Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz (Co-Chair, EndPovertyEdmonton):** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. Do you want me to let you know when we're at the halfway point?

**Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz:** No, that will be fine.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

**Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz:** We have some slides that were handed out, in both English and French, so if you'd like to follow along, you're welcome to.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Jeff Bisanz, and I am a community co-chair of EndPovertyEdmonton. I am here today with Kate Gunn of the City of Edmonton.

As a new community-driven collective for change in Edmonton, we welcome your work toward developing a national poverty reduction strategy. We know that ending poverty is a generational effort that demands investment from all orders of government and the enthusiastic commitment of citizens. We appreciate the participation in EndPovertyEdmonton by member of Parliament Randy Boissonnault and representatives of our provincial government.

In 2014, our mayor, Don Iveson, convened a task force that has sparked a community movement to end the poverty in our city within a generation. Following two years of research, consultation, and community planning, EndPovertyEdmonton was launched to steward this work.

Edmonton has a strategy to end, not merely manage, poverty. It also has a five-year road map containing 35 starting-point actions. In December 2016, the Edmonton city council unanimously approved a significant multi-year investment to kick-start implementation of our plan, one we believe is progressive, inclusive, and maybe even visionary.

I'll mention four key features. First, we believe that how we define poverty shapes our solutions. Our indigenous round table helped us see that poverty requires a holistic approach. We define poverty not just as a lack of financial resources, but also as a lack of social and cultural resources that enable connection to community. Second, we believe that we are all treaty people, and that ending poverty is a very profound act of reconciliation. Third, we believe that ending poverty is an issue of human rights and equality. While charity is good, justice is better. We are eager to lead a human rights approach to ending poverty. Finally, we believe that we need to reframe how we see, talk about, and respond to poverty. Edmonton is therefore focused on growing a grassroots movement for change.

Our written submission includes a cornerstone recommendation, six specific areas for action, and a final capacity-building recommendation. Today, we highlight the key cornerstone recommendation and three of the six areas of recommendations.

Our cornerstone recommendation is that Edmonton be considered as a viable, ready-to-go pilot community in the tackling poverty together project. Our anti-poverty landscape is deep and engaged. We have high-level political commitment from the city and the province, robust community infrastructure in EndPovertyEdmonton, and committed investments. Our road map for action is already funded and under way. Alberta's capital city is ready and keen to be a strong case study site that illustrates a reconciliation and rights-based approach to ending poverty.

We encourage you to invest in the next generation. We know that children who grow up in poverty are often exposed to experiences and environments that disrupt healthy development and contribute to negative outcomes, such as mental and physical illness, continued poverty, criminality, and addictions. After-the-fact remediation is expensive and often not as effective as intervening earlier. Providing a supportive environment to young children and their families is not just a smart move economically; it is essential to our commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Edmonton, we are working to develop a practical plan for an integrated system of early learning and care. We are also working with municipal, provincial, and other partners to develop policies and practices that support such a system.

At the federal level, the new Canada benefit will have a significant and positive impact on low-income families with children. We welcome further engagement by the federal government in three areas: first, improving the quality and affordability of early learning and care, as well as the number of spaces; second, developing, with the provinces, a strategy to build the well-educated workforce needed for high-quality care; and third, ensuring that research is conducted nationally to support continued improvements in learning and care.

Kate, go ahead.

● (0845)

**Ms. Kate Gunn (Director, Community Inclusion and Investment, Citizen Services, City of Edmonton):** Thank you.

We urge the government to support cities to build stronger, more prosperous neighbourhoods. That's because we see that cities are drivers of change in this country and that neighbourhoods are the arenas where this change becomes tangible. Neighbourhoods really play a critical, transformative role in tackling poverty as labs where resources and creativity can come together and where ideas can move to action. Cities don't do it alone, however, and innovative partnerships with other orders of government will really spark change.

As part of our road map for change for the next five years, one of our first actions in Edmonton is the creation of a new community development corporation. It was just launched in January in Edmonton, and it integrates housing, community economic development, job training, and local business revitalization. We're pleased to say that the leadership for this comes from the Edmonton Community Foundation, which is going to incubate and lead this new organization in our community. In December, it received five years of operational funding from the City of Edmonton to kick-start its work, and a \$10-million commitment to parcels of land for development from the city. We anticipate that in the next five years the new CDC will be able to leverage diverse community investment to really stimulate economic growth in some of our poorer neighbourhoods.

On anti-racism and reconciliation, it's very clear that there's an inextricable link between racism and poverty. Although anti-racism didn't appear in your discussion paper as a key area of action, we do believe at EndPovertyEdmonton that it is fundamental to addressing poverty. In fact, we heard from thousands of Edmontonians who were engaged in our process that, if we do all the work to eliminate or end

poverty that we have in our road map and we don't address changing attitudes, shifting values, and the culture in the way we talk about poverty and racism, we will not end poverty.

It's time for innovative solutions, and a couple that we have—

● (0850)

**The Chair:** Excuse me. What is that?

Go ahead. Sorry for the interruption.

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** No, that's good.

In Edmonton, a very exciting project that is part of our road map is something called the Edmonton Shift Lab. It's a human-centred and -designed social innovation lab led by our skills society and the community foundation to explore this intersection of racism, poverty, and housing. It is launching this spring a new tool as a prototype to support rental companies and landlords to assess their practices in terms of bias and discrimination and to help renters understand their rights as well.

A second example in our road map is the creation of a new indigenous community culture and wellness centre. We're located in Edmonton on Treaty 6 territory and, as Jeff has explained, reconciliation lies at the heart of our EndPovertyEdmonton plan for action. We heard that it was long overdue, a new culture and wellness centre in our city, so we would encourage the federal government to continue to advance on the actions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to support innovative community-based approaches into addressing racism as part of a national, rights-driven anti-poverty strategy.

Finally, building capacity—

**The Chair:** We have to evacuate. We're going to suspend then until we figure out what's going on here.

● (0850)

(Pause)

● (0850)

**The Chair:** It was a false alarm. We're going to recommence.

I'll give you about 30 seconds, if that's okay.

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** Thank you.

We urge you to continue your investment in community-based anti-racism and anti-poverty initiatives, and we'd like to close today with the words of Nelson Mandela, "Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings."

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Moving on, from the Right to Housing Coalition, we have Tyler Pearce and Clark Brownlee joining us.

Tyler, please, the next seven minutes are yours.

**Ms. Tyler Pearce (Chair, Federal Working Group, Manitoba, Right to Housing Coalition):** Thank you.

My name is Tyler Pearce. I'm the chair of the federal working group for the Right to Housing. With me is Clark Brownlee, a member of the working group and formerly the volunteer coordinator of Right to Housing.

**Mr. Clark Brownlee (Member, Federal Working Group, Manitoba, Right to Housing Coalition):** Right to Housing Manitoba is a volunteer-run advocacy group. Our members include policy analysts, housing providers, and service providers. We have well over 50 organizational supporters in the community and in the province.

We'd be happy to share with you our written submission at a later time on how the federal government could re-engage in social housing as well as in enhanced private-sector capacity to build affordable rental housing. We cannot imagine a poverty reduction strategy that does not include a strong housing component.

**Ms. Tyler Pearce:** We will make note of income before focusing directly on housing.

In Winnipeg a household would need to make \$43,000 to afford a two-bedroom apartment, and nearly \$50,000 to afford a three-bedroom. A household made up of minimum-wage earners would need 2.2 to 2.5 full-time, minimum-wage jobs to afford either of those apartments.

The rising costs of shelter have far outstripped any increases in income, including minimum wage levels, but also including rates for social assistance. In that way, housing affordability cannot be separated from income. Any poverty reduction strategy should consider how the federal government, through its social welfare policies or its training and employment programs, can encourage increases to wage levels in partnerships with its provincial counterparts or private companies.

Other worthy measures introduced at the provincial level in Manitoba include rent assist and introducing basic income. It should be noted that renters face the highest affordability burden, particularly single parents, and overwhelmingly indigenous people, on and off reserve, are over-represented in core housing need.

● (0855)

**Mr. Clark Brownlee:** In total, 100,000 fewer Canadians are now living in social housing than in 1999, and that's not because there isn't a need. It's substantiated by the fact that 1.5 million Canadians are at risk of homelessness.

Between 1999 and 2014 Manitoba lost 5,000 units of rent-geared-to-income or social housing as their operating grants expired. Another 35,000 units are at risk, with the loss of these units expected to accelerate starting in 2022.

As people are pushed out of RGI housing they pay more of their income on shelter costs. This in turn pushes up rent, as more and more people vie for so-called affordable housing. In that way, the bottoming out of RGI units does have a serious consequence for the entire housing market. Keep in mind too that the rental universe is shrinking. New construction of rental housing has been very slow, and construction costs are rising.

Our 2015 brief outlines a list of measures that could be used to encourage new construction of rental units. This remains important

for poverty reduction because there is currently a bias against new rental construction, which also plays a role in driving up costs.

Rent-geared-to-income units are going to require an ongoing commitment. Very low-income Canadians will continue to use it. The market is not going to solve all the problems in housing, especially for people on low and moderate incomes.

Our analysis of government funding for social housing compared with the tax revenue generated by CMHC's lucrative business in mortgage backing found that while the government provided social housing funding to CMHC of about \$18 billion in the last decade, CMHC made over \$20 billion. This means that for the past decade, Canada's social housing program has been funded entirely by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's profits, with the federal government netting about \$1.3 billion in the process.

We advocate strongly that CMHC profits should be used to fund social housing.

**Ms. Tyler Pearce:** To close, we want to emphasize the short-term and long-term benefits of social housing by sharing with you the words of a manager of a deep-subsidy social housing provider in Winnipeg who serves indigenous families. He says:

We have some deep subsidies, we depend on those deep subsidies. Our tenants depend on those subsidies. When operating agreements end, the only way to exist is to raise rents. To raise rents, we become landlords, not social housing providers.

For this housing provider, the difference between being a landlord and a housing provider is a bit of understanding. He has a mandate to work with tenants to make rental payments. In the most extreme cases, some families take all month to cover their rent.

This understanding is key. He says:

Social housing providers make room to maneuver. I think families need that. And they need help here in the city because not everyone will give them that chance...

I see so many families come and go and grow. People come in as single young mothers who go to school, get a job, they work.

Successful tenants move out, he says, when their RGI rents get too high, but not everyone is that successful. He says:

We see families that do not experience that kind of growth, but they become part of the community. They are still on assistance, but their children have a different view. Their children are established in a house. They are not changing schools every six months.

We want to leave you with that as you develop a poverty reduction strategy, because we'd like the committee to remember that there are both tangible and intangible benefits to safe and stable housing. Poverty is often intergenerational. Access to good, stable, and affordable social housing is the best way to tackle intergenerational poverty.

Thank you.

● (0900)

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

Now we will hear from the University of Winnipeg.

Jino Distasio, the next seven minutes are yours, sir.

**Dr. Jino Distasio (Vice-President, Research and Innovation, Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'd like to acknowledge that my presentation takes place in Winnipeg on Treaty 1 land and the homeland of the Métis nation.

My name is Jino Distasio. I'm the director of the institute of urban studies. I've been with the university since 1999. By way of background, the institute was founded by Lloyd Axworthy in 1969. I always tell him I was one year old at the time. He doesn't like that. Since that time, we have produced well over 500 reports, publications, and pieces of critical information about housing, poverty, homelessness, mental health, and the health of communities. I think we've added to the discourse.

At the institute, we are working in an applied nature to help understand some of the complexities facing our community and to dig deeper into community-based solutions. I think that the way to do that is to begin to understand how policy plays an important role in what we're trying to do, which is to shape policy and ensure that fewer Canadians struggle with poverty, mental illness, disabilities, and other challenges.

I think it's important to note that, as an academic, I've also had an opportunity to serve on a number of boards, including Habitat for Humanity, Westminster Housing Society, and our own board. As an academic, I like to tell people that I've actually built affordable housing for Winnipeggers and others across this country in a role that I'll talk about shortly. I've also had the opportunity to pen the community plan, the HPS plan for Winnipeg, and I was on the plan to end homelessness in Winnipeg. I'm trying to bring a whole bunch of different perspectives together here.

Let me start by saying one thing I noticed in some of the different points. We talk about the government's role, and I really think that education is such a key driver. There was a question related to how we support education through things like the Canada learning bond, and all these different things. Interestingly, we were given \$750,000 and a three-year mandate by the feds to examine why there was low uptake among new Canadians and indigenous populations on the Canada savings bonds and all of these various programs.

At the end, we said simply that there are just too many barriers. How do we have a program that has so many families jumping through so many hoops? How can we not just make it automatic? How can we not just empower families through income tax or some other means, rather than making them take weeks and weeks to open a free account? This is painfully difficult and painfully problematic. It's such a simple solution. It just pains me that we had to spend three years telling people how to do it simply.

As I knew he would, Clark took some of my thunder. I have some statistics we all share on the number of Canadians struggling with homelessness—30,000 Canadians on any given night are estimated to be struggling. We know that last night, just outside our doors, many Winnipeggers, maybe upwards of 1,500, struggled. Many have lost hope. Many have fallen through the cracks.

We also know that on any given day there are probably—and I use this number all the time—upwards of 10,000 Winnipeggers that I call part of the hidden homeless population living in ramshackle

rooming houses, in SRO hotels, in unfortunate circumstances beyond their control.

We know that the core-need model puts a spotlight on Winnipeg's challenges—single families, indigenous persons, new Canadians, not only struggling with affordability but also living in apartments three to five storeys high that have no elevators. On a day when it's 30 below, it is difficult for somebody to get into and out of their apartments. We know that accessibility remains a critical challenge in a city like Winnipeg, where almost 40% of our housing stock was built before 1960. Fundamentally, we need to find ways to improve what we have, not only to expand. We have a massive amount of old housing stock.

We know that the homeless population is overrepresented by indigenous community members, perhaps 70% or higher, so we know we need unique programs and supports to deal with that. I think you quoted Lawrence Poirier from Kinew Housing. Kinew Housing remains a showcase for Canada. It is the oldest owned, operated, and managed aboriginal-based housing organization in this country. From 1970 to now, it has transformed families. It is a model.

End-of-operating agreements, however, remain a fundamental challenge in Canada.

• (0905)

To me, a simple solution would be to replace that program with a subsidy, provide a gap of a couple of hundred dollars per unit per family to support the maintenance of some of this housing. A good chunk of what has been funded by that program, at least in Winnipeg, is a hundred years old. It needs help. It doesn't need just a walk-away mortgage. It needs help.

Very quickly, let me switch gears to say that over the last eight years, I have served as the principal investigator in the the At Home/ Chez Soi project. The federal government provided academics and researchers with \$150 million to establish the Mental Health Commission of Canada. As you know, we went from five cities in this country using the housing first approach, to now perhaps 70. Housing first and the commitment of government to fund an innovative approach was transformative.

I struggle in saying how amazing it was to see a thousand people sheltered. I think in Winnipeg the success was in localizing it, giving the indigenous community members an opportunity to grow a largely American model by understanding that the local community had the answers. Ottawa didn't, the federal government didn't, but in partnership, a whole bunch of us in this city tried for six years to do something different, and we did. I think there are a lot of things that we can gain from that.

We know too that while the housing first approach is critical, housing first and putting somebody in housing doesn't end poverty. One outcome that I always share with the folks around that table is, yes, we got somebody off the streets and into housing, but we didn't end poverty. To really be transformative, we needed to add that extra dimension.

My final comments, because I know you're going to hit the button, are on the HPS model. When I mentioned that I have had the opportunity to work on Winnipeg's community plans, I've done so for a very long time. I know the original SCPI program. I know that the \$750 million helped to build shelters. But increasingly, HPS has been strangling community-based organizations with red tape, metrics, reporting, and paperwork that are killing the essence of what it used to be: a community plan. There is no community left in those plans. But let me say that HPS is critical.

I'll acknowledge too that I did work at CMHC, and they're at my heart. I think that between CMHC and HPS, CMHC brings the housing building experience. They should be building housing and HPS should be funding communities to come up with their own community-led solutions.

When we begin to think about those solutions, communities can begin to address their own needs. Whether it's mental illness and disability, and all the different challenges, what we've demonstrated in Winnipeg.... The other piece that I'm almost ashamed to say is that, for 40 years, Winnipeg has been a laboratory for every imaginable federal, provincial, and municipal intervention into poverty, urban renewal, neighbourhood change. We have spent billions of dollars experimenting, testing, and learning.

Community-based organizations that are run by the folks around this table have the answers. We just need to find a means by which to give them support funds and the ability to do the great work that they're doing, because it is being done and we've demonstrated that time and time again.

I think I'll end there. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, and well said.

We're going to get started right away with questions.

To begin today, we'll have Karen Vecchio for six minutes.

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

I'm going to start with you, Jino. I really appreciated everybody's presentations today, but specifically yours, because you seem to have done a great amount of studying on this.

Are there any approaches that we could do to streamline what the federal and provincial governments are doing to help reduce poverty in this community or across Canada? Is there anything that you would say we need to attack?

• (0910)

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Again, I would suggest that over the last 30-plus years, going back to either neighbourhood improvement programs, NIP and RRAP, and all these kinds of initiatives, I still think that the HPS framework provides a mechanism that has enabled local communities to create entities to receive federal money. I think the mandate needs to be shifted just a little to give more empowerment to communities.

We have a tremendous wealth of expertise. We export housing technologies and information through CMHC. Get them supporting organizations that are building housing, because what I see in my

roles at both Habitat for Humanity and Westminster, and the work we've been doing elsewhere, is that we're not skilled.

We have a tremendous number of community-based organizations in rural parts of Manitoba that are taking on massive capital projects without the expertise. They just have the tremendous willpower. If CMHC were empowered to provide hands-on support on the build and HPS was the organization through which to diffuse cash to communities, you could do tremendous change with very little.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

Tyler, I'm going to turn to you. You brought up the basic annual income. As part of the all-party poverty study, we're looking at this as well.

There are very different ways of looking at it. What's the cycle of it going to be? So many people will say, "This is what we need to do", but there are so many different ways of actioning it. Can you tell me what you believe is the best way of actioning the basic annual income for Canadians?

**Ms. Tyler Pearce:** I wish I could answer that. I am not an expert in basic income. All I know about it is that there are many approaches, some that actually cut social services and some that will top things up. I am going to say that I'm not the expert to speak on that.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I appreciate that.

**Ms. Tyler Pearce:** But I think we need to appreciate the push and pull between income and the cost of housing, and you have to consider both. There's not going to be a magic bullet whereby if you can raise people's income, it's going to solve their housing stress.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you very much.

That's one of the reasons I ask. I've studied this a lot. I see some positive approaches to it, and I've seen some negative approaches. We've seen that over in Europe. I believe it's Switzerland that said no to it because it was for everybody.

I'm going to ask this. Has anybody talked about the basic annual income and had a greater access to the information? Jino, have you studied it at all?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Manitoba did try the guaranteed income program.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Yes, the Dauphin—

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Again, we always look at that.

My view remains that income is one part of this. Again, maybe as an educator, I still feel that, as we all know, the single greatest determinant of well-being and healthy outcomes is education. Education to me is the piece.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you very much. I agree very greatly.

Kate, I believe you brought this up. When we talk about some of the barriers that we have to housing, a lot of it has to do with red tape. I think you said there are so many challenges to building the rent-geared-to.... You know what I'm saying.

What are some of those challenges and how can we fix some of those barriers? What do you see as being some of these issues?



**Ms. Kate Gunn:** Access to affordable housing, we believe, is a human right. We see that there are barriers for newcomers and for our high-risk, at-risk youth. Certainly in Edmonton now, we're very pleased that we have a 10-year plan to end homelessness, which is well toward the 10-year period. They're looking now to update that and to ask where some of the gaps are.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** What are some of those barriers, specifically?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** One of the areas, I think, that has been identified very recently from our experience in Edmonton is the permanent support of housing that is needed. It is really an area that has come to the fore. In the homelessness counts that are done regularly, annually, in most cities, ours included, I think a significant portion was the chronically homeless. It was very hard to find housing.

As they go forward, to look at the next 10-year plan to end homelessness, that's going to be a focus. They also have a focus on working with aboriginal youth. That may touch on some of our issues having to do with racism and discrimination in terms of housing.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you very much.

Allan, thank you very much for your presentation. As part of a job before, I tried to set up charitable organizations, so I can see the issue with that.

What have you tried to do to have that legislation reviewed and looked at? I hear what you're saying. I think it's a great idea, but what have you done, or what challenges have you made to the government on this?

• (0915)

**Mr. Allan Wise:** It's the decision to actually approach it this way. This is a first step. I took over the helm at CNDC in 2009, and since then we have applied twice. Right now we are under review.

Again, how do you alleviate poverty with all that you do? The definition is very focused on the actions rather than the purposes of what we do. In community economic development, you don't just look at it like "Here is bread. You're hungry. Go home." You look at the long-term effect.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Having charitable status would be a way to engage people to provide so that they have income tax benefits.

**Mr. Allan Wise:** Absolutely. We started under a Manitoba government program. We have a Manitoba act, actually. We have The Community Renewal Act that was adopted by our NDP government previous to the current government. That act enables 13 organizations funded by the Province of Manitoba to operate in designated areas. You can read the statistics on, for example, three of my neighbourhoods that fall within the federal riding of Winnipeg Centre. That is practically the poorest area in Canada. A corner of it starts with the R2W postal code. That is the poorest place in Canada.

So what do you do? You don't approach this simply through charitable acts such as opening up a soup kitchen. In times of crisis, that is great, but how do you follow the life of a young man or woman who starts in one of our kindergartens, follows through to junior high, and goes to the high school? How do you make sure that person graduates?

Most of our schools—and this is very important—are trying to maximize their instructional dollars. That leaves a whole bunch of extra supportive activities and extracurricular activities that my agency provides. I hire and train people who live in the area, who are living below the low poverty line or at the poverty line, and I send them to school, for example, to learn how to read. There's a program called read-assist for kids. We follow those kids, but not statistically, because, again—and Jino said this as well—there is a whole lot of focus on statistics, on reports, and on red tape. That really undermines and does not give any consideration to the dignity of the individual.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now for the next six minutes, we have Mr. Wayne Long.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests this morning for their very heartfelt presentations.

Mr. Distasio, I just want to talk with you, if I could, for a minute. Your presentation was excellent, and I apologize in advance. You're more than just an academic who is giving me numbers. There's a lot of passion and experience there. Where have we as a federal government gone wrong? I see your frustration. I see everybody's frustration. You were given \$750,000 over three years to study this. You said yourself that billions of dollars have been spent.

I come from Saint John—Rothesay, in New Brunswick, and we do lead the country in child poverty at 31%. Some of our priority neighbourhoods are upwards of 50% to 60% child poverty, but I believe that transformational change comes from federal programs, such as the Canada child benefit, or for seniors, the OAS or the GIS, for example. Where have we as a federal government gone wrong? Can you just speak to what you think we could have done?

This isn't a political statement. It's us, it was the Conservatives before us, before that it was us, and it was the Conservatives before that. Where have we gone wrong? Have we not aligned properly? Have we not been focused? I know I'm asking you six things at once. Is there a better way we can align that money between federal and provincial, and then with the municipalities? There's something missing here. Again, my biggest frustration in Saint John—Rothesay in particular is that despite what we do, the needle isn't moving.

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** I think that's a recurring thought. It's hard to put a single.... I think the federal government has done not a bad job with respect to housing and homelessness over the last 15 to 17 years. I think, interestingly, that policy has evolved from the 1999 approach to building shelters to now realizing that mental health, addictions, housing first, employment, and all these kinds of pieces are important. I just think we've overtaken organizations that know what they're doing.

• (0920)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Sorry, can you say that again?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** I think we've just burdened organizations. I'll give you an example. I received HPS money to do a report on the African housing situation in your neighbourhood, \$25,000, and toward the end I said to the community entity, "Why don't you just keep the money? I can't deal with all your requirements and my finance department telling me they've never been asked these questions on reporting, on requirements, insurance, and certificates, and all these kinds of things." I just said, "We don't need the money. We're just in education. I'm just an academic." I keep saying, "How the hell do organizations deal with this bureaucratic quagmire?"

What we've done well, though, is that we've created community advisory boards, we've created the CEs, the groups in each city that are tasked with doing things. Just empower them.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** But are we studying things to death?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Yes. I think there is room for some exploration. Again, selfishly, the At Home/Chez Soi project is a good example of an applied research demonstration project. We were demonstrating housing first in five Canadian cities that then leveraged \$650 million through HPS into housing first.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I've met frequently with Claudette Bradshaw. She's in Moncton and obviously, she was—

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** She was a powerhouse.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** She was a very instrumental part, I might add.

You did mention with respect to housing first and the homeless partnership strategy, that it's more than just putting those people, if you will, in homes. There's the extra dimension, as you said, and I call it more wraparound.

Do you feel we're delivering that, the wraparound services? Because, to your point, you can put somebody in need in a home, but that's just the start of the problem.

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Absolutely. Housing is the easiest part of the puzzle. We can build the best housing in the world and we do.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Are we funding the support?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** We need to continue to fund the teams through, say, the At Home project, which identified teams that provide those levels of support.

Remember, our intervention was focused on those with very high needs, mental health needs, addiction, more moderate needs. Our intervention was on mental health and homelessness. Remember too, about 20% of individuals in housing first we have no solution for. We have an even more acute need among those individuals.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I say this with respect, I see your title, vice-president of research and innovation. Can you talk to me about what innovation you've seen in poverty reduction over the last five years?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Yes. I'll give you an example. I'm going to use the University of Winnipeg.

We're an academic centre. Out our door we established the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre, which is the front door to the community members that never thought they had a place on campus. Now, every day after school, we have indigenous kids or new Canadians coming in tinkering with computers. We have parents coming in—

**Mr. Wayne Long:** After school programs?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** After school programs run by education students, run by staff, run on vapour, because we have no money for this. We built a rec-plex, through Dr. Axworthy, that signed a community charter so that kids in Allan's neighbourhoods can come.

As well, 30% of that time, we've just given to the community. In Winnipeg, I know people pay \$200 an hour for ice time, but it's even more so for field time. We give it for free, and there are hundreds of kids there on a weekend playing soccer. They're off the field, and they're thinking hopefully that there's an avenue.

The last little piece is the opportunity fund. Lloyd also established a fund for kids in the neighbourhood to have a leg up. By the time they get to university, through the University of Winnipeg, they'll have a couple of grand and they can go anywhere. We don't care, but we want to see them.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Have the numbers in poverty moved in Winnipeg in child poverty over the last 10 years?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** A few have edged us out. I think we're moving slightly, but not much at all.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Niki Ashton.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Thank you very much, and thank you to all of our witnesses for very insightful presentations.

Obviously, as is known, I have the honour of representing northern Manitoba. It's clear to many of us that poverty faced by people up north, particularly first nations, is intricately connected to poverty in the city.

I'm wondering if perhaps those of you who are based in Winnipeg could speak to how important it is for the federal government to invest in on-reserve housing, particularly in the context of supporting local solutions. I'm sure you know of a number of initiatives where communities have tried to tackle this issue, but of course, there's red tape and a number of different disincentives, including from CMHC. Although, apparently through their review, they are much more interested in supporting local solutions on reserve.

Through understanding, and perhaps for us to take away how important it is to allow people to stay in their communities and create opportunities in the community rather than having no other choice but to flee to the city, not because there are opportunities there but that there's some sort of sense of a better chance of survival. Again, in the spirit of giving us some solid recommendations, could you provide us with some?

I wanted to echo a Canadian Press article that came out a few months ago saying that fixing first nations housing in Manitoba alone would cost up to \$2 billion. It would come as a huge deficit, and I see this impact every day, but those of you working in the inner city understand those connections deeply as well.

Perhaps, Allan, we can start with you, and then we can go to Tyler, Clark, and Jino.

• (0925)

**Mr. Allan Wise:** Thank you for the question. In terms of federal initiatives that I can think of with regard to housing—maybe not in northern communities but at least in rural communities—one that has been successful is the CAB model, the community advisory board. I don't know if Jino or Clark have been involved with that. It was mentioned earlier. A community advisory board is a multi-stakeholder initiative that allows community input. That's one federal initiative that I know of.

Going back to your comments about poverty and the lack of housing in northern communities, my communities, especially the Centennial, see a lot of those communities. We no longer consider newcomers as only those who come to Canada. We also consider newcomers those who come from northern communities to Manitoba. We have the Health Sciences Centre, which is the biggest provider of health services in our area, and because of that, we have a need for housing around that area for newcomers who come from northern neighbourhoods. I can tell you that we are nowhere near addressing any of it.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Tyler and Clark.

**Mr. Clark Brownlee:** That's such a critical issue in this country. I don't even know where to start, and quite honestly, the Right to Housing Coalition is not focused on housing for indigenous people. We have made some assumptions, perhaps, that we weren't in a position to speak for indigenous people. Out of respect, we have supported the vision outlined in the Assembly of First Nations housing strategy, which calls for housing policy to be informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I have personal contact with a good friend on a reserve. He is responsible for housing on the reserve. It's a small reserve in Manitoba, and the money it receives for housing is very limited. The

housing comes in to be assembled. Often they can't afford to get professionals to assemble it, so they do it themselves. The housing is not designed for the communities and the lifestyle and climate in which they're being put. They're hardly adequate for down in Winnipeg. Way too many people are overcrowded, as you know very well, and the houses are not conducive to people who are living on the land.

There's a huge amount...and I'm sure \$2 billion isn't going to do it. I don't even know where you start with that. The problem is the result of neglect over many years, and as a country, we should be putting way more time and money into it than we currently are.

That's the best I can do right now.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** That's perfect. Thank you.

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Thank you for the question. It's very important.

We've had an opportunity to work with both the AMC and MMF a few years ago looking at aboriginal mobility into Winnipeg. We tracked 600 people over three years from 125 different communities in this province into Winnipeg. Over that three-year period, 50% of those in the project were unable to secure housing over the long term; we had repeat movement.

I say to people all the time that in the Canadian context, now that 50% of the indigenous population is living in cities, it's a distinctive pattern that we begin to see, because you can't understand homelessness in Winnipeg without understanding the complex interrelationships that people have with multiple locations and communities. At one time we argued that we have provincial shelter allowance rates, yet a family member will come into Winnipeg, stay with a family, and the family will receive nothing for accommodating that person. In fact, their presence in the community here is important, but nobody.... We're not getting innovative.

A good example—and again, I just try to provide best practice examples here—is the Eagle Urban Transition Centre that was established to be a go-between for those moving into Winnipeg from rural northern and remote communities. As you know, each of those geographies has distinct needs.

Let me also state quickly that we know that homelessness costs the economy billions of dollars. If we can build some housing and provide better additional services, we can have a transformative impact. Peguis First Nation is working on a land acquisition strategy. They're purchasing assets in Winnipeg to fund housing. There are innovative ideas across the country where first nations are becoming economic powerhouses and trying to transform themselves. Peguis and Long Plain in Winnipeg are some great examples of where economic enterprise is changing lives, along with education.

I do think there's a lot, but we're nowhere near it. But again, in Winnipeg a tremendous number of indigenous-based organizations have ideas. Urban Eagle Transition Centre is a great best practice, as well as the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. All these organizations, for decades...including Kinew Housing, that since 1970 has been providing local solutions.

Help fund them.

● (0930)

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

MP Dhillon, you have six minutes, please.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Thank you.

Good morning to all, and thank you so very much for coming. Your testimony thus far has been very touching. It jars you.

Ms. Gunn, you spoke about the link between racism and poverty. Can you please elaborate on this?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** In our experience with our task force for the past two years in Edmonton, it really came through loud and clear from our community, as we talked to both indigenous Edmontonians and newcomers, that some of the barriers they face are systemic barriers. They're barriers that are related to discrimination and racism. Certainly when we went back to the community with the report on our engagement, and told them that this is what we heard, they in turn said, yes, and they were proud that we were calling it what it is. We weren't just focusing on inclusion and on people all getting along. We were saying that we have an issue with racism in this city—in all cities across Canada, frankly, and around the world—and we need to call it like it is.

It's certainly something that we see as being really central to the work of EndPovertyEdmonton going forward.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** What kinds of systemic barriers are they?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** We know that our newcomers face challenges with their credentials when they come to this country. They may come with vast experience, great academic credentials, and be unable to find a position that suits their skills or where they can really contribute. Our approach in Edmonton is focused on a human rights and dignity approach. We want people to have that sense of dignity.

As well, certainly we hear about discrimination in terms of housing where people are turned away and where they understand, even though it may not be said quite that bluntly, that they maybe are turned down for housing because of their race.

Those are two examples of the kinds of racism that is prevalent in all communities.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Is it the same for indigenous people in terms of the systemic barriers?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** I think so. We have an amazing community in Edmonton. Some of our leaders in terms of the work we've been doing these past two years are the leaders of our indigenous community organizations. As Jino, Allan, and all of us have talked about, the expertise is great. For instance, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women in Edmonton works with

women in order to provide them with the capacity to apply for jobs, to have that capacity to address barriers. They're really leading the way, I think, in terms of supporting especially young indigenous women to really contribute to their community, to take leadership roles in their community, and to support and help their families thrive.

● (0935)

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** When we speak about credentials and indigenous people and newcomers, would you say that the link between racism and poverty is that they also have fewer job opportunities based on their ethnicity—i.e., they won't get the job they applied for even if their credentials are better than others'?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** I think so. Certainly there are challenges for newcomers to just learn the systems. I mean, some of the systems are the barriers themselves. These are the systems of red tape and of having to go from one agency to another. They can find their way through that maze if they have support, if they have a cultural navigator. Some of our newcomer organizations have worked with this concept of a cultural navigator to work one on one with families and individuals, a wraparound, as Wayne talked about, that helps them get through the maze when they have credentials but then have to find their way through. That's hard for everyone, let alone those encountering discrimination along with the issue of accreditation.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Okay, so it's systemic and it's based on race.

How can we guarantee equality and non-discrimination? It is up to governments to prevent marginalization. What I'm hearing is that it's cyclical. It goes from generation to generation. If the parents start in poverty, or have lack of opportunity just because of the way they look, this is a shame on our society. It's our shame. How do we as a government prevent marginalization? How do we guarantee equality and non-discrimination?

That's for anyone who wants to answer it.

**Mr. Allan Wise:** I'll add something based on what Jino said earlier: education. I can put a personal spin on it. I came to Canada in 1989. I was a 19-year-old man, a refugee from Iran. I put myself through school and racked up a huge loan. When I graduated, I was one of the top three in a class of 12, with a grade point average of over 4.0. I applied for nearly 100 jobs at the time, and I did not even get a call back. The minute I changed my name and anglicized it, I started getting letters.

Does that mean it was a success? I had the opportunity of being born to a family with an Iranian dad and a Russian mom, and I look white, just to say it simply. That helped me. This is not to say that sneaky, hidden discrimination is something that can be quantified or felt by the aggregate population, and that's not to say that the aggregate population is exercising that.

What I can say is that education engagement, that's the role.... It's guaranteed to us under the charter. The right is guaranteed. I think the role of the federal government should be education.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, again, to our witnesses.

Mr. Distasio, would you say that the single best way to end poverty long term would be a comprehensive national early learning concept?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** I wouldn't disagree with you.

I think that early childhood interventions are critical for two- to four-year-olds. My office has looked at Scandinavian countries, and there seems to be a lot of success there, even with respect to Germany. You have two-year-olds in the program.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** So you would agree with me.

One of the single biggest things the federal government could do long term would be to come up with a national early learning program, obviously in conjunction with each province.

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Agreed. I think that has to go hand in hand with supporting families and supporting families living in quality housing. Yes, you have my full support.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you.

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Just quickly, though, we did publish a paper—I know it's about academics—looking at ACE scores, adverse childhood events. We think we added one of the first papers that definitively linked adverse childhood events with a greater likelihood of becoming homeless later in life.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** There's no question. I agree with you, and thank you for that.

Ms. Gunn or Mr. Bisanz, how many people are on the wait-list for affordable housing in your city?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** I'm not sure if I can give you that figure offhand. I think it certainly is something that's increasing. I could follow up and provide that to you.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I'd like to know.

Just for an example, in New Brunswick in September, we announced an additional \$56.8 million in affordable housing, the IAH, that is going to go to housing repairs, enhancements, builds, shelters, and so on. I'm assuming there were also additional monies from the budget announced in Edmonton.

Who advocates for that money? Where has it gone? Can you share with me how that trickles down? Obviously, it's a federal-provincial announcement, but then it goes into the municipalities, too. How do you advocate for that money to make sure Edmontonians get their share?

• (0940)

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** It's not something I have a lot of detail on, but I would say that our key lead agency in Edmonton is Homeward Trust. Certainly they advocate and are the recipient of a lot of funds

that are then disbursed to projects. Of course, the municipality is a huge advocate—

**Mr. Wayne Long:** But on a municipal level, does your group advocate for housing? We all know we need housing. There was additional money in the budget for housing. How does that work? How do you...?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** Raise that up?

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Yes.

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** In Edmonton, our EndPovertyEdmonton organization is a collective. It really just got off the ground this fall. One of its key roles is to advocate, but it's a very new kid on the block in terms of launching. We see that it will be a key. It's identified in our road map as one of our game-changers, affordable housing. It definitely will be one that, with the municipality and other key community players, EndPovertyEdmonton will advocate.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you.

Mr. Brownlee and Ms. Pearce, I want to ask you basically the same line of questioning. Again, where I'm going with this is that at times it's frustrating.

As the federal government, we seem to come out with things, and then it goes to the provinces. The provinces have their own mandates and their own agendas. It goes out and then the municipalities are saying, "How about us?" It's one of those things where, in my opinion, if I could wave my magic wand on it, I would have more, if you will, strings attached to some of the federal money that goes out through the provinces.

Can you share with me your knowledge, if you don't mind? In Winnipeg, how many people are on an affordable housing wait-list?

**Mr. Clark Brownlee:** I wish I could. We can't get good information from Manitoba Housing. In Manitoba, the provincial government has basically taken over 99% of the public housing responsibility from the municipalities.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Is that not a public number, though, the number of people on the wait-list for affordable housing?

**Mr. Clark Brownlee:** No, it's not. It sounds like it should be quite easy to find, but we can't get a good number. I would say it would probably be in the thousands.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** For example, in Saint John there are 1,400 people on the wait-list for affordable housing.

**Mr. Clark Brownlee:** I can't give you the number. I wish I could. I wish you'd asked me the question. I would have tried yesterday.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** No problem.

Again, from Winnipeg's standpoint, how do you align yourself with the provincial and federal governments? Who lobbies on Winnipeg's behalf for money for housing?

**Mr. Clark Brownlee:** As a volunteer advocacy organization, we have a working group for each level of government. We have people advocating with the city for what they can do, what they have left of their mandate around bylaws, taxation, and safety, looking after the existing housing stock. Our big housing group is the provincial working group. I agree with your assessment that it's a bit of a jumble right now in terms of a federal program that filters money down to the province, which might get out to community organizations. Everybody is taking off their share in order to maintain their office and their staff and whatever they do.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I appreciate that.

Mr. Distasio, one really quick question for a quick answer. Shelters receive money from the province. For example, in my city, the shelter gets \$160,000 from the province. They have to privately fundraise almost three times that amount to make the shelter work. What's wrong with that system?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Well, we shouldn't have shelters in the first place....

**Mr. Wayne Long:** But we do.

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** For funding, it is the same thing here. One of our shelters has been able to have consistent funding, Main Street Project. They've only recently had to focus on fundraising. Siloam Mission is probably in that same boat. They provide critical services, but they have to reach out. They have to reach out and adjust their mandate to be more than just a shelter. What we've realized now is that you can't just put somebody in a bed for 10 hours and kick them out in the morning. You have to have that continuum of service, even in shelters. They've also become smarter at providing additional supports.

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

Mr. Zimmer, please.

• (0945)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming this morning.

I wanted to frame the way we hear requests for more money. We hear that a lot. I represent 107,000 northern British Columbians who work very hard for their money. They're usually dual-income homes, and average about \$70,000 to \$80,000 per household per year. They can afford a modest home. I'm concerned that they're finding it more and more difficult to afford a house and sustain their lifestyle. The government keeps asking for more money, more tax dollars, money for different reasons. Whether it's a carbon tax, etc., it's all on the shoulders of Joe and Jane Taxpayer.

I want to use that as a framework to ask my next questions. Mr. Distasio, you say billions have been spent studying poverty reduction. If you were in our decision-making seats, what would you do to reduce programs that are ineffective? Do you see any government programs that are targeted to reduce poverty that are ineffective?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Again, I think the greatest programs are the ones that are able to direct funds toward community-based organizations. The more we can empower those community

organizations and entities to come up with local plans, the better success you have. I still say the HPS, which is the current—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Can you explain that acronym for us again?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** It's the homeless partnering strategy. The federal homeless partnering strategy is a good framework because it gets money to Winnipeg and it actually bypasses the province in some ways, but it's just tacked on with all this tape. Get rid of the tape, give the money back to the local community organizations, and have them do good work.

You raise one question I don't think we've talked too much about today, which is home ownership. Again, I put my old hat on from when I just stepped off the board of Habitat. Habitat is a neat model. As much as we always focus on affordable rents and the impoverished, we need to figure out a way to lift more Canadians out of poverty through home ownership as well. Affordable home ownership is a good way for government to get back and be involved in things. CMHC was that place—5% down and assistance. We can grow that. We can rethink home ownership.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** We just came from Saint John and we saw some excellent examples of those community organizations that were asking for more funds as well. My caution to them was that they are doing a great job without us, so why would they want us to be involved or why would they want us to push them beyond what they're already doing?

I think there's a perception that government can help: "We're from government. We're here to help." Often they're doing a great job on their own, and this is the kind of initiative we would really like to see go. I think one thing we see with poverty, which some of you have discussed, is that this isn't a poverty-sustaining study. We actually want to take people from A to D where they're out of poverty. That's where we want to go.

Sorry, I called you Mr. Distasio. Are you a doctor? Okay, so you're a doctor. I wanted to correct that before I moved on.

I think the discussion was about red tape and red tape production. What specifically would you suggest to us as a committee should be reduced in terms of red tape, to get better value for the taxpayer dollars from Joe and Jane? These dollars come from actual people. I like to define it that way, because we always look at this big grey building in Ottawa as the big bucket of money that we go ask, but every single dollar in that big bucket of money comes out of taxpayers' pockets, and they're usually working very hard to earn those dollars.

On red tape reduction, what would you suggest we do?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Use the community-led model through the HPS that established community advisory boards led by local experts and supported by a community entity that manages money. Just give those community entities a little bit more autonomy to make local decisions and just lift the continuous burden. As I said, it took me, with tremendous resources of the university and our accounting—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** But explain that, because you said “lift the burden.” We're always hearing, “reduce red tape and lift the burden.” How?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** I think there's a good model in your jurisdiction. In Vancouver, your local HPS community advisory board is Vancity. Vancity has created a really simple program to get money into people's hands, to monitor it, and to get reports back. They simplified a very complicated process.

Again, in my view, there are good best practices there, but there's a tremendous level of reporting that seems to take layers and layers and layers to just fund a small program. You have two layers. You have a community advisory board approving; you have a CE managing; and you have a federal representative there, yet that's not enough. It still needs to go to Ottawa to analysts and persons who, I'm assuming, check a box on a spreadsheet somewhere. We need to forget about that box and just have some assurance that locally, the money is managed by your federal representatives here through the CE, through the CAB, to the organization.

● (0950)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Dr. Distasio, would you be so kind as to submit to the committee information on what you talked about, the entity in B.C. that you're saying has a great way to operate?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I think we need that. We need those suggestions, because we often hear about problems but we don't hear good solutions. The good solutions are there waiting, because you see clearly what they need to be.

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** I submitted that to the HPS and the review a couple of year ago, so I'll forward it on. I think the Winnipeg model works. We have a really tremendous efficient model that I'm sure Edmonton and your community have as well. We just need to fine-tune it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're actually on time, but I understand you have something to add quickly here.

**Ms. Tyler Pearce:** Yes. I just want to talk about Jane and Joe. I think they actually have a real interest. They should have a real interest in social housing and affordable housing because as RGI units disappear and people are paying more and more.... If you're paying 60% to 90% of your income to shelter yourself, you're under a lot of stress. We know that as that rises, people are now accessing more health care and other social services, and families are under huge stress.

If we think about the bigger picture of the burden that Jane and Joe might have, if we are mispending huge amounts of funds, in a sense, by increasing costs in health care, etc., across the social welfare system, Jane and Joe should actually have a really big

interest in making sure that affordable and social housing is available. We need to consider that.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I agree with you. I'm concerned though that without the changes and without making things more streamlined, even more of a burden is put on the backs of Joe and Jane. Then they have to provide even more of their limited margin of income that they have left at the end of the month for another government program. That's my point.

**Ms. Tyler Pearce:** It's just being increased through other places.

**The Chair:** Sorry, I have to cut you off there.

We'll go to MP Dhillon.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you.

Mr. Bisanz, you spoke about a lack of social and cultural resources. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

**Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz:** That's part of the way we define poverty. We wanted to make sure that poverty wasn't just considered an economic issue. We looked at income, but what we think is important is quality of life, and that has a lot to do with connection to communities. When we think about poverty in Edmonton, we're trying to think not only of income but also of economic and cultural resources.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Which ethnic community do you serve the most?

**Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz:** I can't say we're looking at it as separate communities we're trying to serve. We're trying to serve all of Edmonton, and that means providing strong support wherever it's needed. In your consultation period, we heard lots about where help is needed. That's what led to our action plan, with 35 action starting points. We're intent on guiding a process through a generation that will get rid of poverty.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Would you say the majority of people you serve are from the aboriginal community?

**Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz:** It depends on the area you look at. In housing, the aboriginal community is underserved. In income, they are not in good shape, although there are plenty of exceptions. Newcomers are a big issue, as are single parents. Single-parent families have a 30% poverty rate, and early learning and care is really important for that.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Would this include the cultural needs of aboriginal people, the early education?

**Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz:** Yes, early education is relevant there. It's relevant everywhere, really. There was a large study done in Edmonton some years ago called “Families First Edmonton”. One of the key issues that families face is finding high-quality child care so that the parents can engage in the economic system. That's a huge barrier and something that needs to be addressed.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Wise. We didn't quite get to finish before. You were speaking about education. I was asking how to prevent marginalization and guarantee quality and non-discrimination. You spoke about the importance of education, but at the same time you explained to us that education is not a guarantee. I see this too every day. I speak to constituents. I grew up with it. Even if you're educated, you will not be given those opportunities.

How do we guarantee opportunities?

• (0955)

**Mr. Allan Wise:** I wish I had an answer for you. How do we guarantee it? I'm a firm believer in education, both formal and informal. Formal education will give you a level of expertise that will enable you to get from A to B, but this should be accompanied by practical wisdom, which comes from informal education, from interaction, from access. A first point of poverty reduction and countering racism is interaction, giving access, and making sure populations that historically have been marginalized form alliances by understanding and getting to know one another.

One of the initiatives we have in our city brings aboriginal youth and newcomer youth together throughout the summer or in wintertime with various programming that allows them to share their cultures. We have programming with law enforcement, be it Winnipeg police, the RCMP, or the corrections. We have an initiative called *umoja*, which is Swahili for unity. Youth in the community who have had negative experiences with people in uniform are brought together with members of the police to play hockey, basketball, and football. This way, they grow together and recognize that under that uniform is a human being, while the other side recognizes that there is more than one way of doing things.

It takes a long time to put these things in statistics, to quantify them. The school life of a child starts from K to 12, and even if we follow that, it's not going to happen overnight. We need time.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** As MP Zimmer just said, I too believe in finding solutions. We have a lot of statistics, but do any of you have something to add to what Mr. Wise just said?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** Yes. I'd like to say that what Allan said triggered for me what's really important, we think, in shifting the culture in this whole country around ending poverty, which is to engage our next generation.

We've seen the same thing. We've seen the challenges that both indigenous and newcomer youth face, but we've also had amazing young people in Edmonton who have come forward. The John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights single-handedly helped shape our task force report by bringing in that human rights lens and saying "this is what it's about" in the criminalization we experience. The need to focus on human rights is really how we have to come out of poverty.

I think we're talking about a generational issue here. We need to make sure that our next generation, as Allan has said, is helping with those solutions.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have about two minutes left, but that's it for your turn, Anju, I'm afraid. I'm sorry.

Karen. It's sort of your turn, but I don't know if you....?

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I'll take 10 seconds.

You have that adverse event study that you did a couple years ago regarding children in situations of trauma. Is there a way for us to share that with the committee as well, if you don't mind?

**Dr. Jino Distasio:** I'm sorry. I'm going to admit that at the At Home project, we've published probably 150 publications. I'll send you that one in particular, but there are a few good ones.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I'd like to look at that one specifically.

I'll share my time with whoever has questions.

**The Chair:** Does anybody have one last question?

Niki, go ahead.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Mr. Wise, I'm familiar with the neighbourhood renewal corporations' really good work up north. I know that obviously you're facing some insecurity here at home. In terms of the work you do, I'm wondering if you can speak about the importance of sustained government funding at the federal level, obviously, but at the provincial level as well.

**Mr. Allan Wise:** My agency has not received much federal funding. We had some federal funding some years ago, but we haven't had that... I know of agencies that do receive federal funding. Currently, our provincial funding is up in the air. We are under review. All 13 corporations are. We have started a campaign of engaging the provincial government to highlight what we have achieved.

In Manitoba, neighbourhood renewal corporations started in 1990. Prior to that, it was done in one neighbourhood in the north and by the Mennonite Central Committee.

For the provincial government, we have highlighted our efforts over the past 20 years in a report called "The Collective Impact of Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations". I would be more than happy to share that with you.

• (1000)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the last word, we'll hear from Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you.

I want to say to Allan that I think it's unfortunate that you face that discrimination again. I look forward to the day when we don't see skin colour anymore and we don't see each other as any different, but just as one human being sitting across from another. It's one thing... I grew up in an aboriginal community, and I don't see a difference there. I know that some do, but I look forward to the day we all can view each other this way.

I have a question for Kate Gunn.



You say that affordable housing is a right. Is that correct? Did you say that?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** Yes, we do.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I know that our time is limited, Chair, so stop me when you need to.

What does that look like? For what you're suggesting, it would cost billions of dollars in Canada to pull that off. I'm not saying that's bad, but I'm going to ask you two questions. Where is the money going to come from? How many people would that affect?

How many people do we need to provide housing for? Understanding that this is a Canadian committee, this means 35 million people. This is a pan-Canadian study. What is that going to look like as a Canadian all-inclusive? What is that going to cost? For how many people is it going to be required to provide housing?

**The Chair:** It's a big question, but I'm going to need a very brief answer.

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** Yes, it is a big question.

I would say that in EndPovertyEdmonton we do believe that housing is a right for all Canadians: the right to have a safe and comfortable home to bring up a family in. I think the important thing... It's a huge number of dollars that you're talking about. We know that in Alberta alone \$7 billion to \$9 billion is spent every year on poverty, on things that are related to poverty, whether that's the health care system or the criminal justice system. You look to see where the money goes and what the huge costs are, but there are huge costs that are going on now—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Do you have a number for what the costs would be?

**Ms. Kate Gunn:** I do not have a figure right now for the entire country. No, I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** We're over time, but Mr. Brownlee has been waiting very patiently with his hand up and I know he has a very brief comment he wants to share.

**Mr. Clark Brownlee:** It's brief but so important. Thank you very much.

One thing we haven't even talked about—and this is totally federal responsibility—is the taxes that are levied on the construction of housing, which increase the soft cost of housing considerably. Up to 12% of the price of a new building of any kind is taxes and fees by three levels of government, but the federal government has, over the years, increased that. As it's reaching into our pockets to do that, it's raising the cost of social and affordable housing, so that could easily be a recommendation.

Cut out that stuff. Reduce it. It's not necessary, and where does the money come from? That's a really good question. We could do a much better job of progressive taxation in this country. We're taxing people who are on the margins, and we're letting people who are making billions of dollars off pretty easy. I'm not a tax expert, but look at it. I think it's worth looking at.

**The Chair:** Before we spiral into that conversation, I have to close the discussion.

I want to thank all of you for getting up early to join us today. I know I learned a lot. Thank you to all the committee members, all the logistics folks, and the people to my left and right who make this possible.

If you wouldn't mind staying in your seat, I would love to get a quick photo for the record if you are willing. Thank you very much.

Committee, we're going to break for about 10 to 15 minutes and then come back for the next round.

•(1000)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•(1020)

**The Chair:** Good morning, everybody.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is resuming its study on poverty reduction strategies.

We are very pleased to welcome two groups to the second panel this morning. From the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, we have Diane Redsky, executive director. Also, from the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, we have Josh Brandon.

Thank you both for coming. We're going to give you up to 10 minutes to speak in your opening remarks. Then, of course, we will have questions from the panel after the introductions.

To start off, Diane Redsky, the next seven to 10 minutes are yours.

**Ms. Diane Redsky (Executive Director, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc.):** Thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

Welcome to Treaty 1 territory, the home of the Métis nation. Also, welcome to the indigenous capital of Canada. We know that we have more indigenous people here per capita than anywhere else in Canada. That is really important to us as an indigenous-led organization, which is what I'm here to represent, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre.

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre is an organization that this year will be 33 years old. It is a non-profit, non-mandated, indigenous-led organization in Manitoba. We are the largest in Manitoba, and we are focused on providing family resource support services to indigenous families in Winnipeg. We focus all of our work on indigenous families in Winnipeg.

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, as I said, is a very large organization, and we have a number of key areas that are of interest to this group. The first one is our work in our community care centres. These are like family resource centres, where they're a little bit of everything to everyone. You can come and use the phone, do the laundry, talk to somebody, take a workshop, or become a volunteer, part-time staff, full-time staff, and then ultimately the executive director, if you keep going at it.

There's a place for everybody at Ma Mawi. Last year alone, we served just under 25,000 indigenous people within our community care centres. That's just a small part of the services that we deliver. The number one reason they are coming to the the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre community care centre is that they are hungry. There's not enough food in their homes, in their fridges, in their cupboards, and they're hungry. We feed approximately 300 people lunch every single day, and this includes children, seniors, and elders, who are indigenous.

In terms of poverty and the purpose of this important consultation, there are some particular things I'd like to express to you with regard to how this affects indigenous people more than non-indigenous people, or anybody else, for that matter. It's rooted in gender inequality, racism, sexism, and classism, and it plays out in a whole bunch of different ways. Ultimately it can be very harmful, particularly for indigenous women and children, who are at greater risk because of the stereotypes that continue to exist in our country: that we just want to have sex, that we enjoy violence, that we want to have kids and then stay on welfare. We know that is not the case. The systems for the most part are the ones that continue to perpetuate and contribute to creating that vulnerability, so women actually have no choice but to live in the circumstances and survive within the circumstances of their situation.

Back in about 2010, we worked with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives to start looking at trying to move away from these typical stereotypes about who is poor and what exactly they are doing. We titled that report, "It Takes All Day To Be Poor". If we assume that people who are living in poverty are just lazy and wanting handouts, in fact they're probably the hardest working people in our society. It does take all day to be poor. You have to run around to food banks to get food, to get services, to go from point A to point B, and if you have bus tickets, you're lucky. If you have to tag along children, that can be a very challenging situation, particularly for single parents.

I want to give a short scenario of how this can be harmful to a single parent when other systems can be involved and we're not understanding the connection between poverty and child welfare. We know that most of the reasons why children are apprehended is that people are poor. If we focused our resources on not making them poor, then we would be decreasing the chances of the children needing protection.

● (1025)

To give you one example, we were called in by a school—because we have a good relationship with the school—wondering why this single mom with four kids, two of whom are school age, were not coming to school. Should they call child protection? Are the kids in need of protection? What is going on? What should they do?

It took us minutes to figure out what was going on when we did a home visit. We found out the problem was that her children had lice. When kids have lice, they can't go to school. Currently in our province, we have some assistance to single parents. They buy them a washer, but they don't buy them a dryer. We know—if any of you have had kids with lice—if you put things in the dryer, you've just solved the problem.

That's how we solved the problem. We did two things for her. First, we raised the resources to buy her a dryer. Second, we gathered up a whole bunch of people in the community who helped her clean up all of her stuff and clean up all of her kids, and then they were able to go to school. Things like that, that could be stereotypes, can be harmful, particularly for single parents who are struggling. Of course, lice medication is usually not covered by anybody, so that's another additional cost. A single parent with four kids would have to make the decision between lice medication versus food.

Also, in the context of what I wanted to express today, there is the direct impact to indigenous families and then there are also the systemic challenges we face. There are a couple of things about that. First, indigenous-led organizations are not funded the same way to do the same work. There is an inequality of funding, yet we know that when indigenous organizations are supported to do the work with our indigenous families, we do have good outcomes. It is still a real challenge for an indigenous organization, like the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, to have funding equality when it comes to delivering services and addressing the needs of people living in poverty.

Another thing is that, other than this table right here, we are often not consulted on what the solutions are. We are often not engaged in a meaningful way at decision-making tables that directly result in policy-making. Organizations, like the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and many other indigenous-led organizations, are often not consulted, so we do appreciate the opportunity here today. Historically, it has been the case that we're not at the tables. There are other people that are speaking on our behalf.

There are some very real realities for indigenous families. They have unique challenges that may not be fully understood by mainstream society. I think we can sometimes just think that it's not that serious. I'm sure you heard earlier about the difficulty with getting housing and then safe housing for families. Poverty reduction does start with having food and a home, just having your basic needs met.

Another challenge is the lack of opportunities for supportive employment and training programs because it's one thing to get training to get the job; it's another to get the support you need to keep the job. That is particularly important for indigenous people.

We often don't get the jobs. This is a harsh reality, particularly for single parents who may have a number of small children. One gets sick and you're on at least a four-week hiatus making sure that you're caring for them because they usually can't go to school or to day care, so many parents leave their jobs. We need to build a stronger safety net for single parents who are really trying to better their situation.

Then there is the lack of programs that focus on building capacity. Rather than acknowledging us for all the things that are wrong with indigenous people, we need to start looking at all the things that are our strengths and the things that we contribute. It's a different kind of conversation to have with people.

In our community care centres, when people are coming in they may be coming in hungry, but they're also coming in because they're valued and respected when they come in. They're not coming in because they're going to go see the mental health worker over there, or their addiction worker over there, or the parole officer over there. It is not about acknowledging what is wrong with you. It is about shifting the service to a strength- and value-based model, which has far-reaching and more positive outcomes because then people have a sense of belonging and over time, they will resolve the challenges they have.

● (1030)

I am aware that part of your agenda, and part of where you're going to be speaking and learning more about is in Manitoba. We have the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council, which, along with the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, has been very supportive. I understand you're meeting with them.

They talk about 10 practical things and that if you work on these 10 things you could make some real progress: achieving independence through income, accessing responsive human services, having a home, getting strong, getting around, learning for life, thriving and healthy environment, feeling safe and included, expressing ourselves, and feeding ourselves well.

These are about making sure we're taking care of people's basic needs, creating a safety net when they can't, and having the resources to do so.

Thank you very much.

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

From the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Josh Brandon.

**Mr. Josh Brandon (Community Animator, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg):** Good morning, and thanks so much for the opportunity to present before you today.

The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg is a community-based organization. We provide leadership in improving social conditions through effective solutions, progressive policy community development, and partnership.

We've been working to develop solutions for combatting poverty here in Winnipeg since 1919, so we're one of the organizations that came out of the social movements around the general strike here in Winnipeg. We have a long history of working in these areas and are really pleased to have the opportunity to present before you.

I know the work that you're doing is quite broad, and in my remarks today, I'd like to focus on just one area of the different areas that your research is focused on here. I'm going to be looking at housing, and particularly the circumstances around housing as a poverty issue in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg is a city with unique challenges and resources, but what's applicable in Winnipeg does have relevance right across the country.

Housing is the largest expense for people living in poverty. One of the things that I do as a community animator is that I work with a number of coalitions of groups and organizations working on poverty in Manitoba. One of them is Make Poverty History

Manitoba. We bring together about a hundred different community organizations, and consistently when you talk to community groups, the number one need people have is housing. It comes right to the top of the list. That's not surprising, because for most people living in poverty, that's their largest expense.

In the 2011 census data, 37% of renters in Winnipeg lived in housing that took up more than 30% of their income, and 50% lived in housing that met one of CMHC's core housing criteria of being in poor condition, overcrowded, or unaffordable. It's a really important issue for low-income people here in Winnipeg.

In recent years in Winnipeg, we've had this kind of long trajectory. In Winnipeg, like most other cities across Canada, since the 1990s, there's been a decline of availability of rental housing. There's been some good news actually in the last few years. There has been more construction of rental housing since about 2013, and you're starting to see some pick up of availability. Vacancy rates have moderated, which is really good news.

Unfortunately, the housing that is available often is housing that's unaffordable for low-income people. It's really interesting if you look at it by quartile. This is probably true in other cities as well as across Canada. The housing that's being built is nowhere near what's available for low-income families. It's difficult for even moderate income or middle-income families to afford a lot of the rental construction that is available.

We're finding the housing that is available at the cheapest quartile of housing often has vacancy rates less than half of what's available at the higher more expensive quartiles of housing. This problem is particularly acute when you look at particular types of housing, and the housing that's most in need. For example, in Winnipeg, the fastest growing portions of our population are newcomers coming here often with very large families.

At the Social Planning Council, we've been working very closely with a lot of the refugee families that are recently being settled from Syria and other places. They're coming with very large families, six or seven people often in the family. That means we need larger bedroom sizes.

● (1035)

Indigenous Manitobans are the next fastest-growing population in Winnipeg with extended family sizes, different family structures, and sometimes larger family sizes as well.

We're finding that there's very low availability for three-bedroom rental units in Winnipeg. The numbers from the October 2015 CMHC survey show that for affordable three-bedroom units, there was a vacancy rate of only 0.7%. I did the calculations for that and what that shows is that there were approximately four affordable three-bedroom units in all of Winnipeg. Thinking about all the families coming to settle in Winnipeg and make their homes here, making it affordable is a real challenge.

Similarly, we found there were only approximately 27 affordable bachelor units in Winnipeg, using those numbers. At the same time, the October 2015 street census found that 1,400 individuals were experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg, but there were only 27 affordable units.

There's a real disparity. A lot of it is because the federal government disengaged from housing for a number of decades. We're really pleased the federal government started to reinvest last year. In the 2016 budget, they started to put back housing with a short-term, two-year commitment. What we really need is a longer-term commitment. We need a 10-year housing plan and a long-term housing strategy to rebuild our housing and social housing stock across Canada. Really, we need at least \$2 billion to be spent annually to start to rebuild that housing stock, and the priority should be given to social housing.

One of the problems we have seen with the investment in affordable housing agreement here in Manitoba is that it doesn't allow for investment in social housing. It's geared primarily towards construction of affordable housing. Again, it's those deep subsidies that are needed for a lot of the families coming here.

There are opportunities with CMHC. They've made about \$18 billion in profit over the last 10 years. If that money were reinvested back into social housing stock, then we could make a serious dent in the housing need here in Manitoba and across Canada.

The other major problem is around repairs. A lot of the existing housing in Manitoba is in need of repair. This is particularly the case with social housing. There's a backlog of approximately \$500 million that needs to be spent to bring up the social housing stock in Manitoba. Canada has committed \$33 million over two years, but a longer-term commitment is needed to help erase that gap.

I'd also like to say that the backlog for repair on Manitoba first nations housing is even greater. Our primary focus at the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg is on housing here in Winnipeg, but we understand that there is a \$2-billion deficit on first nations housing in Manitoba alone. We know these problems are interconnected. I did some research working with the Eagle Urban Transition Centre, a group that helps indigenous people coming to Winnipeg. It helps them find housing and navigate the system.

We found that there are a lot of people who are leaving poor housing conditions on first nations, where there is overcrowding and deteriorating housing, or they're being flooded out of their homes. They come to Winnipeg and they're finding that there isn't good housing here either. Housing is unaffordable and they don't have the supports to navigate the system. We need to see that these problems are interconnected.

There also needs to be flexibility across Canada. The housing market in Winnipeg is not the same as in hotter markets like Toronto or Vancouver. There are different housing needs. We need to recognize that one size is not going to fit all right across the country. There needs to be flexibility in how the programs are rolled out.

•(1040)

We know that here in Manitoba there have been some problems with housing that's been constructed according to deadline, and as a result, the housing that gets built isn't always what's needed in terms of the right time, the right space, or the family type.

I just want to say one more thing. I talked a lot about the bricks and mortar of housing. We also recognize that housing is an income issue. People live in poor housing because they have insufficient

incomes to afford good-quality housing. We can do more around income-support programs as well.

Thank you.

•(1045)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brandon.

To start us off, we have Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing this morning. My questions are going to be predominantly to Diane Redsky.

You say that it takes all day to be poor. I was a former high school teacher and taught a lot of aboriginal kids. I mentioned before that I didn't see them as being any different from my regular students. They were all my students and they all are human beings. I would say it's really easy to treat people as equals when you see each person as your child or somebody's son or daughter. That's the perspective I had.

You mentioned missing and murdered indigenous women. That affects my riding dramatically. I represent Prince George, plus to the north. It's a huge concern. I can't imagine having a daughter who's 12 and having her lost, especially in that way.

You talked about employment and training programs as part of the solution to reducing poverty. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I see it this way. It isn't just a job. It's hope, it's opportunity, and it's freedom. That's how I see it myself. My son just got a job as an apprentice, and his whole life changed because now he can buy a truck and he has money to spend. You know what it's like to have a job. It's a big change in life.

From your perspective, with employment and training programs specifically—and you can even expand to a larger extent—if you could wave the magic wand, big question, what would you do to change the current system? We're targeting aboriginal kids especially, because that's a huge unemployment area, and it seems to be a pattern there. What would you change?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** In regard to education and training, I would invest in those indigenous-led organizations that are already doing great work. In Winnipeg we have the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development, CAHRD, which is an indigenous-led organization that has been working on building the capacity of indigenous people so that they are employable. The difference between that and what you talk of as an apprenticeship program is that CAHRD understands that many of our people are in trauma still, for a variety of reasons. There is continued racism, so even in some sectors, where they may be training for a job, they are not going to get the job because it's typically non-indigenous people who are getting it. That is a reality for the sector, and it includes the trades.

My magic wand would have more indigenous-led organizations, such as CAHRD, that continue to lead in the area of doing trauma-informed service and building the right supports around an individual so that they have the proper protective factors and the proper skills and tools. Then, when they are in mainstream society and are working, they have a shot, and they're not, in the first week or the first day, losing their jobs right off the bat. There would be training programs that are really going to honour the experience and the reality of an indigenous person in Canada.

In my opinion, we have another generation or two to go that will still need those trauma-informed and culturally appropriate services.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** One of the witnesses I brought to committee was a young guy who started a company, Kory Wood. He's 27 years old and comes from meagre circumstances. I just met his mother on the plane coming out here. She was so proud of him having appeared at committee, but I think the big difference I saw was that there are two different kinds of thought within the thought processes of aboriginal kids. There are those who have a positive outlook and hope and feel they can change things and become whatever they want to be, and there are those who are stuck in the rut of what has happened in the past.

The ones who are successful were able to get out of the rut, I guess, and that's what we're trying to do, help them get out of that rut as much as we can. I guess what you're saying is help us get out of the rut. I applaud you for your efforts there.

Specifically with regard to aboriginal women, we've seen tragic situations of abuse, systemic and generational. What would you suggest, in terms of poverty too, because that's the last thing? It's difficult. They're in a dark place. A person might be overwhelmed by the kids and difficult circumstances. Again, with the magic wand that you have, how would you help that side of society? How would you help those ladies see a bright future for their lives and get out of poverty?

• (1050)

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** The answer is very complex—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** It is, yes.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** —because sometimes, and we're not blaming her for her circumstances, the system puts women into these difficult circumstances. So chances are, particularly if you're living in Winnipeg, you were most likely connected to child welfare at some point, which creates a lack of opportunity and a lack of the safety net that we all enjoy within our families. When we need help, we can have all hands on deck, and many of our families are not.... If one is struggling, they're all struggling, and it's a question of who's struggling the most. It's a survival reality for many indigenous families.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Would you say there's a need for a support structure? You're saying there is a need for the funds. There's the need to buy food and pay rent, but it sounds like you're saying that the support structure is what's lacking, that mother and grandma influence helping the mom along when there's an issue raising the kids.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** They may or may not be there because of historical factors of us reclaiming our understanding and experience of being in a relationship. Relationships for us are harder than they

are for other people because we've been removed from our families. We've been isolated generationally. I'm only first generation of a residential school survivor, and that is the reality still of many people. My mother went to residential school, and there are a lot of things that go with that.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** How do we get from there? We know that it has happened. Through truth and reconciliation, we're trying to repair damaged relationships, but how do we get from where they're at now to the future? Very quickly, please.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** To me that's where the easy answer is. I believe the indigenous community needs to lead that, in partnership, of course. We need to lead that, to define that, and be funded adequately in order to address the issues that are facing our community. It's about building from the inside out. We need the opportunity to do that, and it's not going to happen overnight. It has to happen over a long period of time and it will involve multiple people.

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

Now over to Mr. Long, please.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our presenters this morning.

Ms. Redsky, I am moved by the plight of indigenous communities right across the country. Presenter after presenter who we've had over the last 20 or so weeks tells the same story.

You said in your presentation that you make 300 lunches daily. Have you seen any progress at all over the last few years with respect to innovation? Are the numbers just continuing to be the same? Are they growing? Are there things happening like social enterprise and other things in your community to try to pull people out of that cycle?

Obviously, we all know it's generational, but could you comment on whether you've seen any progress over the last while? Has the Canada child benefit helped? I'll get you started with that.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** First, I would agree that, absolutely, the child benefit helps, and it's not clawed back, which is extremely helpful to families. As food goes up, no other money goes up. If you are on social assistance—and it has been that way for a really long time, with no increases to assist families—you are still faced with having to make the decision, “Do I pay rent, or do I buy food?” You don't buy food, so where are you going to go to get that food? You can go to organizations like Ma Mawi. It's a vicious cycle that's very hard to get out of.

That being said, organizations like Ma Mawi, which are on the front lines, focusing on their strengths and building their capacity to increase their skills and their voice, make a huge difference, because the people who have come in.... Ma Mawi has 200 staff, and almost every single one of them has come to Ma Mawi for service, and then volunteered, worked part time, gone back to university, came back, and is working for us or continues to work for us.

More organizations that operate with that philosophy of creating opportunities within the community are really going to have an impact.

•(1055)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I'm stating the obvious. Obviously, indigenous communities and groups have been woefully underfunded for a long while, but—to my colleague's point across the table here—it's not always just about more money and more funding. Do you see other opportunities with respect to innovation and other ways to break that cycle? Has there been innovation?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** Yes. That's one of the areas in which the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre specializes. You call it innovation. We call it indigenous traditional knowledge, where we are doing things differently. For example, we have a program called family group conferencing, which changes child welfare because it changes the decision-making in the child protection from the child welfare agency to the family. We're actually reducing the kids coming into care and preventing kids from coming into care in the first place. That's done through a model we call family group conferencing.

It's referred to as innovation, but much of the work that's being done and led by indigenous organizations is innovative. It really is going back to who we are as indigenous people.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thanks.

I was going to get to you afterwards, Mr. Brandon, but go ahead and jump in.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** I wanted to jump in about innovation, because here in Manitoba there are some really good models of that, as well as CAHRD, which Diane was talking about. There are some really interesting, innovative social enterprises, like BUILD and the Brandon energy efficiency program.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** If you don't mind, just hold that thought. I have a few rounds here, so I want to get to you on that.

I'll go back to Ms. Redsky. Can you talk about early learning and what initiatives have happened in your community with respect to early learning? How important do you feel a national early learning program would be, to pull those children out of poverty? Does your community also offer parallel programs to parents at the same time? Certainly, one thing we hear a lot is that parents want to help. They just don't know how to help. Can you comment on that?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** I would say they are excluded from helping.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** How do you mean “excluded”?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** We create systems within our school system that don't always encourage parental involvement.

Leading up to that, just in context, I would say that another program the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre operates that has been very successful nationally and well evaluated is aboriginal head start. That's an early learning program for children two to five. They end up speaking three languages before they get to kindergarten.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Head start...?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** It's the aboriginal head start program.

We are finding that the problem is... It has high parental involvement. We get the families engaged, and then the kids are speaking three languages. They're ready for kindergarten, and they know all their stuff. Then they get to school, and by grade 2 it stops. The parents are not as welcome anymore. It's a system in itself, the education system. There is that transition, and it's really difficult for

parents to continue to be engaged in their children's lives, so they drop off. That affects children's learning at that point.

•(1100)

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

Now we'll move over to MP Ashton, please.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you very much, Ms. Redsky, Mr. Brandon, for your very important presentations today.

The central point here is that we're looking for some very clear recommendations on what the federal government needs to do. While obviously there's no question that there need to be the intangibles of support in making systems more efficient, etc., what we're hearing consistently is the need for resources.

Mr. Brandon, you pointed to the fact that the federal government has been retreating from housing for decades. I certainly would love to hear your thoughts on the importance of the federal government stepping up with resources and our not minimizing the importance of that point.

I want to get your thoughts about that, Ms. Redsky, because I know, Mr. Brandon, you touched on it. Given the people, the families you work with, how important is it for the federal government to invest in housing on reserve? How is that connected to the kind of poverty you see here in the city? Obviously I'm thinking of communities up north and people I know, and the fact that many people come to Winnipeg not because they have something better lined up but because they know some people and there's some sense that they'll be able to survive.

How important would it be for the federal government to simply step up with resources on that front?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** Yes, recently it does feel as if the federal government is stepping up.

There are consultations like this, but there is that sense within the community that there's more opportunity for funding programs and for engagements, etc. I think some good first steps have happened. We are watching and waiting, and are ready to jump on when that happens.

Absolutely, there's a connection between housing on reserve and why people migrate to Winnipeg when there's a lack of opportunity within first nations or it's completely unsafe to live in those situations, so it's extremely important. We are people who are connected to our land base, and that's important to us. To be able to go back home is really important. To invest in housing on reserve is a smart investment. People are not going to leave. If you don't pay attention to it now we'll be paying for all of it later.

At some point we have to get off this roller coaster, the cycle that we're in whereby our community continues to be neglected. We can't expect things to get any better if we're not making strategic investments in social development, housing, and indigenous leadership, etc.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** That's great. Thank you very much, Ms. Redsky.

Mr. Brandon, in your presentation, you briefly touched on the role of CMHC. Again, because we're here to take direct recommendations at the federal level, how important is it for members of the Social Planning Council to see CMHC fulfill its mandate?

We heard in a previous presentation that significant profits have certainly accrued when the commitment should be on investing that money and creating housing, and as you pointed out, social housing.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Housing is a critical federal function. CMHC was created after the Second World War to deal with a significant housing crisis at that time. Over the subsequent 30 years, from the sixties through to the 1980s, there was a real strong investment from CMHC into building one of the most enviable social housing systems in the world here in Canada. We built over 600,000 units of social housing right across the country. That number hasn't increased since the 1980s, and in fact it has started to deteriorate. As the operating agreements have come due, we're seeing a decline in social housing across the country, even as need is increasing.

Middle-income people struggling to afford housing, as well as wealthier Canadians, have all put into CMHC through the insurance program and through different ways. When they do that, they expect that money is going to feed back into social housing and into affordable housing, and into a complete housing system, because they know that the next generation is going to need help getting their foot in the door.

I think Canadians want to contribute to create a complete housing system. That's why we have the system in place. That's why we have CMHC in place. However, when CMHC in its annual reports pats itself on the back, saying, "You know, we've contributed \$18 billion over 10 years towards deficit reduction", it's not fulfilling that prime mandate that Canadians expect it to fulfill. If it gets back to that, we can have a robust housing system again here in Canada.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Dhillon, you're up.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Good morning. Thank you for being here with us.

My question is for Ms. Redsky.

What do you think is needed to break out of this vicious cycle of poverty, in your opinion, from what you've seen?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** I think in practical terms, it's an opportunity to have some leaders across the country, our provincial, regional or something, really rolling up their sleeves to make changes and recommendations within their regions that are going to make huge differences.

I don't want to answer that in a grandiose kind of way, "If you change the system everything will be better". I think engagement with the indigenous community in a meaningful and direct way, where we're engaged and involved and part of the solution making, is where you will see some concrete ideas and concrete ways in which we can address poverty that is specific to our territories.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** You mentioned before that even if the young people get trade diplomas or the training, they still won't get jobs because of who they are, because of their backgrounds.

How do you think we can overcome this kind of discrimination?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** We're doing that at our local level, for example, with the trades. We are bringing the trades into schools. They are doing some soft education and awareness, and getting kids excited about being in the trades, while at the same time they're understanding more about the sector.

Indigenous people are the largest growing population in Winnipeg, yet they're not represented in jobs in the service industry—anywhere. We're starting to create those opportunities to get younger people, like grades 5 or 6, excited about trades, and to have the trades not be so scared about, for whatever reason, including indigenous people in the trades.

It boils down to relationship building and being proactive, so there are some local initiatives that are under way to address that. A few years from now, we should be seeing a shift and seeing more and more indigenous youth in all areas of employment.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** What would you like to see as part of the poverty reduction strategy?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** We need a voice, a clear meaningful voice for indigenous people. We need to be sitting at the table—working, making recommendations, and taking the lead.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Mr. Brandon, you mentioned that housing is the largest expense for people living in poverty, that it's at the top of the list. You spoke about flooding and people coming to Winnipeg, and you said they need supports. What kinds of supports are you talking about?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** A lot of people coming to Winnipeg for the first time don't have experience with rental markets, so they don't necessarily know their rights as tenants. Some people don't have the identification they need to access social services. If you're coming from a smaller community, which most first nation reserve communities are, you go to the band office and you're able to get your resources all in one place.

Here in Winnipeg you're going through a number of different systems. You may be trying to access social assistance or to find employment. You may be looking for a different agency to help you with housing or with family issues. You're trying to navigate all these different systems, and there isn't a central resource for people sometimes. This can be an intimidating factor as well. Then there are factors of discrimination. If you're trying to find housing and you're indigenous, how often is it that people are discriminated against? Unfortunately, it's far too often here in Winnipeg.

• (1110)

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** By "discrimination" do you mean turned away?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** I mean turned away or taken advantage of. We heard one report of a family being met at the airport by a potential landlord who got them to sign an agreement without even seeing the apartment, which turned out to be not very liveable. People are getting taken advantage of in those sorts of ways.

**The Chair:** Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Brandon, for your presentation.

How many people in Winnipeg are on a wait-list for affordable housing?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** The numbers are tricky because Manitoba Housing doesn't keep a unified list, but we understand there are about 3,000 people on eligibility lists.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** How long are they normally on the list?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** In some cases, they can be on a list for many years. It varies. Some people get something quickly if their circumstances are really bad, but some people wait for years.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** We came out with investment in affordable housing, additional money. I know it was announced in my city of Saint John, New Brunswick, that there was an extra \$56-million, two-year agreement for investment in affordable housing. How do you see that money trickling down, though?

One of the biggest frustrations I've had as an MP is that there are some great federal initiatives, but then those federal initiatives have to go to the province and work their way down to the municipalities. Do you see opportunities for better alignment of the three levels of government? I believe that the greatest change will come through federal initiatives. Do you see better opportunities for alignment down through the levels of government. Did Winnipeg receive money, and who advocated for that?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Winnipeg did receive money and it's a multi-part agreement with \$33 million for repairs. There's about \$11 million per year, which doubles the existing \$11 million, so it's an extra \$44 million in total. Those are important investments.

As to your point of how we get those investments into the right places, I think we need to have community leadership, and there needs to be support for community groups to develop plans that meet their needs.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** You believe the community should have a stronger voice as to what specifically they need.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Exactly. Too often what happens is that requests for proposals go out, and the organizations that are first to jump on the list are the most organized ones. Too often we see groups that maybe don't have the capacity. Indigenous organizations, for example, or organizations that are dealing with communities that are less organized aren't able to take advantage of those opportunities so there isn't good matching with resources and need.

What we need to have in place is capacity building so that all communities can take advantage of the resources that are available in a timely fashion.

• (1115)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I think it's safe to say there's been a lack of investment in affordable housing over the past several years.

Certainly a comment was made in my riding that there was a man at Outflow, the men's homeless shelter in Saint John, who went into affordable housing, and three days later he came back to the shelter. They asked him why he was going back, and it was because the affordable housing he went into was not up to any standard. He wanted to go back. He felt, if you will, safer in the shelter from the perspective of bedbugs or what have you.

How do we fix this problem? Saint John is the oldest city in Canada. Our housing is old. We're putting money in it, but in your opinion what do we do to get upstream of this?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** I think you need to have the people living in poverty have a voice at the table. Here in Winnipeg, at Lord Selkirk Park, one of our oldest social housing projects, there was an investment in helping build the community there so that the people who lived in social housing had a voice on what priorities should be met in terms of improvements when they implemented a number of improvements in redeveloping that complex.

When you get people who live in the housing at the table and have their voices heard, they take pride in the ownership of the development, and also you're able to best address the needs that they are experiencing. We need to have investments in renovations and redevelopment, but we also need to have the community voice at the table.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Ms. Redsky.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** I would like to quickly say that I'm the co-chair of End Homelessness Winnipeg, which has adopted a collective impact model. We're a board of people from the private sector, philanthropy, service, people who have been homeless, elders, etc. We have a group of people who would typically not sit together.

One of our working groups is a housing supply working group, so we're working with developers, people who have lots of business experience, along with people who have been homeless and who are homeless. They are working together to come up with a housing supply response system for Winnipeg.

Having a collective impact is my key message on how we need to engage more people with an opportunity to bring solutions.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Very quickly, Mr. Brandon, what can we do to make the housing first program better in your opinion?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Housing first is a clear demonstration that, when we provide housing for people, that is the first step towards their taking the other steps they need toward employment and dealing with problems around addiction. We need to give people safe housing first before they can take any of those other steps.

I think in some models of housing first, as it has been applied, it becomes a system in itself. You have to fit into certain boxes to access the system.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** That's a challenge.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** We need to make sure it's more universal and meets the needs of people who are applying for it.



**Mr. Wayne Long:** Would you agree with me that we need better wraparound services, too?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Karen Vecchio.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thanks very much.

I'm going to start with Ms. Redsky.

You mentioned in your comments that when people find jobs, they still need to have continued support. What is the continued support that you see as most lacking?

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** It depends on the sector and the needs of the training program. To give one quick example, Ndinawe is a youth-serving organization, which developed a specialized child and youth care diploma program. It's still certified through our college, and they can go on to university, etc. This program, however, is specialized for survivors of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. They build in all of the trauma-informed and culturally appropriate services. Then they start working in the helping field on prevention and with other sexually exploited youth in the area of human trafficking.

They've created an alumni program because now these women, who have been highly traumatized, have a diploma. Some of them even go on to pursue their degrees. Now they're working, but they're triggered every day. They're triggered by the trauma of their past—and for them that would be more extreme. We can't underestimate trauma for an indigenous person who has either intergenerational or direct trauma.

• (1120)

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** A lot of times you're looking at the social and mental welfare of that person perhaps.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** That's right. They've created an alumni program so that the women can come back and create and have a support system so that they can keep their jobs.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

Josh, I want to turn to you because you talked about the resettlement of refugees coming to the community. I have some concerns with it because I think we already have a system that is responding as well as it can with thin resources.

Have you found that the resettlement services money has been adequate for refugees coming into your community or into Winnipeg?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** It takes many years to fully resettle people, and we're very early on in the process for a lot of families. Some families that are coming into Winnipeg are struggling to find good housing. When they are able to get into good housing, that becomes a foothold for their settlement. There are amazing people working in language training, in all the different aspects, job search training, and helping people get through that process. The first year is really critical.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Are there enough dollars coming from the federal government through the resettlement programs? Have you seen an influx of money that way or no?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** All the programs are stretched. I don't think anybody really understood how much work it would be to bring in 25,000 people in such a short period of time. The bigger challenge is just ramping up the capacity. It's not so much the dollars that are coming in but the capacity in the community.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Yes, absolutely. It's just that when we talk and.... Ms. Redsky, we look at the work that you're doing with the indigenous people, and now what we're doing with the refugees. We're dealing with a program that is widespread but needs to meet everybody's needs. We're taking people who have had issues for centuries, and then people who have come over and had traumatic situations from foreign countries. It's one of those things. It's finding the balance.

I want to know if there's something we can do better, especially since we have two very different types coming to these resources. Do we have the resources that are necessary?

I was out at Saint John where I saw some awesome work being done at the YMCA with their resettlements. I think they spoke 28 languages or something crazy like that within the area.

Are those resources for language training available for the refugees coming to the area so that we can try to put them on the same step as everybody else?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** There are programs available. It's a huge leap to come to Canada. People are enthusiastic about coming here. I'm confident that within a few years, we're going to be reaping the benefits of those communities making their homes here.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Perfect. Thank you very much.

Please, go ahead.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** With my perfect wand to make the world better, indigenous people would have the equivalent resettlement services that newcomers do. By far, there's no equity when it comes to what happens to a newcomer versus what happens to an indigenous person coming to an urban environment. The amount of resources available are nowhere near as much.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you very much for that comment. I think that's necessary for us to hear.

Diane, you seem to have a great deal of wraparound services available. I think you said that you had served about 25,000 people. When we're looking at the data—I don't know if you have any data on this—are we looking at people who have had trauma, people who have mental illness, and people who have disabilities? Do you have a breakdown or any ideas in terms of what that demographic looks like for those who are coming to your services?

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Give a very short answer, please.

**Ms. Diane Redsky:** Yes. Of that 25,000, they're all indigenous people. You can be pretty much guaranteed that there's some level of trauma in all of them. The severity of it will depend on a whole bunch of factors.

Of the 25,000 people who access our services, 80% are first nations individuals who are connected to a first nation somewhere, mainly in Manitoba.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Anju, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** I will continue with Mr. Brandon.

You spoke about working with other agencies. Which agencies do you work with?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** We work with over a hundred different organizations that are working on hunger, employment, mental health—it's the whole range of social justice agencies—and one thing we've tried to do is to bring those priorities together.

One thing we've recognized that really needs to happen is that there needs to be a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction in Canada. When you look at housing, you see instantly that it's connected to employment, to income, and to mental health issues. All those systems need to be integrated.

We also need to focus on targets for where we're going to get to and timelines for realizing them. Those are some of the major lessons we learn when we bring together large coalitions from across the community.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Do you have one umbrella organization, or is it spread out everywhere so that people have to seek it out themselves?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Here in Manitoba, I chair a coalition, Make Poverty History Manitoba, and that does a lot of the work of bringing together community organizations from various sectors and helps set and develop priorities.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** You may not be able to answer this, but you didn't get to answer earlier when we were talking about job discrimination and saying that even if they have the degree or the training, they won't get the job. Why is there this discrimination?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** There have been centuries of discrimination and racism in Canada, and I think all Canadians have absorbed some of that to one degree or another, either on the receiving end or in perpetrating it. It's a part of our culture that we really need to deconstruct.

In terms of employment, I think there are some great organizations that are doing good work here in Manitoba in helping to give training to people. There are social enterprises that are bringing people into apprenticeship programs. They are helping people by recognizing that more than just training is needed. Life skills development is also needed, as is working with the employers, in order to recognize that different groups have different abilities, different capacities, and different skills that they're bringing to a job situation.

One of the important roles that government can have is not just in funding those organizations, but in procurement from them. A lot of the really good work that has been done in Manitoba housing in recent years has been done through social enterprises that provide training and employment opportunities for people with barriers to employment. That helps get people in the door and it gives people confidence. Once people have more confidence and more work experience in their jobs, they're able to move out into other sectors of employment.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** You mentioned that income support programs are also needed. Can you please tell us what you would like to see as part of these programs?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** We've had some really good steps during the past couple of years, both in Manitoba and in Canada. With the introduction of the Canada child benefit program, you start to see a drop in food bank use already because of that. People have access to better shelters because of the rent assist program.

I think if you start to look at it globally, you can start to see the makings of a basic income program right across Canada because we have basic income for seniors, we have, for families, the start of basic income with the child benefit program, and for renters here in Manitoba there's rent assist. One of the biggest gaps we see, though, is for the basic needs of things like food, clothing, communications, and transportation. That chunk is missing, and people have to go to social assistance programs that are almost always inadequate and have barriers and all kinds of problems.

Diane was talking about it taking all day to be poor. If you're having to go to the welfare office to knock on six different doors, it's not only inefficient, it's degrading. It reduces your ability and your capacity to enter employment and to develop your training and skills. If we could just get, across the board, basic income programs that deal with all of those elements, then people can have firm ground to stand on to get to the next level of their development.

• (1130)

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

Karen, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you, Josh, for breaking into this, the basic annual income.

I've done a lot of research on it personally and I am part of the all-party anti-poverty caucus, which has heard different people come in and discuss this. There are different ways of approaching this, so tell me the model that, for basic annual income, you think is best.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** I think it's important not to take away from existing programs. Recognizing that, as I said earlier, we need a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Could you be much more specific? There are different models, so what I'm looking at specifically is what model it is that you're saying we should bring to the table when we talk about basic annual income.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** There are two main models that are usually proposed. One is a model that's universal, that just provides a flat income benefit for all people, and then there are adjustments to the taxation system to claw it back. The other would be a negative income tax model—there are different terms for that—where you have a graduated approach. Generally speaking, the research is starting to show that a graduated approach is better at targeting the families that are most in need, but either way it's proposed, it really depends on how it fits in with other systems.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Yes, I think we saw that Switzerland is looking at the universal. Of course, if somebody's making \$150,000, why would they need the basic annual income? You're talking about a much more targeted approach.

Now, here's where I need to get into it, and I've said this many times. I've done 83 tax returns, and I'm looking at the basic annual income, the child benefit, and all of these things. I'm not going to say that the child benefit is not a positive thing for families, because it is. I know that; it does help families. At the same time, when you talk about marginal rate of tax, there are a variety of different things that weigh.

When I was working as an assistant in an MP's office, I made \$40,000. A person who was on benefits made \$72,000 and had affordable housing as well. My whole household income at the time was \$75,000, and that included my husband's and my income, and I was serving somebody who had housing and a non-taxable child tax benefit, because it was never taxable. What are we saying here when you're saying not to take those programs away?

This lady made \$3,000 less than my spouse and me, but had all of these non-taxable benefits coming to her. How do we have equality? I'm going to use what good old Bob Zimmer says, "Joe and Jane Taxpayer." How can we settle this, when people like me and my husband, who worked 40 and 50 hours a week, were not benefiting, yet we had some people on programs that were fully benefiting, especially when you're saying you cannot take those benefits away?

If they get the basic annual income as well, they're going to continue to draw away from the working poor. How do we deal with that?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** I think we need programs that provide a basic platform of income for all households. We still need to recognize that some households may have other needs. One participant in one of the programs that I'm working with has severe disabilities. She needs medication and she needs supports for helping her around her house. We can't say that her needs will be the same as my needs. The kinds of income supports that people need will vary across the board.

We need to provide a basic platform for all Canadians and then look at other programs to see where the gaps are. We know that a basic income doesn't mean that families don't still need child care to be able to access employment or access their education.

• (1135)

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I want to go into the basic income a bit more. When we're looking at it, we have to take into consideration the public funds: old age security, child benefit, Ontario Works, and things of that sort. We haven't discussed seniors yet, but when we're looking at seniors, we recognize that with GIS and old age security, it's that same idea of a basic annual income. Now, it's not very much, but it is that.

We have to be very cautious when we're looking at these things. I know that a lot of times people will talk about basic annual income, but when we're dealing with non-reported income, which is so much higher than many people understand, how are we going to deal with it in terms of the working poor and the taxpayer? There's a very unequal issue here.

I believe in equality. I totally believe in equality, but we have to be cautious and we have to make sure that it's not just on the taxpayers' backs. When we're dealing with old age security, we need to be looking at all of these. You're saying don't draw back, but we need to

look at them all. This country will be bankrupt if we don't. I have clients who are bringing in \$85,000 in child benefits in my community and still getting social housing. We have to make sure that not a single dollar of that is used on their Ontario Works programs.

What's happening is that we have a huge separation between the working poor and the people on social benefits. I think when we look at basic annual income, we have to report everything and combine those programs.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** You know, when you talk about—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, we have to move on.

Ms. Ashton, you have three minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Great.

Mr. Brandon, go ahead and share your thoughts on that, if you like.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Thank you.

When you look at basic income or any social program, it's important not to look at one individual case and say, oh, you know, there's this family who's benefiting unfairly. You have to look at the bigger picture. I work with hundreds of people, low-income people, who aren't making anywhere near \$80,000 a year, who critically depend on supports through social housing, and who could substantially benefit from a basic income.

The other side is that when we're talking about how we can afford that, unfortunately in Canada, through various forms of corporate welfare and through tax breaks for some of the wealthiest Canadians, we're effectively giving huge subsidies to some of the wealthiest Canadians who can afford to pay much more. That's where I would argue the bigger weight on working Canadians is coming from, rather than from the few low-income Canadians who may be misusing existing programs.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I just want to pick up on that last point, Mr. Brandon. Some of our presenters in the first panel also touched on the question of priorities and the rhetoric around "we just can't afford it".

Where are we spending money that's not making a difference in terms of alleviating poverty, or reducing poverty, or eliminating poverty? In the spirit of us taking back recommendations, what kind of recommendation could you give to us that we could in turn give to the federal government with respect to ensuring that there is adequate funding?

You touched on fair taxation, for example. Perhaps you could phrase it in more of a recommendation format.

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We're lucky to be here, and we all benefit from living in this great country. We all benefit from the generosity of first nations people who welcomed Canadians from all around the world here, and if we look at how those benefits are distributed, we see that they're not distributed evenly.

We should not have poverty in Canada. There's no excuse for a country as wealthy as ours, with as much resource endowment, knowledge, and skill, to have any poverty. I would make it the high-level recommendation of this committee to listen to people who live in poverty.

Listen to those voices. Bring them to the table. Look for concrete ways to get to a point where there aren't children depending on food banks, where there isn't homelessness, and where all Canadians can afford a basic standard of living.

• (1140)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** To clarify, are you calling for fairer taxation and redistribution?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** Absolutely, we need to look at our taxation system to ensure that those Canadians who can afford it are paying their fair share, and that those Canadians in need are receiving the benefits they need to afford the standard of living that Canadians should take for granted.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I think I speak for everyone here when I say that we share that sentiment. It does not make sense that we continue to see poverty in this country, given the wealth of this country.

I'm going to take advantage of my role as chair and steal the last few minutes, if that's okay. There was one topic that did not come up. We started to go down that road a little bit.

I was on the executive of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries for a number of years with executive director Linda Terry, from whom I have learned a ton. They were integral in helping to develop a plan, alongside a number of other organizations in the Waterloo region, for the influx of refugees.

With what's happening about an hour and a half to the south of us, in Emerson, Manitoba, how is that impacting your decisions moving forward? Is there a plan? Is there a safety net or an emergency protocol in place right now, in case this trend of refugees coming across the border from the United States continues?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** What's happening is tragic. People are crossing fields of snow in -20°C weather. That should not be happening.

We need to look at the safe third country agreement, so that people are able to access help right at our borders, rather than having to cross through fields to get here. We should not be fearful of people who want to come to our country and are willing to make those kinds of sacrifices to make it to our borders. If they are making those sacrifices to get here, we should welcome them with open arms.

We need to have supports available when they get here. The existing programs in place, places like Welcome House, are finding they don't have the capacity to meet the need. We know that in Minneapolis alone, which is the nearest major centre across the border from Winnipeg, there are 23,000 people who come from one of the seven countries that are being targeted by the executive order in the United States. We don't have the capacity to deal with them. Just last weekend, there were 22 people who came across. We need more capacity here.

**The Chair:** Of the 22, are they being settled in Winnipeg? Do you know?

**Mr. Josh Brandon:** They've found temporary settlements so far. Usually, it takes a few weeks to get people settled, but if the numbers increase, we don't know if we'll be able to continue to see that settlement rate.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'd like to thank both of you for your time, for coming out today, and for speaking with us and contributing to this study.

This is our first stop this week. We're heading to Medicine Hat tomorrow and then on to Vancouver. As has been mentioned, we were in Saint John last week. We tried to get to Toronto, and we tried to get to Kuujjuaq. We're going to get back to Toronto. Kuujjuaq, unfortunately, I don't think is in the cards.

Thank you very much for coming out.

The meeting is adjourned.







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