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Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (0935)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): We are in the public session of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs of the Parliament of Canada, and we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

It's very nice to see representatives from the Sandy Bay First Nation, from Manitoba. We're very happy that you found the time and made your way all the way here to Ottawa to present to us on community capacity-building on reserve.

You have up to 10 minutes. We try to be liberal with our time. After that, we'll go through rounds of questions from members of Parliament.

Any time you're ready, please start.

Chief Lance Roulette (Sandy Bay First Nation): Thank you.

First off, thank you very much for the opportunity not only to speak to the standing committee, but also to share and engage in the process of reconciliation, and to get that clarity and understanding from both sides. We from Sandy Bay thank you very much for the opportunity to allow us to be part of this unique discussion, but also to share exactly what Sandy Bay is encountering and how the decisions from today can make a difference not only for our community, but for many other first nations communities across Canada.

I'll give a briefing on capacity in terms of what Sandy Bay has gone through. The realm of capacity is consistently evolving, and it has a set of skills to achieve not only employment, but also growth along the evolution of any person or any first nations child.

Sandy Bay has been successful in achieving the means of capacity development throughout its existence. This is directly attributed to the growing population and the demand for specialized services.

A prime example of a successful community capacity-building model would be the Sandy Bay First Nation implementation in the 1970s. The chief at the time, the late Howard Starr, clearly reiterated to the community that it was time to move in a different direction in order to train our own people to teach our own people. A lot of this was really directed at the education realm.

From there on, into the 1990s, Sandy Bay First Nation was able to train quite a few of our own local members to not only become certified teachers, but also to assist with the development of our

children, taking a unique cultural approach, having a *sui generis* nature. These individuals graduated with degrees in education, and took a first nations approach. More people followed in the path in the following years, and today the majority of teachers in the school are first nations community members.

The barriers of the current capacity models within Sandy Bay have been met with many desired outcomes, and many not. One thing remains: the ability to overcome the funding parameters on specific or engaged projects that reflect continued service that is guaranteed. This has been a focal point in the intended area of capacity-building of Sandy Bay.

The Sandy Bay ASETS program has served the community in the areas of capacity development from the late 1980s to the current time. To date the program, known previously as the AHRD initiative, has been semi-successful in achieving its goals in many areas and designed targets. These targets have been community-driven and -centred.

The following training programs have been offered to the community, some in conjunction with the province, Service Canada, education and other program departments, and with ISC. I'll just name a few: the "Mature 12" program and the partnership that we have with many other organizations such as ACC, and so forth; the community access program, which is IT; the summer youth employment strategy; and special education, SETA, with manpower and providing that training so that they begin to step into the realm of education.

A good key focus within the program specifically has been in the areas of trades and apprenticeship, journeyman plumbing, electrical and carpentry; nurse practitioners; home care; certified heavy equipment operators; class 1 licence training; tower assembly training; and meat cutting and processing plant training.

Once again, I thank Ms. Mihychuk for her collaboration in making that program become not only a reality, but a successful project that we've been going about throughout the years. We are on our seventh cohort, starting next week, so thank you very much for that opportunity.

As well, just to name a few of the projects that we have done through the ASETS program, there are various first aid courses; work hazard informational sessions and systems; driver safety; partnering with medical transportation through health; safety and skills; survival skills, partnering with education; and gun safety.

● (0940)

There are benefits to training our own people; however, the reality is that many first nations have limited employment opportunities, especially for people who have successfully completed the programs. It does speak to a larger issue in many of our first nations communities, as they have to go off reserve.

As a result of these projects, there has been a complement of services that include non-negotiated contribution agreements and self-imposed policies. These imposed guidelines restrict a true community-driven approach to a needs-based model. Regional administration and non-negotiated areas of service delivery are also restricted. Secondary services are a good prime example of the flow-through mechanisms from government to secondary service level providers.

It's understood that those secondary supports require specialized professionals in attaining assessment tools and getting a more centred approach, from identifying the developmental stages of a child to understanding the learning parameters of any individual, whether they be a visual, auditory or tactile learner.

One of the things we had noticed at Sandy Bay was that the flow-through mechanisms, such as FPDI, AMC, SCO and MKO—and no rudeness intended to those organizations—impede a true grassroots impact from the funds that are provided from the federal or the provincial side, and they don't speak to the true intent of a community needs-based model.

When considering community capacity development, we are consistently met with barriers: underfunded agreements; agreements that are usually signed under duress without any means of negotiation; agreements that are awarded to tribal councils without considering the needs of the individual; and the authorities, due to the inability of ISC to meet the needs of the funding in question.

In Sandy Bay's case, it was centred directly on the set contributions, whereas there was no means of negotiating for additional funding set out on the actual needs versus perceived needs of any first nation by its funders, but more so, the fact that any community matter under a subagreement will meet failure.

This is a direct result of the non-community-driven initiative, but also indicates non-funded community-based program costs as dictated by funders and many non-consulted regions, which is usually the case, once again alluding to the fact that the funding models that come down to secondary service providers don't hit the targets.

In closing, I pointed, to a degree, on what specifics to identify during a process of self-sufficiency and through general understanding of parameters that are set in place to govern the areas of service delivery, based on the perceived model of development. It contradicts itself, as no need is more in demand than another. It is rather a priority based on urgency.

Whether we are a politician, an advocate or a service provider, one thing remains, and it is how the decisions from today will improve the access to many needed services and programming that truly reflect a first nations or community-driven model. To ensure progress within the community, it is important to note that there is a clear and concise method of gauging the desired outcomes and processes on community-driven programming, as well as transferable skills to meet the needs of each successful participant. These types of programs and initiatives should be fully funded and specific to community demographics and location. The reason I express this is that unfunded areas don't reflect the needs of Sandy Bay and other first nations communities.

With that opening statement, I say thank you.

I'm not too sure how much time we have left. I would like to have Virginia make a few other statements.

● (0945)

The Chair: You have about a minute.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk (Assistant Director of Health, Sandy Bay First Nation): I'll just add to the chief's comments in relation to the barriers. The funding normally flows to the secondary organization rather than straight to the community, and this decreases the chances of our people within our community to access that training.

For example, another organization that receives money through the education system on behalf of our community is the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. They train their people to come and provide the services at the community level, which we feel is the opposite of what we'd like to see. We would like to see our people being trained. That would help with retention within the community because people would live there.

It would also help with the economy within the community because these people live there. It's not somebody else coming from the outside who doesn't understand what our culture is within our community and may not be able to speak our language. I'm proud to say that probably 80% of our community members are strong speakers of our language. Eventually we want to see in our education system that nursery to grade 12 is taught in our language. We feel that's very important in our identity as first nations people.

I think it's really important to note that there are a lot of services we're not receiving at the community level that would help with the education of our people. They are programs such as the maternal child health program, which benefits the parent and the child in that early learning, as well as the aboriginal head start program. We do not have that in our community and that would help to support children in their early years, so that they do have a better start to their education system as they grow older, and hopefully we would see higher numbers of grade 12 graduates.

I also think it's really important to note that we would like to see these relationships with the post-secondary educational organizations coming to our community to deliver the education that's required with the new health transformation call-out. We are one of the communities that are looking at developing a health model within our community based on geographic population. That's never happened before. We have one of the largest communities in Manitoba, yet provincially we are not identified as a huge geographic population where other services are provided to other non-first nations populations. We want to see that come to a more even scale.

Thank you.

● (0950)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move on to the question round, and we will begin with MP Yves Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for their testimony.

I'm going to start by speaking about education. The witnesses told us about difficulties getting adapted infrastructure to provide appropriate teaching to the students. Can you describe the current state of the infrastructure in your community?

[*English*]

Chief Lance Roulette: As infrastructure within Sandy Bay itself, we do have a K-to-12 school. With the growing population, it's beginning to be a hindrance on how much room we have for the children.

On the issue of capacity development, it does impede what staff supports we have in place. A prime example of that would be our grade 2 classes. The student-to-teacher ratio is anywhere from 28 students to one teacher, which is double the norm of what any other educational facility has at a provincial or a federal level.

The ability to ensure that the child receives the best education—especially with the growing demand of many children with disabilities and need for specialized professionals to assist in identifying the child's opportunity to learn—I can best describe as being very low.

Once again, as my colleague Virginia had indicated in relation to MFNERC, they receive money for us for specialized professionals to come into Sandy Bay—and they do receive a huge chunk of change on Sandy Bay's behalf—but having them come in once or twice a month does not fit what we need within Sandy Bay. This is why we spoke to the issue of secondary services.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Yves Robillard: It does.

[*Translation*]

Here is my second question.

How can the federal government assist you with respect to education infrastructure?

[*English*]

Chief Lance Roulette: I think the direct relationship would work best. That way, there's more clarity provided between the two. A lot of the time we have regional offices that say they speak for their community. No one can ever speak for anybody's community, other than the community itself. I truly believe that a direct relationship without the flow-through mechanisms of any of these secondary services would be the key.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: The Sandy Bay First Nation has had local control over education since the seventies. Are there any promising practices you might share with other first nations, with respect to education?

[*English*]

Chief Lance Roulette: Well, I think the one thing we've been very successful at, once again, is the issue of cultural retention, and also incorporating that with the importance of education. The exchange from student to teacher has always been unique; a majority of the teachings are understood in both a cultural sense and also in a contemporary sense. The model that Sandy Bay always tries to provide is that we want to be able to capacity-build our students not only to be successful within the education realm but also to come back home and be the future leaders of the community, be the service providers of the community. That's always key.

We've been very successful in post-secondary programs as well, once again, but a successful post-secondary program is also dependent on the curriculum within Sandy Bay. Our curriculum is two years behind. We need to ensure we have funding for the compulsory programs that are required so we're not setting up our graduates for failure when they do undertake a post-secondary program.

Would you care to add?

● (0955)

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Yes. I just want to add as well, in relation to culture, that we do have a junior chief and council set up at the school. As well, there are land-based teachings that happen on a regular basis. They have a little powwow group as well, too, that is learning drumming and stuff like that, which I believe is really important to the youth.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: With regard to education funding, can you tell us how the federal government is helping you at this time? How can we improve that?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have about one minute.

Chief Lance Roulette: I believe how we can help each other improve, once again, would be the issue of funding parity between the province and the federal model. Also, it's about having a direct relationship and being able to have direct engagement with one another, ensuring the secondary-level services that are out there fit with the first nation, our model, specific to each community, basically.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: I'd just like to add to that. I think it's investing in capital. We are so behind in capital at the community level. There hasn't been an investment in all areas for a very long time. Our school is very crowded for teaching our youth. It's an older school.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Arnold Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our guests for being here today.

I think the time goes to Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): If you have a question, go ahead.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I'm always convinced that the chairman gives me the short minutes, so I'm going to take it.

Thanks for being here today.

Around the education piece, across the country it looks different. Where I come from, even within my own riding of 14 first nations, it's different depending on which part of the riding it's organized from. Six first nations have organized themselves into their own educational authority, and they're doing their own thing. Some of the other ones that are closer to town send their kids to the public school. Others are off on their own doing their own thing.

I just would like to know what the model is in your community.

Chief Lance Roulette: In our current model, the administration is usually handled through our director, and recommendations for any changes, whether to the curriculum or to the overall structure, would come from our director of education.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It's federally managed?

Chief Lance Roulette: It's federally managed, yes.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Is there another community close by that you could partner with?

Chief Lance Roulette: Do you want to speak to that, Virginia?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: No, the local rural municipalities are quite a ways away, so it would be a good 45-minute bus trip for a child to go to that school, plus that school isn't very big. It's only, I think, up to grade 7. They bus their high school kids even further, which takes another hour.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Are there any private institutions offering education in your community?

Chief Lance Roulette: We did have some engagement with Pine Creek School Division, Frontier School Division and MFNERC.

I guess the feeling around is that it doesn't truly reflect what a community-driven model would be for Sandy Bay in the realm of education. We have expressed some interest in that before, but the direction from our elders and our youth is to not only maintain that control but also to find a way to enhance access to more programming, mainly in the areas of compulsory programming and land-based cultural funding.

• (1000)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Also, there is a bit of a relationship between the University of Manitoba, Red River College and Assiniboine Community College. They'd be willing to come to the community if we had some way to work out a deal with them to deliver post-secondary courses on reserve.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: One of the things we hear all the time is that there's never enough money for all of the things we'd like to do. But with the control of the money, at least, you can make the decisions. You can control where the money goes. How does the money flow through for education? Who is making those decisions? Is it the parents, the students, the elders, the band and council, a bureaucrat in Ottawa?

Chief Lance Roulette: With the introduction of new interim funding and the task force in place from the Manitoba region, as well as our efforts on the issue of funding parity, we had a huge discussion on exactly how those future funds are going to flow.

We are in the midst of giving the school control over those funds and gearing them specifically towards the development and education of the child. The accountability required to ensure that the child has the best quality education is always key. With the new interim funding, we're hoping that we'll be able to achieve that goal. We are in the midst of preparing a declaration with the school director and the school representatives to ensure that any money that comes in will go into programming, where it should be, rather than being absorbed into the overall band operations.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: One of the things I've learned from education around the world is that when parents are engaged in their child's education, the children often do a lot better.

How are parents integrated into the system? Is there an opportunity for them to do a check-off on the money that flows through or anything like that?

Chief Lance Roulette: No, we don't have that model in place yet, but we're working towards ensuring that parental involvement is a key factor. The issue of mentorship, extracurricular involvement, is also a factor in the development of any child in our school.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: How would parents be involved in the education system in your community at this point?

Chief Lance Roulette: At this point, it's very minimal. We're hoping to improve that once we get a firmer footing as to how the model of a parental committee is going to influence the curriculum.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay.

Yes, Ms. Lukianchuk.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: I would just note that we do follow a governance model at the community level. The community is brought together. Questions are asked about what we should be following, and then the direction is given. That involves the parents of the community.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: My experience in these communities is that there's very much a sense of family. It involves the elders and everything. How are the elders included in your education?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: The elders actually have a room at the school right now. They are really involved with the youth. They're there through everything, for the whole day, giving advice to the youth and giving advice to the teachers. That model has been there for a very long time.

You hit the nail on the head when you talked about family. In a first nations community, everybody knows everybody. It doesn't matter how large you are. We are like a huge family. It's a totally different structure from any non-first nations community. We're there for each other. If somebody gets hurt, everybody is there at the hospital. We've had to work with the province in allowing some of these things. We are a big family. We're related to each other.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

The Chair: The questioning now moves to MP Rachel Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate what you've taught us today.

I just want to make sure I understood you right. You have a school where you have kindergarten to grade 12, and within that school you're able to encompass the traditional language and a lot of the practices. Is that right?

That's amazing.

One thing they talked about was that the provincial resources for communities of a size similar to yours have more significant funding than the community you represent. Could you talk a little bit about what that difference is?

• (1005)

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: A lot of services, for example, that are available in the province aren't available to a first nation. We're just now starting to make a little bit of a relationship with the province in relation to some of these availabilities to the community. For example, there are healthy living courses available through the province that aren't available to our first nation.

When we look at the core components of a non-first nations community versus a first nations community, we see a huge disparity. The federal government funds only the mandatory programs to a first nation, not the other supporting programs that are available to every other Canadian—or every other Manitoban, in our case.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

You also mentioned earlier that the curriculum is two years behind. Can you tell me a little bit more about what that looks like and what sort of supports are needed to get that curriculum up to speed?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: In relation to the curriculum and some of the supports that are needed, I think the chief alluded to it a little bit in regard to the services that MFNERC is supposed to be providing. Funding was given, which I guess at the time was the Jordan's principle program, that was supposed to help provide youth in the school system with services that would help them in the education system. Currently, that isn't happening. We're seeing a large number of youth who are requiring speech therapy. There are no speech therapists coming to the community, or one is coming

maybe once every second month to deal with the 297 students who require that service; I think that was the number we looked at. They're not up to par in terms of where their education level should be.

Chief, I'm not sure if you wanted to expand on that.

Chief Lance Roulette: Yes, I could add to that.

As has been clearly reiterated, there are specialized services that we require, and they're not being met. I'd like to put in a personal experience.

My daughter has not received the assessment tools that are required for her or the school in order to understand exactly what her learning disabilities are. She is now 16 and is going into grade 7. She was basically passed on and put into the next grade without the actual assessment tools, which hindered her ability to comprehend some of the information, but also, not only that, her hearing disabilities were not recognized until recently, when I got an assessment done on her.

There were a lot of things that we failed to do, not only as parents but also as educators. It really broke the spirit down in me to be saying that I should have been more proactive in the issue of advocacy, but also, the tools and the funds that go to another program hinder us in identifying what learning disabilities our kids have. She is one of many.

It's great that you brought up that question, because we need to ensure this if we're going to give the best quality of education. We require these tools, and we require this specialized training even if we have to train our own to do it.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: That would be the best thing: to train our own people to do it.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: You talked about having teachers who have been trained, so a large part of the teachers who are teaching at your school are from the community. Is your ability to retain those folks fairly strong? Or do you have a hard time keeping your own members who return with that education?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: No. We have really good retention in regard to teaching. Even in nursing, for example, we have I think 10 nurses in the community, and eight of them are from the community, so that really helps with retention. We don't have the turnover that normally happens, especially in the medical field.

• (1010)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: For the specialized training you need for people who can do assessments and work with your community, what's the challenge? Is it that you don't have the ability to fund them to go and get that training?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Yes. We don't have the funding to send them somewhere. Plus, there's a lack of that training out there right now. Because there's such a huge need throughout the province, all of those spaces are full.

What we'd like to see is a relationship with the university or one of the colleges and for them to come to the community to do that education, because we know we can fill those seats with just our people. There's a huge need there. We prefer, as a community, to train our own people and to have them providing the services, because there's nothing.... You have more heart when you're doing your job if you're from that community and with your people. You have that ability to have that conversation in your own language instead of depending on somebody else to come in and provide that service.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm running out of time, so this is my last question. You talked about having a junior chief and council. I'm curious about what that group adds.

Chief Lance Roulette: At the time that we had our inauguration, we felt that it was very important not only to involve the youth in some of the decision-making processes that we do as leadership, but also to prepare them for future leadership roles and for them to have that clarity on exactly how the process works within the local level.

We do engage our youth quite a bit. We have monthly athletic events with them. When we first thought of the notion, it was a great idea. Providing that clarity on what their roles are going to be once again lets us know what types of hindrances they are encountering within the school as well, or anywhere within the community, and ensures that the voice of youth is there. It's very important that our youth voices and our elder voices are there.

The Chair: Thank you. The questioning now moves to me.

I am very pleased to see you. Sandy Bay has a training facility. I had a small role in working with the chief on it. There is a nearby company called HyLife, which processes very high-quality pork products for Japan. They were actively searching for employees and actually were considering foreign workers.

The chief got involved, so maybe you can provide a short update on how that project is working. Do we see members going to Neepawa to work at HyLife? How is that working out?

Chief Lance Roulette: On the meat cutting program, once again thank you for assisting in that and involving me in the dialogue. The Sandy Bay meat cutting program is a first nations training program that's quite unique in the sense of where we're located. It's one of the first. We have gone through seven cohorts. We've had a 96% success completion rate. They are currently expanding into the area of beef. We were able to form many partnerships for employment retention, for instance with HyLife, but also with northern companies that have hired quite a few of our people who have completed the program.

I'll use HyLife as an example. We transport our people who don't have a means of transportation and charge them a small fee for getting to and from work. We have two drivers who drive I believe it's about 12 people in each of these vans. It's been very successful. Some have also moved into Neepawa and have begun to become more self-sufficient, and their responsibilities are quite unique. Seeing how people became very self-aware after completing this program was *sui generis*.

I do recall a couple of people who kept themselves away from people. Seeing these people today, you would never know that they

would seclude themselves. They're animated. They're engaging. It's quite heartwarming.

In terms of the future of the meat cutting course, we are definitely encountering barriers once again as a flow-through from Service Canada and ISC down to FPDI and then down to the first nation. FPDI has definitely taken upon itself to try to dictate to the community what the service model should be, which isn't the case.

As a result of it, we've been met with issues of flow-through monies down to the first nation, which should never be the case. But it is occurring. We are definitely trying to find another means. We have submitted some letters to Service Canada to once again engage in a direct relationship with them. We're hopeful that we will be successful within the next half year.

● (1015)

The Chair: Sandy Bay First Nation is in an agricultural area. There's quite a bit of seasonal harvesting for strawberries and other fruits, and then later on for harvesting the potato crop.

Is there interest among your membership to work in that seasonal activity or is that something that your membership is not interested in? There is a perception perhaps by some that first nations maybe are not interested in that kind of work or maybe you're looking at other things.

Chief Lance Roulette: We do have a number of members who go to work for cropping companies. Once again, the access at a local level is still yet to be determined, but the interest is there. Once again, there's the issue of being able to provide a foundation—"this is where we are right now, this is where we want to be and how do we get there"—especially in terms of a general understanding of what that process looks like.

The Chair: How many people would want to go and work in agriculture? I think when I was there, there were 100 people preparing to go for the potato harvest. Are there even more than that who would be interested?

Chief Lance Roulette: There are probably a few more than that. I would probably estimate about 150 people. It could be a little bit more. Once again, there are a lot of contributing factors for people to steer away from that. One is location. For some people who don't have that experience off the reserve, sometimes it's a cultural shock for them to even leave the community.

To be able to provide that on-reserve training is always key, but also providing other supports to help them not only to further themselves, but also to be part of that process.

The Chair: The questions will now go to MP Mike Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): I know you wanted to say something, so please go ahead.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: I was just going to mention that the seasonal work, like that in regard to potato harvesting, is in Portage la Prairie, but they had a huge influx of foreign workers. We don't really have that many people there anymore, because there are a lot of foreigners in Portage la Prairie now.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I was really impressed, Virginia, when you said that 80% of your community speaks the Ojibwa language, which is phenomenal because we see so many communities that are losing their language. Would you say that's because you've had control of your education since the 1970s and you've got teachers from the community who are teaching the language and the culture?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Yes, I think that's part of it. I'm going to be frank here and let you know that the strongest language spoken in the community is in the families who did not attend residential schools and did not attend any school. That's where the language is strongest. In fact, that's their first language. They have to speak the language because they don't really understand the English language.

• (1020)

Mr. Mike Bossio: Is there continued language training in the school as well?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: We want to strengthen it. Though the community members, teachers and staff are from the community and they speak the language, it's the children who might not speak it that much. We said we want to strengthen that and have some sort of a language class for the ones who don't understand.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I was also really impressed that your teachers are from your own community. Once again, that is not something that you see in most communities. What contributed to that success? Is there a way to replicate that in other professions like nursing, personal support workers or any other professionals that you require in the community?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Yes. In the community, all our staff.... How many staff do we have? 400?

Chief Lance Roulette: We have about 400.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: We have about 400 staff, and I would say 90% of those staff are from the community. They're professionals. They're certified. Our health centre is accredited. We're looking at accreditation for our other facilities as well. That all stemmed from the past, and we feel that there's strength in having our community members educated and providing those services within the community. It's really worked well for us. As we said, we're looking at having these larger-scale models and looking at the population health and not only providing services for our first nations members but also looking at the population....

Mr. Mike Bossio: Has that been driven by having—

The Chair: Mike, I'm sorry. It's my fault. I used up a lot of your time. I really appreciate that.

It rightly needs to move to MP Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you both for being here.

I'm just looking at your post-secondary handbook. It hasn't been updated on your website; it's seven or eight years old. It says here on page 17 that you're supplying financial support. Are you still doing that? It can go up to \$2,000 with support. A married student with dependent spouse gets \$1,434, and all this. I am looking at the assistance category.

Chief Lance Roulette: Yes, it's what they call the living allowance for students in urban areas. A single used to get \$805. That was changed about two months ago, and increased to \$1,050. That is still not up to par. The increase in cost of living really does

impede single students who need to provide for themselves and keep themselves well fed.

There was additional funding that did come in. The increase to the cost-of-living allowance is still being looked at, for us to not only provide that further level of service but to ensure that they have the financial supports in place to help them be more focused on education.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You give a \$300 clothing allowance here. Is that still in effect?

Chief Lance Roulette: Yes, the \$300 is usually graduation-centred. It's geared to help them with clothing for whenever graduation comes, because a lot of the times the students are already impoverished. Everybody would like to look lovely for graduation. I know I would.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What are your graduation rates?

Chief Lance Roulette: One year, with a combination of our nursery, kindergarten, grade 6, grade 12 and post-secondary, we had the biggest number that I've seen graduating at one time. There were about 153 students, with a combination of our kindergarten grad, our grade 6 grad and our grade 12 grad. The biggest number we had in our grade 12 grad all at once, I believe, was 32 graduates in that one year. At the beginning of the year, our school has roughly 1,100. Sometime around the middle of the year, it drops down to just under 1,000 or so.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What would be the percentage of grade 12 students? Give me a number.

• (1025)

Chief Lance Roulette: Do you mean the successful number?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes.

Chief Lance Roulette: I would say about 70% to 75%.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's high, if you don't mind me saying. That's success. I know you've got maybe 30% not graduating at that time, but 70 to 75% is extremely good.

For those who don't make it—let's say in that three-year period from grades 10, 11 and 12—what are you doing to bring them back, to help them if they're short a subject, for instance?

Chief Lance Roulette: Normally, when students drop out, they don't try to come back to school until after they reach the age of 18 or 19. Due to the policy within the schools, we don't really like to have a mix of adults with students, so we have a lot of barriers in relation to “mature 12” programming, as well as youth STEP programming.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Just recently—in the last few years—we've started a life skills program for students who have dropped out, to try to give them a head start as well as bring them up to par so they can go into the “mature 12”. We've actually had a few success stories where they've gone from there to college or into the meat cutting program and stuff like that.

That's a non-funded program, the life skills, but we felt we needed it to get to that population that just didn't make it to grade 12 and needed that extra hand.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It says you have 45 day care spaces. I imagine it's jammed, or is it?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Yes, it is.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes, so is it first-come, first-served? How do you deal with that? Probably you could do more, but...

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: I'm not really sure about the day care, but I think they go by the need, so are there working parents out there? We want to support the staff who are working as well if they require day care, so it wouldn't be just a stay-at-home mom taking her kid in.

As I alluded to earlier, we want to expand on maternal and child health, aboriginal head start and then day care, so that we can have those supported services for the child's early learning as they start into the school system. I think that's really important. Right now we just have the day care and the nursery. We don't have those other two components that are key in supporting the parents and the student.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes, that is key now and we're seeing it in a lot of urban schools. You bring in a two- or three-year-old and by the time they get to K or grade 1, they can identify the letters and the numbers. It's so important right now. I think early learning is huge, as you know, so I would encourage you to look at that.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: We've been trying to, but we haven't been able to secure the funding in those programs through Health Canada. We've always been told, "No." The maternal and child health was a pilot project. There were, I think, 10 or 11 first nations communities in Manitoba that were picked, and that's been it. It hasn't expanded since then. Unfortunately, even though we have over 100 babies born a year, we don't have that support in our community, which we feel is very important. We just haven't been able to get there. We haven't been able to secure the funding for that.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You've done a pretty good job on ASETS. I was just looking at that. Skills development is often overlooked, but it shouldn't be because people who are good with their hands can get pretty good jobs right off the bat, right?

Do you want to expand on how you've worked on your aboriginal skills and employment? Who do you work with? It's all about partnerships, I would think.

Chief Lance Roulette: Yes. We've done a lot with ACC, Red River College and the University of Manitoba in relation to trades.

As you know, in today's economy there's a huge demand for trades, whether for electricians, plumbers or carpenters. We have a group that's actually taking their level 3 carpentry, and then they'll be moving on to do their Red Seals very shortly. I believe we have about 16 students, a combination of men and women, taking that program.

We have also done the heavy equipment training, and we had 18 people take the course. We had 18 graduate. Of the 18, there was one woman who was part of that, and she was very successful in completing that program.

Being able to diversify the issue of trades once again is somewhat of a barrier on its own because the interest from either side is going to be specific to the individual. What really helped us was communication, networking as much as possible and providing clarity on both sides. A direct relationship has always been key.

•(1030)

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we're close to wrapping up, but we're going to this side. MP T.J. Harvey has a question.

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): I just have one quick question for you, Virginia.

In your earlier testimony, you spoke about the influx of temporary foreign workers into the mainstream community, and the causal effect of that on the reduction of labourers from your community going to work in the agricultural field.

Is that something that you feel is measurable? Do you feel there's a direct correlation between the number of temporary foreign workers in that area and the ability of your people to attain those jobs?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Definitely. The foreign workers have moved into the community. Portage la Prairie and Neepawa are where the majority of the foreign workers are. They are the ones who are securing the jobs because they live right there, whereas our people have to travel in. I believe it's had a negative impact on the number of jobs that are available for our people in those areas.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Would that be for seasonal work?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Yes.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Okay. That's all I wanted to follow up on. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I have one quick question from earlier on when I didn't have a chance to finish.

We talked about how all your teachers are from the community, and the process you went through to establish that. You also mentioned in previous testimony that you had agreements with the University of Manitoba, Red River College and Assiniboine College, to come into the community to provide that training. In the teaching case, is that what occurred there? Did they come in from U of M to train the teachers, or did the teachers go off site and come back?

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: The teachers went off site and came back.

Mr. Mike Bossio: You said also that you have others who have done the same and come back. You have a very good retention rate, of bringing community members back to the community.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: Yes, we have nurses, certified health care aides, administrators and our tradesmen—plumbers and electricians—who have gone off site for training and come back to the community. What we are suggesting is that if we had the training available at the community level, even a cohort of training of some sort coming to the community, we would see a larger number.

A lot of these people have families already. It's hard for them to go off the reserve. There are a lot of areas out there, and whether or not anybody believes it, there still is a lot of prejudice happening out there. We feel that to support our people, it would be good to have those services within our community.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I know Madam Lapointe had some questions as well.

If you'd like to, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Very well, thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses. What you have to say is greatly interesting. I am learning a lot.

You spoke about secondary level graduation. What are the rates?

[*English*]

Chief Lance Roulette: As I said earlier, the rate is probably around 70% of the kids within that grade 10, 11 and 12 bracket. A lot of the time, the supports that are offered through school are directly attributable to that number being as high as it is.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: How do the graduation rates in your community compare to those of other first nation communities in Manitoba? Is there a difference in the figures?

[*English*]

Chief Lance Roulette: I believe there would be a difference in the numbers, once again, just getting back to whatever each first nation is doing...if some are under a school division versus ones that have local control.

What we have noticed is that the ones that are more under a school division don't have that direct cultural piece, not only for general understanding of certain course material but also the supports that the elders provide, what some of the mentors and their facilitators provide to these students.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

You referred to the student capacity of your schools. By what percentage do we need to increase capacity in primary, secondary and post-secondary schools?

[*English*]

Chief Lance Roulette: I think because the issue of capacity is always identified as a growing set of skills, the gauge on what level of capacity we require at Sandy Bay and also education for other schools is going to be specific to each community. However, with the cost of living and the increase of professional fees, that number has yet to be determined. I'm pretty sure it is going to be a pretty high percentage to identify from a first nations school to a provincial-level school.

Some of the barriers that we encounter, especially in the areas of funding, are the collective bargaining agreements that we have within our community. We have two collective bargaining agreements, which are The Manitoba Teachers' Society and MGEU. The negotiations from there really hinder what financial capacities we can ensure towards instructional services, towards programming within our own schools. It really does impede our ability to guarantee certain programming as a result of collective bargaining agreements that we currently have.

If you have any suggestions for us and or any advice that we could utilize to deal with these unions, we definitely have an open ear for it. I have always said—and I have no rudeness intended to the unions—they will, one of these days soon, be the death of the community.

Ms. Virginia Lukianchuk: I want to add too that we're looking at succession planning, as a lot of our staff who have been trained in those areas are getting ready for retirement. It's good that we're talking about capacity, because we want to build that capacity so that we're keeping the tradition alive within that capacity.

The Chair: That concludes our time.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for coming to Ottawa to present to us. I think you provided new insights and explained your challenges very well. We appreciate it.

Meegwetch. Safe travels home.

The meeting is adjourned.

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