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Chair

Mr. Andy Fillmore

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•(0840)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.)): Welcome, everybody.

Before I officially start the meeting I would like to welcome Hunter Tootoo, the local member of Parliament, to welcome you to the room.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, everybody.

I would especially like to welcome my colleagues from the standing committee to Iqaluit for this very important issue that we deal with here in Nunavut and across the north. I think it's an important issue that has been called a crisis here in Nunavut, and hopefully you will have some very good discussions and presentations here today, and I look forward to the report you come out with. Hopefully there will be some strong recommendations for the minister to come up with some programs and some funding to be able to help alleviate this issue we face here in Nunavut.

I look forward to presenting to you in Ottawa at a meeting there.

Welcome to Nunavut. I wish the weather were a little better but the hospitality is always warm here, so I hope you have a great visit, and thank you very much for coming.

The Chair: Thanks very much for that welcome, Hunter, and with that we'll start the meeting.

I want to say welcome to everybody who is in the room this morning. Welcome to our witnesses. I'll get to a proper introduction in a moment. Welcome to the folks in the audience and the gallery. Welcome to our friends in the media.

With regard to the media, you can see the camera leaving now. When the gavel is struck, there won't be any broadcasting, for privacy concerns. When there is a break or after the proceedings, the media may be broadcasting at that time, but just know that they are not recording during the actual session, other than the notes that are being taken behind me.

We have French and English interpreters. We also have an Inuktitut interpreter. There are headsets. Please feel free to tune in to whichever language channel is your preference.

I also wanted to let folks in the room know we do have some mental health support in the room. Mental health nurse Mary

Griffiths is here and has made herself available for the day if anyone would like to have a chat with her.

I'll spend a moment framing this. This is the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We're here because we are conducting the first study we are undertaking as a committee in the current government, and that is the study of indigenous suicide. Of the many issues that have been before us, this is the one that has risen to the top with the most urgency to be dealt with first by us. That's a measure of the deep concern each of the committee members holds for this tragic epidemic we're facing in so many communities in Canada.

Although the committee members here represent three of the major parties, this really is a non-partisan committee. Committees are not part of government. They advise government; they stand separate from government.

The thing I would like to impress on people is that the members here represent eastern Canada, central Canada, western Canada, and northern Canada. We're carrying a very broad representation of Canadians. The words, stories, and suggestions we hear through this hearing will be folded into a report that will be completed sometime early in the new year, perhaps February or March.

They will be delivered to the Government of Canada and will indeed guide policy decisions and budgetary decisions, so there is real impact here. What we hear and what we learn from our witnesses today, and from the other communities we're visiting as part of the study, will have a real impact. We look forward to being a part of that. The committee members will be present as those changes get implemented, and will be keeping an eye on that as it happens.

As far as how the process goes today, we have four panels. This is the first of four during the day. The way it will work is our guests, who I will introduce in a moment, will have the floor for 10 minutes to give a presentation. Then that will be followed by a round of questions from the members of the committee.

Both during the presentation from the witness and during the question period from members, we do keep a close eye on time so we can have fairness and make sure we hear all of the panels during the day. When there is one minute remaining in any of those periods, I'll be holding up a yellow card, so members and witnesses please observe that. Then when the time is up, I'll hold up the red card. Please come to a close as quickly as you can at that point.

I would also mention that when we get through those four panels at the end of the day, we are going to have an open mike session, so we can hear from other members of the community and other members of the audience. Unfortunately, the rules of committee procedure don't allow interventions from the audience during testimony, but we have created time at the end of the day for that. I expect that will be between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.

● (0845)

With that, let's get into the first panel. It's my tremendous honour to welcome the Honourable George Hickes, Minister of Health and Minister responsible for Suicide Prevention, to present for 10 minutes.

Hon. George Hickes (Minister of Health, Minister responsible for Suicide Prevention, Government of Nunavut): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

Before I get started, I'd like to acknowledge the presence of Minister Johnny Mike, the Minister of Family Services here in Nunavut.

I'd like to again thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the invitation to appear as a witness in this committee's important work and for travelling to Inuit regions. I would like to acknowledge those who have appeared before the committee already: Natan Obed, president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and Jack Hicks. Natan, Jack, and many of today's witnesses have spent years building the foundation of our suicide prevention work. I fully support their calls for social equity and knowledge-based interventions.

I would also like to acknowledge the federal government for its recent investments. We are in the third year of the territorial and pan-territorial health investment funds. These programs have invested over \$7 million over three years to develop youth mental wellness, add mental health counselling capacity, and train current and future employees. With Canada's lead, we anticipate the reopening of the Mamisarvik in Ottawa, the only culturally grounded residential substance abuse treatment facility available to Nunavummiut. Most recently, we anticipate that the announcement from this June for additional funds for suicide prevention in indigenous communities will allow us to pilot an on-the-land addictions treatment program and facilitate the development of men's groups.

Nunavut is in a position to undertake these initiatives because we have a territorial suicide prevention strategy. The partners to the strategy—Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Government of Nunavut, and Embrace Life Council—undertook community consultations in 2009 and released a strategy in 2010 and an action plan in 2011. Copies of these documents are available.

There were some bumps along the road. The partnership model was weak at the beginning, and the first action plan was unfunded. Recently we took a renewed approach to our work. Premier Peter Taptuna declared suicide a crisis in our territory. We created a cabinet committee on quality of life, a minister responsible for suicide prevention, and a secretariat to improve collaboration. In March, with our partners, we introduced Resiliency Within, an interim one-year action plan that allowed us to begin implementing the recommendations from the coroner's suicide inquest, while also

engaging communities for the development of a longer-term action plan.

What is important in all of this is that we're not reinventing the wheel. We are not looking for any magic solutions. We are working towards the priorities and needs of individuals and organizations in our communities. We are using knowledge and engagement at the core of our partnerships. There is much work to be done, but we know what we need, and we are working together to get there.

In May of this year, we engaged stakeholders for the longer-term action plan. Priorities identified during the United for Life Stakeholder Summit for Suicide Prevention were similar to those from 2009. They included community-led action and decision-making, transmission of Inuit language and culture, early childhood development grounded in Inuit culture, supports for children and youth grounded in Inuit culture, healing gatherings and support groups in all communities, and more mental health services for all ages, with a focus on involving communities and Inuit practitioners.

I will circulate the summit report to this committee after its final review by our stakeholders. The mechanics of each priority boil down to local infrastructure, responsive and predictable funding programs, capacity development, research, and jobs in wellness and healing.

As the chairman said, you are here to better understand how Canada can be part of the solution.

First, Nunavut and Inuit need to be full and equal partners with Canada. We need to be engaged in the design and delivery of new programs, services, and research so that they meet our needs and we have adequate time to develop capacity for delivery. As just one example, the national native alcohol and drug abuse program does not fund our country's two Inuit-specific residential treatment centres, and neither will it recognize a Nunavut facility. As a result, we continue to rely on costly medical travel and on English-language facilities in the south.

● (0850)

Our unique language and vast geography mean that we have 25 health centres providing services in four official languages. We need to be at the table, working together, to design programs and services to meet our unique needs.

Indigenous people have spoken about and documented many traumas, and have worked towards restoring wellness in our communities and our country as a whole. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Qikiqtani Truth Commission warrant the arrest of individuals charged with child sex abuse. The list is long and will soon include the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. I call on Canada to acknowledge these historical wrongs and to implement the recommendations with Nunavut and Inuit as full and equal partners.

Second, indigenous suicide prevention needs long-term, stable, and predictable investments. Given the need, our communities require more mental health services, not less, than the average Canadian jurisdiction. We need a breadth of services utilizing both western and Inuit healing methods that respect and reflect our language and culture.

Given the need, we need more youth and early childhood education centres than the average Canadian jurisdiction. This requires both program and capital investments. We need to address the immediate risks through intervention and by addressing underlying needs such as affordable housing, early childhood education, and food security, so that children born today can live in a healthier society.

This is not a shortcoming of Inuit. Our people are dealing with rapid social and cultural change. Within our living history, Inuit have faced tremendous injustices, all well documented, which created the conditions for suicide risk factors. In some individuals, these traumas compromised their ability to cope and heal, and they in turn passed the trauma on to younger generations.

The situation we are facing today is the result of decades of social injustice. The Government of Nunavut does not have adequate resources to self-fund the solutions.

I want to be clear in the need for Inuit-specific and Inuit-led approaches. We are past the days when we had no other options. Today, we have an accredited training program for counsellors called "Our Life's Journey", thanks to the dedication of Iliisaqsivik Society in Clyde River. Those counsellors are critical to the wellness in our communities, yet they are not recognized as equals in pay or title by current federal programs. Today, we have documented and accessible wellness resources, such as the Inuit language preschool curriculum, Inuinnaqtun songbooks, and research by Inuit scholars. To scale up these programs, approaches, and interventions, our territory needs long-term, stable, and predictable investments.

I would like to address your specific request for indicators for Nunavut's place on the KidsRights Index and the need for more data. Many of the indicators from the index are not relevant here, such as running water, sewers, and education for both genders. Our desired outcomes should inform our monitoring, not the other way around. With the partners to the suicide prevention strategy, we are in the planning stages for collecting and analyzing more robust data specific to the strategy. This could be achieved under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement's Nunavut general monitoring plan, if additional resources were made available.

Finally, we need a national dialogue with regard to our country's recent history, cultural safety, and opportunities to address common misconceptions. Suicide is not the Inuit way. Being indigenous is not a risk factor. I'm going to quote Natan Obed in his committee appearance earlier this year. We are here because:

At the base of this issue is social inequity. We can talk around this issue all we want, but if we don't provide health care, housing, education, and a basic level of security for all Canadians and all indigenous Canadians, then this issue is not going to be addressed the way that it could be.

Not only are the issues we are faced with relatively new, we have significant strength as a people who have long thrived in what others

considered a hostile environment. Public health efforts should be built upon these and our many strengths.

In closing, I thank you for undertaking this important work. My list of priorities is short: Nunavut must be a full and equal partner with Canada; we need stable long-term funding; and, the time for a national dialogue on cultural safety is now. That is a tall order, but we're optimistic. I'll leave you with some hope.

The Arviat Wellness Committee has introduced Young Hunters, an after-school program for youth, which has resulted in increased school attendance, food security, mental wellness, transmission of traditional knowledge, and intergenerational connectedness.

● (0855)

In Hall Beach, a men's group to serve those who were spending too many nights in jail began last September. Men and their relationships with each other, their spouses, and their families are healing. This has been supported by a reduction in jail cell use.

These examples demonstrate the strength of the individual and community initiatives that serve as the foundation for mental wellness, resiliency, and suicide prevention through our communities. They also serve as a reminder that the most effective programs and initiatives are locally initiated, culturally appropriate, and based on Inuit societal values and traditions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just in closing, I'd like to recognize my associate deputy minister Karen Kabloona. As I mentioned in my opening comments, Nunavut has taken the step to create a ministry portfolio responsible for suicide prevention, and my associate deputy minister leads that division. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Hickey.

Welcome to Ms. Kabloona as well. It's nice to have you here. As I understand it, you both may answer questions, depending on the questions asked. Thank you for that.

We'll move right into questions from committee members. The first-round questions are seven minutes, so each member will have seven minutes to ask and to hear the answer for the question. I would just remind members, as always, to try to come to the point as quickly as you can so we can have more time to hear from the witnesses.

The first member to have a question is Gary Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Minister and Associate Deputy Minister, for being here. It's a pleasure to be here in Nunavut.

I was just glancing through your report on Resiliency Within, and we looked at the partners and I noticed that the federal government is not listed as a partner. What are the impediments for the federal government to be a partner on this? I think it's an important place for the federal government to be, and it's a great responsibility. What were some of the challenges, and what does the government need to do to be a partner?

Hon. George Hickes: To start off, in going forward we do want the federal government to be an equal partner, as I mentioned a few times in my opening comments. When we're developing the national suicide strategy, I think there's definitely room for more partnerships. The Public Health Agency of Canada has assisted us in some components with creating two positions. That's basically what we're asking. You guys are here, and hopefully what I see in the report is for the federal government to sit at the table with us. Thank you.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: With respect to social inequity, housing has become a recurring theme in the last couple of days as one of the major areas of inequity. What are the housing needs of the people of Nunavut, and what kinds of solutions can assist in alleviating some of that inequity?

Hon. George Hickes: That's an excellent question, and I thank you for asking that one. Housing is obviously a critical need across the entire territory; the lack of infrastructure and the infrequency of investments. We're doing the best we can with the monies we have to promote housing and home ownership and develop public housing. Other than the infrequent funding investments that we do have, one of the real challenges is O and M. The costs of maintaining a unit across this territory are in the neighbourhood of \$25,000 a year with our extreme costs for power, water, and sewer. It's an ongoing challenge and this is something that you're probably going to get tired of hearing me saying: long-term, stable, reliable funding.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: The other major issue we saw was the need for education and the need to have attainment rates that will allow young people to go on to further education. I think it's a cycle, and it's important to have people from the community who go through an education system and come back and serve. What are some of those impediments, and how do we work to fix them? I know it's a huge question, but if you can give your thoughts, that'll be appreciated.

• (0900)

Hon. George Hickes: That would almost take another committee meeting, but in a nutshell, the consistency of education across the territory is very important. It starts at the early childhood level. When we have our youth going into early childhood curriculum, their success at the K-to-12 level improves dramatically. When we're looking at funding for our schools—and we've taken some steps within our education act to be at least equal to the Canadian average or better—the challenge is that we're holding to a statistic. I think we need to do more on a needs base. We need to recognize the population of some of our schools, and the resources that are available to them, not just to maintain, but to enhance the education process with the science labs, the gymnasiums, the arts sector. We do have our Nunavut Arctic College, which has a number of great programs. Some of them are degree-granting partnerships with outside universities. We need to further enhance those relationships. We need to encourage our youth to take on post-secondary education opportunities, and—this is our goal as well—make sure they are incentivized to come back so that we don't lose that brain power.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Just to probe a bit more on the education front, one of the issues that was identified last night by a small-group gathering is the lack of post-secondary education locally. If somebody wants to study, they need to go south. Oftentimes there are some serious barriers when someone leaves the

community. They're disconnected from their day-to-day life as well as many of the social supports they've had.

What is your government's overall position on establishing a post-secondary institution here, and what are the things you need in order to do that?

Hon. George Hickes: There was very recently a study done on just that: creating an actual university of the Arctic or a northern university. One of the challenges is to receive university accreditation. There are a number of different protocols or guidelines to be able to be considered a university, one of them being enrolment, which, with our numbers, we probably wouldn't be able to make.

We have taken a very serious look at partnerships. We have a nursing program here. We have a teacher program. We're in the process of revitalizing the law program. In addition, there are a number of other training opportunities through our Nunavut Arctic College, and we have satellite campuses in all of our communities. So the access to initial post-secondary education is there at the local level. If you are going into different academic streams than what we can provide, we have relationships with different Inuit associations in the south for support. There are different organizations in Manitoba, and I think Montreal has one, and there's one in Ontario. There are groups out there to help some of our students.

You have travelled here to Iqaluit, and as I mentioned to a couple of you during discussions, Iqaluit is not the norm for Nunavut. When you take a kid from a community of 350 people and put them in Laval university, the cultural challenges are pretty overwhelming.

The Chair: Thanks, Minister, and thanks, Gary, for the questions.

The next question is from David Yurdiga.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Good morning. I'd like to welcome you to our committee.

Obviously, we have a passion to make a difference within the north and throughout our indigenous populations. There's a significant increase in suicides, and this is a concern to all of us.

I understand that you have created an action plan for suicide prevention. What are some of the short- and long-term measures identified in those strategies?

Hon. George Hickes: There are a number of them. Again, this would take a pretty long answer, but one of the key things to take from our strategy is working with the community, at the community level, and we talked about that a little bit earlier. It's one of the things we really need to focus on. We know what we need to do to move forward. We need some help with the resources and to develop the capacity to work with our communities. We have some very active communities, as I mentioned earlier—Arviat, men's wellness and keeping people from the judicial system.

The engagement within some of our youth groups is very prominent. You met with some of our great youth leadership last night. I was very happy to see that occur. There are a number of strategies outlined, for example, monitoring and program funding. We need some help in gathering some of this capacity to be able to analyze the data so that we can move forward, see what's working and what's not working, and enhance those that are.

• (0905)

Mr. David Yurdiga: During our conversations in the past few days, a lot of people have been concerned about sustainable funding. Programs come and go, and they want to see a longer period when they are guaranteed this funding. A lot of times, when they just get going, the program changes, and then it goes through the whole process again of making application and all the barriers that are put up when you have to fit into this or that category.

Is that a huge challenge with a lot of these suicide prevention strategies—dealing with the funding itself that is always changing? Are there any plans to have a longer-term process where somebody says, yes, we can do this for 10 years, or whatever, so we can develop the program and maintain it over a longer period of time?

Hon. George Hickes: Absolutely. One of our main goals out of this exercise is to reinforce the belief that, given some stable funding with some flexibility to it.... Again, as things adjust, as things adapt, we need some fluidity within the parameters of the programming so that we can adjust as we recognize things that are working and things that aren't working.

As I mentioned in my opening comments, there is the Nunavut general monitoring program funding, which could be utilized to gather and assist with a lot of these programs, but stable long-term funding is the key message.

Mr. David Yurdiga: You mentioned that programs should have flexibility. Every community is a little different. If you go 50 kilometres and compare one community to the other, there are similarities, but there are also a lot of differences. In these programs, how much flexibility is allowed, so they can tailor that program to fit that community's particular needs? Is that one of the strategies, to make it more and more flexible so it can be tailored to that community?

Hon. George Hickes: That is one of the challenges with the funding that we do have and that we are able to provide at the community level. It is more the community initiatives that are developing the programs. We are trying not to be Big Brother. We want the communities to develop their own programming, if they can. We also need the funding and the resources to be able to, again, take advantage of best practices, take advantage of a program that has worked in one community and modify it for another community so that those positive impacts can be territorial.

Mr. David Yurdiga: We understand that you have a quality of life secretariat. What does that role entail?

Hon. George Hickes: I am going to let Karen respond to that one, if you don't mind, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Karen Kabloona (Associate Deputy Minister, Quality of Life, Department of Health, Government of Nunavut): The quality of life secretariat is just getting built right now, and the main purpose is to collaborate within the Government of Nunavut so that

the Government of Nunavut is a partner in the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy implementation committee. That is with Nunavut Tunngavik, the RCMP, and the Embrace Life Council. Prior to that, the other partners worked quite regularly with each other but then had to call in other departments one at a time, so it just helps with the collaboration within the Government of Nunavut.

We are also able to move faster on the implementation, because somebody is responsible; it's not off the corner of a desk.

• (0910)

Mr. David Yurdiga: What is the exact role of the quality of life secretariat? Whom do you report to? I want to understand the mechanics of it all. I understand the position is created, but how does it fit in the whole region? How does that work, the mechanics of that position?

Hon. George Hickes: That was one of the things we did as a jurisdiction, and it is a very new concept across the country. I am the minister responsible for suicide prevention. Karen reports directly to me, so it has that direction and responsibility from the very top, from a cabinet level, which I think is a key component, not having departments work parallel to each other, with duplication and passing the buck, in some cases. The buck stops here.

I will let Karen elaborate a little more on the actual mechanics of it. Thank you.

The Chair: Be brief if you can, Karen.

Ms. Karen Kabloona: We have a new cabinet committee, as you heard from the minister. Also in the department we have a new Inuusiq committee, which is the life committee, so all of the departments feed into it. The Quality of Life Secretariat holds those meetings, disseminates information, and brings information back. We're the lead for monitoring the implementation of the action plan you have there, for reaching out to communities, and for engaging with communities and our other partners. We're just starting to do some research specific to the strategy, so we are focused on delivering the commitments of the original strategy.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Our next question is from Romeo Saganash.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to both of our witnesses for their contributions to this committee.

I have a couple of questions, but I want to go back first of all to the issue of housing, because it's such an important component to this debate on suicides of our Canadians. I know that you mentioned, in response to Gary's question, that there's a critical need in the territory. I understand it's a critical need for all regions in the north, but can you give us a specific number of units that will be required in the territories, let's say tomorrow morning?

Hon. George Hickes: We wouldn't be able to build that many units in a short term, but again it is a question of stabilization of funding. The latest numbers I have show that we're more than 3,000 units short across the territory. That may not sound like a lot to some people from larger jurisdictions, but it's a huge component here and we're going backwards, anywhere between 85 and 100 units per year, due to population growth. So we're not even maintaining what we're growing, never mind tapping into the backlog of needs.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It's comparable. I have a riding in which there are 25 indigenous communities: 14 Inuit, 9 Cree, and two Algonquin, and the amount is about the same. Three thousand units would be required tomorrow morning if we were to meet the needs.

Just to follow up on that issue, one of our witnesses in Kuujuaq yesterday said that if we were to tackle the issue of housing in our communities, it would solve 50% of our problems. Would you agree with that?

Hon. George Hickes: That's a very long discussion. Housing has a very diverse impact; you're talking about health, education, and mental health. The opportunity for violence in a household when you're living in overcrowded scenarios, I would say is at least 50%. It would alleviate some of the pressures on a lot of our social issues.

When we talk about housing, it has such an overarching effect on our quality of life. I live in a home with my wife and two children. I've seen people living in that size of unit with 18 people in it. I can't fathom the complexity and the challenges of just finding a quiet corner to do your homework or finding a spot to have a good night's sleep.

• (0915)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I want to go back to that cabinet committee on quality of life. I think it's an important initiative for your government. I was wondering whether or not you are also looking at the whole question of cost of living in the north. I recall a couple years back, during your previous Parliament, I wrote to the Auditor General to look into the nutrition north program, for instance. He responded positively to that request. He examined the program and concluded that the program doesn't work. He even went on to say that the department responsible for the program did not have any mechanisms in place to check where the money was going or who was benefiting from the program. Is that part of the work that's going to be involved with that cabinet committee?

Hon. George Hickes: I'll let Karen enhance it a little afterwards, but in general, yes, to a degree. We are looking at social inequities, which Mr. Obed brought up in his appearance, and I reiterate that. When we're talking about people living at or below the poverty level, food security is obviously a huge component of that. However, it just goes more to general social inequity if our people, our residents, and our fellow Canadians don't have access to opportunities the way everyone deserves and the quality of life that people deserve in Canada.

We export a lot of funding and financial aid to a lot of places outside Canada while we have people in our country living in overcrowded conditions, who lack food security, and opportunities. That's a huge component.

I'll let Karen elaborate. I've covered it? Thank you.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I have a general question perhaps. With all these strategies and plans that are being proposed by many different organizations and levels of government, local and throughout the region, is there an organization or government that can play a leading role in coordinating all these plans and strategies with respect to suicide prevention?

Hon. George Hickes: That's our office. Right now, we're working on our action plan. There are a number of different indicators we want to have an impact on, but we need assistance. We need partnerships.

The federal government is one of those partners. The RCMP has been a great resource, NTI, and a number of stakeholders. We also want to participate in the national suicide strategy as it rolls out. The ITK strategy that came out a couple of months ago is a step in the right direction. I was in Kuujuaq for that announcement as well.

The Government of Nunavut is a representative government, but 85% of our population are Inuit, and we have to make sure that we are working with our population to overcome the challenges that society has thrust upon us in such a short period of time.

The Chair: That's the end, Romeo. Thank you.

That's rather ominous. It's not the end, but it is Michael McLeod's turn to ask a question.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, George and Karen, for appearing in front of us.

I'm from the Northwest Territories, as you know, and this is certainly an issue that we share in terms of jurisdiction across the north. We've been hearing presentations and talking about this issue for several months now as a committee. During that time I've been trying to put together numbers as we hear presentations and as we start to see the broad crisis situation that's developing and has been in place for a long time. It's important that we put it in perspective, and I think between Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Nunavik, Yukon, and Labrador, in the last 15 years we've probably seen well over 1,000 people commit suicide, and that is something that the nation did not recognize for the longest time. But I think now we have the attention of the nation on this issue.

We've had strong voices from youth across the north, from the leaders across the north, and we're certainly starting to have the political attention to this issue that it requires. I think it's no surprise to all of us that one of the factors that leads to the condition of despair is that people feel there's no way out. We have some challenges in the north. The high cost of living is one of them. Housing and socio-economic inequity are right across the north. Our youth are starting to experience cultural disconnect that is really causing a lot of confusion in our communities.

I think we all recognize that there is no magic solution. We've heard it in the communities that we visited. We were in Kuujuaq and we were in Nunavut yesterday, and I think everybody recognizes that is the case. There are a lot of things we can do for prevention in this situation, but it's going to require adequate investment in the north, as you pointed out. We need to deal with the issue of housing. We need to increase the number of dwellings in our communities. We need to have more on site and better educational opportunities. The economy has to perform a lot better. We need more jobs. We need people to get to work.

We have to deal with the issue of trauma, physical and sexual abuse in our communities. That may be a result of a number of things, but residential schools have certainly been mentioned throughout our visits. We certainly need to find a way to deal with the addiction issues we have in every one of our communities, including mine. For the most part, we don't have the resources. We don't have the facilities to do so.

We heard many things during our visit. We heard about the need for crisis centres in the communities and cultural centres. We heard about the need for family centres. I would like to raise the program of friendship centres that we have in southern communities that seem to work quite well, and education-based programs for early childhood. Throughout our visits we have heard that people want to see community-based solutions by our own people, our own communities, and the people who live there.

So I wanted to ask you in your capacity, and I know you've been around for a while, what you have seen that works, what approaches work in our communities? What would you like to see happening in our communities to help us deal with these concerns that we're experiencing?

• (0920)

Hon. George Hickey: I agree with everything you said, Michael. One of the things is that I think you'd be very hard-pressed to find somebody in Nunavut, NWT, Labrador, or Nunavik who hasn't been touched by this issue of suicide.

When we're talking about some of the things that have been working or some of the things that need to be enhanced, you talked about that cultural disconnect. A lot of our youth don't know where they fit in right now. Are they living in a western society? Are they living in a cultural Inuit society with the values associated with that? We've got a foot in both and we have to find ways to bridge that and celebrate our cultural connectedness to each other, to the land.

On the values that our elders are passing down to us, we're losing more and more every day. I'm also involved with the seniors file obviously, and there's so much knowledge and so much desire to assist our youth to overcome this adaptation to today's society. We have to work and we have to be able to give our kids the tools to overcome their challenges. We have to give them the opportunity to be able to live and learn, and to know that suicide is not an option. When you said earlier in your comments that when we've put our children in a place where they consider that they don't have any other options, we have to put more options out there then so that suicide is not one of them.

• (0925)

The Chair: You just have 30 seconds.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I have a number of questions, but since I have such a short time.... Language has been raised many times as an important part of growing up in those communities. Can you just tell us what your plans are in Nunavut to continue to support languages in schools and other places?

Hon. George Hickey: I'm probably the worst person to respond to this, Michael. I lost my language as a child, but I think that gives me a higher focus on how important it really is. There are a number of different words in the Inuit language that you just can't translate into English. Working with the Department of Education, working with the official languages division, we are streamlining a lot of the processes through recommendations. We are working with NTI and our regional Inuit organizations to accelerate language training opportunities for not just our youth but for people like me who have lost their language yet who desire to at least be able to function at somewhat of a level.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We're moving into a five-minute round of questions now. The next question is from Arnold Viersen.

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

Thank you for being here today.

We've been really inundated over the last couple of days with this topic and so the questions just keep piling up to some degree. You're the health minister. One of the things that comes to mind is smoking because that was something that our nation tackled over 30 years ago. We've seen a dramatic reduction in the use of cigarettes and things like that. There was a several-pronged approach to that. There was a taxation approach and there was an education approach. That's one of the things I'm looking at in this.

Do you have an education approach as Health Canada did with smoking? You think that education is education, but it was a Health Canada initiative, advertising and all these kinds of things, something that would hold up a good story, a positive message. A lot of this is dark, depressing talk about these things. We were even told that just having these discussions may actually trigger some suicide attempts. That's the question. What are you doing for more of a positive approach?

I really appreciate the ITK report and the talk about all those mitigating factors. You can go through that list. I think it's five items. Do we have a family that you can hold up and say, these are good intergenerational connections, this is a cohesive family unit that works well together, so a good-news story basically or some things so that you could say, just don't go here, and we'll have a better outcome eventually? Is there an education program, an advertising program, or something like it that you're running?

Hon. George Hickey: Health has a number of different programs with a smoking cessation program. We have a number of different campaigns on smoking cessation, specifically, where we have posters of residents that people know.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes. Not specifically for smoking, but are we doing the same thing but for suicide?

Hon. George Hickes: We have a promotion of life campaign that's ongoing. A lot of it is still being developed, even as we speak. With this specific focus on suicide prevention, out of my office, there's a number of different initiatives, such as injury prevention and not hurting yourself, and promotion of a good quality of life across the territories. There are a number of different campaigns that we're looking at, and that's where we need some assistance to be able to focus our energies on specifics.

• (0930)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Is there an Inuit leader we can look to as a role model? I think in our Internet age, we all end up in our silos. Where are the guys we need to follow? For me, it's some of the snowmobilers who do the high arctic snowmobiling and stuff like that. I think that's cool. I'll probably never do anything like that, but I'd like to do that some day.

Is there a range of Inuit role models we can look to? An inspiration, I guess, is what I'm looking for.

Hon. George Hickes: Absolutely. You've hit the nail on the head. We have to celebrate. There are individuals in our society, and the first one who comes to mind is...we do want to focus on the everyday people, but we do have leaders.

Jordin Tootoo is an example. He's led a number of suicide prevention initiatives internationally. He's done some great work on bringing focus to the Inuit. He lost his brother, my cousin, to suicide a number of years ago. Instead of dwelling on the negatives of that, he's taken a leadership role.

We have a number of people who live in the Territories, and we've all been touched by suicide in one way or another. We have a lot of people we want to continue to work with at the community level. They're everyday people who are seen every day, and we celebrate their lives and their healthy life promotion.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: That's my time.

The Chair: Arnold is self-policing. Thank you for that.

The last question in this panel is from Michael McLeod, for five minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I'll try not to have a long preamble this time.

We talked about funding. There have been some new resources identified through your government. I think there was \$4.5 million identified for the Quality of Life Secretariat. The Government of Canada has recently announced \$9 million in funding. There are more resources to draw from.

We've heard in the last while from different people about the difficulty of trying to access money. The proposal requirements are fairly difficult to manoeuvre through, such as the drafting. The funding that is available is inadequate. For a lot of the organizations and groups that want to use this money, it seems the criteria doesn't fit the need.

Could you talk about that a little? We've also heard there's a 32-week waiting period before you get your money, and then you have

to scramble to spend it. There seems to be a lot of issues around funding. Have you experienced any of that?

Hon. George Hickes: We have, to a degree. I wasn't familiar with the waiting period. I hope that's not the case.

I was with Minister Philpott when that announcement was made in Kuujuaq on the \$9 million. We've been working on putting proposals together. I know there have been some back and forth challenges, and there's a lack of clarity in the requirements of the proposal.

That being said, we need to look at more of a needs-based approach, where if there are programs in place that we can enhance, then it should streamline the proposal process.

If there's one recommendation out of the many that I'm sure you will put forward, I hope it is a way to streamline the funding process so we can utilize the funds that are provided. There are additional monies coming from Health Canada over the next few years, as well, for core funding.

When we're talking about specific proposal-based funding, I hope there's a way to streamline that process to take more of a needs-based approach to it.

• (0935)

Mr. Michael McLeod: My next question is around the trust factor that seems to be of great concern with the youth, and more so with elders and the adult population, when it comes to dealing with police, social workers, nurses at the health facilities, and schools. We've heard of people not wanting to enter the schools, and not wanting to even attend graduations because they've had very negative experiences through the schools, through the residential school program. A lot of the time, the people who are employed in these occupations cannot speak the Inuit language, so it really puts up a barrier. Often, people in these positions haven't been trained in cultural awareness, nor are they familiar with the history of the Inuit, nor all that should be known about living in a small town, or isolated situation.

Are there any programs that your government provides to help alleviate this situation, to tackle this challenge?

Hon. George Hickes: Without going too much into specifics, it's a very diverse approach. First, we need more of our residents getting into those careers as teachers, mental health practitioners, counselling, so our people at risk are seeing people they know, or at least come from a similar background and do speak the language. In the meantime, we do have to rely upon outside expertise and bringing professionals from the south.

But going back to the cultural competencies and knowledge of people, when people come up here they ought to understand what they're going into, and that needs to be taught in the schools and universities. There are a number of challenges, as I mentioned earlier, traumas that our people are working to overcome today. That's where we need the tools to heal, so we don't dwell upon those traumas over and over and keep that cycle of repetition ongoing. We need to work on programs to help people heal, so they can walk into that school and feel okay about walking in there, that they've dealt with their trauma and have got past it.

We need to focus on employment levels of local professionals as one of the key things.

The Chair: Thanks for that. We're over time now, Michael. Thank you.

That brings us to an end of this panel. On behalf of the committee, I would like to say thank you, Mr. Hickes and Assistant Deputy Minister Kabloona, for your testimony today and for the thoughtful answers. As I said at the start, everything you've said will have a direct impact on our final report and, ultimately, on policy and budgets, so thank you very much for that.

We will now suspend for 20 minutes.

- (0935) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1000)

The Chair: We're going to resume the hearing of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs and the study of indigenous suicide.

My thanks to everyone in the audience for joining us, and I want to extend special thanks to our witnesses.

I'd like to welcome three organizations that will be speaking from Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. We have James T. Arreak, the CEO; Jeannie Arreak-Kullualik, the director in the Department of Social and Cultural Development; and from the Nunatsiavut Government, Johannes Lampe, president. Finally, from the Government of Nunavut, we'll hear from Shuvina Mike, director of Inuit Qaujim.

I think we have Mr. Arreak starting.

Thank you.

Mr. James Arreak (Chief Executive Officer, Executive Services, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): *Qujannamiik. Ullukut*, members of the committee.

Standing committee, my name is James Arreak. I'm the chief executive officer of Nunavut Tunngavik, the land claims organization responsible for ensuring the rights of the Inuit of Nunavut set out in the Nunavut agreement, the Constitution Act of 1982, and elsewhere are upheld.

On behalf of the president and the vice-president and the board of directors of NTI, I want to thank this committee for coming to Nunavut.

I join you today to discuss a very sensitive and important issue that affects every Nunavummiut.

Over the last few decades historical trauma and social problems at the community and individual level have contributed to a steep and unfortunate rise in the rates of suicide in Nunavut. To give you some perspective, in 2009 the suicide rate among Inuit in Nunavut was 83.9 per 100,000, while in the rest of Canada it was 11.7 per 100,000. Other data from 1999 to 2011 shows 259 deaths by suicide in Nunavut.

In 2015 the conclusion of the coroner's inquest into the high rates of suicide in Nunavut led to the declaration of a public health crisis in Nunavut by the Government of Nunavut. The Nunavut suicide prevention strategy partners, NSPS, which include NTI, GN, RCMP,

and the Embrace Life Council, have since released a one-year action plan for suicide prevention, and we are working to develop a suicide prevention plan for 2017 to 2020.

The coroner's recommendations directly and indirectly implicated key systemic causal issues in the suicide crisis. These include intergenerational trauma as a result of their residential school and other colonial experiences, inadequate housing, lack of early childhood education, and the failure of the current Nunavut education system to deliver on the rights for Inuit and our children to be educated in our own language and in accordance with Inuit culture. The NSPS partners are working closely more than ever to see that these recommendations are put into action. We need investments in all these areas to improve the overall quality of life.

In recent years we've struggled and worked hard to understand this issue in ways that we can address in our communities. We've developed and contributed many resources: The community consultation report was submitted; the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy; the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy action plan; evaluation of the NSPS; research documents on child sexual abuse, substance abuse, and early childhood education; the Nunavut Youth Centre Environmental Scan; as well as a historical look at deaths by suicide in Nunavut from 1920 to 2014.

It's been extremely difficult to engage communities at times because it's an extremely painful and difficult issue. Some elders have suggested that talking about suicide too loosely is irresponsible and draws more of it into our lives, while others acknowledge that we need to talk about it to address it and prevent it from continuing. Examples are: a Inuktitut term used to describe suicide in itself is a concern, *imminiriq* "to do by oneself"; suicide prevention is *imminiiqtailimaniq*, "to prevent one from doing something on their own".

We also got instructions from Nunavut Inuit not to sensationalize suicide because so many are deeply affected, at first second-hand, either by direct family relations or through other relationships in the community, the workplace, or through their support systems.

Page 7 of the NSPS describes the impact of rapid societal change, historical and intergenerational trauma:

The trauma experienced firsthand by Inuit in the settlement transitional period has had an immense impact on all generations...This unresolved trauma compromised their ability to cope with stress in a healthy manner.

- (1005)

As a representative of roughly 30,000 Inuit in Nunavut, NTI knows that suicide is preventable and that we must do all we can to reduce the rates and advocate for programs and services, which is why NTI continues to invest in this area and treat it as a priority.

In May, Atausiuqatigiingniq Inuusirmi United for Life Stakeholder Summit on Suicide Prevention took place in Iqaluit. The summit was a successful initiative taken by the partners to get a better understanding of resources, programs, and initiatives in our community, as well as the challenges communities are facing and their perspectives on the issue of suicide.

The themes included the need for healing at the community level, the need to address intergenerational trauma and build confidence in Inuit identity, the need for education that is reflective of Inuit culture and language, the need for addiction treatment throughout Nunavut, and the need for parental programming. Among other historical government policies that have impacted Inuit, it is the crown's responsibility, alongside Inuit organizations, to help Inuit reclaim our identity, language, and customs. You, as the federal government, hold fiduciary responsibility to provide continuous, multi-year funding and assist Inuit organizations in funding services in suicide prevention and addictions treatment. I emphasize that Inuit need to heal from intergenerational trauma that exists within our families, communities, and our society.

Identity is a key issue for us. Our youth are currently straddling two worlds, being told that in order to be Inuk and be confident in oneself, you need to do A, B, and C, yet also being told that their language and culture are insignificant and of less value than that of western Canadian society. These beliefs are reinforced through the education system, through the media, popular culture, and everywhere.

In June of this year, Prime Minister Trudeau observed that restoring indigenous languages is a key to addressing youth suicide. Loss of language is one of the most serious threats facing Inuit today. The biggest factor in the erosion of Inuit language and culture is the predominantly non-Inuit school system. In Nunavut, there are 9,247 students enrolled, and 300 are non-Inuit students, yet there are 453 non-Inuit teachers and only 126 Inuit teachers. There are more non-Inuit teachers than there are non-Inuit students. Ninety-five percent of Nunavut students are Inuit, yet 80% of the teachers are non-Inuit.

These numbers reflect a continuation in present-day terms of the cultural assimilation experienced by Inuit in the residential school era. The Inuit of Nunavut and our children have the inherent aboriginal right to be educated in our own language and culture. The right is not being honoured today.

It is instructive to note that federal investment in Inuit language education and services is a slight fraction of the figure for the comparable French language services in Nunavut. NTI welcomes the recognition and support of French language, but the expenditures for Inuktitut should be comparative with the Inuit population. As a means of addressing suicide, low graduation rates, and other problems, both levels of government must ensure that adequate funding is available to implement the Inuit right to be educated in their language.

•(1010)

Our education system needs your investment. NTI has requested Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit become a core curriculum subject or core element.

Why does it take eight years for curriculum on staking the claim in Nunavut, based on the negotiations that happened and why the territory was created, to get approval and implementation into the classroom? That's eight years.

Regarding mental health services, there are urgent needs for mental health workers in our communities to speak Inuktitut and understand our culture. We must train Inuit to fill these roles. We have to start the process of engaging bodies like Ilisaqsivik, which is in Clyde River. We know measures have been taken by the GN, Government of Nunavut, in recent years to enhance the capacity, but we need much more in this priority area. Proper intervention measures must be put in place. In partnership with the NSPS and our health partners at the table, we are trying to figure out what the healing, grief counselling, and bereavement support groups are going to look like, and implement the action plan, Resiliency Within.

NTI continues to advocate for access to culturally appropriate mental health services in Nunavut. This includes being able to receive care in Inuktitut.

Mr. Chair, the "Annual Report on the State of Inuit Culture and Society" was tabled in Parliament. The report focused on the state and the status of Inuit children and youth in Nunavut, and emphasizes the importance of the need to access early childhood development programming in the language of their homeland.

We also need to shift our work in monitoring programming for men and inunnguiniq parenting, which directly create reinforced protective factors in suicide prevention. I cannot overstate the appreciation and the gratitude we have had for many years with this initiative, the front-line workers who continue to lead these initiatives, and the community leaders who spend countless hours standing at the front line; so we accept them, and we appreciate them.

Lastly, I echo what our elders have said, that there is hope and there are many ways to celebrate life. Many of our elders survived hardship and starvation, and have a proven way to survive millennia, to pave a way forward, and to always embrace a new day.

Qujammamik, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Arreak.

Mr. Lampe.

•(1015)

Mr. Johannes Lampe (President, Nunatsiavut Government):
[*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

I know first-hand just what it is like to lose a loved one to suicide. I have lost a brother, a nephew, and a son. There's a lot of hurt and pain, and a lot of suffering. The impacts are far-reaching. I've spent many sleepless nights, struggling to understand why people choose to take their own lives.

August 9, 2008 will forever be ingrained in my mind. It is the date my son took his own life. For a long time, I felt lost, hopeless, and confused. But I eventually realized that I had to find the strength to pick up the pieces of my shattered life and to move on, not only for own mental health and well-being but also for other family members who leaned on me for support.

My story is not unique. It's a common story throughout Nunatsiavut. A paper published in *The American Journal of Public Health*, May 19 of this year, on suicide mortality in Newfoundland and Labrador, revealed substantial disparities in suicide between indigenous and non-indigenous populations in the province.

The results showed that over a 17-year period, the suicide rate in Newfoundland was 8 deaths per 100,000 person-years. By contrast, the age-standardized suicide rate in Nunatsiavut was 165 deaths per 100,000 person-years, 20 times higher than the rate in Newfoundland. According to the study, this trend holds across all age groups. However, the disparity was greatest among those aged 10-19 years. It also accounted for a majority of deaths. Suicide rates were elevated among females in Nunatsiavut communities.

Research has consistently shown high rates of suicide in northern and indigenous populations in Canada and elsewhere in the circumpolar world. This study underscores the need to close the gap of the persistent health inequities in northern Canada. The study, conducted in partnership with aboriginal governments and groups in Labrador, combined community-based methods, including consultations with elders, youth, mental health and community workers, primary-care clinicians, and government decision-makers.

During the launch of the national Inuit suicide prevention strategy on July 27, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Natan Obed listed the following factors as contributing to the high suicide rate: trauma due to relocation, inadequacy of schooling, our self-determination being taken away, and our inability to live the life we lived before we knew alcohol, drugs, or any other types of addictions.

I was born in Nutak in 1965. When I was nine months old, my family and all of the people in the community were forced to relocate south. The same thing happened to the people of Hebron in 1959. These were disturbing times for our people, and a sad time in our history. Many Inuit could not speak English.

When we moved to the new location, we didn't have any choices. We lost our traditional hunting grounds. There was no work. There was no support to help us adapt.

• (1020)

Our lives were turned upside down. Relocations have had a profound impact not only on those who were displaced, but on their families, and they will for generations to come. We continue to struggle with high rates of suicide, particularly among our youth. Unemployment rates in our communities are several times higher than the national average. Our literacy rates are several times lower.

We continue to struggle with the pain and suffering caused by alcohol and substance abuse. Many of our people continue to live below the poverty line. We are in danger of losing our language and our culture.

Those are huge challenges that we have to overcome as a people, but the challenge is even greater for those who were forced to move away from their homes and for their children, grandchildren, and many generations yet to come.

The northern territorial government has worked very hard over the years to raise awareness of mental health issues and suicide prevention. We continue to provide many prevention, intervention, and post-intervention programs, and we work closely with other governments, organizations, and groups in dealing with these issues. As we move forward, we must not forget who we are as a people. We must take pride in our cultural identity and we must strive to find ways to revitalize our language.

I believe these are key as we travel down the road to healing. A national Inuit suicide prevention strategy, I believe, is a good step forward, not only in increasing awareness, but also in giving people more hope. I look forward to seeing this strategy implemented for the benefit of Nunatsiavut and Inuit Nunangat.

Nakurmiik.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lampe, for speaking on behalf of the Nunatsiavut government. I very much appreciate it.

Now we'll hear a voice from the Government of Nunavut, please.

Shuvinai Mike, you have the floor for 10 minutes. Thank you.

Ms. Shuvinai Mike (Director of Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit, Department of Culture and Heritage, Government of Nunavut): I'm honoured to be here.

When I read the requirements, I said I was going to come here as an individual, but I would also like to speak about some of what I do in our department.

To start with, there is an inquiry to get a better understanding of how to help those who have been impacted. I am asking this because

[Witness speaks in Inuktitut]

The way we comprehend or interpret is different. For example, to my understanding, the term "suicide survivor" can mean "I have survived my own attempt to commit suicide".

Inuit elders, parents, and families advise those of us who have lost a loved one not to dwell on grieving. They say we need to let go of them so that their spirit is not lost.

In Inuit tradition, one of the ways to cope with losing a loved one is through kinship naming after a loved one who has passed away. I will tell you, though, that it is difficult to do right away. At least for me it was. I had to listen to my elders' advice and respect and honour our ways and accept that. As the saying goes, it was easier said than done. I lost a daughter to suicide, and it was hard to accept that babies were named after her, shortly after, but I had to accept that and honour that as well.

I have been struggling to find support from teachers who have training and understanding about what kinds of trauma and impacts suicides can have on students.

I heard a professional say that there is a difference between having compassion and discipline. It pierced my heart to hear that since there is a lot of difference. When one has compassion, then trust can be built up with a student who has been impacted. If discipline comes before trying to understand what the student may be going through, that is a concern.

We need aftercare services. We do have family support and friends. The missing part is understanding and knowing why. We parents tend to just protect and provide for a child to cope with a traumatic experience, and try to figure out how they can learn to live without their loved one. It can be mentally hard and draining.

The school system has a huge role, because our kids are with them more than they are with their parents. It's a lot to expect, but they are the most important professionals we rely on.

I am trying to be involved, but to meet someone else's expectations. I can recall hearing some saying, "Get over it. It's now the child's excuse." These comments, to me, are heartless or show a lack of understanding. I keep repeating myself, asking them to understand a child who has lost their parent, to have more understanding and not to treat them like a child who has not been impacted.

I am sharing these real life experiences only because all the suicides have no answers, only assumptions. We have to learn how to feel those angry moments. And as a mother, when will I stop crying and asking myself what else could have been different? Why do I feel so much shame? What did I do wrong, and why do I have to keep saying, "Have compassion, and not pity"?

I wanted to start off like that only because I want to share, as an individual who has been impacted, and who is also providing aftercare to my two grandchildren, one of whom is parentless. I know the government and other organizations have all the good intentions and are starting up groups or even walks.

• (1025)

But sometimes the terms, especially "suicide prevention"...as I mentioned during the first inquiry, to us when it comes across in Inuktitut, it means you were preventing the suicide.

Inuit say those words in our native language, it means they're preventing it, as if they were present at the time when an individual was attempting it. We have to find ways to work with people who have been impacted in order to find proper resources for after-care, and that's the part that's really missing in the experience that I have as a director of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in culture and heritage. A lot of the funding that is provided through that department is for the people to retain their initiative and their own way of promoting life. They might not like the goal or the objective to be suicide prevention. The goal is for people to relearn the traditional ways and values that are relevant in their communities and in our communities as well, because today, as James said, the young people have two worlds.

When I was a teacher, I used to say the elders had the two worlds because they had to live the nomadic life and the life that is modern. Now it's as if we have to provide workshops that are promoting identity and building self-esteem in parka making and similar things—all these initiatives that are relevant to the people—and those are the ways to promote life. In the experience that I have with the elders, I coordinate the terminology and when they are not from an Inuit concept, it's hard for them.

That's the part, the Inuit perspective, that I promote in the government so that departments at least have an understanding of the needs of the people through their perspective, not the other way around .

Thank you for this time.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

With that we'll move into rounds of seven-minute questions without wasting any time. We'll start with Michael McLeod, please.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing in front of us today.

We've been talking about the issue of suicide for several months now as a committee. We've heard a lot of testimony, some of it very heartbreaking, as we're hearing today. A lot of the youth have also testified in front of us. They're going through some very difficult times, and this issue doesn't have a magical solution. There are many factors that we can point to. Some of those factors were raised earlier today: housing, lack of jobs, difficulty in getting a good education, physical and sexual abuse. All these things are ingredients of it.

We also heard from the youth who came in front of us about the loss of identity and the inability to be proud of who they are, and that really is of concern. I'm from the Northwest Territories, and this is discussed with the aboriginal people there. People always connect language, land, and culture as part of their identity. Many of our youth can't do that anymore because they've lost the ability to go out on the land or to speak the language, or they don't know their own culture or their history.

I think there are many things we can try to do, many recommendations we can make, but one of the main goals is to try to get people to be proud of who they are, especially our youth. Everybody should be proud, Inuk proud or proud if they're a Dene or a Métis.

I'm very curious to hear from all of you, if you were here holding the pen, what kind of recommendations we should be making as a committee and what you would say about recovering identity. I know we talked a bit about it, James, and I'm really curious to hear what you would say to help us formulate what we should say.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, James, please.

Mr. James Arreak: Thank you for the question, Michael. I appreciate that youth is a big concern for you. I think it is the same here, because the majority of the Nunavut population is under the age of 25, so it's really a big concern for us.

We have efforts. For example, in Clyde River they've built mitigation measures into the community when issues like this come up, when youth are vulnerable. They have engaged elders to help stabilize them by taking them to the land for a time so that they can have a sense of being cared for, being around familiar environments, and just being in a place where they can really look at themselves and receive the care they need. Youth, in terms of identity, is a big concern for NTI.

While we have this initiative going on, the government is also closing much-needed group homes for youth in Iqaluit. To me, that doesn't make sense. At the same time, it's a challenge to try to bring some balance to this in terms of helping the youth forge ahead. They need attention, because they're being faced with issues that I never faced. In some ways I did, but it's different now. When I was growing up it was different. I had discipline and I had caring parents. Today, there are youth who don't have the same kind of care and opportunity to be cared for by parents who are ready at the same time.

It's a very difficult and sensitive issue, but at the same time I want to share with you that restoring pride in our young people and who they are is a major goal for us.

•(1035)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Michael McLeod: The issue of residential schools has come up many times in our discussions. Senator Sinclair appeared before us. He said that since the residential school policy was put in place, the government spent seven generations kicking the crap out of our culture and identity, and it will probably take seven generations to recover. I honestly believe it's going to take a long time, and we have to start reclaiming our identity.

You mentioned in your presentation, James, that identity had to be reclaimed. You also said it was a federal responsibility. I'm assuming you meant through investment and resources. Perhaps you could explain or elaborate a little more on that.

Mr. James Arreak: Thank you for the question.

NTI is prepared to work with the federal government to develop curriculum that is relevant and would reflect Inuit culture. Also, in terms of funding, it would really be beneficial if we could set multi-year funding arrangements, as opposed to piece by piece, because this challenge is really in need at this time.

I hope that helps answer your question. I think we have other comments.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to answer?

Please go ahead, Jeannie, and then Johannes.

Mrs. Jeannie Arreak-Kullualik (Director, Department of Social and Cultural Development, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For every committee, for every consultation and working group that we go to, the number one recommendation is always that we need healing from intergenerational trauma and loss of our loved ones first before we can even tackle....

With 60% of our population being 25 and younger, we also have to weigh the balance between what's good for the older generation and what is also good for the younger generation. It's a very fine balance, and I agree it's going to take years. It's also been identified by each of the conferences and summits that it's not a one-time fix; it's going to take years, especially when you have to become confident to communicate all the stories of wrongs and injustices or trauma that you have experienced yourself. A lot of times we are in denial and say we didn't experience that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lampe, we're well over time on this question. I hope you'll find a way to add your comments under a subsequent question.

The next question is from David Yurdiga, please.

•(1040)

Mr. David Yurdiga: I thank you very much, Chair, and I'd like to welcome the witnesses here.

This is very important to all of us right across Canada. One of the common themes I've been hearing and feeling is family. If you have a healthy family, you have a healthy community.

I think we have to go back and create the happy family atmosphere that has been lost. The youth have a passion, and I'm really impressed that these are our future leaders. They want to move forward aggressively. A lot of times they're limited by resources, which is a challenge. I think that moving forward, resources have to be made available. It's always about the grassroots. A lot of the time, program money is very difficult to get because there are many barriers in place.

What I'd like to see eventually is direct funding to the youth, because they are our future. I heard one comment that really touched my heart; it was that the family circle has been broken, and a lot of it is the result of the residential schools.

In your opinion, how can we fill that gap? How do we heal the family? I think it's a big challenge for everyone to try to mitigate that aspect, because the residential schools took a large portion of that circle away. In your opinion, how can we heal that? How can we move forward?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lampe, please.

Mr. Johannes Lampe: I believe that we have to go back to the truth, back to the first contact. When the Europeans first came, the aboriginal people of this new world at the time were impacted. They are still being impacted over 500 years later. Most certainly, the Europeans were looking for riches for their crown back in the Old World, and most certainly, the indigenous people were being used to destroy each other by the French and the English.

I believe that for something like that to be acknowledged by Canada and the provinces would make some difference. I believe that the hierarchy of any government, whether it's federal, provincial, territorial or local government, means that we are working in a triangular system, and even here today it is a square. We need to make a circle. A circle will have a continuum to proceed with the tools that are needed for us to work together. This is how we can look at reconciliation.

I, for one, as an individual, have had to face the truth, and I have had to reconcile myself with the issues I have experienced. As a child growing up, I thought that was the normal way of life, because of the education system in my years at school. Bullying in schools has a very negative impact on school children today, and that is just one example. Bullying is not just happening in the schools; it's happening at home. When children grow up, they again do lateral violence. Lateral violence could happen at this table or at any other table in Canada.

That is the truth for me. Reconciliation is very important, and I believe, as Shuvinai says, that we have to come back to the teachings. We have to come back to the Inuit traditional knowledge and the way that the culture and the language were passed down from generation to generation.

I believe this committee is taking a step forward, and I appreciate that.

I want to give Shuvinai a chance to speak.

• (1045)

The Chair: Ms. Arreak-Kullualik would also like to speak.

Ms. Mike, would you like to respond, as well?

Okay, Jeannie, please go ahead. There is about a minute remaining.

Mrs. Jeannie Arreak-Kullualik: Okay. Thank you very much.

I wanted to say that we had the honour of hosting an Inuit summit on socio-cultural issues a couple of weeks ago. The first day was concentrated on a structured debrief healing session using the timeline of Inuit societal changes and transitions.

That first day served three purposes. One was on healing, because a lot of the elders and residential school survivors told us they never had the chance to feel or grieve their own losses. Another purpose was understanding our own history of self-reliance and our own determination and self-regulation. The third purpose was to have the recent history on why we have the land claims agreement, how the Nunavut government was created, and why we have a clause in our land claims agreement, article 23, on Inuit employment and consultation to ensure that Inuit are consulted when government programs and services are being created through policy or legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next question is from Romeo Saganash, please.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

I want to start with Shuvinai Mike. She wanted to answer some of the previous questions, so I might as well start with her.

I listened carefully to your testimony and your story, and I was moved. You talked a lot about culture, language, and your own experience. I think a couple of you talked about our youth living in two worlds, which is definitely a reality. I lived in three worlds. I was

born and raised in the bush; then I was sent to residential schools, and then I went on to university.

My first question is to all of you. I think it's an important one for the youth, and we've heard them a lot over the last two days. How do we achieve that balance? How do we do that? You talked about programs in Clyde River, but how do we achieve that balance?

One of the ways that we found in the Cree world, where I'm from in James Bay, is that the school is closed for two weeks in the spring when the geese arrive. The entire village is empty for two weeks, because all the children and youth get to go with their parents. They spend two weeks in the bush and they wait for the geese to arrive. They get to be Cree for two weeks, and only Cree for two weeks, in Cree territory for two weeks, and speak only Cree for two weeks. That helps, I think, and I've seen it.

I first want your thoughts on how to achieve that balance in the north. Then I have a couple of other questions.

• (1050)

Ms. Shuvinai Mike: I think that's part of what I wrote, especially about decolonizing the education system. We already know that the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program in Ontario is successful, and it's a model, so why aren't the high schools providing that same kind of program, especially in Nunavut?

If only I had more time.

When I was doing my master's degree, I wrote a paper on why Inuit students struggle in grade 10. I was also an Inuktitut teacher at the high school here. I'm only going to speak about the high school here, because that's my experience. I need more people to understand.

I know it might be different now, but there were three systems: academic level, majority non-Inuit, and general program. You didn't even have physics. In the sciences, there was some general programming. You weren't provided the same programming as in the academic level. In the general program, you could graduate, but you wouldn't be able to go to college level.

I'm only stressing these because my goal is to decolonize. We need to have schools that promote healthy life and honour different cultures, not just one that's dynamic and majority so that we're a minority in our own land. Our school system is also, for the most part, not majority Inuit-relevant. This is still going on. It's been 40 years now. It was over 20 years ago, and I was a teacher for 23 years.

We need consultative workshops. We need history to be taught in a way that is relevant to the students. We need students be able to have more pride, and not just those students who are academics or those who are more privileged than others. A lot of students are falling through the cracks because of that. I'm saying decolonizing the existing system would be the way to go.

The Chair: There's about a minute remaining.

Mr. James Arreak: I just wanted to highlight that while the erosion of our language is a big concern, we do have programs that are working. One is a day care facility in Iqaluit that is an Inuktitut day care. When children are allowed to be respected and cared for in their language, it does something good for them in terms of being confident in who they are. When they go to kindergarten, they're totally different people. In terms of a positive influence, that's been a good program that we know is working. That's something I wanted to highlight to the committee.

[Witness speaks in Inuktitut]

The Chair: I guess we're done there. You have 15 seconds if you can make use of that.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I have a very quick question. A lot of these things are already provided for in our different agreements. Are there implementation issues that you have right now with the federal government?

Mr. James Arreak: Generally, there are. We always have implementation concerns, due to the lack of implementation policy that pushes both levels of government to commit to any kind of implementation of their federal obligations as far as the land claims are concerned.

• (1055)

The Chair: The next question is from Gary Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: James, I would like to ask you to just finish that, and maybe elaborate on what you started.

Mr. James Arreak: Yes. In terms of implementation, there has been very little implementation, as far as we're concerned. There are genuine efforts, but really what we're seeing.... I think the land claims coalition is pushing for some new ideas that are being proposed to the federal government that would help the government focus in terms of being led by a policy that helps the government focus its resources towards their obligations. I think there are 26-plus land claims in Canada, and we fit into the modern treaty section. The modern treaties are separate, but we get to co-manage the resources. Also, there are different themes that differentiate us.

However, in terms of trying to work with both levels of government, it's a daily effort, and sometimes it's like trying to pull teeth when we try to convince people that a systemic issue exists, that a barrier exists for Inuit. With the issues that we present before you, it's sometimes very difficult. We appreciate the opportunity, yet it's a real challenge at this time.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

I just want to probe a bit further on education. I know you had mentioned in your presentation that there was an inherent right to education in Inuit culture and language. I know you mentioned earlier the need for decolonizing the education system. Putting all this together, what specific measures need to be taken within the current education system that will allow for higher attainment, a higher success rate within the system as a whole, and allow young people to go on to post-secondary education?

One of the things you also mentioned was this 95%:80% ratio, but in order to have an increased level of numbers within the population, they will need to have the training to fill those numbers, so it's almost like a never-ending cycle that we need to break.

The Chair: James, I'll just mention that Jeannie has her hand up as well, so could you share the four minutes remaining?

Mr. James Arreak: I'll just quickly say that we see education as a tool to help us keep and enhance who we are as a people. We want to use education as a tool to keep our language, to keep our culture, and so forth. I just wanted to add that. Maybe I'll let my partner respond further.

Mrs. Jeannie Arreak-Kullualik: Thank you.

One of the things NTI has proposed to the Department of Education is to create an Inuktitut language stream. We had three streams. The Qulliq stream is predominantly Inuktitut. We had three different models, and we are proposing now to create an Inuktitut language immersion stream.

For Inuit whose first language is not Inuktitut, we would introduce them to it and immerse them in learning. We would also immerse their parents in it, encouraging them to speak more Inuktitut and learn more words. We would also have a cultural component in there on why it's so important to learn.

One of the things the elders told us when we had the Inuit summit was that we need to have trauma-informed administrators and principals and teachers at schools instead of sending or reporting a student to family services for foster care or something like that. We would understand why they misbehave, why they get emotional, why a few things trigger their emotions—trauma.

I think we have already communicated and built the case as to why these would be very important, except we're also being told a different message, which is that the low graduation rate is because Inuktitut is our first language. That's the reverse of what we are trying to do. If you have the language foundation, research studies have found that you can learn more and achieve more academically.

I'll just end it there. Thank you.

• (1100)

The Chair: Thanks.

There are about 50 seconds left.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: In terms of post-secondary education, what would be your vision for that at the local setting?

Mr. James Arreak: I'll start.

As I said earlier, I think it would be helpful if you as the federal government and we as the NTI would commit to work together to develop a curriculum that would help us shape the kind of curriculum that would help our students not only develop their academic skills but also understand, using language and culture, how they can become successful people who can contribute to a healthy society.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move into a round of five-minute questions.

The first five-minute question comes from Arnold Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you all for being here today.

My question is also probably for James. It's specifically on education, something we talk about a lot around here.

I guess I'll start with choice and competition within education. Is that something that is explored? I know that just within my own community there's often great division or diversity of thought on who should run it, where it should go, and these kinds of things. In the past in Alberta, 10 or 15 years ago, we had a very broad spectrum of education: home-schooling that was completely parent-driven, independent schools, charter schools, public schools, public Catholic schools, public Christian schools. It was all over the place. There was some concern that we were sending several different messages, but we noticed that over the long term, the level of education went up overall. We had different streams, but they all seemed to compete with each another and everything went up.

Are there in Nunavut—and I'm sure even within Inuit communities—different thoughts on the goal of education and these kinds of things? Is there any avenue for a parent to say no, they don't want their child to go to that school or that they'd rather home-school them or send them to a rural and remote school, or send them to some boarding school somewhere in the U.K. or something like that? Are there those kinds of opportunities?

Mr. James Arreak: Let me just respond this way.

As you were flying in, you probably saw the visible lack of infrastructure. In terms of that concern, that quickly tells you about choices. Do I have restaurants to go to here? You can probably count your options on one hand.

When it comes to education, I can point to only one option that we have. In that regard, I will just make the point that the lack of information that we parents—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Is there an appetite on the part of parents to even consider different options?

Mr. James Arreak: Going back to Clyde River, there is a cultural school there that is doing remarkable things for young men who are in need. They go there absolutely broken and needing help, and then after a couple of years of going through there, they are transformed. They realize they'd been convicted of what they'd done wrong, and I think that's been helpful to those individuals.

In terms of whether there is an appetite, yes, I would say there is absolutely an appetite. People are keen. One of the panellists has been a teacher for a long time; she has a wealth of knowledge. There are others I know who have created their own in-class curricula that they have researched themselves with local elders, some of whom have passed on. They've developed a way to teach, for example, how to make a traditional kayak. I think that implies that there is interest.

• (1105)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Just correct me if I'm wrong here, but one of the issues we have is attainment. In my own community as well, that was something we had to work on, the idea that attainment doesn't mean entrance into college; attainment means being able to provide for and protect your family.

Is there some way we can work on changing that view of what it means to attain an education? Is that something you're working on at all?

Mr. James Arreak: I don't know if the other panellists have anything to say about it, but I think we go—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: If I want to pull it back to the big picture, when you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. When you're a teacher, college is the end goal, and sometimes it's not where we need to be headed.

Is that a correct analysis?

Mrs. Jeannie Arreak-Kullualik: It depends on your level of skill. I believe that as a parent you already have choices when your child goes to senior high—which stream they are interested in, what requirements they have to achieve in order to graduate from high school.

Another thing we had explored was trying to create an Inuktitut school that would have 90% Inuktitut spoken. In the beginning, that's what one of the elementary schools in Iqaluit, the Joamie school, was created to be, but because of all the other requirements and the number of students who had no Inuktitut language skills or who were not able to speak Inuktitut but were expected to go into the Inuktitut stream, that quickly changed.

When NTI proposed revisiting the idea of creating an Inuktitut school, the response we got was that it would have to be a private school, which didn't make sense to us, because 95% of the public school students in Nunavut are Inuit, enrolled under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you. That's all my time.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next question is from Michael McLeod, please.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the youth, but also about the adults in this situation. For the most part, our focus has been on youth and the issue of suicide and youth. We've heard many testimonies on youth.

We visited a community where at one point there were 80 youth under suicide watch. The school reported that to us. It was shocking to hear, yet at the same school, when the students were given a questionnaire about what they would like to see changed or fixed, the response overwhelmingly was to fix their parents, so it's not just the youth we have to be concerned about: it's the adults as well.

We've talked about many scenarios of potential investment for solving some of these situations. We talked about family crisis centres. We talked about education programs and early childhood programs, and yet we haven't talked a lot about the adults. I know you mentioned in a couple of your speaking points that there needs to be healing and that there needs to be investment to help adults deal with their situations.

We have a lot of situations of the adults, the parents, not really passing on information, not teaching them about language, not teaching them about their history or their culture, not teaching them their traditional practices, so how do we do that?

In his report, Jack Hicks considered the differences between the young people and the older people. He found that the risk factors were different.

I wanted to know if the presenters might have ways to help the adults deal with the situation and to become better parents, and also better examples in our society.

• (1110)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lampe.

Mr. Johannes Lampe: That is one of the most important questions that has to be asked.

Certainly residential schooling issues have impacted Labrador Inuit and aboriginal groups across Canada. Those who went through residential schooling have not been given the parenting skills required to look after their children. When they become grandparents, the problem is passed on to the next generation. We as parents and grandparents do not have the values as aboriginal people that our ancestors were given the opportunity to pass on to us.

When our children were taken away from their homes across Canada, much of our tradition was taken away. The parents of today, even grandparents, suffer from various types of abuse. They do not have the values that Inuit were blessed with when they were born.

We have to go back to the teachings the elders have. Because departments work in silos, we have to work around those issues. It's not just INAC that is responsible, and it is not just INAC that has a file on issues relating to aboriginal groups across Canada. Only when the different departments start to work together will they realize that this issue is bigger than what we see. It is bigger than what the aboriginal groups already know.

Qujannamiik.

The Chair: Thank you. I can see there's more to say on this. There's time for three more questions from members, so perhaps one of the members would invite a continuation of this particular conversation.

The next question goes back to Arnold Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

Do you want to carry on for a bit here, Mr. Lampe?

The Chair: I think Jeannie and James had something to add as well.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Johannes Lampe: Certainly, where education is involved, in order for our children and our grandchildren to have good mental health, they need healthy home care. They need food on the table. They need to be able to sleep at night to get the rest and the energy that they need to be in school. Most do not make it to school. They will not go to school because they are hungry or didn't get the sleep they needed.

They don't have opportunity to speak to what it is that they want to become, what dreams they may have to become a teacher or a policeman or even someone who is a mentor, a role model. The only way that education will move forward, I believe, will be when we look at the role models, which are the mothers and the fathers; it is only when other parents start to see that, or when territorial and provincial governments start to acknowledge parents who are giving their children the proper care they need. That is challenging when the funding is not adequate for a single mother or a single father, and

most certainly when even the grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren where the parents are not able to provide the health care and take on the responsibility to get their child to the school.

There are many different issues that we have to look at, and most certainly we have to look at issues that relate to the children and the grandchildren.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you.

There are about two minutes remaining, if you would like to share.

Mr. James Arreak: Thank you. I will try to respond quickly to this.

In terms of what the question is concerned with, there is a deep need for health services among our people, and a need to help them cope and move on from the issues. We have a mental health strategy, but we need it to include mobile trauma response teams. We also need additional mental health specialists in the area, and we need grief support networks to continue and to be funded.

I want to quote something that I think is really appropriate here. It's from the 2009 NSPS document that was the development of the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy. It says:

Elders are a very important part of the cycle, for them to educate young people. [They need] to coach the students to give them an understanding of where they are coming from. Some issues need to be addressed on a daily basis, education, healing, etc, but also need to start understanding that you are living a life where you have a sound foundation to stand on. For some young people, especially young adults, notably those who have problems of consumption, suicide becomes part of the picture. There needs to be much more education among [those at risk] in order for them to become aware of who they are and be proud of [who they are and] where they come from.

The Chair: Thank you. There are about 20 seconds left, Arnold.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I will probably make a bit of a statement.

Specifically in the territories, it seems that an Inuit person's life is inundated with alphabet soup: KRG, NIT, and all these things. I haven't a clue what... Whenever we have a witness here, we get all these acronyms thrown at us, along with the words "approval", "program", "proposal", "rate", and "services". There are all these words. I wonder how we could move to a world where that wouldn't be part of the everyday vocabulary in our territories. I guess that's kind of a hope.

• (1120)

The Chair: Perhaps we'll hear the answer as we progress here.

Thank you, and thanks for allowing our conversation to continue.

I have another five-minute question from Gary Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the last couple of days we've heard a number of references to Clyde River. I know you mentioned it, Mr. Arreak. I'm wondering if you could, in about a minute or so, give us a summary of what it is and why it's successful, and if it is something that could be replicated in other places.

Mr. James Arreak: Clyde River has two things going for it. One is the Iliasaqivik Society, which is a community wellness program initiative. They have counsellors who are respected elders and have proven abilities to help those who are in grief. Again, those are key situations, so there's that program, and they go out to the community.

Second, they are a cultural school that is specific to Inuit and they kind of spearheaded this. I'm not sure if it's under the Arctic College or the Government of Nunavut, but they have a very specific role in terms of teaching students about what our culture is. It's based on the cyclical pattern of the unique calendar year. This coming year they're focusing on caribou, the skin, and then they're kind of following the pattern of the seasons and educating the students about this. We're hearing very interesting results coming out of it. It's something that I think this committee should be aware of and should probably follow up to dig deeper into the program.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Getting back to education again. Ms. Mike, you mentioned decolonization. How do we do that in a deeply western education system?

Ms. Shuvinai Mike: That's the whole cleansing idea, having that as an example. The program James is talking about is the way to decolonize schools, to make Inuit valued and embedded into schools by the seasons and by the parents. I'm saying that because here they start at eight o'clock in the morning. I don't think I've ever been asked if a student or a young person would be learning at eight o'clock in the morning. I saw some other studies saying eight o'clock in the morning for a teenager is like five o'clock in the morning. Making the school system relevant to that environment would be to decolonize. We would be listening to the parents about how they want the school system to be.

I wanted to respond to private schools, boarding schools, or whatever they're called. There are all kinds available in the south. It's not so easy up here to do that. You need funding in order to have private schools, in order to have all that stuff. That would be the way to decolonize it, to have a model like the Clyde River school that has been mentioned.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: What supports are required for the parents in order to support their children at school? I know that lack of support has been one of the intergenerational challenges. What needs to be done in order to strengthen the support?

Ms. Shuvinai Mike: We need to work together, the parents and the school. Not just the school but the whole government needs to understand what cultural competency is, what the cultural differences are. All of those are very important to start discussing in relation to how we could work together, how we could communicate with the parents. They want parents involved, and yes, we're trying. If the school is just answering through an automated system and they're unilingual, you're not going to communicate. There are many things that we need to discuss, and not enough time.

• (1125)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Could I just have her—

The Chair: We are out of time, and also Jeannie had her hand up. I'm sorry.

The final question, and it's a three-minute question, is from Romeo Saganash.

I would add we were meant to hear from the Iliasaqivik group today, from Clyde River—the other James Arreak, I guess—but their plane was cancelled. However, we do have submitted testimony from them, and we're going to make a time to meet with them again and delve into this, so thanks for underlining that.

Go ahead, Romeo, please.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I'm prepared to let Jeannie take a bit of my time if she wants to answer the previous question, and if there's time, I have a very personal one for Shuvinai.

Mrs. Jeannie Arreak-Kullualik: Thank you very much.

When you go to the capital cities in each of the provinces, you see billboards offering free English as a second language or free evening classes for French as a second language. We don't have that luxury here. We would like to provide free Inuktitut as a second language, but we don't have the resources. We don't have the capacity or the infrastructure to provide that. Those support systems are available only through the churches, through religion.

Another thing we wanted to create was with Piqusilirivvik. That was initiated through the Inuit organizations in partnership with Nunavut Arctic College and the Department of Education. It uses the Greenland model of the folk school, where you relearn what your parents lost or didn't have time to teach you: to skin, hunt, follow the ice conditions, and read the weather.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I listened very carefully to your personal testimony and your personal experience with suicide. One of the questions you asked yourself was, "What did I do wrong?" As you asked that question, I wondered what kinds of services were provided to you to help you in that trying moment, in that difficult time, or was there a lack of services to assist you in that trying moment?

Ms. Shuvinai Mike: I think we have those questions. Every now and then there were different services, but through a referral, which I had also mentioned in the last inquest. It was by calling the mental health office, but through a referral and the 1-800 number that's provided by GN, the Government of Nunavut, but also at the same time it was limited. I was mainly supported through the elders and through self-help. I know I only ended that like that because I'm sure I was not the only one who felt that way at that moment. This morning I did have anxiety. That's why I always talk about the terminology about suicide. It gives a bit of anxiety if you have been impacted.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lampe, you wanted to add something.

Mr. Johannes Lampe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a really important question. After having lost a brother, a nephew, and a son, I had to learn to say "I love you" after the fact. Today I'm able to say that to my grandchildren and to my wife and daughter and to others who I know are going through a hard time.

When I see someone is going through a hard time, I have to say, "I care about you, and if you need to talk, we can talk." For parents and grandparents, the most important thing is to learn to say "I love you". I believe that is what our children and our grandchildren are looking for from each other. I believe that is the most important thing that can help prevent suicide.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

It is hard to imagine a more powerful and fitting note to end on. Thank you for that, Mr. Lampe.

Thank you to all the panel members for your testimony, and for sharing so freely your experience and what is in your heart. This is going to help us a great deal. Thank you very much.

We are going to suspend for an hour, and we will be back with the third panel of the day at 12:30 p.m.

Thank you.

• (1130)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1240)

The Chair: Okay, we're going to start this afternoon's session.

Welcome to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. It's nice to see our witnesses again. We had a nice discussion last night as well.

For those in the gallery, we have simultaneous translation in English, French, and Inuktitut, so please feel free to use the headsets at the door if you would like to use that service.

We also have a public health nurse in the room with us today who is available—she's waving; thank you very much for the wave—if anyone would like to have a chat with her at any time. She'd be more than happy to have that chat.

I'm just going to go over the process we use in these meetings so that everyone is aware. We have three organizations speaking in this panel. Regardless of the number of representatives, each organization gets 10 minutes to present in total.

I have these little cards, and when we get to nine minutes, I'm going to hold up a yellow card. That means you'd better start to come to the end, and then a red card means to really finish up.

The same cards will be used when the members of the committee are asking questions. I'll be a little more clear about that when the time comes and we get to that part in the afternoon.

Without wasting any more time, I'm really happy to welcome from the president of the National Inuit Youth Council, Maatalii Okalik. Thank you very much for joining us. You are the sole representative of your organization today, so you have the full 10 minutes.

You have the floor. Thank you.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik (President, National Inuit Youth Council): *Qujannamiik.*

Good afternoon, honourable chair, members of the standing committee, Inuit elders and youth, and all attendees.

My name is Maatalii Okalik, and I testify today as the president of the National Inuit Youth Council within Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, representing Inuit youth from across Canada.

Before I began, I tabled the following documents, as I reference them throughout the testimony for the record: the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami of this year; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report in 2015; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action in 2015; the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' final report from 1996; and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

As you are aware, there are approximately 60,000 Inuit Canadians who contribute greatly to this country and have done so well before Canada was created. Inuit youth make up the majority of that population, and in my term thus far, they continue to inspire me with their strength and resilience and their vested interest in preserving and promoting our language, culture, and practices and in seeing that suicide is eradicated.

Suicide in our 53 communities that span half of Canada's land mass and coastline is an epidemic. It has been declared a crisis in some regions. All our regions have called for action for decades to address the rates of suicide among Inuit. The rates of suicide among Inuit in regions are five to 25 times the rates of suicide for Canada as a whole and internationally.

It is recognized that suicide is 100% preventable. There must be a national discussion with a national response. Now that we are finally discussing it nationally, the "why" of suicide must be recognized and understood. To me, this is a dialogue that does not require concerted efforts involving fact-finding on the part of government to then lead to an evidence-based discussion that would only then yield validation to address the issue to eradicate suicide. This has been done, both by you and by us. When I say us, I say indigenous people of Canada. The "why" of suicide can be explained in Canada's history, in the truth that is not known by all Canadians.

I recognize the history before the creation of Canada whereby Inuit were at the epitome of self-determination, exercising the way of life that is at the core of our being. Suicide prevention is returning to this level of self-determination. How? It is through a concerted effort on the part of all Canadians: the federal government fulfilling its fiduciary responsibility to its citizens and implementing treaty agreements, which we are all party to, and changing policy and budget allocations according to our needs; Canadian society as a whole, recognizing and respecting the history of colonization and our right to live as a people in our homeland within Canada, and playing an active role in reconciliation; as Inuit continuing to champion our language, culture, and practices as healthy individuals, parents, and also playing an active role in reconciliation in our communities.

The why has been entrenched in the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report from witnesses who have testified before your standing committee in the past, through the very need to have modern treaties: our land claims agreements in existence, and within the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy.

None of this is new. Inuit Canadians do not have the same quality of life as the majority of our fellow citizens. In Inuit Nunangat 39% live in crowded homes, versus 4% of other Canadians; 29% of Inuit aged 25 to 64 in Inuit Nunangat have earned a high school diploma, versus 85% of all Canadians. In Inuit households in Nunavut, 70% do not have enough food to eat, versus 8.3% of all households in Canada.

The number of physicians per 100,000 people in Nunavut is 30, versus 119 in urban health authorities across Canada.

• (1245)

The average life expectancy for Inuit is 70.8, versus 80.6 for all Canadians. Not only are we dying younger due to the aforementioned social inequities, but the leading cause of death in regions can be attributed to suicide.

Suicide prevention is closing the gap of social inequities for Inuit Canadians. It also includes creating cultural continuity.

I can positively report that today Inuit youth are in a state of identity crisis. To your predecessors who were once seated in the House of Commons, this would be very good news. Why do I say this? It is because strategic assimilation policies and acts by government to create relationship dependencies with government have proven to be—as reflected in our statistics today—very successful, to an extent.

You and your honourable colleagues, however, have the ability to reverse such a reality and take a leadership role in contributing to the elimination of social inequities. A key area of this important work ahead of you and us is Inuit cultural continuity. Mobilizing Inuit knowledge for resilience and suicide prevention is a mitigating factor for suicide. Our language and our culture are key.

It is in the interest of Inuit youth—the majority of our population, and the fastest-growing population, with more and more young families—to reverse the negative cycles of intergenerational trauma by federal policies and raise healthy Inuit children. There is also a responsibility on government to contribute to the nurturing of

healthy Inuit children as well. This is also a suicide prevention requirement. Ensuring access to a continuum of mental wellness services for Inuit reflective of our culture is another identified solution. We must heal the unresolved trauma and grief.

Inuit youth must have a successful completion rate in education, both in the western ways of knowing and in our ways of knowing. Allocations by government for education of Inuit residing in and outside of our modern treaty jurisdictions is integral to this solution. Again, these solutions are not new.

I look to the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action, and as I speak for Inuit youth, I point specifically to call to action number 66, which indicates:

We call upon the federal government to establish multiyear funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices.

This is achievable, and I see it as a solution that requires action from the federal government and ensures a holistic approach on a community-by-community basis for suicide prevention. It is everyone's responsibility. Communities know what they need, but they require the appropriate investment to do it. Short-term funding that yields short-term results can no longer be the norm. Let us do this together.

The term “renewing our relationship” is also not new. It is the take-away from the RCAP report dating back to the last century. This continues to be a repeated statement by government into today. Let us ensure that there is action attached to it. Let us truly see the Inuit-to-crown relationship defined and honoured.

As I think about suicide, I recognize the complexities involved in the “why” as well as in the “how” when it comes to eradicating it. It must be a holistic approach whereby Inuit have the ability to fulfill the level of self-determination we seek within Canada, where we choose how we address suicide with Canada as our equal partner. Our youth today and tomorrow depend on it.

I commend the standing committee and its members for prioritizing suicide, as we have made it our priority as well. I look forward to the report that will be tabled next year as a result of these hearings and research, as Canada celebrates its 150th anniversary on the world stage.

Suicide must be eradicated. Social inequities that Inuit face, compared to our fellow Canadians, are intolerable. Double standards can no longer exist.

• (1250)

To quote the Right Hon. Prime Minister of Canada, it's 2016.

Qujannamiik. Nakurmiik. Thank you. Merci.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Maatalii, for that and for speaking on behalf of your organization.

We're going to continue through and hear from all of the panellists before we go to questions. I'm very pleased to welcome, from the Qarjuit Youth Council, Alicia Aragutak, president, and Louisa Yeates, vice-president.

You have 10 minutes to share between you. Thank you.

Ms. Alicia Aragutak (President, Qarjuit Youth Council): Thank you very much for having us.

Today we will be delivering our testimony on behalf of the youth of Nunavik. I will be splitting this 10 minutes with my colleague, who will introduce herself.

Who are we? The Qarjuit Youth Council is a regional youth organization that advocates on behalf of the youth of Nunavik, which makes up more than 65.9% of the Nunavik population. Our partnerships are with other regional organizations that are key to our success in servicing the needs of the youth.

We consult with our population to solidify current situations and issues and propose solutions that come directly from the youth. We would like to mention the recent consultations that the Qarjuit Youth Council initiated to confirm with our population our priorities targeted for the coming year—mental health and suicide awareness—which expand beyond mental health. This involves discussions of our past, our present, and, most crucially, our future.

The current situation is that the youth are feeling the impact of the drastic modernization within the last three generations. Most of the population agree that currently the youth are going through a cultural identity crisis. We strongly feel that the youth today have not, to their full potential, been passed down their true identity as Inuit, which we feel as a region has a major impact on the self-esteem and self-confidence levels in our youth population.

The loss of self-identity means youth do not have a solid foundation in their path of life. We believe this has a greater impact on the unfortunate statistics of suicide within our region. Of course there are other factors, such as the high cost of living, lack of housing, and minimal regional resources in all aspects of our region.

Nunavik also has programs and initiatives to keep youth on their feet. There are great programs, such as the on-the-land program, but the programs are inconsistent, with a lot of budgetary constraints.

Stigma is a very big topic within our region, and is a major topic that we are starting to discuss within the Nunavik region. It is a difficult topic to talk about and requires delicate and immediate attention. With available services and resources in all levels of government, we wish to take proper, culturally appropriate steps to take these discussions to the next level.

When we talk about suicide, we cannot just focus on one situation. It is a global topic that intertwines with other aspects of our community.

Who we are and where we place ourselves within our society play a great role, so it is important for us to start de-stigmatizing these important topics, such as suicide rates, teen pregnancies, sexual

orientation, religion, and a lot of other topics related to education on human nature.

There are our past factors. We can all agree that our realities today are not what we know of our past history. Inuit are strong and resilient. Inuit survived in the harsh environment of the Arctic and had their own ways of governing their mobile communities. Inuit had their own education system within their community and the environment to take on their part of the society. The education was cultural, covered all aspects of Inuit life, and touched upon medicine, geography, spirituality, and so much more of what was relevant to the time and place.

We have used our own system to survive for thousands of years, and today we are not able to say that we have our own system. We are in the process of adapting to modern society as Inuit get to define what that really is. We are constantly trying to keep updated to today's ways of life. To get to this point, a lot of traumatic events have happened to our people, our language, and our identity. Of course we have to consider the major impacts of the unfortunate statistics of our region.

I will pass it on to my colleague, who will now introduce herself.

● (1255)

Ms. Louisa Yeates (Vice President, Qarjuit Youth Council): Hi again. It's great to be here. My name is Louisa Yeates. I'm vice-president of the Qarjuit Youth Council and I'm going to continue on. Thank you.

With regard to regional components, education within Nunavik starts with early childhood development within the day care system. Our children are taught at a young age in their mother tongues. These children hold the legacies of our futures, whether they are aware of it or not. As they transfer from day cares to the regular school sector, they are taught mainly in Inuktitut for the first three years.

As education is essential for everyone, we seem to be lacking in adequate teachings for these children to be able to develop and establish a future for our region. We often speak about being able to acquire support from the parents and the guardians, but to be honest, we are in a state of decolonization and have a generation that was so damaged by the residential school system that these impacts are passed on without intent.

With a high school dropout rate of almost 95%, we need to revive and remobilize our region and stimulate change in the perception of education. Inuit youth have voiced their concerns on how important it is for them to be able to connect and fill the gap that seems to be growing with the generations before. As they hold the key to our traditional and cultural learnings that our youth aspire to, it is clear that to be able to gain back some identity and confidence, youth need to be able to learn about where they came from and who they really are to be able to build a solid foundation on which they can build the rest of their lives. We need more support in the sense that we need to have more spaces and places to be able to hold and deliver these services.

Nunavik's inadequate housing situation is also a major factor in our region's issues that relate to the risk factors and high suicide rates. Along with the high cost of living, it is not easy for our youth to have no options when it comes to their living situations. Sometimes they are caught up in overcrowded, not-well-maintained dwellings, and it becomes overwhelming as the pressure to just survive is immense.

As well, when abuse is in a home and there's nowhere to go, youth often turn to anything, mostly negative outlets, to help them cope. With a population of over 13,000 in Nunavik, we only have 3,000 social housing units. With high costs of living and rent increments of 8% on a yearly basis, surviving is strenuous and tiring, and it's often difficult to see past those walls. Nunavik is in need of assistance to relieve the stresses and risks that the lack of sufficient housing brings to our people. We need additional support to raise our communities above settling for the least. There needs to be more funding allocated to the housing needs and high cost of living in the north.

Since the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975, our population has quadrupled in size. The resources needed are not keeping up with the drastic population changes and the high cost of living. In most chapters of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, these issues are not on a par with our current situation. Whether it is jobs to feed our families, land management to create businesses, or quality improvement in education, health, and all aspects of community development, we need to be given resources that are easily accessible for our regions.

On health care, the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services has been able to take major leaps and bounds when servicing our region's growing needs. They have identified factors contributing to suicide risks, established reach-out strategies, and formed a Nunavik suicide response plan. It's still in the works, but it's a major step in moving forward to be where we need to be, yet it still seems light years away.

• (1300)

I'm going to pass it to Alicia to conclude. Thank you.

Ms. Alicia Aragutak: Okay, I will just conclude.

We'd like to propose to the standing committee and we'd like to set out long-term plans that are targeted toward the suicide risk factors—healing from past traumas, putting forward and implementing the TRC 94 calls to action. We specifically mention number 66, which Maatalii has mentioned as well, whereby the youth would have a community-based program that would have great impact on re-educating, learning about important history, and solidifying their identity; healing centres that are culturally oriented and specified for young individuals; improved living standards; and improved housing situations, etc.

As a policy-making entity, we would like to call upon you to take action, as our fellow Canadian influential body, to recognize that modern youth need resources to identify the roots of our identity and to assist us in educating decision-makers on our colonial events, which have had a great impact on our statistics in our region.

Thank you very much.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We'll move right along to Nina Ford, who is representing the Nunatsiavut government youth division.

Thanks, Nina.

Ms. Nina Ford (Youth Representative, Youth Division, Nunatsiavut Government): Thank you.

[Witness speaks in Inuktitut]

Good afternoon. It's good to see you guys again.

My name is Nina Ford, and I am here today as the youth representative from Nunatsiavut, where everybody waves and everybody knows your name.

Nunatsiavut is the home of five Inuit communities, all found along the northern coastline of Labrador. From north to south they are Nain, Hopedale, Postville, Makkovik, and Rigolet.

It is also the home where the leading cause of death is suicide. Trying to explain to non-indigenous people the gruelling effects of suicide among indigenous people and our communities is nearly impossible. It is nearly impossible to put into words.

I know you all understand stats, so I'll give you some. In 1997 the results of the regional survey showed that 33% of respondents in Nain have seriously thought of suicide, and that is one-third of that population. Of the respondents in Hopedale, 25% have seriously thought of suicide, and that is one-quarter of that population.

Between the years 1993 and 1998, there were one to five suicides among Labrador Inuit each year. In the year 2000 it skyrocketed to nine suicides. In 2001 and in 2002 there were one and two suicides. Taking you to 2003, there was an epidemic number of suicides, and that number was 13 in that year. There were five suicides in the year 2004 and seven suicides in 2005. Over the last 23 years, there have been over 100 Labrador Inuit who have taken their own lives. It doesn't stop.

I did an interview for the CBC's *Labrador Morning* on September 9. That was just a few weeks ago, and there have been two more suicides.

There is a common feeling for those who are victims of suicide, including those who have lost a son, a daughter, a sister, an uncle, a friend, or even someone they just know. Every loss leaves a common sting, or a common numbness, and that aching in your chest. After a suicide loss or in dealing with those who contemplate suicide, a common feeling is helplessness. You feel helpless. When you lose someone to suicide, your immediate and everlasting grief is, "I should have known" or "I could have helped him or her" or "I shouldn't have said this". Mainly it's "I should have known". It's immediate self-blame. That's not just a feeling: it's a burden. It's a heavy burden that is carried around with you for the rest of your life.

The population of Makkovik is approximately 370 people. The population of our largest community within Nunatsiavut, which is Nain, is approximately 1,200 people. A loss within our Inuit communities is felt within our region as a whole, as opposed to losing someone in Ontario, where the only ones who are affected are the ones who have lost that individual. In a small community such as Makkovik or Nain or Postville, when you lose someone it affects everybody, not just the family. Everybody is affected.

•(1310)

Suicide is such a common tragedy that every time the phone rings your heart stops. It's not a cancer loss, or a boating accident, a loss that you have no control over. When it comes to suicide, it's a choice. There is some control that can be taken, and needs to be taken, especially with those who have attempted suicide already or contemplated it. So what do you do? What do I do?

Somehow our advances and knowledge about this are not sufficient. Neither is our counselling. We have not succeeded in bringing about peace or reducing overall suffering. This situation brings me to the conclusion that there may be something seriously wrong with the way we conduct our affairs, something that if not corrected in time could have disastrous consequences for the future of our people.

Sure, we could add youth hang-outs or programs for youth to attend in our communities. You can build the most expensive buildings in our communities, and no one can deny the material benefits of modern life. But we are still faced with suffering, perhaps more now than before. It is only sensible to try to strike a balance between material development on one side, and the development of spiritual, cultural values on the other.

In order to bring about great change, we need to revive and strengthen our Inuit values and culture. We also need to deal with the larger social issues such as housing and children in care. I see all these as suicide prevention measures. We need to work on bringing back our inner voices that were damaged and silenced through generations of our ancestors' suffering from relocation, residential schools, and other generational trauma.

I hope that you share my concerns about the present suicide crisis, and that you will join me in calling on all humanitarians who share this concern and proceed to take progressive approaches to a brighter future, for each individual is eligible to help shape these needs.

[Witness speaks in Inuktitut]

The Chair: Thank you, Nina.

We're going to go to the rounds of questions from the members of the committee.

The first question is going to come from Gary Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, once again, for that succinct presentation.

There were a number of issues that you touched on. I want to pick up on something Nina said about children in care. It's not an area that we've had a great deal of discussion on. I'm wondering if each of the organizations could speak briefly to how that's affecting the community. What are the issues? Tell us if it's parallel to the

decisions of the Canadian Human Rights Commission on aboriginal children in care, and tell us what effects this has had on individual youth.

•(1315)

The Chair: Maatalii, would you like to start?

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: Sure. Thank you for that question.

With respect to children in care, I require clarification. Is it for children who have been apprehended and are in the care system?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Maybe I misunderstood when you mentioned children in care. The assumption I had was that it was young people who are apprehended by the children's aid society or are in some form of government care. So it could be primarily the children's aid society, but it could be adoption, foster care, or other forms of care that are outside of the children's families.

The Chair: Nina has her hand up just to clarify.

Ms. Nina Ford: Yes, that's what I meant. When there are parents who are struggling, when children are taken away from them, sometimes those children are sent outside of Nunatsiavut, so their culture is completely not around, and that also brings many other struggles along with it. It brings on more struggles for the parents because their children are away from them, and then it brings on troubles for the children who are taken away. That's what I meant.

The Chair: Okay, did you want to pick it up from there then?

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: Thank you for the question and clarification. We definitely identify children in care as being extremely problematic for Inuit in Canada. Many say that children in care is the new residential school experience by virtue of the sheer numbers, comparing the percentage of Inuit in Canada versus the percentage of Inuit children in care. I don't have the specific numbers at this time, but I am sure you can understand the picture.

I understand the reasons behind it being based on the assimilation policies of the past. When I speak of assimilation policies of the past, it could be as far back as the early 1900s right up to my mom's generation, which is just the generation before ours as we sit here today. The intergenerational effects that are a response to those federal policies, as well as those of other stakeholders that were involved in those processes, have very dire outcomes that require immediate reaction.

I don't put the onus only on government; the onus is on us as well. In terms of a potential solution, I definitely see on the side of the federal government—that's the audience today—the priority to eliminate the social and economic inequities that we face as being one of the overarching solutions, and that's across the board. You have heard from our youth leaders who are present about the regional realities as they sit here.

Something so simple that I shouldn't have to bring it up is the implementation of agreements that govern our day-to-day lives and that would implicate what happens in a home across Inuit Nunangat. The defined Inuit to crown relationship requires a cabinet-wide commitment and is also a nice example of an overarching solution that suits the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government.

The Chair: Maatalii, both Alicia and Louisa have indicated they would like to add something. We have about two minutes left, if we can....

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: I'll quickly close.

Decolonization within our population by strengthening our language and culture and celebrating our practices would continue to instill pride as identified to address the identity crisis as we become parents, so that we can create healthy environments for our children; but the investment into early childhood education and K to 12 and beyond is also a requirement.

Qujannamik.

Ms. Alicia Aragutak: All right, I just wanted to elaborate on one sentence that I had stated during my testimony. When we are modernizing as Inuit very drastically, then parenting, the basic, basic needs of parenting should be natural. It seems as though that is really not there anymore. I don't know if you were given the sad statistics of our region in Nunavik where seven children out of 10 are in the system right now. That gives you an impression of how many children are in the system, and probably half of those have no place to be taken, so a lot of them are being taken down south where the environment is very unfamiliar. Some are even claiming today that these events, the system we have in place, and our not being able to take care of it as Inuit are the result of our being detached from our roles and responsibilities before.

So I really wanted to just elaborate on that, and now I will give it to Louisa.

• (1320)

The Chair: Briefly, please.

Ms. Louisa Yeates: I know. I'm going to try to be really quick, but I'd really like to state that the youth protection act that is in place is not culturally relevant.

I talk out of experience, because I sat on a youth advisory board. There were standards for foster homes that were totally ridiculous and were nothing like our reality. Decent foster homes had to have a certain square footage per room. They had to have a dresser that was five feet away from the window.

Unfortunately, these are not our standards. We're in overcrowded dwellings as it is. If we have an extra bed, a safe home, and food in our fridges, that should be okay. According to our cultural standards, that's fine, but because the youth protection act is not culturally relevant to our reality, we are displacing children out of our region.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we go to the next question, I want to extend a sincere and warm welcome to the group of youths who have just come in and joined us. Thank you very much for making time to be here today.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: It's nice to see you.

The next question is coming from David Yurdiga, please.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today. You have a passion to move this thing forward in terms of committing your

whole life to making a difference. I really appreciate that, because we have to do something. The time for action is now.

During one of the sessions earlier in the week, I remember one young gentleman saying that he was trapped between two worlds: he can't go back and he can't move forward. What does that mean to you? How do we move forward?

If everyone could give their perspective on that statement, I'd appreciate it.

Ms. Louisa Yeates: How we can move forward? Is that the question?

Mr. David Yurdiga: Yes. One gentleman was saying that he was stuck between two worlds: he can't move forward and he can't go back. I want to understand that statement and what that means to you.

The Chair: Alicia had her hand up, and then we'll have Nina, please.

Ms. Alicia Aragutak: I think the first step in terms of how I understand that, as the president of the Qarjuit Youth Council, is that currently we have an idea of who our ancestors are. When you say we can't go back, we really can't go back, because we're not going to be living the nomadic way, right? For me, I think the next step, and what we're aiming at, is to redefine who we are right now in balancing both worlds: balancing our foundation as Inuit with the modern society we're living in now.

I think the first thing we should do is identify our status and solidify where we really are. This involves a lot of education, a lot of parental resources and training, and a lot of consultations with the youth. As well, decolonization has a really big part in it.

• (1325)

The Chair: Nina, we have five minutes on the question.

Ms. Nina Ford: I'll make a quick remark on it.

To me, from what he said, it sounds like he's in the stage where he has lost his identity. For aboriginals that happens way too often. It's something that we really struggle with because we don't have education on our people. I had to learn from someone in the U.S. about aboriginal people. I was really struggling at a very hard part in my life, and when he said he was stuck between two worlds, it struck something in me. I was really desperate at that time, that's why it's so emotional, because I feel that he's so stuck right now, and I feel for him.

I was so desperate for help. I tried counselling, and it didn't quite work. It didn't do anything. It did, but it wasn't everything that I needed, so I was desperate. I tried everything. I come from a really close-knit family. You will find in aboriginal people that they're very closely knit. So I called the spiritual healer and said I needed some help, and she told me that aboriginal people are very, very intuitive. They have premonitions and they can feel what the person next to them is feeling, and things like that. So when you're in a troubled community and you are as intuitive as an aboriginal is, you feel their pain, and there is a lot of it. I'm sure you've heard it time and time again. It comes from residential schooling, relocations, and things like that.

You can be stuck between both worlds when you're at that age where you've lived in your community and you've grown up there and then it's time for you to go to university. It's a whole different world. It's kind of like you don't want to go because it's so hard to go to that university and live that way of life compared to what you're used to living, but you have to go because you have to get educated so that you can make a better life at home. You can't stay here because you need something better. That's what it's like to be stuck between both worlds.

The Chair: We have two minutes left. A minute, perhaps, for Maatalii, and a minute for Louisa.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: *Qujannamiik*. I'll rush this answer.

If you can't move back and can't move forward, where is it that you go? That might be the reason why suicide is so prevalent, because there is nowhere else to go.

I can confidently say the interest of youth is to continue to become more proud of being Inuk. That is entrenched in our language, our culture, and our practices. As Alicia mentioned, our realities are different today, so there is no real opportunity to be at your level of self-determination pre-contact. However, I see reconciliation as being the day before assimilation policies were influenced on our people across Inuit Nunaat. So having that pride and ability to have control over your day-to-day life and decision-making over your day-to-day life in the Inuk way is a solution.

I believe that we can harness the strength, resilience, and beauty of our culture pre-assimilation into today so that we have Inuit educated about their history, the communities educated about that history, Inuit having access to that information when it comes to our language, culture, and practices on a day-to-day basis through education and in the home, and thereafter Inuit becoming educated also in western high school and post-secondary education so that they can be fully on the front lines within our communities in the way that makes sense to us.

• (1330)

The Chair: Okay.

All right, we're well over time now on that question. We'll move on.

The next question is from Romeo Saganash, please.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There's a lot to be said on this issue. I can feel it from the panel, so I'll continue on with that. I feel that if there's one topic that elders, leaders, and youth have touched upon on an equal basis and in the same manner, it's the need to balance both worlds. It's this very question that we're talking about.

I mentioned earlier to a previous panel that I sort of grew up in three worlds, being born in the bush, raised in the bush, sent to a residential school, and then went on to university in an urban setting. I didn't say that to brag about it. I was saying that because I may look normal but I'm not normal, because of all those things, and part of that was not of my choosing.

I'd like to hear more about your own personal experiences. How did you achieve the balance between your culture, identity, and

language, and the modern world in which we all live today? How did you achieve that balance? Was there something missing in that challenge? It's a question to all four of you. Was there something missing in all of that, in this challenge?

The Chair: Louisa, please, followed by Alicia and then Maatalii.

Ms. Louisa Yeates: Getting a little bit personal here, I can tell you right away, I was born in the city to a mother who went to residential school and who had never seen her first white person until she was eight years old. She had this background, coming into the city and kind of being foreign to it and everything. I'd like to say, when I moved back into my community, it was really hard for me to assimilate back into my own culture. It was really difficult. I rebelled. I can be completely honest with you right now. The person who I am now is definitely not the person I was when I was a teenager. I had no coping mechanism. I had no idea how to deal with it. This is how a lot of the youth are right now. They're simply trying to figure out how to cope with something that's missing that they don't know.

How did I get out of it personally? I have no idea. I fluked out. A lot of youth don't have that privilege of finding a fluke somewhere along the way.

Since this is going to be on the public record and I have a bunch of youth behind me, I'm going to say to you all right now, don't give up. I was there, too. I was at the end of that. I was being kicked out of school. I was pregnant, and I was able to get where I am. So don't ever give up.

Thank you.

Ms. Alicia Aragutak: When I was looking for who I was as a modern Inuit girl, I saw that my grandmother, my mom's mom, was never settled in her life. She was following the herd. She was not settled anywhere. Then my mother was sent to Winnipeg for education. When she came back, she was not the same person as she was when she left. My grandmother was very traditional, my mom was right in the middle, and I was part of the modern world. I was very fortunate to have been surrounded by my family, which is very close-knit. I am very proud, very fluent in Inuktitut. I exposed myself to as much culture as I could. When I was looking for who I was, I said I was going to get involved. I went straight to elections, the municipality, the government, the school system, what was happening. Why wasn't I educated? My mom didn't educate me about who we are. We weren't really cultural. She didn't bring me out on the land. I did not get it first-hand.

I was on the verge of just giving up. Inuits don't want to go to work every day. The education system is not working. The basic needs of parenting are not being met. Why are we in this situation? I don't want to go to healing. We can't go back. Let's not open that can of worms. I just want to go forward. I was a stubborn girl who got exposed to politics, and I wanted to move forward. These are a lot of the same feelings I have today.

One day when we attended the Hona Conference, all of the youth were gathering in workshops and everything like that. Mary Joanne Kaukai was there, and I went to her. She was delivering decolonization sessions for the youth. I said, “Mary Joanne, our people don't want to go to work every day. Our parents are not educating. They are not feeding their children.” She gave me that missing link of understanding. She said, “Wow, you still have your language. They tried taking that away from you. Look, you have your traditional wear right now, and they didn't want you to expose that.” She gave me that flip side—that I should be proud in spite of the unfortunate events that happened to our people.

I think that's what I want to deliver to the youth that I am advocating for, but it's difficult to get at when there is not much in the way of resources.

Thank you.

• (1335)

The Chair: Thanks, Alicia.

Maatalii.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: My answer will require a few minutes, and I seek consent to go beyond the time allotted to answer this question.

The Chair: You have it.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: *Qujannamiik*. Thank you for honouring my request. It's really in the interest of the listening youth and attendees, as well as for your report.

Qujannamiik for asking that question. I think it's really important that we continue to identify best practices and highlight role models such as those who sit beside me on their journey to continue to serve in the best interests of Inuit in Canada.

My personal journey was looking around and identifying that something was wrong, from a very young age—trying to understand why I had relatives who had died by suicide; trying to understand why I had relatives and people in my community and in Inuit communities with an overarching number with substance abuse, children in care, and virtual homelessness with nowhere to live because of our environment; and why people were so hungry.

I was born in Nunavut but I grew up in Ottawa, and I didn't see that reflected the same way in Ottawa. I always heard that Canada prided itself on its human rights work on the international stage, and I didn't see that reflected in our communities.

I began to ask questions at a very young age. [*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*] Why? Why are these things there? That's when I began to learn about the history of Canada, where my people were implicated.

With that understanding I was able to critically analyze what was happening around me and make decisions for myself in how I, as an individual, I as an Inuk, and I as a Canadian was going to make healthy choices for my future and in my work for the future of Inuit.

What was missing was that space, that space where that open dialogue happens not only within our homes across Nunavut, but across Canada. That understanding was missing.

We all experience racism within Canada but also within our own communities, and that's an example of the effects of colonization.

What was missing was investment by government for that safe space to occur, as well as for me to understand my resilience as I would be faced with conflict. That resilience is laid out in our language, culture, and practices.

I find when I'm speaking to youth that there is a lot of anxiety and stress around the status of youth. They're in between completing high school and going into the working world, so there is an expectation that you do well in high school, go to post-secondary education, find a good job, find a good partner, and raise a family. There is that linear expectation, but the reality is that it doesn't work that way, especially when we have the risks that we've identified and the social inequities in our homeland.

We're in constant crisis mode, and I was always in constant crisis mode because of our realities and having to respond to crisis instead of being able to focus on that path. If we don't have the opportunity for Inuit children and youth to learn our language, to thrive in our culture and our practices, it's very difficult to understand your resilience as an individual when this crisis comes up. That can have an implication on our day-to-day lives and have an effect on our suicide rates.

The other reason I am where I am today is that I have the will to survive and an interest in living the Inuk way. Let us do so here in Canada.

Qujannamiik.

• (1340)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

The next question is from Michael McLeod, please.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of you for your presentations. They were very thorough and informative. They covered all the bases and were very professionally presented. I have to say, I'm very impressed. Also, thank you for sharing with us last night. You certainly have left an impression on me. I know that for a fact, because this morning when I woke up, one of your colleagues' words about what happened to us were ringing in my ears. He said, “Take an apple tree. Rip it out by its roots. Transplant it. Build four walls around it, and pour alcohol over it every day. That's what happened to us, and we won't survive. We'll wilt and die.” That's a very powerful description, and it will certainly be something I'll steal and use whenever I can.

There have been many presentations over the last while in different communities. I heard something this morning from one of the organizations when they did their presentation. They talked about the reluctance for people within the Inuit culture to talk about suicide, to share it. There's silence and there's also shame around discussing that topic. It leads to making this issue not as important as it really is.

All of you have spoken out loudly and very well on this subject, but I'm sure you must have seen or experienced this. How do you get past that? Is it something you have faced? Could you talk about that a little bit?

The Chair: Louisa.

Ms. Louisa Yeates: It's a stigma. We talk about stigma. We talk about carrying guilt. When we ask why we are quiet, it's oppression. We've had generations upon generation of oppression. I can use my grandfather's situation as an example. He survived by using sled dogs. That was his way of living. That's how he taught his children. That's how he moved from location to location. That was his manhood. What did they do? They killed them all. What happened? They took his manhood. It's a way of oppression.

I'm going to be specific about men because our statistics show that it's going to be men between the ages of 15 and 24 who are most at risk of suicide. We're always trying to find out why and what's going on. Not only is it partly cultural, but also because their manhoods were taken away. When you're out on the land and you're hunting, you're not loud. You're being very quiet and you're waiting for the animals to come. These two big factors, cultural factors, are always being passed on intergenerationally. We are at a point where we're trying to break the cycle with guys who are our age. We're at the point now where we're trying to give a voice, we're trying to give venues for people to have a voice.

I'm going to respect the time and hand it over. Thank you.

• (1345)

The Chair: Thanks.

Alicia.

Ms. Alicia Aragutak: *Nakurmiik*. I'm just going back to my testimony again. I really believe in this concept because we have an elder within the Qarjuit Youth Council board of directors, and we just held our annual general meeting. We were trying to talk about this topic as well. We expressed very clearly that it's a very difficult topic to talk about. I was trying to consult with my population as to how to go about that and how to approach the situation.

We were questioning ourselves about why this is so hard to talk about and why it isn't considered normal; these are basic human needs. I thought it was very strong when our elder raised her hand and said, "I am very sorry, because in our culture we are observers and that's how we learn." We respect our elders and we listen and we are guided by our elders, which is a lot of the reality we feel today. She said, "I'm sorry, we did not teach you how to talk. We did not teach you how to express the situation because we were told not to talk about it." So it is long overdue. I think that as modern Inuit youth today, we need to find ways to find that balance again. Trying to regain communication skills on basic human feelings is something I'm really aiming at. How can we de-stigmatize it? By finding that balance again.

Thank you.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I heard Maatalii talk about children in care, and she referred to it as the next residential school. A comparison was made there. We've also had presentations from Correctional Service Canada that talk about our jails being full of aboriginal people, and that would be our next crisis comparable to residential schools. We also know that our facilities and our people are struggling with FAS, so we have many issues that are going to be on the horizon.

Do you think that what we do in the area of helping to deal with the issue of suicide will also help with the other areas that we focus on?

The Chair: Can I just interrupt for a moment? I see that our youth guests are leaving. I don't know if you're under a timeline, but if you're able to wait, I'm sure that our panellists would love to have a conversation with you, unless you're in a rush to leave. I just wanted to put that offer out there. In about 10 minutes we'll be done.

A voice: We have to leave. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Okay. On the whiteboard outside the door is a website address where people can leave comments on the website about this topic. I encourage and welcome all of you to do so. Take a picture of it with your phone so you have the web link, and we'd love to hear from you. Thank you.

I'm sorry for that interruption. I think someone was going to respond to Michael's last 30 seconds there.

Maatalii.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: I definitely recognize that when we're talking about suicide prevention, that has to be an interdisciplinary and holistic approach. I see one of the strengths as prioritizing this and eliminating those social inequities so that we are raising happy and healthy children who go on to become youth.

You talk about the criminal justice system. I can positively affirm that a lot of the actions that are being done are a cry for help based on the risks that I identified in my testimony. Those are results of root-cause issues; and those root-cause issues, I believe, are based on those social and economic inequities across Inuit Nunangat. But coupled with thinking of proactive measures and mitigating factors, I would identify Inuit culture, language, and practices as being also a very strong mitigating factor to those statistics.

Qujannamiik .

• (1350)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move into the five-minute questions, and we have time for just two of those. The first one is from Arnold Viersen, please.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here today.

My question is probably for Louisa mostly. You just a moment ago were speaking about manhood. One of the things that Michael and I talk about a lot is economic opportunity. Basic economics is food, clothing, and shelter. Those are the big things, and Thomas Gregor, an anthropologist, says that manhood is defined pretty much exclusively in every culture as the ability to protect your family and the ability to provide for your family.

In the north, we typically take in food, clothing, and shelter. It's been taken away from the role of the father or the uncle or the son of the family, and it's been given over more to the government as being responsible for those kinds of things. Can you verify that? How can we give back to men that ability to provide for their families essentially, whether that be by traditional methods or even modern methods?

Ms. Louisa Yeates: We keep talking about our struggle with trying to figure out how to re-identify ourselves. I can speak on behalf of Nunavummiut, because we have a really great hunter support program. Basically it's under our municipality. They offer services and sell goods—healthy, on discount, for the women—and things like that. Fortunately we have sources like this.

Then we have the men. I think about men our age, and they're... I'm going to talk a little bit more—I'm sorry, my mind is exploding right now—about how a lot of them are incarcerated right now. They're missing from the communities, and then the ones who are there may not have the means and resources to go out on the land, go hunting, and things like that, to provide for the family. As well, when we have our municipalities servicing in places where it's missing, it's even harder for them to be able to identify with that way again.

We're always talking about finding our balance between our past and our future, but really we need to own our present right now. This is something I will keep saying. It's a big struggle for us right now.

I also wanted to say to Michael that it's not fetal alcohol disorder anymore but actually fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. They're different. This is another big thing we're facing. It's not within the men to feel like they have a say over their pregnant girlfriends, but really it's a family thing. We need to be able to encourage young families. We need to be able to instill parenting skills again. We need to give these roles back to them.

There are no resources for these things. There's not even a place to hold them, even if we had the resources. We need assistance. We need infrastructure. I will keep saying this. We need, need, need, need, need.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Louisa Yeates: I'm a bit all over the place, but...

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Well, these things are all tied together.

Ms. Louisa Yeates: They are all tied together.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: When we were in Kuujjuaq, we talked to one of the girls there. She told us that there seem to be perverse incentives with regard to some of these things. The folks who have their lives in order don't get the help. The gentleman who works hard is forced to live with his mother until he's almost 30, yet the one who has a child at 17 now suddenly gets a house, essentially. There is that perverse incentive.

Can you confirm that, and is that something we perhaps have to look at?

• (1355)

Ms. Louisa Yeates: I'm pretty sure I know who you're referring to. This is a battle I've actually been fighting with her for a long time.

Our social housing standards are very low. Our standards of social housing compared with southern standards of social housing are very different. We need to be able to regulate the social housing standards according to our culture, our traditions, and our standards. It's ridiculous, when you think about it. The more social issues you have, the more points you get on the system, which leads you to get a house faster.

Olivia and I presented in front of the standing committee on behalf of the housing study you did. We keep talking about what we need. We need more economic development. We need more opportunities in the north. We need co-operative housing. We need different standards. We need to raise our standards.

I'm all over the place here, but just in closing, I'd really like to say this. To be able to tackle everything, really we need to go to the suicide risk factors. We need to go after housing. We need to go after parenting schools. We need to go after education. We will not solve suicide overnight, and there's no one magical solution, but we will diminish it more quickly if we filter it through the risk factors for suicide.

The Chair: Thanks for that, Louisa.

We're well over time, and there's one question remaining from Gary.

Gary, I don't want to put you on the spot, but if you feel like you want to hear more, Maatalii wanted to add to that. It's up to you.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Perhaps I could do this in two parts. I'll take one quick minute and maybe get a very brief response, and then I have a two-part question for everyone.

First, what's one issue that could be tackled that would have a significant impact on young people? And second, what's a program out there that you know is working on the ground and that could be expanded?

If you're able to answer briefly, please do. Then maybe tackle the issue from the previous question.

The Chair: Maatalii.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: *Qujannamiik*, honourable member, for that question.

There is not one issue that could be tackled stand-alone. I have been saying over and over that social and economic inequities that Inuit face in Canada must be eliminated, based on statistics as well as other things I've indicated in my testimony.

However, one thing that I think would be extremely important for Inuit in Canada today is that if we know our history and who we were yesterday as Inuit we can move forward with strength into tomorrow. This is entrenched in removing those social inequities that have a day-to-day impact as well as ensuring that our language, culture, and identity are at the forefront. This is our responsibility, but we require assistance and positive investment from government in that regard.

As for a program that currently exists that is very effective, based on my messaging here, it doesn't exist at this time. I look at Truth and Reconciliation Commission call to action number 66, which calls on the federal government to have the space available to invest in community-led initiatives with respect to reconciliation—as we all know, reconciliation is very multi-faceted—as well as a national network that would provide for the space to discuss best practices.

That doesn't come out of left field. I recognize the very positive impacts that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation had with its community-led fund around addressing the assimilation policies of the past. I see Truth and Reconciliation Commission call to action number 66 as a replication of that, but more specific to youth. I also see it as having real, positive, resounding impacts into tomorrow.

Qujannamiik.

The Chair: We could consume the rest of your time on the first part of your question. You have to phase the response, obviously.

• (1400)

Ms. Alicia Aragutak: Okay.

Just to very briefly touch on the two questions, I agree with Maatalii's point. If I could silo one point—I'm not aiming at any organization—I would say education, formally and informally, and that would be in all aspects of basic community mobilization, basic community operations, basic parenting, and how these organizations run as well. It's hands-down education. We understand that, and we have a strong understanding of you as the standing committee for this as well.

But it's in all aspects. We can't just target the education system, because it's both ways. Having some community-level projects works in our region. I must say on my own behalf, of projects that are working I think of Mary Joanne Kaukai's decolonization project.

She is in high demand, but she has another job too, so she does it rather on the side, and there's nothing stable about it. It's really hands-on, and she has all of her equipment. It's where youth actually touch all of the equipment and raw material of who we are as Inuit, and it's a very youth-oriented approach. She makes it fun. We're not trying to create racism or anything; we're just trying to be educated as to why we are the way we are today. I would really invest in those kinds of programs within our community.

Thank you.

The Chair: We're out of time now.

I want to thank each of you for the testimony, for how thoughtful it was, and for how well it was presented. If you'll allow me a comment, there seems to be in you and in the youth we met last night such a bright spark, and yet a wisdom that is usually reserved for

people who are older, which seems to have been visited upon you by these hardships.

I want you to keep on doing the beautiful work that you're doing; it's wonderful to see. I want to think that now we're all going to be a part of that work as well, so thank you very much.

[Applause]

The Chair: If you're willing, maybe you would stay just for a moment for a photograph with the committee members. We would appreciate it.

Thank you.

We're suspended.

• (1400)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1430)

The Chair: Welcome back, everybody. Thank you for being here.

We'll go right into the panel.

I'd like to welcome and introduce our guests before we start.

Representing the Embrace Life Council is Kimberly Masson, the executive director, and David Lawson, the president. Representing the Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line is Sheila Levy, the executive director.

Sheila, in your case I think you're speaking for two people. You've asked for leave to maybe go a little longer, and I'm sure that would be fine with the committee.

Why don't we get going? I'll lay out the rules.

Each organization has 10 minutes. David and Kimberly, you can divide that time between you. I understand that Kimberly will present.

Likewise for you, Sheila. You'll have some flexibility because of your longer piece.

With that, Kimberly, you have the floor for 10 minutes. Thank you.

• (1435)

Ms. Kimberly Masson (Executive Director, Embrace Life Council): Thank you.

Thank you very much for the invitation to appear as a witness here.

I would like to begin by contextualizing the Embrace Life Council. ELC is a non-governmental organization that was created in 2004 to combat the high suicide rates in Nunavut communities and to encourage Nunavummiut to embrace life.

Council members include representatives from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the regional Inuit associations, the Government of Nunavut, Kamatsiaqtut Help Line, the Nunavut Association of Municipalities, the Nunavut Teachers' Association, the faith community, and an advisory group based upon traditional Inuit values, so we have an elder sitting on our council. Incidentally, Natan Obed, whose testimony you have already heard, is a former president on our board of directors.

The Embrace Life Council is based on the belief that suicide prevention must concentrate holistically on enhancing life, rather than on the narrower focus of preventing death. The council does not provide services directly. Rather, we provide training, ideas, resources, support, advocacy, and information to communities and groups. Communities then provide services and programs that are appropriate to their specific needs.

We work with the front line every day. We witness our community members struggle against the factors contributing to the elevated levels of suicide in Nunavut: social inequity, including food insecurity, shortage of adequate housing, poverty, and low educational attainment; historical and intergenerational trauma; a lack of access to culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services; and family trauma, including abuse and addictions, acute stress, and, for many, living in a prolonged state of grief. For more detail regarding these, please refer to ITK's recently released "National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy", which details and documents much of this historical struggle.

ELC's work revolves around protective factors: creating and promoting resources grounded in Inuit language and culture; providing training in healthy relationships, youth leadership, community violence prevention, and coping skills; gatekeeper training, including ASIST and safeTALK; child sexual abuse prevention training; and healing and bereavement support.

We are also partners in the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy. In March, Embrace Life and the NSPS partners NTI, the RCMP, and the GN released "Resiliency Within", a one-year action plan for suicide prevention in Nunavut, "It allows NSPS Partners to undertake important work to implement [the coroner's recommendations in the verdict], build on successes of the previous Action Plan and engage stakeholders for a longer-term plan to foster and support resiliency within Nunavummiut and our communities."

In May 2016, we hosted the Nunavut suicide prevention summit, United for Life, in Iqaluit in order to engage community stakeholders in the development of a longer-term action plan. We are currently using the valuable information gleaned from this event to inform our next steps. A number of very important needs were expressed by the stakeholders at the summit. First and foremost, any action taken regarding suicide prevention, intervention and/or post-vention must be Inuit-specific and community-driven. Community members asked for healing—programs, services, and resources. They asked for infrastructure—community centres, addictions treatment facilities, and shelters—and for multi-year or core funding to support this infrastructure. They asked for financial and human resource support for cultural programs, be they land, sewing, or arts-based. They asked for crisis response teams.

Our stakeholders need culturally appropriate gatekeeper training like ASIST and safeTALK. They need Inuit-guided research on topics they identify as relevant, not those identified as relevant by external academics and institutions, and for the research conclusions to be shared with the community for the purpose of creating a healthier community. They need culturally specific early childhood and parenting programs.

Our delegates identified other community challenges with which they need help: low school attendance, desensitization and normalization of suicide, language loss, a lack of connection between elders and youth, and travel challenges largely driven by cost. Our delegates also identified incredible community strengths, and we see these daily in our work: strong, well-educated, and dedicated Inuit leaders and community champions; intergenerational resiliency; stable, healthy families and communities; the comforting hum of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit that seamlessly permeates Nunavut.

This is an amazing territory full of amazing people.

• (1440)

Embrace Life Council is dedicated to celebrating and building upon these strengths. However, we face challenges of our own.

One example is geography, and thus physical access to communities. We have a staff of three people with limited funding. As I prepare this, I reflect upon our program coordinator, Cecile Guerin, who left to deliver six days of training combined in two communities, Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord. She left on Monday, September 5. She was scheduled to return on Friday, September 16. She arrived home yesterday, which would be the 22nd rather than the 16th, due to weather conditions. The current budget for her trip is somewhere in excess now of about \$14,000. This doesn't factor in the human cost to her young family while she's delayed, or to other communities that were scheduled to receive her programming.

Unfortunately, access to the Internet is pretty limited in the Territories and we really struggle and must deliver programming in person. Investment in improved broadband in Nunavut would have a significant impact on our ability to build community capacity. This is but one challenge in a myriad of challenges, but we forge on because the work is so necessary.

To conclude, I respectfully refer the standing committee to article 7.1 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which declares that "Indigenous Peoples have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty, and security of person".

I look forward to the meaningful work we will all do together in order to fully realize these rights in Nunavut and then the rest of indigenous Canada.

[Witness speaks in Inuktitut]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Masson, for that.

We'll go right along to Sheila Levy for her presentation.

Ms. Sheila Levy (Executive Director, Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line): Thank you for this invitation.

I've read testimony from various other witnesses who appeared before you during the summer. I will try not to parrot what has already been said. I will respond to the objectives of your study drawing from my own studies and experiences, many of which will be grassroots.

Quickly, I'll just outline who I am, which speaks to the objectives of this. I'm a retired person, but have lived in Nunavut for over 29 years, starting off in Pangnirtung, Gjoa Haven, Cambridge Bay, and now Iqaluit. I did do a year's study to finish my master's degree in psychology and counselling, but during my years in Nunavut, when I was working at a paid job, I worked in education and finished my years as a guidance counsellor at Inuksuk High School. I was also a trainer for school community counsellors. I also did much volunteer work and have been very involved in the area of suicide prevention within both Nunavut and nationally. I'm the past president of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, a founder as well as the past president and now current vice-president of the Embrace Life Council, and a founder, trainer, and past president and current executive director of Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line. I have worked with many suicide research projects, publishing chapters in books and journals as well.

As we all know, suicide is multi-faceted, complex, and happens far too often among indigenous populations, especially here in Nunavut. It is, though, a public health issue that is highly preventable given the correct circumstances. As such, there is a need to focus in many areas: communities, families, and individuals. It is critical to recognize that, when a suicide happens, it affects so many people in the community and sometimes right across the Arctic. Everyone who lives in Nunavut for any length of time is potentially at risk. There is no one who has not been touched by suicide in some form. Many have had to deal with it on a continual basis in one way or another with themselves, a family member, a friend, a co-worker, or a community member. The list is endless.

Research tells us that exposure to suicide is a strong risk factor. There is no evidence that suicide actually runs in families, but there is evidence, certainly here in Nunavut, that it becomes a learned behaviour. When so many people around you die by suicide and/or make attempts at various times of their lives, others often emulate these actions.

There are some salient facts to consider. Again, northerners attempt and die by suicide at a far greater rate than southern Canadians. Added to that, and certainly connected, there is a far greater incidence of addiction, violence, and sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, which certainly the Embrace Life Council is trying to work with. There are few northern-based facilities or resources, though, to deal with these problems.

The past colonization, history, and legacy of the residential school system has affected all aspects of life, including parenting and coping skills. Recognizing personal and intergenerational trauma, social inequity, and the fact that many communities do not have appropriate access to mental health are important factors that really need addressing. The continuum of mental health care is also important. Isolated communities are the norm in Nunavut, not Iqaluit—we are not the norm—and people who do get mental health support in the south go back to their communities without the

necessary supports in place in order to ensure that any changes can be made, supported, and continued.

Resiliency and healthy coping skills also need to be taught and supported. Everyone has ups and downs in life and stressful situations and times. Recognizing that and dealing with it are important factors that are not always practised in a healthy manner. It is important, though, to remember that in the past Inuit were resilient, and many are still today, but in the past they had to be in order to survive in a harsh environment. I've heard elders tell many stories of great endurance. Our youth today need to learn about these strengths, but be able to harness them to deal with the realities of their lives today.

● (1445)

The Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line is a community-driven service. During 1988-99, there were many suicides in the Baffin region of what was then the NWT, especially among young people. A conference was organized, with players from all the affected communities. The problems and possible solutions were explored. One idea that was put forward by a community member was the establishment of a first northern crisis line, or helpline, manned by trained volunteers. Because when I was much younger I worked at Ottawa's distress centre when doing my undergraduate studies at Carleton University, and because I was a participant at this conference, I was asked to help with this project.

In the spring of 1989, a group of CBC employees got together for a curlathon to raise funds for starting the helpline. This event provided the impetus for a group of like-minded citizens who got together at the same time to form the first working committee for the creation of the line. Over the summer, the trainers donated their time to develop a culturally relevant training program for the volunteers. With the generous assistance of many community organizations and a variety of individuals, the line started operation on January 15, 1990. During the first year of operation, the line received over 400 calls, and at that time we were only open to Iqaluit.

Having been in existence now for 27 years, and with a 1-800 number as well, the Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut helpline has continually operated 365 days a year as a volunteer organization. "Kamatsiaqtut" means "people who care", and the name was chosen by one of our Inuk volunteers who has been with us the full 27 years. We utilize a large cadre of trained volunteers in Iqaluit who listen nightly, via both a local line and a 1-800 line to Nunavummiut accessing Kamatsiaqtut from all three Nunavut regions, as well as parts of Arctic Quebec and southern Canada. During these calls, people express their suicidal ideation, trauma, anger, grief, and pain resulting from unresolved issues and describe their isolation, fear, frustration, and lack of resources and information that serve as barriers to the successful resolution of their issues.

Kamatsiaqtut has recently put in place a 24-7 service, as recognized and desired by the Government of Nunavut. This additional service utilizes the assistance of Ottawa's distress centre, which answers calls when Kamatsiaqtut volunteers are not available.

As we recognize that Nunavut's suicide rate is higher than in any other Canadian jurisdiction, we are highly motivated as a volunteer organization composed of a wide variety of Inuit and non-Inuit Nunavummiut who demonstrate care and concern and translate it into concrete action.

There is a recognition that the helpline has saved lives and has made a significant and positive impact on many other lives. We have intervened many times, sometimes with sending out help and most other times with helping the caller come to the conclusion that they will stay alive for at least 24 hours, with the volunteer helping them plan out the next 24 hours with them and what they can do in case overpowering feelings take over again.

We have also heard from callers about the impact the service has had on their lives, and we've heard that perhaps they would not be here if the service did not exist. Our motto of "Helping Others Help Themselves" is relevant. Although volunteers are trained to deal with suicidal callers, we hope people call before they are in this state and get support for whatever their issues are.

The training is well received. Even the Nunavut Arctic College students, the third-year nursing students, are required to take it as part of their counselling course, and we offer it to them for free.

We do have many challenges, though. Our small amount of core funding is an issue. We are part of the Canadian Distress Line Network and are working on getting a Canada-wide 1-800 suicide line. We are the only organization that does not have a paid ED or any paid office staff.

Recognizing that there are many needs in Nunavut competing with us financially, we also need more core funding for many issues. One issue is to do a PR blitz. We don't have the funds to ensure the information about the line is known in all the communities and the number is on the tip of everyone's tongue. Posters and CDs with radio messages are all sent out, but we never know if they get distributed, or used, or put up around the community. The line also needs to be able to keep better statistics, as there is a constant expectation that we are a source for this type of information.

● (1450)

We would like to be able to purchase a program that is used all over the world in help lines, the iCarol program, but we again would need the money to do so and the funds to be able to receive training so we can train our volunteers on the system.

At this point, we cannot offer 24-7 service out of Nunavut—maybe in the future with enough resources. It is important, though, to keep the services office in Nunavut with Nunavummiut answering the calls for at least part of the 24-7 time.

For some callers, and for Nunavummiut in general, it is important that a 27-year service—started here because of community wishes and needs—be managed from Nunavut. We also need money to be able to continue to really work with the Ottawa distress centre in person so we can ensure that they become culturally aware and more competent in dealing with our callers.

Also, as with many help lines throughout the world now and certainly in Canada, the phone calls are not coming in as much, as many people use online chatting or texting. We would also like to be

able to offer that in the near future, because I think this would appeal to a lot of youth more than the telephone, but again it would require resources and training to implement it in a safe and effective manner.

Again, another big challenge is having enough Inuktitut-speaking volunteers available. We have some, many of whom have been with us for years—some for our whole 27 years—but we certainly need more.

For best practices, possible solutions, and general recommendations, I'll talk here about some basic homegrown and grassroots ideas as well as some others.

If suicide prevention and intervention is seen only as a government and organization affair, I am concerned that communities and individuals will be more apt not to take responsibility or ownership themselves. They will say that the government or various organizations are responsible, not me, or not us.

I strongly believe every Nunavummiut can make a difference. They can make it their responsibility to learn the signs and symptoms. They can intervene successfully. They can support an individual at risk. They can arrange a circle of support, so they are not doing this on their own and the support is ongoing.

Therefore, the government does have a part to play, and it's an important part. It is the government's job to ensure that individuals, family members, and groups are given the necessary resources to start to feel comfortable with knowing the signs and symptoms and ways to intervene. In that way, government would be enabling effective community ownership of the issue. Communities also need to be consulted on what they want or need to help them impact the suicide rate in their community. This means community meetings for brainstorming, and realizing that each community is different, and their needs might be different. Also desired in the communities are parenting groups for training, support, and discussion, to learn suicide risks, symptoms, prevention ideas, and intervention techniques. Communities also need places for people to gather for informal counselling and support as well as culturally appropriate activities. Youth especially need positive space to gather and have fun as well as receiving support.

Changing the face of suicide in Inuit communities is possible, I believe. There are short-term solutions such as providing the necessary and appropriate mental health support, family support, and community support as needed. This is not as simple, though, as just sending in a cadre of workers to each community. It is important that the communities get the support they feel will make a difference with their citizens, while at the same time realizing that each person is unique, and understanding what they need to be healthy.

I had better hurry up. Is the time up?

● (1455)

The Chair: One more minute.

Ms. Sheila Levy: Okay, I'm going to go very quickly, or just try to make sure I get everything.

Effective cross-cultural counselling education needs to be done with all counsellors who are not from Nunavut. Culturally sensitive and culturally based programs and services are essential if they are to make a difference. When we're blind to the potential effects of cultural differences we sometimes try to export theories and practices and training programs to cultures that are different from those in which the theories and techniques were developed. I'm not saying that we don't use materials or use non-Inuit counsellors. We just want to be sure that everyone has the ability to respond in a culturally relevant manner.

Research is really important. Evaluating programs and intervention techniques to ensure they're making a positive impact is important.

Support is a really big one. You can read all the rest of this from what I've given you. There is a need to offer support for survivors, both for those who have lost somebody, as well as those who attempted, but lived. There is also a need to provide support for those dealing with suicide on a regular basis—counsellors, community wellness workers, church support people, elders who intervene, and people who've taken such courses as ASIST and have used their skills to intervene. The helpline volunteers can debrief each other, but other counsellors throughout Nunavut need that same type of support.

We can teach people the prevention and intervention skills, but in order to avoid burnout we need to ensure that everyone gets the support they need and the debriefing they need.

The Chair: If you leave your notes, they can be read in their entirety into the record if perhaps you want to go to your conclusion.

Ms. Sheila Levy: Yes, I will go to my conclusion, that's right.

In my conclusion I will just talk a little bit about something that I'm involved with right now. The Kamatsiaqtut is holding the 2016 Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention's national conference with groups like the Embrace Life Council, and the theme is hope, health, and healing. This is going to be open to people right across Canada. We even have some Maori people from New Zealand coming to present, so it's really going to be an amazing conference.

We have specific goals and objectives. Sessions were solicited and selected on the basis of hope, health, and healing.

We have Natan Obed, Maatalii Okalik, and Senator Murray Sinclair as keynote speakers for this conference.

I'm going to end this presentation by conveying that we all have a role to play in suicide reduction and life promotion. While successful actions and appropriate approaches will sometimes be attributed to their being necessary from an individual or group, no one individual group or organization can address suicide reduction in isolation. It is a collective effort.

• (1500)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Sheila. Well done in the speed trials, there.

Romeo, if you want to leave your question as you're on your way out the door, we can put you at the top of the order. You won't be here to hear the answer but the analysts will.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: First of all, thank you to all the presenters here. Most of you have confirmed a lot of what we've heard, at least for my part, over the last two days. I just took note of a lot of the things you've confirmed from the past testimony that we've heard.

There's something I would like to know, that was talked about in both Kuujjuaq and in the time we've been here. There seems to be a lot of need for different types of infrastructure in a lot of the communities. Some of these facilities do exist, but only in one place. For instance, there is a regional treatment centre in Kuujjuaq, although the needs do exist in the 13 other Inuit communities in Nunavik.

What other types of services or what other types of infrastructure would you see in these various communities? Some have talked about crisis centres, and some have talked about family centres to reunite and heal the families themselves at the core. Some have talked about youth centres throughout the communities, land-based treatment centres, and so on and so forth. What other types of important infrastructure does this effort require throughout the communities?

The Chair: I think both Sheila and Kimberly would like to answer, but Sheila first and then Kimberly.

Ms. Sheila Levy: I'll just say that certainly an addictions centre for Nunavummiut is really important. I know we can't have a centre in every community. Youth centres in all communities is critical. Having a centre where people can gather to get support and help and maybe have some fun as well is really important. These things can be put in every small community. I really believe that. It simply needs the support to have them built and to have people running them.

Ms. Kimberly Masson: Agreeing with Sheila, I would add cultural centres. I think at the summit we heard over and over language and culture, language and culture, and we know how very important it is. Sometimes when we label things under mental health or that this is a healing centre or wellness centre, we somehow attach stigma to that terminology, unfortunately. But I think a cultural centre is pretty de-stigmatizing and it would be a real dream to see a place where people could simply join together and enjoy the fruits of the land and participate in cultural activities, like sewing and preparing for a hunt.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Thank you for that. I'll be brief as I have to leave for a conference call.

One of the reasons why I insisted on the implementations issues to our presenters is that most of the leaders from the north are youth leaders, confirmed in the necessity of implementing agreements or treaties that we already have with most of the groups in the north, certainly in northern Quebec with the Inuit and the Cree. A lot of the infrastructure and services and programs that we talk about today are already promises or commitments or obligations under treaties and agreements. In that sense, I think there's no need to reinvent the wheel for many of these programs and services that were already promised. I think it's just a matter of good faith and goodwill to implement those promises and commitments that are already made.

The Chair: Thank you, Romeo. I understand you have to go for a conference call. Thanks for that.

There are still two minutes on the question if anyone would like to add anything more, or we can move along to the other questions.

David.

Mr. David Yurdiga: I'll add a couple of things

I was in the west recently, as I said last week, and one of the communities didn't have one place for the kids to go, not one place. They didn't have a youth centre, not a cultural centre, not a wellness centre. They're in desperate need of help. They're asking and they're screaming for help. These are just basic places for kids to go, safe places. Unless they have a safe friend or family, there really isn't a place to go in some of these communities. This is needed very much.

• (1505)

The Chair: Thank you. We'll move along to the next question then, which is from Michael McLeod.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I'm interested that many presenters have raised the need for infrastructure, for programs, and for investment. I'm also curious about applying for existing programming. I'm from the Northwest Territories, so what's available there might be different than here. I see in the Northwest Territories a number of programs such as Aboriginal Head Start, which is popular, and every community wants it. It has programs geared toward FAE, and it has programs geared toward supporting toddlers, and toward mothers to teach them the basics of how to look after children. It's working quite well. It's geared toward people who are in a difficult situation, and who need that bit of extra help.

We also have friendship centres. Friendship centres do a lot of things. They run a variety of programs for sport, after school, drop-in, crisis intervention, and so many other things. They are struggling to get resources, too, but they have a broad mandate, and they don't fall under any political umbrella. They're independent, so they don't answer to any of the political community organizations.

Is any of that available? I know there is a friendship centre in Rankin Inlet, so I'm wondering, is it because there's not an ability to draw down the money?

Yesterday, we had some good presentations, including from David. We had some good discussions. One of the things that was identified was that even though there were new monies announced, and monies from the Nunavut government, the amount available for Nunavut is relatively small, and maybe even insignificant. Are you able to get some more money? Are you able to access any other programs that exist?

I say that because there is a study, or a review, of aboriginal strategy. I'm wondering if that reaches out to Nunavut, or is it only in the southern parts of Canada and the Northwest Territories?

Ms. Sheila Levy: I'll answer a bit. I'm sure Kim and David have a number of other thoughts.

With any type of program like that in a small community, often it takes a dedicated individual or a dedicated group of people to get things going. Small communities are not just offered a ton of money and told, "Oh, put in a friendship centre, do this, do that". It usually takes people who say, "Okay, this is a need, and we want to have this done". Then they get people to help with that, or put a group together

in order to find the money to do it, but it takes dedicated individuals or groups to do this.

That's what happened in Rankin Inlet with the friendship centre, which is wonderful. People wanted it, and they found the money in order to do that. In small communities sometimes that's difficult. Even here in Iqaluit, it's the same people often coming up with all the ideas, and the work, and the implementation. Sometimes they start with no money at all, and then have to find ways of getting it. It can be difficult.

There has to be a way of somehow making communities realize there's money available if they want to do get things done and how they can implement that.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Can I ask you, if there was a new program for cultural centres, and you had to apply for it, then are you going to have the same challenge?

Ms. Sheila Levy: I think if it was put out to communities that this is available, and they had support in applying for it and support in having the program work in a way that worked for their community, then I think, yes. We would get support. I think there would be people in communities to do it. When the friendship centre got going, it wasn't because somebody said, "Here's money for a friendship centre". It was people saying, "Gee, wouldn't this be great. We could use this", and they applied. They found ways of getting the money in order to get it going. It was different.

What you're saying is that if you were to offer to all the communities, "There's this amount of money and you can use it to develop a cultural centre", then I do believe people would be able to get together and see that happen. Some communities are small, and they would probably need a lot of support in order to help write the applications, and get the whole infrastructure going. I do believe people could do that, yes.

• (1510)

Ms. Kimberly Masson: Thanks, Sheila.

I'd like to add to that.

I know Ilisaqsivik isn't here to speak, but they're a great example of true Inuit Qaujimatjuqangit resiliency and creativity and being resourceful. They opened a hotel in order to support themselves financially. The Ilisaqsivik wellness centre in Clyde River is run by an executive director, and I believe they have over 50 staff at this point now. They run all those great kinds of programs. It's amazing. There's everything from youth programs to training counsellors in the territories.

We have a large group of Inuktitut-speaking counsellors in various communities around the territory. They're a crisis response team, certainly at least in the Baffins. Sometimes they go west as well. However, in order to do so, they had to open a hotel to support themselves financially, because the funding is not necessarily guaranteed every year, and they wanted to maintain their programs. They're very creative, with a brilliant executive director. They've done wonderful things.

The challenging part of all of that, though, is that we could all learn from Jakob Gearheard and his team who have done this, but we kind of operate in vacuums. It is partly because of isolation, which you're familiar with. That's where we want to take the expertise of someone like Jakob and his team and share it with other communities that might like to do the same thing but that don't really know how they did that—what steps they took, and what they would do next time to simplify it for the next people.

There is a lot of programming going on. There are possibilities.

The last thing I would add is that sometimes it's the way we have to apply for the funding that's the greatest challenge. It's not that the funding is not available necessarily, but that maybe you have to be registered with legal registries in Nunavut to apply for funding and you don't know how to do that. Sometimes it's just the hurdles of paperwork and red tape that really restrict what a community wants, or perhaps the funding is so narrowly focused that although what people want to apply for is what the community needs, they can't access it.

The Chair: Thanks so much for that, and we're out of time.

David, the first question is from you.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for sharing today. It's valuable information for us to report back to our colleagues. I'd also like to thank David for what he shared last night from his law enforcement perspective. That gave a different twist to it. We don't always see the other side and we really appreciate the input.

During the past number of days, I've heard the term “decolonization” quite a bit. I know what it means, but not really, so what does it entail when someone has to go through the process of being decolonized? What does that really mean, and what's the process?

Ms. Kimberly Masson: I'll tell you only because I just completed my master's degree in indigenous studies and I feel as though I've been trained in it.

The way I look at decolonization is that it is changing the lens that I look at the world through, which is challenging. It's obviously part of who I am, and I'm not as decolonized as I would like to be. It's really looking at things through a different lens in order to see through another person's lens.

Mr. David Lawson (President, Embrace Life Council): Everyone's going to have a different perspective on it, but the way I look at it is that you have the residential school system, you have my grandparents' generation with the dog slaughter issue, and you have people being colonized and being forced to move into settlements, so when we talk about decolonization, you have a whole generation that's kind of lost in between two cultures.

I lived it. First, I grew up with my very cultural and traditional grandparents in Pang , and my dad was from Halifax. I lived both sides of the big stream.

To be decolonized is to kind of revitalize the culture, I guess. However, there are a lot of people lost in between the two right now, and that's one of the big issues we're having.

● (1515)

Ms. Sheila Levy: I will just add a little bit.

When I think of colonization, I think of issues such as power and control. When people went into settlements, they didn't really have a lot of power and control over their own lives, and certainly the residential school system reflects that as well. Decolonization is hopefully allowing people to feel that they have power and control over their own lives, and not only that they have the power and control but that it's respected and that everybody is on equal ground and that one group is not telling another group how to live, how to think, what to do, what language to speak. It's taking back what has been lost, but in a way that works for the realities of today.

The Chair: There's still time.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you for that.

I'll just initiate it. Is it done in the schools? Are there workshops? How is it implemented? I guess that would be a good way to put it.

Ms. Kimberly Masson: I don't know that there is a set plan. There's a lot of talk about cultural competency training, and there's a lot of that developing. In fact, there's a program that ELC is looking at potentially diving into, because it's a real part of healing and trauma-informed practice and understanding what it is to come from a different time and place and to have experienced the impact that colonization had, but I don't see anything forming.

Mr. David Lawson: I'll add to that. I'm speaking to my generation and the folks I grew up with.

Right now you have the on-the-land program and the kamik-making programs for making sealskin boots, in which folks my age are just learning it because it was lost as we were growing up. Even when we had the summit back in May, a lot of people were saying we needed more land programs—and that was repeated over and over—not only just to revitalize our culture and our traditions but as healing. Being on the land is basically the best healing you can get. That was repeated over and over—the need for land programs and traditional....

Ms. Sheila Levy: Correct me if I'm wrong, because I retired from the school system a few years ago, but there was a program, or at least a course, that looked at the residential school legacy. Is there still?

Oh, good. Yes, that is still going. It wasn't started when I was there; it just started the year afterward, actually, and that was a beginning. I'd like to see that type of course given all over Canada, so that everybody understands and realizes. That's another piece of decolonization, I believe.

Ms. Kimberly Masson: To add to what Sheila said, there's a unit in grade 10 social studies. Both of those are grade 10 social studies courses—the residential schools unit and a unit called “staking a claim”. NWT also has that implemented in its system. It's about the land claim and its implementation.

I guess one more thing would be Nunavut Sivuniksavut, which is an incredible institution based in Ottawa that takes maybe 30 Inuit students 30 per year. It's an intensive training program. They can take a one- or two-year program, and that's part of the decolonization in addition to the land program and traditional programs. It's so empowering for these young people to really learn their history in depth, and they come back with such incredible... Maatalii is a perfect example of a product of that program. It's so empowering to learn about who you are when you're lost in the middle.

• (1520)

The Chair: Thank you. We are out of time there, David.

The next question is from Gary Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Decolonization is something that I've had to deal with for a very long time. Colonialism affected many people around the world in very different ways. It really is a much deeper process than just offering a course or some programs here and there. I think it has caused us to deeply look into the challenges and change in the structure of power and development and education that has led to intergenerational struggle, but the effects of colonization are almost similar in many aspects around the world. I wanted to mention that.

With respect to the Inuit context, I think a lot of the issues that we've learned about in the last two-and-a-half days—which have been quite remarkable—have come down to education at the core. It's a way of deconstructing many of the challenges that have occurred over the last couple of centuries and to rebuild the confidence, the cultural experience, the cultural connection, the connection to the land, and all of those things.

I'd like to ask David—because I think you made a very profound statement yesterday when you talked about suicide—what, in your opinion, needs to happen in order for this to take place in this community. I'm not only talking about Iqaluit, but about the different Inuit territories.

Second, I want to ask you a question about being a law enforcement officer. In your experience with respect to the criminal justice system, do you feel that those members of the community who are charged get treated differently from the rest of the population?

Mr. David Lawson: What I think needs to happen is for us to receive a strong commitment from the federal government to support us. When I was looking at the Resiliency Within action plan last year, I didn't feel any support outside Nunavut. I felt as though we were on our own.

Recently the federal government announced a bunch of money, but again, as I said last night, it didn't come to much. I'm not sure how it was broken up. I'm guessing it was per capita, so with our low population it wasn't really much at all.

We need a strong commitment from the federal government to bring our numbers down. It's such a vast land, so spread out, and everything is so expensive. When we brought those 100 people together last May, probably about 40% of them were from Iqaluit or from down south. It was \$250,000 just to bring 60 people into town to hold that five-day summit. Everything is so expensive that it's

hard to do on our own, so we need more support from the federal government on all the things that you heard today from the different panels to make those happen. We need more support.

When you look at the criminal justice system, I'm not sure—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I don't want to put you on the spot. I recognize your role as a member of the RCMP. I don't want to put you on the spot here, but I think if you have any suggestions as to how the justice system could be more responsive and reflective of the needs of the community, what would a couple of those suggestions be?

Mr. David Lawson: In regard to policing, I think—from my experience, anyway—that we've done a pretty good job in our limited capacity. We're probably one of the more overworked police divisions in the country, with one of the worst violent-crime rates I've seen at first hand. Not a lot of officers stay up here much longer than three years. With an increased capacity we could do more.

I'm the community policing coordinator for the division, for the territory, and that's only one person. Half my job is dealing with the media, which I spend about 60% of my time doing. As the one person coordinating all of the programming from the RCMP side of this, from the policing side, I'm strictly reactive right now, because I simply don't have the capacity or the time to do anything proactive. There's so much that I want to do, but I just can't do it, and I spend a good portion of my time working for suicide prevention, along with Embrace Life and our partners with the implementation committee.

• (1525)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I have a question for Sheila. I know parts of the territory have cellular phone service and some parts just have land lines. In a world that's increasingly changing, how does that affect the work you do? Are you available on Twitter, on Facebook, and other forms of media to kind of evolve as crisis help lines?

Ms. Sheila Levy: One of our issues is all the changes in the way we communicate. Right now we are only able to do actual phone calls, and they can be from cellphones or regular phones. So many people, especially young people, like to communicate via chats or emails or whatever. My daughter only communicates with me by text, and she lives across town. I get many texts a day.

It has changed. Right through Canada, it has changed the number of calls that people get on the phone. Many centres are able to change and add texting or add other services to what they do, but we don't even have enough money to pay an ED or office staff or anything. I mean, we don't even get enough to pay for our phone lines and our rent, and we fundraise for everything else.

Again, that's another piece of support that is needed. We would certainly like to add to the services and we have a lot of young people who are very familiar with different forms of communication who are ready to help get this going. I'm a dinosaur, so I would rely on them.

It's really important that we offer services—and I've said this before—that people need and want, and we need the resources to be able to do that. We're ready and waiting to do so, but getting the resources is what's critical.

The Chair: Okay, thanks.

We move now to five-minute questions. We have time for two of those. The first one is from Arnold Viersen, please.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here today.

What's really come through in our travels here up in Nunavik and Nunavut is that there are already a lot of people working on this issue. It's been interesting to see where there might be some coordination and things like that. We can definitely give some support where that's needed.

Natan Obed came and presented to us. He gave us a report, and it was a very new, fresh report. Page 12 of the report laid out the black side and the light side—the protective factors, the risk factors, and that kind of thing. I think we know why it's happening; it's just that now we have to respond to that.

Is there anything that you would say about the ITK with regard to the report? What one thing would there be if you had to rank it, or is there something that they missed? Which would you place the highest priority on, and is there possibly something that they missed? Whenever witness groups come, I just keep that page in front of me and my questions are usually based around that.

For me, family strength is the main thing. I think that if we can get that right, if we can renew the family strength that's in the community, a lot of the other things would start to fall into place, because cultural continuity ties into family strength. Social equality ties into family strength, as does health development.

I'd like your comments on the ITK report, maybe the ranking of the things that they've identified, and if there's one thing that they forgot, what would that be?

• (1530)

Mr. David Lawson: It's not an easy question. I guess I'll just touch on family strength and cultural strength. Again, it comes from my experience.

I think my traditional ties to my grandparents were what saved me when I was a kid. All my family grew up on welfare, but family ties—I agree with you—are what can save us and improve our quality of life up here.

When I look at our homes and a lot of my family members back home, I see they're all on welfare. There are a lot of systems that work against them. Look at the welfare system and what happens every time someone gets a job. If you get a job and you're making \$1,000 a month, 40% of that...your rent increases. Everything kind of works against you.

That's just one of the things that I want to mention to bring that quality of life up. You want to encourage everyone to get an education and work, but once they do find a part-time job and make a bit of money, their rent increases.

I agree with you that it's a matter of how we do that, but I have to think about that more.

Ms. Sheila Levy: The protective factors around family are really important. Even in families that some people might think are not

functioning well or are dysfunctional, there are still strong ties, and that's why we need to work on the family issues and the family strengths.

When I've done interventions with young people, I use the family love, because love is always there. I use that as part of my intervention, because I know that within families, even though they might be upset with parents or with what is happening within the family, there is love there. You help them come to the conclusion that they really don't want to hurt these people they love—often it's a grandparent or a baby sister or whatever—and you talk about how their death would impact them for life. That, I can tell you, has made many of my interventions quite successful.

I think that working on making families and communities stronger and healthier and more economically solvent would definitely help.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you. I think that's my time.

The Chair: It is. Your phone should buzz any moment.

The final five-minute question is from Gary, please.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: We were talking yesterday about funding. You mentioned federal government involvement, and I want to get into the specifics. What will allow the federal government to be a proper partner in an overall Inuit suicide prevention strategy? What would the elements be? What approach is required? What kinds of dollars are required for the federal government to be a full partner in this strategy?

Mr. David Lawson: I think we just need the federal government to listen to us a little more. I know that they brought someone up for the summit, but aside from that, they could certainly be more involved.

Let's say you give the implementation committee \$1 million. You announced \$1 million last week to all four Inuit regions, but when you say that we have until until March 31 to spend it—and before that, we have to do all the proposals and get approved first—it makes it really tough for us to simply go along with the federal government's rules and criteria.

• (1535)

Ms. Kimberly Masson: I realize absolutely that there are accountability needs, but I think what our communities have said is really clear: it's that they have all the answers. They know what their community needs.

If the funding could be more broadly based.... We have to increase access and flexibility in how it's applied, because what they need and what's going to work definitely differs significantly from community to community.

Accountability can be pretty stringent. I understand the way that it can be created, but when one community wants a cultural centre and another community wants land-based healing programs, they have to be able to access that pot of money in a very simplistic way—please.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: In terms of both of your organizations, can you identify your overall budget? What would an ideal budget look like for you to maximize the role of your organization within an overall strategy?

Ms. Kimberly Masson: We currently have three employees, and they're all Iqaluit-based. It would be ideal to have fully staffed offices in each of the regions. That cost is going to differ, based upon how much travel they do and how much they access the small communities that they're supporting.

We currently have a budget of about \$500,000. Well, it's changing, because we're changing projects. We're well over capacity right now with that and burning the candle at both ends. Probably a few million would be appropriate for our organization, and then we could access people very carefully and/or have broad-based strategies, such as increased broadband. If we had better digital access to people, it would help.

Ms. Sheila Levy: We have a very small budget, in that we get \$50,000 from the Government of Nunavut to help us run, and then we get a little more to give to the Ottawa distress centre. Our budget is about \$120,000 to \$130,000 now, but that is with no paid employees. That's with me and everyone else doing the training for free, the scheduling for free, the running of the office for free.

That can't continue. People want more access to our services and better access. They would like to have more Inuit counsellors available.

We would like to even be a service of volunteers and perhaps paid counsellors at times when volunteers aren't available. A lot of the help lines throughout the south do that, including the Ottawa distress centre, but we don't have that ability. If we did, we would be able to operate 24/7 out of Nunavut, with counsellors who speak Inuktitut available at all times.

Do we need to have funding? We're waiting for what we get. We could offer that probably with \$1 million, but not with what we have now. We're offering the service in the best way we can, but we need to expand and we need to make sure it's more relevant for everybody, and we need money to do that.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

That brings this panel to a close. I want to thank each of you very much for being so prepared and for sharing such thoughtful remarks. As you know, everything that you've told us today will become a matter of permanent record and will be rolled into the study that we expect will be concluded early in the new year, in February or March. It will then be passed along to government to impact policy and funding positions.

Thank you very much for your time and effort on this, and for all of the work that you do.

We're going to suspend for about five minutes and then we'll come back. We have about 40 minutes available if anyone in the audience would like to make statements from the floor on the microphones. We're happy to do that, and those statements would also become part of the permanent record.

I'll also remind everyone to be aware of the web addresses that are on the whiteboard outside the door. They are another avenue for leaving remarks for us. Any remarks that we gather through that website will have equal weight with anything we've heard in the room today, as we go forward in our study. If our friends in the

media would like to help us get that website out there, that would be appreciated too.

We'll suspend for five minutes. Thank you very much.

• (1540)

(Pause)

• (1550)

The Chair: We'll come back to order and open up the floor for comment.

Members of the committee would love to hear any comment that you have, which will be read into the record just as all testimony has been.

There are two microphones; probably the one at the front would be the best one to use.

We have some flexibility in terms of time. Provisionally, we will continue until 4:40. It's now about 3:55. If folks could keep their remarks to four or five minutes at the most, it would be helpful.

I remind everybody again of our website, where people can make additional remarks.

I see someone approaching the mike. Please state your name before you make your remarks.

Hon. Paul Okalik (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in his native language*].

My name is Paul Okalik. I'm the MLA for Iqaluit-Sinaa, which is right here. You're in my riding. I want to welcome you, first of all, and thank you for coming to my riding.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Okalik: You're talking about a subject that's very difficult. I'm glad you're dealing with it and trying to tackle it. I don't envy your position, but at the same time, I hear comments of colonialism that are out of context for me.

At the same time, we still live with it. It doesn't matter which party's in power, by the looks of it: you somehow have to appoint somebody other than Inuk to represent us.

We left that in the last century. We're quite capable, as the young lady showed you today, of representing ourselves. Please allow us to be equal and give us proper standing in our own country. That's what I want to start with.

I appreciate your efforts. I was active in the last campaign because I wanted to see a government that would act and would represent and at least tackle the issues we're facing today. One of them is suicide.

Thank you for coming. I hope you will make a difference, because we need help. Our government is trying to do its best to try and tackle it, but we need a partner in Ottawa, as you can see, to assist us in making a difference.

I believe a lot of good people came before you today to offer you help. Please report to your masters, whoever they may be, to help us tackle this difficult matter. We'll be there to do our part to assist you, and hopefully we'll turn the tide.

Qujannamiik. Merci.

•(1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Thank you for your kind welcome to your riding. It's a beautiful riding.

Please approach the microphone if you'd like to speak.

Ms. Toby Otak (As an Individual): First of all, I would like to say thank you for coming.

This is a difficult subject to talk about, especially after losing a family member that I loved in the early spring.

I would like to see more mental health workers within the smaller communities. I would like to see more than one there to help, because I've noticed that during the school year there are always emergencies, no matter what. I became reluctant to see one after I lost my brother, because after I was in high school I sought help, but I always ended up having to talk about the same thing over and over, which made me go back to square one.

He left his children at a young age. They seem to be lost. I would like also to see about reminding them that it is okay to talk. Problems don't start overnight. They can start at an early age. As they are growing up, if they don't know how to talk, the result can be suicide. We are getting tired of seeing suicide occurring because they don't know how to open up.

It will be nice to have able mental health workers around, and more than one of them might be there, especially in a small community.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that, and also for spending your day with us today.

I think the guest in the pink shirt wanted to say a word, and then I think Johannes was going to say a word.

Could I ask you to start by stating your name? We have a co-worker, Roxanne, outside the door, who will double-check that we have the spelling right. Thank you.

•(1600)

Mr. Peter Williamson (As an Individual): I'm Peter Williamson. I'm here as an individual.

I was here this afternoon and heard the youth speak. I thought what they said was very insightful. One of the things I really appreciated about what they said was they weren't talking from approved talking points. They were really talking from their hearts and about what they see and experience in their own communities. It is very much a problem across all Inuit regions.

As you probably know, there are four Inuit regions. One is Nunavut. There are three others, and the problem of suicide is across all regions and all communities.

As I was growing up, the first person I knew who committed suicide was when I was 12, and that person was 12 too. As I was growing up as a teenager, a lot of my friends committed suicide. Since then some of my relatives have committed suicide.

I remember walking down the street in my own home community of Rankin Inlet. I and a friend of mine were walking, and we saw blood on a wall inside a house through the window. We thought and said to each other, "I guess they're having another fight." The next day we found out that somebody blew their brains out.

I don't think in the south very many people can say they have known 25 or 30 people who have committed suicide, but I can say that, and I'm not unusual. It's very common for a person living up here. Some of my very close friends have committed suicide, and it's a big problem.

I want to talk about a couple of issues I think will make a difference. One is I really started noticing a difference in how many young people committed suicide after their parents and their aunts and uncles and their grandparents could no longer afford to go hunting, because living the traditional lifestyle and being brought up in a community and in a family where the traditional lifestyle is the way you are brought up really does make a difference. We started losing that in the 1970s, and the 1980s too, but it started in the 1970s. Once that happened, more people did commit suicide.

There was what were called the seal wars at the time, when Greenpeace and other environmental activist organizations who wanted to raise money started to attack the sealing industry, which Inuit were a part of. They really relied on seal hunting to make a living. I remember as a young person that there were a lot of people in my community who went out seal hunting. They sold the sealskins and could then afford to buy guns and bullets and Ski-Doos and lumber to build qamutiks, which are called sleds, and even in the summer they could afford to buy boats and outboard motors and gas, and because of that the traditional lifestyle was still alive. It made a big difference.

Today Inuit communities suffer from poverty. We suffer from food insecurity.

Those are just examples, but they have a profound effect on people in Inuit communities, and we would not be suffering from those two examples if Inuit could still afford to go out hunting. That's definitely the case.

With the negotiation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and the establishment of the Nunavut government, Inuit wanted their own government. They wanted their own government so they could develop and implement their own policies and programs. For a lot of people, that was the whole reason for negotiating the land claims agreement.

•(1605)

There are other provisions that are very important. For many people the purpose was so that they could get their own government and determine their own future, and, as I said, develop and implement their own policies and programs. One of those policies and programs would be how to get people out hunting again, but the Nunavut government has been in place since 1999 and we're still seeing the same conditions as in 1999. Now it's 2016. Where are these policies and programs we were hoping to create that would make a difference in people's lives? Where are the Inuit who would become the managers and senior government bureaucrats?

We have politicians, but we also have our own public service, which I'm sure you know is very important. For Inuit, it's important too, because in our land claims agreement we negotiated a chapter on Inuit employment within government that would allow us to put Inuit in place in senior positions in the government, who could then develop these policies, such as getting more people out hunting, but it hasn't happened.

We need those kinds of policies to be developed and to start being implemented. One way of doing that is to make sure that the provisions in our land claims agreement concerning Inuit employment within government are being implemented—they haven't been so far—and not just with the territorial government, but within the federal government too, because these provisions apply to all governments in Nunavut. The federal government, the territorial government, and the municipal governments all have responsibilities to hire and train Inuit for senior positions within their own governments. I'm not going to go into details on what those provisions are, but they haven't been respected. We need to start making sure that these provisions are implemented.

The last point I'll make, because I know you want to keep this short, is that I worked for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada for 15 years in Ottawa. One piece of research I came across while working there was in the library of that department. It was a report called "An overview of demographic and socio-economic conditions of the Inuit in Canada", published in 1985. This report said that the Inuit population had more than quadrupled between 1931 and 1981. It said that in 1931 there were just over 6,000 Inuit in Canada, and only 65 were outside of Inuit regions. In 1961, 30 years later, there were just over 11,000 Inuit, so the population had almost doubled in 30 years. In 1981, the population of Inuit was just over 25,000 Inuit in Canada. That had more than doubled in the preceding 20 years. In 2006, there were just over 50,000 Inuit in Canada, with 11,000 living outside of Inuit regions.

So there was a fourfold increase in the Inuit population in Canada over 55 years, and in 2006 the Inuit population had almost doubled in the preceding 25 years, which is what one of our youth said this morning. That's why I wanted to bring this up.

This report also said:

The purpose of this report is to describe the Inuit ethnic group in terms of its demographic evolution and specific socio-economic conditions. This publication provides information which should be useful for policy and program development, strategic and operational planning, and performance measurement.

This was in 1985.

When I was working there, I brought this to the attention of the senior people in that department, and nothing happened. This report was underlining the importance of keeping track of how fast the Inuit population was growing so that the department could develop appropriate policies and programs to meet the increased Inuit population in Canada.

●(1610)

We need to keep track of the trends of the growth of the Inuit population in Canada, and we should assume that the Inuit population will double every 25 years. That's extremely important, because we are talking about not only suicide, but poverty. As you

know, or hopefully as people know, poverty does lead to an increase in suicide. That is completely evident in the Inuit communities.

Housing, schools, roads, sewer and water and municipal infrastructure, electricity, and air and marine infrastructure all contribute to the quality of life in Inuit communities, and we are way behind the eight ball.

We really do need to keep track of how the population is growing, which will also affect our ability to deal with the suicide and poverty implications in our communities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much for those comments.

Again, I'll just remind folks of the website portal for detailed submissions. That would be really useful to us as well.

Thank you for standing, and welcome.

Ms. Caroline Anawak (As an Individual): My name is Caroline Anawak, and I'm one of two former suicide intervention specialists working at the Department of Health for the Government of Nunavut.

I'd like to start by saying that if one kid in Kanata committed suicide, there would be a tremendous flurry of activity at every conceivable level. In fact, there would be mobilization in the schools, trauma counsellors coming in, and debriefers debriefing the debriefers.

Policy and training at the Ottawa-Carleton school board level would be looked at. There would be massive meetings with parents and there would be information going home to parents. There would be a large number of people at the provincial level seeing what they could free up for resources and whether they could hold the school board and the school to the standard that is required at times like that. Also, hopefully, the MPs would be working their particular connections to deal with this.

The life of one child in Kanata is worth a great deal. The response to that child shows how much they're worth, how much the community has invested in them, and how much it is concerned about the trauma and the ripple effects of suicide. As I stand here today in Iqaluit, since Nunavut began 102 people have committed suicide—that's 102—and I have never seen any type of mobilization similar to what I described. There are only two organizations—Embrace Life and the Kamatsiaqtut Nunavut crisis line—that exist and are truly concerned about this.

You can imagine how cheap life looks without a mobilization at every conceivable level. It doesn't make it onto the City of Iqaluit's agenda, but potholes and dumps do. It doesn't make it onto the agenda for the school board. They're busy with pencils and how much they're going to pay the guy to take people out on the land. We do not see the infrastructure, the service level, the training, and the dollars. One hundred and two people can die in 16 years, right where we're all sitting today, and there's nothing. There's no coordinated action.

I finally left the Government of Nunavut because in fact the five-year suicide prevention strategy was never funded. It was great for PR, but it was never funded. An inquest actually brought out that fact when one parent was brave enough to agree with the coroner and to call for an inquest. What came out was absolutely dismaying. In the end, I wasn't even provided with the suicide completion statistics, because I might tell someone. I left with my eyes full of tears, but I'm not going to give up, as you can see.

What causes a community like this of only 8,000 people not to be jumping into action the way I described earlier? Part of it is that these suicides come so fast and so often that there's never a chance to grieve one before another one occurs. Because people are interconnected, people from here and also the communities—it could be this region or another region—are grieving. Likewise, there are no supports there.

We have social workers and we think they have suicidology training. We have other caregivers, the mental health workers, and they never studied it in their education.

This is a unique situation, yet ironically it only began in the mid-seventies. As I worked with elders in all four Inuit land claims areas doing research, we spent five days and nights in each of the land claim areas, from the area of the Inuvialuit all the way over to Labrador to the Nunatsiavut area, and they all said the same thing: suicide never occurred among youth. I thought, this is a gem. Why is it that it didn't ever occur? Some conditions were really bad. There was the forced move into settlements for someone's administrative convenience that shut down and gave no role to the males. Even during the hard times, though, it wasn't happening. Why in the seventies?

• (1615)

When it did start happening, the elders admitted they had no tools, because it had never happened before. The government clearly had a clinchhold on the nursing stations, so there wasn't a way to let them in through health boards or for them to sit on health committees to talk about this.

As elders were marginalized more and more, it came to the point where a whole wave of people came north as professionals. This wasn't going on in their families. They, too, did not have the tools, and despite having a lot of training, they were not trained in suicidology. We had a lot of people in senior positions from somewhere else who didn't have this happening, and it wasn't one of their reference points. They had decision-making powers within our government.

The sad thing was that as more and more happened, people began to be so numbed that they really couldn't react anymore. Examples include people saying things like “I don't go to the house anymore. I always did when something occurred” or “I don't want to pick up the phone when it's late at night, because they may just tell me another person died.” People are numbed, so they shut down and they do nothing, and people are on emotional islands with their grief.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your comments.

I wonder if I could just see a show of hands from the audience. Who would like to speak?

I see about five. We really need to keep these comments to about three minutes; otherwise, we're not going to hear from everybody.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Johannes Lampe (President, Nunatsiavut Government): *Nakurmiik.*

My name is Johannes Lampe and I am the president of Nunatsiavut.

I will try to be quick. My chauffeur is waiting, so I'll be quick.

I looked back to our ancestry, to how our grandfathers suffered so much that Inuit are said to be strong and resilient and able to adapt to anything. That is what we did, but times change. We are not what our ancestors used to be.

I believe that our ancestors suffered to the core because of things like relocation when they were removed from their homeland to be taken to communities that they did not know or understand, as well as to residential schools. Young children were taken to schools and left their parents, so their mothers, fathers, and grandparents suffered to the core. When an Inuk suffers, the genes suffer. Our children and our grandchildren today are now suffering to the core, so it continues.

In this day and age major developments are happening. For example, in Labrador the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project is happening. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has made major mistakes in terms of our relocation and residential schooling. I know the Muskrat Falls project also is a big, major mistake that will also cause great damage to the Inuit of Labrador.

Hunters have been made to suffer as their husky dogs have been killed, massacred. Because those were their only ways and means of living out on the land, they again suffered to the core when they lost their husky dogs. They also suffered to the core.

So there are many different factors causing suffering to the core, and also we were not speaking, so we have to connect, communicate, and care about Inuit in all the regions.

I thank you for this time. I have hope and confidence that something will move from this, but the trust has to come from the progress of these hearings.

Nakurmiik.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Johannes.

Mr. Adam Akpik (As an Individual): My name is Adam Akpik, and I'd like to offer my perspective to the honourable vice-chair and member of Parliament David Yurdiga on his question on decolonization, as well as to the rest of the committee.

I found, through my Inuit studies at Nunavut Sivuniksavut, that you can separate decolonization into four different areas. Those would be physical, intellectual, economic, and political. My perspective on decolonization would be finding that middle ground between the societies that indigenous people and Inuit once lived historically and today's market-driven and colonized economy, and for the federal government to support Inuit in the way that they believe that our society will work.

Another thing to touch upon is what Toby said about the lack of mental health workers in the communities. According to Stats Canada statistics from 2006—and I wish I had more updated ones—at that time we had the lowest ratio of physicians, the lowest ratio of registered nurses, and the lowest ratio of psychologists. Although we were above the national average in social workers, many times these are not registered social workers, but they get hired on as social workers anyway. This does not account for or represent the revolving door for these employees who come to the territory. Often there is a revolving door because of a lack of cultural competency and training.

There was a story just last week of a psychiatrist who was due to fly to Clyde River to provide her services, but she had no cultural competency training and she had no contacts, no colleagues to reach in Clyde River. This also doesn't take into account the ripple effect on things such as education; often in our schools, because we don't have this educational psychiatrist, we're not meeting the needs of a lot of our students.

That's what I'd like to say today.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Adam.

I would ask the next witness to state his name.

• (1630)

Mr. Jack I. Anawak (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

I apologize, but when you give us a limit of three minutes, it reminds me of the people who came up for one day, and they were prepared to put a page in the editorial section. If they stayed a week, they were prepared to write a book, as if they knew everything.

Let me give you a bit of a historical perspective from our side. When I was going to school, they told us that in 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered America 500 years ago. We had already been here 4,000 years before that. After that, the whalers came along and almost decimated our whales, the bowhead whales. They almost decimated our muskox.

After that, the Hudson's Bay Company and the missionaries came, and at the same time the government, through those organizations, introduced colonialism. After that, in northern Quebec, they moved some families up to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay, saying that there was better hunting up there. There wasn't. It was for sovereignty reasons.

After that, there were some people who were out camping, and when they came into a community like Iqaluit, the RCMP were ordered to shoot their dogs so they couldn't go back out and they could live in the community. Then we went to Chesterfield Inlet for

residential school, where they wanted to assimilate us. They told us we shouldn't be speaking Inuktitut.

Throughout those years, you can understand why we have had some problems up here, and the highest rate of suicide. I myself have lost three brothers to suicide, yet there are no adequate mental health programs. Not enough money is being put into mental health programs up here. That is the main problem, the main issue. Again, the government has all these nice-sounding programs—suicide prevention, poverty reduction, Nutrition North—but never has the necessary personnel to totally carry them out. All these have not worked as well as they should have, because the people involved have not utilized the people who live up here as much as they should have.

I maintain that the main important thing up here is to provide adequate funding for mental health programs, because there has been so much trauma since Christopher Columbus discovered America that it has piled up.

When I said about 4,000 years, our first nations people had already been here for about 36,000 years—and Christopher Columbus came 520 years ago. When I was a member of Parliament, I always spoke Inuktitut. One of the times I was speaking Inuktitut, a member of the Bloc stood up and said, “Point of order, Mr. Chairman”, and she proceeded to tell the chair that she didn't know what foreign language I was speaking. Those are the kinds of examples. I could hardly wait to stand up and tell her that I always speak Inuktitut. She is speaking French, and I am not speaking English. I can record the history of English and French by a few hundred years, whereas for Inuktitut it is a few thousand years. She got the point.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that.

From the committee, my deep apologies about the limited time. There's a plane leaving, and we're merely trying to hear as many voices as we can before the plane takes off.

Thank you for that.

Welcome.

Ms. Louisa Willoughby (As an Individual): I'm very shy.

I suffer from PTSD because of my past. I used to be able to function and I used to be able to work on a daily basis. I cannot work anymore. I do not have any place I can go to for counselling. I do have one place through my husband's work, but I cannot take that route anymore because there are too many people suffering like me who cannot get help because of their suffering from PTSD. I cannot go for counselling when there's a whole lot more who cannot go for counselling because we're not fully staffed up here. The staff we have through mental health are useless for PTSD. I'm sorry to say that, but they are. They are completely useless.

If you want to prevent suicide from happening, then you have to start with mental health. You have to start educating Inuit people about what PTSD is, because they do not know what PTSD is and they do not know that they're suffering from PTSD. They just think there's something terribly wrong with them, and they can't figure out why.

They not only need to have fully trained staff up here.... I have an option: I can go down south for treatment. I cannot, at this time in my life, go out for treatment, because we have someone in our family who's doing worse than I am, and she has nowhere to turn for help either. She's tried counselling a few times, but she's doing things that she should not be doing because she slowly wants...she wants to commit suicide and she doesn't have the guts to commit suicide, so she's making sure that she's running herself down, big time.

I have an underage drunk at home. I have an underage person at home who is addicted to drugs. We have nowhere to turn for help, because we're not saying the right things that the mental health people want to hear and because we're not doing the right moves that they want us to use. It doesn't work that way.

I have been counselled on and off. I've had to be, just to be able to be here. I can say what I think I need. A lot of people can't.

Mental health needs to be drastically improved. They need to have workers up here for people who do not want to go down south for treatment and who want to be able to be treated up here.

My mornings are getting better. My mornings are getting a whole lot better, but I wake up every morning crying, and I don't know why I'm scared. Honestly, I do not know why I'm scared. I wake up in fear every morning. That has lessened. That have lessened quite a bit. I'm able to get out of the house a lot more now than I used to be able to.

If you honestly want to help us, look at mental health. Don't do these hearings anymore and not do anything about it. We're human beings with souls.

Thank you.

•(1635)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. David Joanasi (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*].

My name is David Tuanasie.

[*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*].

I'm the MLA for South Baffin, representing Cape Dorset and Kimmirut here in Nunavut.

Welcome, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

Since time is of the essence, I'm going to focus on a few things that I hope will help you in your recommendations.

I should say something when the territory has a minister responsible for Nunavut suicide prevention. Our territory set aside \$4.5 million just to address the issue of suicide.

I also want to say kudos to you. I see you've invited some youth to attend this special committee appearance. In speaking with the youth in my communities, I know they want to have a voice. I try to help them. I want to be a voice for them. They have their own voice, of course. They can be loud. I have four children of my own who are loud.

The other thing I wanted to say is that I'm calling for Canada, as a nation, to have a national suicide prevention strategy. Of course Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami has come out with their own strategy specifically for Inuit. If there's a national strategy, we can get the proper support and a cohesive approach from the federal level down to the local level.

There has to be a multi-pronged approach in addressing this issue. The \$4.5 million that the territorial government set aside is doing just that. I have to commend the government for coming out and declaring suicide a crisis in Nunavut. They've assigned the associate deputy minister, who I think has taken on this issue.

It's a big task to take on. The people who are in these positions dealing with suicide on the ground, the front-line workers, need the most support, I'd say.

I also want to say it's unfortunate, as you might have heard, that one of the communities I represent, in Cape Dorset, lost a school last year to a fire. Just recently, in the last week, there was another attempted arson at the only other school in town. These are some of the things we're dealing with on a day-to-day basis, but we have to look at what's underneath the surface of these issues.

Suicide is another thing. I've been told more than once that if we talk about it, it means more people are going to commit suicide. I wholeheartedly disagree with that. I think we need to talk about it and be able to be comfortable in addressing it, as individuals but also as a collective.

I'm glad that you're able to come here and hear from us directly. I hope it means that for those at risk, you can provide some opportunities and some options and help them develop a healthy mind.

Essentially, that's what I wanted to say.

[*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*] Thank you.

•(1640)

The Chair: Thank you, David. It's our privilege to be here, and thanks for your comments and warm welcome.

Mr. Brian Tagalik (As an Individual): Hi. If you could put on your headsets, I'll be speaking Inuktitut here. We didn't have a translator last night.

[*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

Like a general in the middle of a war, I often find myself looking out the window, wondering how I can minimize the casualties of my people. Can you guys not have armed me for this war? These talks and the national outcry from Attawapiskat a few months ago arm us. The money you are delivering to the front-line soldiers such as me arm us to be able to send in infantry and mobilize the communities, and I commend you so much for giving me this opportunity to speak to you, but I would also like to see our words and our voices echoed in our Canadian Parliament Buildings.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Brian.

Would anyone else like to make a remark?

Mr. Emiliano Qirngnuq (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Is there anyone else?

Ms. Caroline Anawak: I'm sorry to be up again, but I didn't get to finish.

We don't have a long way to look for how to get resources and get the infrastructure and the immediate action going. The Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, CASP for short, did a blueprint for a suicide prevention strategy several years ago. I know; I was part of it, but there were many other people.

That particular strategy still exists, and you could look it up. It's called the CASP blueprint. The fact that ITK has come out with their own suicide prevention strategy means you have a couple of things you could look at right away. It isn't like having to start from scratch.

The other thing is that attending several international conferences really opened my eyes to the work that is going on in many countries in the world that all have suicide prevention strategies. Even little Slovenia has one, and we don't. I know the Honourable Bob Rae did his best within the House. I know there have been many speakers on this subject, but with what's going on, we can't afford to not have a strategy. ITK's looks excellent; the CASP blueprint is excellent. I would really encourage you to take a look at both of them, because a great deal of work has been done by the front lines.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is that another hand? Okay. I think this will be our last remark for this afternoon.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: *Qujannamiik.*

I would be remiss if I didn't make a correction to the answer that I provided to the honourable member from Scarborough following the testimony that I made earlier today.

When asked what current programs are working well in our communities, I made a mistake in my response, but in the interest of time and understanding that there's limited opportunity to list all of the amazing work that's being done on the front lines among our regions and in our communities, I'd be very happy to work with the council members of the National Inuit Council to provide a list for your reference in terms of suicide prevention activities and work being done across Inuit nunaat. Again, I put in that encouragement to your recommendation with respect to Truth and Reconciliation call to action number 66, which I had the opportunity to speak more to. On the record I'd like to make that correction.

I pay tribute to all of those individuals—the youth, as well as attendees today—for opening up and sharing their personal stories and perspectives. It is very difficult to do, so I commend each of you.

I did hear a lot about health. Keeping in mind that the health accord is being re-evaluated, one thing not to forget are the transfer payments to our provinces and territories where Inuit reside—in some situations, the majority of the population—and how health is included in that as well.

My apologies for the incorrect information in my quick remarks. I'd be happy to again follow up to the standing committee with the correct information.

Qujannamiik.

The Chair: Thank you for that offer of the full list, Maatalii. We'll take you up on that. Thank you very much.

Thank you to everybody who offered remarks today and to people who sat with us all day long and heard all the testimony starting at 8:30 this morning.

We've had an absolutely wonderful experience in your beautiful community since yesterday and we thank you very much. We're very grateful. You'll hear from us again.

This meeting is adjourned.

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