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—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Please be seated.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are continuing our study of literacy and numeracy support programs in Canada.

Today, we are pleased to welcome Ms. Margo Legault and Ms. Linda Shohet.

[English]

Welcome.

Ms. Margo Legault (Executive Director, Literacy Quebec): Thank you.

Ms. Linda Shohet (As an Individual): Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

As usual, we will have presentations lasting about 10 minutes, and will then go around the table so committee members can ask their questions and make comments.

Who would like to begin?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I will begin.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Shohet: Would you like me to begin with an introduction or remarks?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke): You may begin with your presentation.

The Chair: Begin with your presentation.

[English]

Ms. Linda Shohet: As I am speaking on behalf of the anglophone minority of Quebec, I'm going to present my remarks in English. I've been asked to keep the remarks very brief with the hope that we will have time to explore some of them in more depth during question period.

I bring a long history to this file, because I've been involved in the field for more than 30 years. I was the founder and executive director of the Centre for Literacy, which many people called the pre-eminent

research and resource centre in Canada for many years until we closed in 2015. I've done research and written widely about this topic for a number of years.

I've just completed a study and inventory with Marc Johnson regarding literacy and essential skills, and the needs of minority language populations around literacy and essential skills. We're going to be doing presentations on that two weeks from now, each for our own communities, and then I expect that the office will share the report with people. I'm not at liberty to discuss any of the recommendations, but I will probably draw on some of the findings, because the study has been done in the last six months to a year.

The main message that I bring today is that the literacy and essential skills needs faced by the anglophone community in Quebec are not currently being well met by the services that are there, and that they face a number of barriers—some of them are quite similar to those faced by francophones outside Quebec, but some of them are unique to Quebec.

The large-scale impacts have been felt because of the changes in policy and funding from the federal level in particular, because the minority language groups are very dependent on federal funding that comes through Quebec. Quebec also has—in some ways, I would say—the privilege of having some core funding that goes to its community groups.

Anglophone groups in Quebec get some core funding. It's easy to take that to mask the reality, because the reality behind that core funding is that it's too small to really allow the groups to reach capacity or to serve the populations that they have to serve. I will leave that to Margo to speak about more fully.

I guess the other major impact that's been felt by the minority language community is the same as that has been felt by all the organizations across Canada, and that was the end of core funding for this activity in 2014 by the federal government. It said at that time that it was no longer going to fund research and organizations. It was only going to fund useful projects. What that essentially meant was that 30 years of work across the country was wiped out within a year or two.

Most of the major organizations that provided infrastructure imploded—there are almost none left. There is one that I think you met with last week, Le RESDAC. I still manage to sit on their *conseil d'administration*, but it is on the verge of collapsing as well. I hope that at least its mission will be carried forward.

Almost all of the English groups have disappeared except for one that is just a shell of itself. What it essentially means is that there are no grounds for doing research or providing networking opportunities, or spaces for people to meet and share best practices and knowledge, and so on.

There was also a great loss of collective knowledge and collective wisdom. Internally, what has happened over the past decade is a narrowing of policy focus at the federal level. When literacy first came onto the federal agenda at the end of the 1980s, when the National Literacy Secretariat was founded, there was a very broad vision of adult literacy and adult learning that tied it to citizenship, participation in society, participation in one's family, and participation in the workplace, so it was a very broadly focused vision.

Much of the funding, for many years, that came across the country came to the provinces through agreements that were signed. They were called federal-provincial agreements. There was money transferred to the provinces, but there were also matching funds with the provinces. A lot of the infrastructure, both at national and provincial levels, was based on those federal-provincial agreements.

• (1535)

Those ended in 2007, and the National Literacy Secretariat ended in 2007, and a new entity was created—the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills—which is still in place today.

What happened over that time was that the focus of balance between workplace, family, and community narrowed to be almost exclusively workplace, jobs, and employability. Today, the main focus of work in literacy that has any federal funds attached to it is workplace and employability.

The impact of these changes has been particularly hard felt by the minority language communities, because so much of their funding either came federally or through federal transfers. I hope we'll get a chance to talk about that a bit more.

Quebec has some promising activities going on right now that I hope we'll get to talk about as well. The Quebec government has been putting a lot of emphasis on literacy and skills right now. They've pledged that they're going to raise the levels on the next round of PIAAC international surveys in 2022. We don't know how that's going to affect the minority language community, but there is new money being injected.

I want to say that anglophones, again, have a different profile from our francophone colleagues. We perform better on PIAAC than francophones perform on PIAAC. That doesn't translate into better access to jobs or better access to any of the opportunities that are normally tied to PIAAC scores. The fact that we did better on PIAAC doesn't mean we're doing better overall.

We're a scattered community. We have the bulk of our population in Quebec, but the population has grown in the last few years. We're also a community where the numbers that are counted by Quebec and federally are not the same. Federally, you include the first official language speakers in your numbers of population. In Quebec they recognize only mother-tongue speakers of English. The difference in the numbers that are accepted becomes a difference in the long term in what's potentially available for funding.

I will just end my introductory remarks there and hope that we will come back to talk about some of these things in more detail. I would like to share with you some very specific stories that we heard while collecting data in the last six months, because they give you a portrait of a community that sometimes looks more vital than it is.

I'm going to let Margo talk about her sector, because I think it's a case in point, and then I might want to add something to what you have to say.

The Chair: Thank you, Linda.

We'll listen to Margo now.

Ms. Margo Legault: Thank you very much.

My name is Margo Legault. I am the executive director of Literacy Quebec, and we're the network for English literacy organizations within the province.

Our mission really is to connect and represent community-based literacy organizations. Literacy Quebec and 12 of its member organizations are recognized by the minister of education, and we receive core funding for our programs. It is thanks to this financial support that our network was able to survive the cuts to the federal funding, which Linda explained, but this isn't to say that those effects haven't been felt in our network.

For example, in 2006 the federal-provincial agreements that gave access to IFPCA funding were terminated. Community literacy organizations lost access to a valuable source of funding that allowed for the development of capacity-building projects.

Literacy Quebec has been trying to respond to this gap in support by raising awareness of literacy issues in the province and helping with the recruitment of adults with low literacy levels, assisting in the development of resources and materials, offering professional development opportunities for literacy practitioners, and providing instances of concertation.

That being said, we are working in the context of minority language within the province, and it is not always an easy task. Also, we work with very vulnerable populations where the positive impact that is felt by the people we reach cannot always be measured by graduation levels and employment placement. It can be difficult to quantify the profound effect we can have on an individual's situation. I'm talking about breaking their isolation; empowerment; self-esteem; and the ability to manage one's health, balance a budget, navigate one's surroundings, and even vote.

For literacy organizations working within the context of minority language in Quebec, there are specific challenges that we face. We are responsible for very vast territories. Our 13 member organizations are supposed to cover the entire province, so the province is divided into regions that we cover. Obviously they're not able to provide services throughout the entire region, but have to prioritize and target their interventions.

Also, the funding we receive does not meet our needs, so most of our organizations are working with an average of 1.5 staff members. They also have to restrict the number of hours they're open throughout the week.

Our members create and foster a sense of community among English speakers. They recruit and train volunteers to become literacy tutors, and this not only offers volunteers a valuable opportunity, but it allows them to contribute to the vitality of their community. It also offers a warm, welcoming, and non-judgmental environment for adult learners. They're able to cater the learning to the specific individualized goals and objectives of the individual.

It's important to note also that we do not work in a silo. We believe it's not just up to schools, school boards, and community literacy organizations to improve literacy rates. This is why we're a founding member of a network for literacy. It brings together diverse organizations across the province in an effort to introduce structural measures that address the causes and consequences of low literacy.

Our network was extremely pleased to read about the Liberal Party's recognition of the vital importance of literacy skills in ensuring success in today's society and the understanding of the vital role the non-profit sector plays in both policy development and program delivery.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We will now move on to questions and comments.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Hello. Hi.

I have two questions. It is easy in French, but I will try to ask them in English since you are from an anglophone community.

In Quebec, the anglophone community is not recognized as a minority. Do you think that has an impact on the funding you receive? That is my first question.

• (1545)

[English]

Ms. Linda Shohet: Okay.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The other one you said before is your community is stronger on paper than in reality. Can you explain to me please?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Can I start with the second one?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: If you like.

Ms. Linda Shohet: I'm going to refer back to Margo again. I'll give you two examples, both taken from the study that we recently completed. The first one is that on paper it says that we have referral lines in Quebec, Info-Alpha and Info Apprendre, which are supposed to be *bilingue*. They're bilingual referral lines. They are supported by the Government of Quebec, by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, and run through the Fondation pour l'alphabétisation, the literacy foundation. They have English on their website. When you call you can get English messages and they're supposed to be referring you to more than 600 centres that provide services across the country.

We actually called the director of services there because we wanted to ask in the year preceding this one how many referrals they made through Info-Alpha, which is people at the alpha level. Info Apprendre is adult education more generally. So it could be adult education up to university, CEGEP, etc. They came back to us and said that of 886 calls they had referred from Info-Alpha from April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017, 7% were from anglophones. That translates to 62, and he could not say where they were referred to. He thought they were referred to community organizations, which would have been members of Margo's group, the 13 groups.

I spoke to Margo; she was one of our informants and so were eight of the executive directors. Margo collects data every year from her members, and I asked her, how many did your referrals did your members receive last year from Info-Alpha? She said none. I confirmed this on the way in because I wanted to be sure because it's in my written report and it's in here as well.

I asked them about Info Apprendre. From Info Apprendre, of 1,863 calls during the year 16% were from anglophones, which translates to 298, and they could not say where they were referred. They just said they were referred to appropriate services, but they couldn't track where they were referred to and could not speak to the agencies they were referred to. In the case of the community organizations we could check because they collect that data. So that's one instance.

The other instance probably relates to the network that Margo was talking about, because one of the things that I discovered in talking to the executive directors was that their websites list a large number of activities and services that they offer. I said, "this is very exciting what you're offering". It turns out that in fact they can offer very few of those activities for the very reasons that Margo outlined, they don't have enough resources to do it. So she said they list all the activities they could potentially offer or ever have offered, but they don't offer more than two or three of them in a year and it depends on the needs of the community.

The other thing that I guess was not clear was how many of these services were being offered to adults. The core funding that Margo referred to is offered to community organizations without a lot of strings attached. It's to pursue their own mission, and their mission can be directed to the needs of the community. Again, a number of these organizations were actually offering services such as after-school programs for children, support to youth in the community. Not all of them were offering services to adults, some of them were. Some of them offered workshops once or twice a year because the numbers who came to workshops augmented the numbers that they could report back, because that's one of the measures they report back. Those are maybe two examples.

Does that give you a little bit of a sense of what it means? On paper if you look at it you'd say, these are amazing services, look, they've got these 13 organizations that are core funded and they're offering all of these activities and services. You'd say, look at this they have a referral service that refers people to their services, but the reality is that it doesn't happen. This is true, by the way, of the employability centres as well. There was a study conducted this year not by us, but by youth employment services, looking at the employability centres in Quebec. Of 158 of them, only a small number had the capacity to provide bilingual services.

•(1550)

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you very much for being with us today.

I will ask my question in French, but feel free to answer in English.

You just talked about funding. It used to be workplace, family,
[Translation]

employment skills and the community. Now you receive funding for employment and employment skills only. You lost your funding for the other two components. What impact has that had?

Ms. Linda Shohet: You are asking what impact the loss of funding for the family and community components has had?

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Yes, that's right.

[English]

Ms. Linda Shohet: Federal funds are not being directed towards activities that are addressing family and community needs. Margo pointed out that a lot of the needs around literacy are not solely founded on workplace and employability. There are needs connected to people's access to health. There are needs connected to citizenship. There are needs connected to people's ability to participate in society, new technologies today, the way in which we've structured our activities, including government programs. There are an amazing number of government services today where you are told to go to the website. You get a message that says that if you want more information, go to the website. Well, if people don't have the technological capacity to do that, they are excluded, so there's a lot of exclusion.

If you are no longer directing any of your funds towards the needs of family or community, it means that all of these needs are going unmet except for whatever happens to be met through other sources. An awful lot of people's time—again, in the organizations that we spoke to—was spent trying to raise small amounts of funds. They could be using 50% or more of their time in trying to find money to do the activities they need to do to fulfill the community needs.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You said earlier that a mere shell is all that is left of Literacy Quebec. As I understand it, all the organizations have disappeared.

How many literacy organizations in Quebec have disappeared?

[English]

Ms. Linda Shohet: I need to backtrack a little bit. The shell was not their organization. Before the federal cuts to core funding, there were six national organizations.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Are you talking about national organizations in Quebec?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I am talking about pan-Canadian organizations.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: How many were there in Quebec specifically?

Ms. Linda Shohet: They were not national organizations but pan-Canadian ones.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay.

Ms. Linda Shohet: We use the term “pan-Canadian” because in Quebec “national” refers to Quebec.

[English]

I learned that in 1986. I was appointed to le Conseil supérieur de l'éducation.

Back then, they didn't send things online, so they sent me this huge dossier to prepare, and it was full of discussions of

[Translation]

national policy. I was very naive and thought it referred to Canada.

[English]

I came to the table, and I made a comment about Canadian policy, and the chairperson said,

[Translation]

“Madam, the word 'national' here really means Quebec.”

So let's say there were six pan-Canadian organizations.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

You also said you would like to

[English]

“specific stories”.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Specific stories. Okay. One of them, certainly, was the Info Quebec story.

I want to share a story from the table. The organization called YES, Youth Employment Services, doesn't work in adult literacy. It works around employability, but it regroups all the providers of services. One of the interesting outcomes, I think, of the study we've just completed is that they have expressed an openness to inviting people from the literacy community to sit at their table because they feel that there should be more partnerships. I hope that's something that will eventually come out of it.

At one of these meetings in November that I attended, a colleague who came to the table was bringing news of some new developments at Emploi-Québec—some new policy initiatives—and the documentation had been brought out about a month before. It was only available in French. This woman is, in fact, a francophone, but she sits at the anglophone table as well.

• (1555)

She asked somebody at the table,

[Translation]

“Will that be available in English?”

[English]

“No,” she was told. When she wondered why, another person at the table said, “We didn’t think about it.” Now, that’s an interesting anecdote, because there’s no malice or mal-intent: “We didn’t think about it.”

Just out of interest, I’ll mention the findings of a study by YES of the employability centres. They conducted the study last summer in five regions of Quebec. It was outside of Montreal. They were looking at regions where there wouldn’t necessarily be a large anglophone community. The findings were in Quebec City and the surrounding region. There were 56 employment centres, and one was English and eight were bilingual. In the Gaspésie, of 31 centres, one was English and three were bilingual. The bilingual centres didn’t always have someone who was able to provide adequate English services. Even saying they were *bilingue* didn’t mean they could provide services. The anglophones we interviewed in the Gaspé and a couple of the remote regions talked about having to go for employment services and taking somebody with them to act as their translator. There was a lot of conversation.

The other story I think about is perhaps a little bit more in relation to your question. On the website of a lot of the government programs in Quebec, there is some English. On some there is none. But because there is none, it doesn’t mean that anglophones don’t have access to the funding. Anglophones can apply for the funding, but everything has to be done *en français*.

The Chair: Thank you, Linda.

Next I will go to François.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you very much for being here. I see that you are very passionate.

First, I understand that the Centre for Literacy closed in 2015 because there was no more funding after 2014. Now there is Literacy Quebec.

Ms. Margo Legault: We’ve been around for 30 years.

Mr. François Choquette: You’ve been around, but I mean—

Ms. Margo Legault: We were both working in Quebec.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

When the Centre for Literacy existed, what was the difference in your roles? How did its goals and objectives differ from those of Literacy Quebec? That’s the first question.

Second, you said a lot about the fact that there’s a problem when there is bilingual service, because we often forget about one of the

languages. We know that also, because with French there is the same problem. We have something that we call

[Translation]

“by and for”

[English]

“by and for” the community. What do you think about the importance of “by and for” also for the English Quebec community?

Ms. Margo Legault: For Literacy Quebec, we offer support to community-based literacy organizations. At the time when the Centre for Literacy was around, they would give us valuable insight into research and these types of things, whereas we’re more on the ground in terms of offering support to literacy practitioners. When the Centre for Literacy closed, it was a very huge loss. There was an infrastructure there that allowed for looking at the field of literacy in a much broader scope. We’re very much focused on community-based literacy.

For the question on bilingualism, Literacy Quebec represents community literacy organizations within the province. A lot of the work we do is, first of all, raising awareness about what literacy is, how it affects people in their daily lives, and the fact that we’re an English literacy organization that provides services. Oftentimes, when you’re talking about vulnerable populations, when they finally have that level of trust and the bond that’s been created with the community literacy organization, we become their first point of contact for anything. If they have a problem with their lease agreement or if they have problems accessing health or social services, they come to us. We help them with the English side of getting services.

I’ll pass it on to Linda.

• (1600)

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think Margo made a very good start.

First of all, we were one of the pan-Canadian organizations; there were six. Margo was with a provincial organization. There were two levels of organizations in the country. She represents service providers, works with and supports service providers. Her organization is an umbrella that regroups the service providers that are in the community, on the ground. That’s what they’re funded for.

We were a research and resource centre. We didn’t do the same thing at all.

Mr. François Choquette: Nobody is doing the Centre for Literacy work right now.

Ms. Linda Shohet: No, that’s not happening anywhere in the country now.

Mr. François Choquette: It’s a vacuum. It’s missing for the community.

Ms. Linda Shohet: It’s missing for the country, yes.

Mr. François Choquette: Have you been invited for March 19 and 20, for the ESDC consultation with communities about literacy and essential skills? I know they are doing some communication with the francophones, but have you been invited?

Ms. Margo Legault: Yes, we’ve been invited to that consultation.

Mr. François Choquette: What are you going to tell them? Can you give me a resumé of what you need?

Ms. Margo Legault: Linda will be presenting the findings of her research, which will have an inventory of what is going on in English literacy within Quebec. I think an infrastructure is essential. Opportunities to consolidate the field are needed. Also, opportunities to develop best practices and have this research component that was lost would be very valuable.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Excellent.

[English]

When we heard from RESDAC last week, they were saying that they don't want to rebuild exactly as it was. There may be a new way to conduct something like the Centre for Literacy...something different. I just want to know if you are in communication with the RESDAC and if you have been.... I know that you were a member of—

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Shohet: I am still a member.

[English]

The Chair: Can you make it short? I have to go to the next one.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes.

Are you in communication with the RESDAC?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I am, yes, because I'm a member of their board.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, you're on the board.

Ms. Margo Legault: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thanks for coming, Ms. Shohet and Ms. Legault. It's so refreshing for me, being an Acadian from northern New Brunswick, to hear the exact same problem for the anglophones of Quebec.

I heard in your introduction, Ms. Shohet, that there are 13 organizations in Quebec for literacy. Can you briefly come back to that?

Ms. Linda Shohet: That was Margo.

Ms. Margo Legault: Yes. We have 12 member organizations that receive core funding from the Ministry of Education for English literacy.

Mr. René Arseneault: You said it was almost impossible to focus everywhere on the Quebec territory. You had to target some regions more than others. Coming from a very rural area...and just to give you a picture, my riding looks like the Gaspé coast. The majority are francophone.

• (1605)

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): But better.

Mr. René Arseneault: I didn't say that.

There are some very strong but small pockets of anglophone communities. For communities like the Gaspé coast or Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, do you see a difference in literacy between an English community in an urban area like Montreal versus an English community in Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine or in the Gaspé Peninsula?

Ms. Margo Legault: Definitely in the urban context there is a density of population there. But it is very difficult, no matter if you're in a rural or urban context, to reach adults with low literacy levels. I would say that the way in which they respond is very different. In the rural context, two of my members are starting to look at setting up satellite hubs. They're not able to travel, so they have their headquarters, and then they're looking to different school boards and community organizations to train people so that they're able to offer literacy. They're sharing the knowledge, because they cannot physically travel across the territory. They're finding ways of offering services and reaching out to people who are far away.

Mr. René Arseneault: In remote areas.

Ms. Margo Legault: Yes, exactly.

Mr. René Arseneault: All the English communities in the urban Montreal area have their big institutions: college paper, daily paper, university hospital, etc. Port-Daniel on the far east of the Gaspé coast is far from those institutions. Between you and me, when we speak about literacy that's a way to put a stop to the assimilation. The assimilating forces are a lot stronger at Port-Daniel compared to Montreal's English communities.

Ms. Margo Legault: Yes, we're seeing that. There is a difficulty in promoting and raising awareness through media, even in Montreal. In a lot of the suburbs or the municipalities, their newsletter no longer has an English component. Some of them have just one back page. Even our members within Montreal are having difficulty disseminating information. It's an ongoing issue.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Not only that, even in terms of disparity, if you look at the vitality surveys that are done every couple of years, the one that was done in 2015 showed anglophones living in the eastern part of Montreal have great difficulty accessing services. It depends what part of Montreal you're located in, whether there's a density of services and access. If you're in certain parts of Montreal you are also quite cut off.

Mr. René Arseneault: Would you say that the need for literacy is the same or alike whether you're from the Montreal urban area or far east in the Gaspé Peninsula?

Ms. Margo Legault: Not that they're alike, but I believe there is a myth that, if you're in an urban centre, minority languages are not maybe as prevalent an issue. They still are. We're seeing that. Even our centres in Montreal are having great difficulty accessing regular media to find ways of reaching anglophones and promoting their services.

Mr. René Arseneault: In the weaknesses concerning literacy, the fact that you're living in an urban or a rural area is irrelevant.

Ms. Margo Legault: Not irrelevant but the intensity can be different.

Ms. Margo Legault: Even citizens on the Island of Montreal tell me that depending on where they live they have difficulty going to their local library and finding books in English. You wouldn't think of that, but it does happen. It goes back to what Linda is saying, the English community is very strong on paper, but when you look at in reality on the ground there are still challenges.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Maybe the other piece in the larger urban area is that we have immigrants seeking English services. Politically they are going through *francisation* programs; they're in French services.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: They have no choice.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Yes. But for many of them their first or second language is English. So they are still coming for services in English at the same time; it's very complicated.

One of the arguments that a lot of the English organizations have made is that if they deal with second-language speakers in English they transfer those skills to French. They're still integrating into Quebec. They are still becoming part of Quebec. If you're serving people in the language they're most comfortable in initially and supporting them, they make that transition. You become part of the solution, not part of the problem.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shohet.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): I will give my time to Mr. Lefebvre.

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Madame Shohet, thank you for being here. You are very interesting.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Thank you for the invitation.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: In 2014, when the federal government cut the funding, they said they were only going to be funding useful projects.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Useful projects, that's right.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Those were the words you used.

Ms. Linda Shohet: No, those were Jason Kenney's words, not mine.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay, sorry.

Do you believe your organization that was cut was getting the results you set out to achieve?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I want to give a nuanced answer to that.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Sure.

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think that things could have been done better than they were being done at the time. I think we were at a point pan-Canadian, where we had recognized that. We were working toward building a new kind of collaborative model. We were working

[*Translation*]

through languages.

[*English*]

We were doing a lot of collaboration across language groups, CDÉACF, RESDAC, the centre, HPD. We were sitting together around a table and talking about how we could work more collaboratively.

From my own point of view, was the Centre for Literacy getting results that we wanted? We were getting pretty good results. Was the entire sector getting all the results we wanted? I think we were getting some; they weren't as good as they could have been. They could be better, and we were trying to get there.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you. That's one of the main things, too, how we get the data.

Ms. Linda Shohet: How do you get there?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: How do we evaluate the data, and based on that data, how do we improve?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Yes, I agree.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I think that's what was kind of missing, Do you agree with me?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Data gathering and evaluating...

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think it's probably deeper than what we could discuss here.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay.

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think, at least part of the problem that existed in the sector was created by federal interventions.

The federal government was pushing organizations to say that they had to be addressing jobs and employability in order to get literacy funding. All of the organizations, whether it was part of their mission or a mandate or not, began to insert that into their proposals that came in, and then after three or four years, people at the federal government said, "Well, you all look like you're doing the same thing."

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Same thing.

Ms. Linda Shohet: But the language was language that had been provided to us by the federal funders.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That's interesting.

Ms. Linda Shohet: I could do a whole other analysis. It's not that simple.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I guess, to be pragmatic here and be practical, what specific action can the federal government do today to help literacy in English Quebec?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I'm going to pick up what Mr. Choquette said before. I don't think that what comes next is going to look like what came before. I think what came before is gone. I think that there needs to be, at least, some kind of effort to try not to lose some of what still exists, because there's an awful lot that's been lost that is still needed, and it's not there.

If there's something that can be salvaged, I think it should be salvaged, but I think, right now, you probably need to work with some of the networks and structures that already exist in the provinces. Certainly in Quebec, there are several organizations that already have networks, structures, and trust, and I think that if somehow you can bring together some of those collaboratively, you could probably build a new kind of infrastructure that maybe didn't need the same forms of support that we saw in the past.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

Interestingly for Quebec, I think it may have been Margo Legault or Madam Shohet who alluded in opening remarks to the province changing a bit and being more open. Certainly, they named a Minister of—

Ms. Linda Shohet: That's correct.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: —English Services? Madam Weil.

Ms. Linda Shohet: William Floch is the director.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What are your thoughts? How can this help you and maybe provincial-federal relations when it comes to funding?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think that it's a very positive move, and I would hope that it would give some openings for some renewed federal-provincial dialogue, some of which hasn't happened that much in the last few years. I see that as one of the opportunities.

•(1615)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That's something that your organization, Madam Legault, would want to see this new ministry support, certainly, English literacy in Quebec. How could you do that?

Ms. Margo Legault: Madam Weil had some consultations in rural areas, and our members participated to explain the situation of English speakers in their areas. We see it as a very positive step, and it allows us to voice our concerns to a specific advocate.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I want to ask you again, just to make sure, because this committee will be providing a report to the minister responsible. What would you like to see as a recommendation in the report to the minister?

Ms. Margo Legault: Do you want to start?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I'm not going to go into great detail because some of the recommendations that I think we've been making are coming in the report that we're preparing for the the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, and we're doing that in two weeks. They asked me not to share the recommendations.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Once they're public, can we then...

Ms. Linda Shohet: Of course, but it does link back to what I said. I think that there are some entities inside the province. Margo's is the one most directly dealing with literacy. The school boards.... There's a network of community learning centres in Quebec that is very important now to the population of Quebec, and they've got 86 centres across the province in different schools. They're very well located, very trusted, and they have expertise. They haven't been able to do much with adults and adult literacy in the last few years because there hasn't been funding to support it. They've already got infrastructure, so again, if you can build the partnerships with providers, with the school boards, there are already various pieces in place that right now are just very isolated.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go now to Alupa.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and *bonjour*, Mesdames. Thank you for being here with us this afternoon.

I want to emphasize on this side that if you have any recommendations you want included in our report, you can always send them in written form to the committee.

I met with Jean-Marc Fournier a month and a half ago, and I was asking him if Quebec directly helps francophone groups outside Quebec and across Canada. I was wondering if there are any provinces outside Quebec that send money to the English groups in Quebec to help you.

Ms. Linda Shohet: From other provinces?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes. Do you have this sort of relationship?

Ms. Linda Shohet: We have from the federal government, but not from other provinces—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's interesting. Okay. Even when there's some religious affiliation or other affiliation? There are no funds at all from anybody?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Not—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Not the province itself, or the government, but it could be another group.... There's no transfer of help in terms of people, money, or resources.

Ms. Linda Shohet: There was participation, but not help.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay. Participation...?

Ms. Linda Shohet: For example, the Centre for Literacy used to run an annual institute every year. Every province in the country sent representatives, and they paid to go.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I understand.

Ms. Linda Shohet: It wasn't free. They paid to go, but I wouldn't call that giving us money, because there was a service. There was a learning exchange there. They did participate and they did collaborate with us, but also, the centre wasn't considered a Quebec organization.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Ms. Linda Shohet: It was funded as a pan-Canadian one. That's what I said. Margo's is a Quebec—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I think it could be a positive avenue. It should be that way. It would be fair, you know, because there are nine, with one bilingual province, of course, which is Quebec.... You have eight anglophone provinces, which should take care of the anglophones in Quebec, I think.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Well, nobody has broached it yet.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I'll talk to them about it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I have another question, which is similar to the one that Mr. Arseneault asked. There are some alarmists, sovereignists, who will say that in Montreal the French are disappearing and English are taking more and more land, but I want to touch on numeracy on the Island of Montreal. You said that in the whole province of Quebec numeracy for minority English groups is deteriorating. Is that the case for English speakers in Montreal? Is there a difference between English speakers on the Island of Montreal and the rest of the province of Quebec in terms of numeracy performance?

•(1620)

Ms. Linda Shohet: Do you want to speak to that, Margo?

Ms. Margo Legault: It's something that I'd have to research.

Ms. Linda Shohet: I'm going to say honestly that I have not looked specifically at the numeracy numbers.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: If you could, I would really appreciate—

Ms. Linda Shohet: I could certainly do that, but—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: —seeing that kind of analysis.

Ms. Linda Shohet: —I'm not prepared to answer that today, because I haven't looked at it that closely.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay.

Ms. Linda Shohet: I also found it interesting that you were calling this literacy and numeracy, because usually in this country they talk about literacy and essential skills. It's very unusual to see literacy and numeracy.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay. I used the words that the committee put forward.

Ms. Linda Shohet: They do it in other countries, but it's not common here. They do it in Europe.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: You can see that there are a lot of immigrants coming to Montreal, thank God, and a lot of them will speak English, naturally. Learning French is a big step for them. I'm just wondering how they are doing in terms of numeracy and literacy. Also, how does it help the minority English groups on the Island of Montreal? If you have any information about that, it would be great for us to know.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Again, I'm very happy to go back and look at it, but I don't feel that right now I have enough knowledge to speak to that.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay. Still speaking specifically on the numeracy phenomenon, you said that English groups are disappearing in Quebec. Is this also the case for numeracy English groups in other provinces? Are there numeracy English groups in other provinces?

Ms. Linda Shohet: I'm not sure I understand....

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: In the other provinces, are there groups whose purpose is to improve the literacy and numeracy of anglophones?

[English]

Well, I guess not....

Ms. Linda Shohet: Are you talking about the performance of anglophones in other parts of the country?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes. Do they have numeracy groups or associations, organizations, or governmental programs?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Yes, in every province.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Do you mean like Margo's organization? Yes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay. Those groups are government organizations—

Ms. Linda Shohet: No, they're—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: —in other provinces. Are they well funded? Are they working efficiently?

Ms. Linda Shohet: They tend to be funded through government. Is that what you're asking? Yes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Are some of them closing their doors or not?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Many of them did close their doors after the federal funding ended.

Literacy Alberta closed its doors. Ontario—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Do you mean the provincial government won't even fund it in their own language?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Not sufficiently.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see. That's surprising.

Ms. Linda Shohet: There was not enough to stay open in Ontario. Essential Skills Ontario, which would have been the Ontario coalition, closed its doors.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, it closed its doors. Many of them did.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Why so?

Ms. Linda Shohet: They did not have money, because a lot of their infrastructure money was transferred federally. It was federal money that kept those pieces going. All these coalitions that were set up in the different provinces had mainly federal money. The provinces put in something, but it wasn't sufficient.

[Translation]

It was necessary, but not sufficient.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you for your presentations.

[Translation]

I really enjoyed them.

[English]

They give us another lens to look through so that we can get a better understanding of what the status is.

I just want to make sure I understand. At one point it was said that the core funding was eliminated, and then you said there was still core funding. Can you distinguish that? Is that provincial or federal?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Margo's group gets core funding from the education ministry in Quebec.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's provincial.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Right; that's provincial. It is the only province that provides core funding of that kind, so this is unique. It's not for anglophones; it's for about 185 groups in Quebec.

Ms. Margo Legault: Yes, there are 127 literacy organizations, and 13 of them are English.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Secondly, you made a comment that the minorities were hit the greatest with the cutbacks. Can you explain that?

Ms. Linda Shohet: Yes. That's because the minority populations didn't have a lot of other resources to draw on. When these cuts came, it meant that in fact a lot of what they were doing simply didn't continue any longer. That was the main source of funding for their activity, so that's the impact it had. They didn't have other sources.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's always going to have a greater impact on minorities.

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think so.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I just wanted you to expand on that.

When the former minister said they were only going to fund useful projects, how did that make you feel, the people on the ground?

Ms. Linda Shohet: We were not overjoyed. It felt insulting, in fact, because what they're saying indirectly is that nothing we have done is useful, that we're not providing any useful service or support of any kind, so they're not directing any money our way.

Mr. Darrell Samson: How have the changes to targeted funding improved services for minority groups?

Ms. Linda Shohet: They haven't.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Why not?

• (1625)

Ms. Linda Shohet: It's almost ad hoc. If you actually look at the projects that have been funded, first of all, you've probably been told that a lot of the monies allocated by Treasury Board to the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills in fact haven't been expended, so there is money that gets left unused every year in literacy and essential skills. That's number one.

Secondly, it's not directed specifically to minority language groups. Probably RESDAC and COFA have already indicated this to you, but in the last years of the previous government, and I don't know how much has changed since then, a lot of the monies that used to be designated *pour et par* started to be disbursed to other groups and were no longer coming to the minority groups and minority organizations.

The government said, "Oh, we didn't say it had to go to those groups; we said that they had to be serving the minority language population." So if a group from somewhere else came in and said that 10% of what they were going to do in their project would serve the minority language group, they took some of the monies that were designated for minority language group projects and put it into the pot that went to that project.

There has been a subtle erosion of the funds.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: You said there were cuts in 2014 and 2006.

[English]

Ms. Linda Shohet: Right.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: You mentioned 2006.

[English]

In 2006, what came in?

Ms. Linda Shohet: In 2006, there was a big policy shift. In 2007, the National Literacy Secretariat was replaced by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Did that help or cause a problem?

Ms. Linda Shohet: That caused more difficulty because it narrowed the focus even more than it had been before.

That's also when the federal-provincial agreements ended. They didn't end in 2014; they ended in 2007. There has not been a federal-provincial agreement since 2007.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: We have a saying in minority communities that means when money is tight, the minorities are the ones who suffer. We say that when there is less water in the lake, the animals who drink from it look at each other differently.

It is clear that we have been suffering more since 2007, and we have to remember that the Conservatives were in power in 2007 and in 2014 when the cuts were made. So there is some work to be done.

Thank you.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Let us move on to Mr. Généreux now.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ladies.

There were cuts or policy changes because the way organizations are funded has been changed and funding is now provided per project. Last week, departmental officials told us they are reviewing that because of what has happened with the literacy and skills development network, the *Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences*, or RESDAC.

Ms. Shohet, you have been in the field for 30 years. What impact has the change in the funding method had that was made two or three years ago? What has it changed on the ground?

[English]

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think some of it was very subtle. Some of it has been addressed in the answer to previous questions.

As the federal policy narrowed and changed and they began to demand that organizations focus their work that way, it changed the nature of the work that organizations were doing. You began to say, well, I can't do that project; I can't do a family literacy research project because they're not going to fund it. You would look to see if there was somewhere else you could get support to do that. If there was, then perhaps you would go there. If there wasn't, then you would move that off the agenda.

Margo talked a little bit about something that we haven't addressed today, and that is that over those same years, because of the results from the international surveys, the federal government began to focus on people who were at level 3. It said you need be at level 3 to function well in our society, and it began to tell organizations that their projects that were going to be funded had to be addressing people who could be moved from level 2 to level 3 fairly quickly. People in literacy organizations on the ground will tell you that this was excluding people in the greatest need. That is, people who had the most needs, the most gaps, and who needed the most intervention, couldn't be served because they weren't going to meet that criterion.

•(1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Last week, I tried to get a clear answer to a very simple question. I asked whether it was in response to a political order that core funding had been replaced by funding per project, and the lady who was here said she was not in the job at that time.

In your opinion, was the change from core funding to funding per project made in response to a political order? In my view, it is important to know whether the government of day made that decision. There have been consequences and we can talk about them, but if public servants made that decision without the necessary political authority, that is something we should know.

Can you tell us whether it was a political order or not?

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Shohet: I think it was internally that it was decided. Overall—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: The decision was made by public servants.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Shohet: —there has been a move away from—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I asked whether it is really possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the funding, or what evaluation tools were used to conclude that it was no longer effective and that led to the decision to make the change. Other departments still have core funding.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Are they saying that core funding is no longer effective and that funding per project is preferable?

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Shohet: I'm going to say I don't think we had good or adequate measures to be able to say that. I don't think we had the measures right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I heard you say earlier that life is one thing, but reality is another, and that the data is not that convincing. It is easy to spin the numbers.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That is the truth.

That is all that for me.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I'd like to thank you very much, Linda and Margo, for this presentation, for the exchange that we had with you on behalf of the committee.

Ms. Linda Shohet: Thank you very much for the invitation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will suspend for a few minutes.

[The committee continued in camera.]

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