



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 097

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Thursday, February 1, 2024



Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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

Thursday, February 1, 2024

• (0820)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Committee members, the clerk has advised me that the witnesses' sound has been tested, as has that of Mr. Van Bynen, who is appearing remotely, so we're ready to begin.

I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting 97 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on June 13, the committee is continuing its study on intergenerational volunteerism.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members and witnesses are appearing in the room and virtually.

I remind all members that you can choose the official language of your choice by using interpretation in the room. Those appearing virtually, simply look for the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface and click on the language of your choice. If there's an interruption in translation, please get my attention and we'll suspend while it's being corrected. I remind members, for the benefit of the translators, to please keep your phones as well as your headpiece away from the mic, at a distance from the mic. It does create popping, which can cause harm to the translators. As well, if you could just speak as slowly as possible most of the time, it does help the translation.

Direct all questions through me, the chair. Wait until I recognize you. To get my attention, please raise your hand if you're in the room or use the "raise hand" icon on your Surface to get my attention.

Now I would like to present the witnesses for this morning's meeting, with a particular welcome to Ms. MacKenzie. Ms. MacKenzie was scheduled before Christmas, and there were some issues with scheduling, so I do appreciate her accommodating our schedule.

As I indicated, Sharon MacKenzie is the executive director of i2i Intergenerational Society of Canada. We have Kascha Cassaday from Cyber-Seniors: Connecting Generations, executive director. From One City Peterborough, we have Christian Harvey, executive director. All are appearing by video conference.

We will begin with Ms. MacKenzie, but first Ms. Gray has a point of order.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here.

Just before we begin, there's a little business that I feel we need to attend to. During our last meeting this week, the chair adjourned the meeting without following committee rules, and I would like to bring to attention, from the committee rules—this is chapter 20 on pages 785 to 787—and I'll just read it:

The committee Chair cannot adjourn the meeting without the consent of a majority of the members, unless the Chair decides that a case of disorder or misconduct is so serious as to prevent the committee from continuing its work.

I will say that at the last committee the instance was not happening—we were simply discussing a motion on housing—and so I just want to express my dissatisfaction on that, especially considering the important motion that we were discussing together.

The Chair: Thank you for bringing it to my attention.

Ms. Falk, go ahead.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

On that same point of order, I as well just want to express my disappointment. MP Wayne Long's motion to adjourn was moved before 5:30 p.m., and the motion wasn't put to question either.

Chair, you did adjourn the meeting without hearing the point of order from MP Gray, which would have signalled that there was division: It wasn't a unified decision to adjourn. There was division on that issue, and that wasn't addressed.

I understand that Liberal members may have felt very uncomfortable with the meeting that we had, and they did evidently seem to be filibustering to avoid further discomfort or feeling that discomfort, but I just want to say that it's important for all of us on this side of the table to know that the chair of the committee, which is you, will still follow the proper procedure and practice in a meeting, so that we can continue to have confidence in you as chair moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Ferreri.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to add to what my colleagues have said, speaking in support of them, I think, Mr. Chair, you've shown yourself to be a fairly reasonable chair. I think this was just a one-off situation, and I think it would be great to hear from you as to why, to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

I think it's really important that we're all getting opportunities to use our voices. That's what we're elected to do. That's the point of democracy, so I would just echo the same sentiments and, obviously...that we respect the procedure and practice in following the rules.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Aitchison, did you have your hand up?

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): I did, Mr. Chair.

I could reiterate everything that's been said by these amazing ladies. I do reiterate that, but I also want to say to the witnesses who are here that I'm sorry we've had to do a little business at the beginning of this meeting. We are obviously frustrated by what happened at the last meeting.

It's important to make sure we are talking about one of the most pressing issues in the country right now, and that's the housing crisis, so I want to thank the witnesses. I'm sorry we've delayed things a little bit just to get started, but it's important for us to get that on the record and make sure Canadians get the service they deserve out of this committee in addressing one of the issues that is most pressing in the country, which clearly is the housing crisis, so thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aitchison.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have your hand up.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to clarify something. Was there only a minute left or less than a minute left prior to our adjournment time?

The Chair: My clock was telling me we had exceeded 5:30; we were just beyond 5:30.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: However, I will take the points raised.

● (0825)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: If your clock is at 5:30, on ParlVu that's not synced, so that might be something that needs to be synced going forward.

The Chair: Yes. ParlVu does not dictate. It is the clock here. The clock in the room is not accurate either.

Thanks for your comments. I will take the comments under advisement, so thanks for those.

We will begin with a five-minute opening statement from Ms. MacKenzie.

Ms. MacKenzie, you have the floor.

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie (Executive Director, i2i Intergenerational Society of Canada): Good morning, and an early one it is indeed, out here in B.C.

First of all, I really thank the committee for choosing this particular topic—it's very timely. I also thank all of you for the invitation to present.

I've worked for over two decades in the field of intergenerational work across Canada from coast to coast to coast, and it was started by my interest in intergenerational activity. I started the Meadows School project in 2000—until 2010—in B.C., where I moved my elementary school class into a makeshift classroom in a senior care home for two and a half months, much to the eyebrow-raising of all the people in the community.

I went there thinking that I would break down stereotypes, but indeed what I found—after the two and a half months, and then subsequent to that on a weekly basis, when we connected with the seniors for an afternoon or a morning for the rest of the school year—was that the power of intergenerational connecting was unbelievable. As a result of that, I became a principal resource writer in the field for the Public Health Agency of Canada, several governments across Canada, local not-for-profits and so on.

Our work was actually recognized by the World Health Organization, because what it really brought to light was how powerful bringing two generations together is when it's intentional and there are fun and respectful activities.

I'm finding “intergenerational volunteerism” an interesting combination of terms. What I'd like to talk about this morning is the fact that “intergenerational”, in itself, when you have seniors coming together with younger people and having relationships, is incredibly powerful. I know we can help each other and do various things in the volunteer network, but what is really important to me is the fact that by having seniors and young people come together, we actually create a desire to be a volunteer. Instead of saying, “It's required that you volunteer at high school a certain number of hours,” you have that opportunity to say, “I want to be a volunteer,” and that really is a sustainable situation, then, for volunteers across the country as the years go forward.

What we found in the Meadows School project and, honestly, in all research that comes out of the intergenerational field, is that it improves health right across the board—mental, social, emotional and physical health. Any of you in the room who have a relationship with an older person or with a much younger person will know that the connection is very powerful and really fulfills so many of our needs as human beings. As a result of that—and with this being about government, taxpayers and so on—it's wonderful, because that saves money. When you have people who can actually connect with one another, break down isolation and loneliness, and talk over what seems to be huge trauma—which may be something that can come from just having somebody to connect to—all those kinds of things put less pressure, not only on the health care system but also on social justice and policing systems.

I have these funny little glasses that I usually put on when I'm presenting, and I ask you this morning to take an intergenerational view of what we're trying to do in Canada, in terms of connecting people and making more resilient communities.

On a very regular basis we're contacted by an absolutely amazing array of people across Canada, wanting to know how they can fit intergenerational activity into their field. That's everything from the Alzheimer Society to hospice, to the Arthritis Society, and to housing projects, schools or care homes. It's amazing where the requests have come from and the work that we've done over the years with our society, assisting people.

It's very interesting too that a lot of the things that come out of that, which are webinars and resources that the people in a particular organization create, get tucked away under the umbrella of that organization, and other people don't really have access to them. They're wonderful ideas that we could share and either copy or use some kind of a mutation of to make them work for our own communities.

What I have to say to the committee, which I would really like the Government of Canada to hear, is that we're at a point now, with intergenerational relationships and the interest in them across Canada, when we really need to have core funding from the federal government to create an intergenerational hub. That hub would be like an umbrella for all the different factors.

I mean, we all age. Everybody's aging. It doesn't matter what your background is or where you're coming from; all of us are aging, and it's one thing that can tie so many splinter groups and separate groups together in a general focus.

● (0830)

We all go through ages and stages where we're all lonely, and we all find that there are times when things are not going well in our lives. When you can connect with somebody from another generation and really feel that you have a friend, somebody who listens to you and sees you, I think that's very productive.

What would that hub look like? I'm hoping you'll ask some questions later on so that I can—

The Chair: Could you bring your comments to a conclusion shortly, please?

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: Yes, I certainly can. I wasn't sure what time we started. I was all set for 5:15, so I'm sorry. I didn't look at my clock.

That is my pitch. It's to have a real focus on intergenerational work, and we have a wonderful model that we've been using in New Brunswick for the last four years that we could spin off to do something like that.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. MacKenzie. You have the opportunity during the questions part to elaborate on your comments.

Ms. Cassaday, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Kascha Cassaday (Executive Director, Cyber-Seniors: Connecting Generations): Thank you for having me here. My

name is Kascha Cassaday. I am the executive director and one of the co-founders of Cyber-Seniors.

Cyber-Seniors is a non-profit that was founded in 2015. Our mission is to bridge the digital divide and connect generations using technology. We envision a world with digital equity, where everyone has access to technology and the skills to use it.

Cyber-Seniors provides tech training for older adults using an intergenerational volunteer model. Teens and young adults are trained as digital mentors through lessons and learning activities, and older adults are provided with tech training and partnered with these volunteers, enabling them to practise what they have learned. The results are enriched intergenerational communities that keep both the older adults and the young people socially connected and engaged.

Cyber-Seniors programs are delivered both in person and virtually. By offering both of these options, Cyber-Seniors is able to ensure that high-risk, vulnerable older adults are kept connected and remain self-sufficient even if they are unable to leave their homes as a result of disease outbreak, lack of transportation or physical limitations.

A 2020 Government of Canada study demonstrated that there is a significant increase in subjective feelings of isolation among older adults in rural communities compared to those residing in urban communities. Social isolation and loneliness are serious public health risks as they concurrently increase the risk of depression, anxiety, mortality, rehospitalization, falls and dementia among older adults.

The Cyber-Seniors intergenerational model for training older adults has been proven to be highly effective. While older adults are experiencing increased levels of digital equity, the young people helping them are learning valuable transferable skills. On a collective level, the program provides a significant boost of feelings of community enrichment and inclusion. Many young people who have participated in a Cyber-Seniors program feel as though their place in the community is validated through their participation.

In the past three years, we have supported tech training for over 25,000 older adults and have accommodated over 280,000 attendees in tech training sessions. We also have trained over 5,000 volunteers to work as tech mentors. We are invested in this issue, and I thank you for inviting us today, because we've seen a number of issues that sometimes make it difficult not only for young people but for older adults to participate in programs such as ours.

One issue is that youth, especially right now, are torn between work opportunities and volunteering. A volunteer experience might be more rewarding and provide more experience, but many would not and can't pass up the opportunity to earn money.

Also, transportation is a major factor for participating in person a lot of the time, not only in our program but in any kind of volunteer space. Youth and older adults don't typically have access to reliable transportation. They might rely on public transportation like ride-sharing, taxis and public transportation, but all of these can be out of their budgets.

On recognition for youth, again, when our young people are volunteering, to some extent they're doing it because they have to for school, or if they want to do it, they're doing it for some sort of accreditation. We have varying degrees of training and have certificates that we offer young people. They take them and put them in their applications for school and for work experiences. However, youth are always looking for federally recognized certificates that employers and schools will recognize during application processes.

Of course, there's also the economic benefit of volunteering, and without consistent funding and support for volunteer management and operational costs, organizations struggle to support their biggest economic benefit, which is their volunteers.

Thank you very much. I do have points as to how those types of issues can be accommodated and solved, hopefully, but I will leave it there.

• (0835)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cassaday.

We go now to Mr. Harvey for five minutes, please.

Mr. Christian Harvey (Executive Director, One City Peterborough): Thank you so much for having me here. I'm the executive director of One City Peterborough, a multiservice non-profit in Peterborough, Ontario, with a large range of programs supporting those experiencing homelessness and/or criminalization. Our programs are diverse, but what unites them is a vision of a community where everyone belongs and together we flourish. This vision is not possible without a volunteer force of a variety of ages, backgrounds, experiences and skills coming together to imagine a different way of being community.

As non-profits looking to address homelessness and criminalization, we are facing obstacles like we've never seen. The combination of a housing crisis with increasing food prices and a drug poisoning epidemic means that the demand for our services and the intensity of need are increasing at an alarming rate. We operate a 45-bed winter shelter where we're turning away upwards of 15 people every night because we literally have no room. Funding has not increased at the same rate as the need, and it's only through the mobilization of a vast range of volunteers that we're even able to scratch the surface of supporting those most abandoned in our communities.

One such example is our circles of support and accountability program, a program developed in Canada but used around the world. CoSA is a program that helps individuals who have committed acts of sexual violence with safely reintegrating back into the community. This is vitally important, because we know that one of the biggest indicators of reoffence is isolation. CoSA has shown through studies a 70% to 88% reduction in reoffending rates and utilizes volunteers to run the program. These aren't professionals but people who have committed to making their community safer

through volunteering and doing hard work. Regrettably, the federal government ended its funding of CoSA, thus many sites have closed.

A community where everyone belongs can happen only when we break down many of the social barriers that exist in our community. We believe that creating a strong volunteer force is one of the important steps to achieving this. A key facet of belonging is a feeling of having a role in something bigger than yourself. With this in mind, we recruit volunteers, not just from the community at large, but also from those we are looking to support. When people are working side by side to create something, it builds a relationship that can challenge many of the strongly held biases we hold.

We have volunteers who are currently living outside and working alongside retirees who, before this relationship, would have referred to those experiencing homelessness as "those people". A wife of a wealthy retiree once said to me, "Before he was volunteering with you all, when we were downtown he'd cross the street to avoid someone who appeared homeless. Now, he eagerly approaches to see if it's one of his friends."

This change is one of the utmost importance, as this comes to the heart of why we need volunteers. Non-profits like ours are doing the important work of keeping people alive, but we need to be clear: We are just managing the issue. The type of change we need to see to make any sort of impact on our housing crisis, inflating food costs and a drug poisoning epidemic is going to come from changes at the federal and provincial government levels.

I applaud the steps that have been taken, but we need more. We need to rise up, mentor and mobilize volunteers, because it engages more people in issues on homelessness, on affordability of living.... Once volunteers begin to see what is happening on the ground, it is our experience that often they will begin to see that it is policies that are making our conditions worse and that they need to engage in that. We need older volunteers, because they can remember a time when our society did not abandon so many people on our margins. They can challenge the narrative that it has always been this way, because it hasn't: We have created these conditions. Also, we need young people, because they have the creativity, energy and boldness to challenge these issues head-on. It's through movements of young people that many of the great changes have taken place in our society.

We call for the following: to invest heavily in the non-profit sector. You need our creativity, our nimbleness and our ability to mobilize large swaths of the community to address an issue.

We need to address the major crises we are facing and take bold aggressive action. The increase in homelessness across the country is not because we have seen an increase in people making bad decisions. It's a result of bad policy decisions. If we want more people to volunteer, we need to make it so that fewer people are trying just to survive. We know, though it's not exclusively the case, that people are more likely to volunteer when they don't have to worry about their survival.

Thank you very much.

● (0840)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey.

Now we'll begin the first round of questioning with Ms. Ferreri for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

I apologize to those not on Eastern Standard Time. When Ms. MacKenzie said it was 5:15 a.m. there, I thought, "Oh, wow." I sometimes forget that here in Parliament we work across different time zones.

Christian is from my community of Peterborough. As his testimony tells you, they do some pretty remarkable work there, and we heard some great suggestions. The accountability—I absolutely love this—and the empathy created through your model, I think, are critical to moving forward and working with the most vulnerable.

There are two things I would like to talk to you about, Christian. On your last point about survival, we've heard this repeatedly from many of the witnesses on this intergenerational volunteerism study: that the cost of living is deeply impacting people's ability to volunteer. Can I get you to expand on the impact on your organization?

Mr. Christian Harvey: Yes. I think what we see is that it is hard for people to focus on creating a better community when they are focused on just meeting their immediate needs. We see that very much. That is something where we are not going to be able to do a whole lot of things unless we begin to increase the quality of life for many of those we're supporting.

The other beautiful thing we are seeing, though, not to counter this at all but to go along with it, is that giving individuals who are experiencing homelessness an opportunity to be a part of creating the solutions that affect them is having really strong impacts. We have had people who were living outside and who began volunteering with us and then moved to actually becoming staff. The confidence they've gained through volunteering and then the expertise they bring through their very lived experience is one of the most beautiful things we've learned.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Yes. You transferred right into my next question.

It's kind of ironic, isn't it? When you're really struggling or depressed, or struggling with your own problems, the thing that makes you feel the best is helping someone else, but you almost

can't seem to get to that point, because you're struggling so much. It's this kind of vicious cycle of what you just touched on.

To your point, there's a great success story. I think it's really important to have this read into the record, because it's such a powerful story. I had a chance to meet this gentleman who was living on the street. He said, "Michelle, a year ago, I was the most miserable human. I hated the world." He was in a very compromised situation.

He has now been housed in one of the modular homes that Peterborough has put up. He was a kind of natural security guard for the people on the ground. Through working with you and your organization, Christian, he now is paid to do that and is a very respected, trusted person within that circle. I would just love you to tell the story of this gentleman.

Mr. Christian Harvey: Yes, it's amazing, because his story is one that we see over and over again. Again, the true experts in our communities around these issues are those who have to live it day in and day out.

One particular individual was one who was experiencing homelessness and was able, like you said, to access some of the modular homes. We recognized in him the ability to just connect with people and the respect that he had. It benefited us through the volunteer work, which we saw first, but then, through employing him, it made our organization stronger to have his expertise, his relational skills and his connection to the issue.

It's not a one-time thing. We've seen this over and over again with individuals. There was one individual who went through one of our programs, who was reintegrating out of prison. Through volunteering, he gained some confidence in his ability. He had lost a lot of that. Again, he is now employed with us and doing all kinds of work that is really benefiting everyone, which we are so grateful for.

● (0845)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I love that you said it benefits you as well. It's a win-win situation.

It's a long-term win, especially when you look at the people who are most vulnerable and experiencing homelessness. Transitioning from that survival mode to getting housed and then also trying to reintegrate into, say, the workforce, or volunteering in general, is a very big challenge, but you have that ability to help people transition to that.

I love and value the model of peer support more than anything. Sometimes we put so much regard or value on labels or a professional, when it's often peer support, someone with lived experience, who can really help somebody walk through this. When you say "bad policy", what else do you think you need corrected to help you?

Mr. Christian Harvey: We know this housing crisis is not going to be ended by shelters like ours. We are clearly a band-aid, right? It's a band-aid that's necessary.

We see it ourselves. People are in the river of poverty, and we're throwing life preservers to people to keep them alive, but we need policy around aggressively hitting how we are going to address the commodification of housing. That has led to huge issues of people being left out. We need to hit on these.

We need to look at how we decriminalize substance use, rather than thinking that by treating people as if they are criminals for substance use we're going to see change—we're not.

We need to look at how we address these root causes, like the access to housing—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey. Your time has concluded.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have six minutes.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Ms. MacKenzie for being able to attend. We went through a number of challenges in order to arrange her participation, including winter weather and getting the headset over to her in time, in addition to the time change that she's dealing with now.

I'd like to hear more about the hub that you mentioned. I'd like you to talk about that concept in the context of the main challenges that you see in maintaining a strong volunteer sector. Also, what strategies would you recommend to engage volunteers, particularly youth?

I need to remind you that I have only six minutes.

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: Thank you, and thanks very much for all the calisthenics that you had to do to get me here today.

I think that for the whole volunteer idea and for increasing the number of people in Canada who want to volunteer, you have to start with the young people. One of the things that I see has happened over my tenure in this particular area is when intergenerational activities are introduced to the schools. It's an optional thing; people participate if they want. They come together with senior people. They get to know them, and that relationship creates a feeling within them that says, "I want to do this more. It's really fun, and I really like to do it." I think that the whole intergenerational activity is really excellent.

How do we find out about that? If you type "intergenerational" into Google.... Most people don't know about some of these wonderful programs that you've already been interviewing and that I am aware of on the side of my desk. If we had a hub that was all things intergenerational—things like the presenters this morning—their activities and their websites could be launched through there as well, so that any new ideas are there if somebody from another centre in Canada comes to that site.

It has to be supported by government. Generations United in the States is a particularly good example. It is funded and secure, and it's a national entity for intergenerational activity. It does webinars, but it allows awareness and access to all people within the country. If you want to find out about something intergenerational in the States, you type in "intergenerational" and up comes Generations United. It's been around for a really long time, and you can go there and get assistance and help and ideas for all sorts of things that you can do in various fields.

What I've seen is that the involvement of kids and young people—especially young people, because that's an investment in your future—with older adults is so rich. A lot of the things that the two presenters this morning talked about—sharing of knowledge, feeling purposeful, having that unity in community and that kind of thing—come from that.

If our young people can come out of high school saying, "Wow, I really enjoyed being part of the community in that way," then I think you've really trained people to become volunteers, rather than having to go out to try to get them to participate.

• (0850)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: The Province of Ontario requires students to have a minimum number of volunteer hours. Are you aware of any other programs across the country that require that? Is that something that you'd recommend?

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: That came out, and it was wonderful. That came out quite a few years ago, right across the country, and then provinces started opting out. Then, within provinces, schools have opted out, and now, in B.C., it's translated into work experience.

My whole issue with that is that it's required. As a teacher, I was getting kids who were, on June 1, calling me up and saying, "Ms. MacKenzie, can I come to your class for eight hours? I'm short eight hours of my volunteering time." I'd say, "Well, I didn't know that you wanted to be a teacher," and they'd say, "Well, I don't; I just need the time." That's not a way to engender volunteerism of the heart, so that it will go on and be sustainable. That's like getting the recommendation done and checking it off the list.

I think it's a great opportunity to start that discussion, but the bottom line is that I think you have to have those relationships between younger and older people in the community. That is what's going to bring people back to wanting to be volunteers.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Are there any strategies that you'd recommend that would engage youth in volunteer programs?

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: Do you know something? It could be anything. One of the mottos of our society is to not do something different but to just do what you're doing differently. It's a mindset. That's why I have those silly glasses that I was showing you at the beginning. It's taking a different view on things.

You could take a book club, for example. Senior people are reading books; kids are reading books. Have them all read the same book and come together and have a discussion. Make that interaction. Another example could be art.

You can do it through anything, so the strategy is really looking at things and coming together. It's not adding on to your workload but taking the two generations and bringing them together to do together what they are already doing. It really is just a shift in the way we do things. As a result, it's not expensive, and it really doesn't make extra work for anyone. In fact, it actually lessens the workload for a lot of people, because they are so engaged with each other.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Finally, what do you recommend that the federal government could do to better support the volunteer sector and the organizations on a national basis?

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: Again, I'm looking at it through the intergenerational perspective, so I really think that if the federal government would support us, support the people who are involved in the intergenerational activities and bring awareness.... I mean, we're a huge country, yet probably half of the people in Ontario don't even know anything about these programs that we've talked about already this morning, and that's a pity.

We really should have a lot more awareness of how important it is to bring those two ends of society together. They have so much going for them that is similar. They both are outside the workforce. They both have time that they can dedicate to coming together, and that's not something that's available to a lot of people who are in the busy work world or raising families right now in Canada.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. MacKenzie, and thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank all the witnesses.

As parliamentarians, the biggest takeaway for us from this study will be recognition of all the work that your mostly non-profit organizations do in the community sector and your focus on intergenerational volunteerism. Committee members have heard from organizations that have each shared their own experiences.

There's no doubt in our minds that your contribution to society and that of volunteering are a great asset. Thank you for your testimony and for sharing your truly rich experiences with us.

The committee will have to submit a report following this study. The report will provide findings on what can be done to better support intergenerational volunteerism.

Ms. Cassaday, you talked about connectivity. From a human standpoint and from a technical standpoint for seniors and volunteers, that's a tall order. At the end of your presentation, you said how important it is to have stable funding. Could you be more specific about your expectations in that regard?

• (0855)

[*English*]

Ms. Kascha Cassaday: Yes. It's stable funding, depending on your organization's size and what's available to you.

I previously tuned into other sessions that you guys have had. One conversation that took place was about removing episodic funding and instead doing bigger or larger year-long or multi-year funding, which is very nice for individuals and organizations that have a foot in the door in those types of grants, but what my organization finds is that we spend many hours on these grants and what happens is that year after year they tend to go to the same programs—very well-established programs.

That is wonderful, because they are doing great work, but those episodic grants are what allow smaller organizations to get their foot in the door to show government and to show other grant programs that we are capable, that we are doing good work and that the money given to us does go to important work. Keeping those small episodic grants open, but also recognizing that in those episodic grants, there would be an amount of money that would be going toward operational costs and also costs for volunteers.... As mentioned by many people, what motivates volunteers to be involved? In the current economic situation, that tends to be funding to our young individuals.

We talked about the mandate for volunteer hours, which is great when it's put into a school system. Maybe they're getting off a class in order to do that volunteerism, so it's within their school curriculum, but if it's required outside of school hours and they have the option to work versus volunteering, many of those individuals would not give up the opportunity to take on a part-time job if they're able to get it. If there were some level of stipend or grant guaranteed.... I know that there are grant options available to young people who've completed a certain amount of volunteerism, but also, for a lot of those grants, someone has to recommend that young person.

For me personally, I oversee all of our volunteers. How am I supposed to pick which volunteer I should submit for one of these grants? How do I know that they're interested? How do I know that they're needed? Having some level of "tierism"—if you have this many hours of volunteerism, you're guaranteed this stipend or you're guaranteed this scholarship opportunity—I think those types of things financially really help us, because they mean that our volunteers can come and know they're getting something out of it. It's more than just the support we can give them; they're also getting some type of financial support as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

I was impressed to learn that you train 5,000 young volunteers, if I understood correctly. That's really incredible. With regard to recruitment, you mentioned that volunteering was mandatory in some schools or if it's a prerequisite for accreditation.

Despite the difficulties encountered with regard to work, even if young people were recruited because they had to volunteer, in your opinion, did they find the experience enriching and rewarding enough in their life journey to continue their volunteer work? Do you manage to retain young volunteers or do they leave after volunteering?

[English]

Ms. Kascha Cassaday: Yes, we are. I think all young people really benefit from all levels of volunteering, no matter the program, but specifically for us, we put a lot of emphasis on ensuring that our volunteers get something out of it.

When funding allows it, we provide additional training opportunities, like work readiness webinars for them and so forth, but yes, we have a training model, and there are different levels of it, depending on how they're joining us.

The main way we are able to support our volunteers is.... They're volunteering virtually, so all we ask of them is that they join us for an hour and a half on a call, whenever they're available. They sign up, and it's flexible for them. Whether they're in high school or university or have a job, we don't require them to show up somewhere, take an hour to get there, an hour to volunteer and an hour to get back home; they're able to do it from the comfort of their home.

• (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cassaday.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Madame Zarrillo, you have six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start my questioning with Madam MacKenzie, but first, I want to start by thanking all of you for being here today. It's likely that I won't get a second round of questioning, just because of our late start today. I'm going to apologize now for that and thank you all for being here today.

Ms. MacKenzie, I wanted to dig a bit deeper into the health benefits of intergenerational volunteering. You mentioned that it definitely improves health for seniors. I wonder if you could expand on it a bit.

My question on it is whether this concept of intergenerational volunteerism should fall under the health file federally.

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: I'll answer your last question first, just by virtue of the fact that in the last 20 years I have worked with one foot in health and one foot in education. Interestingly enough, they have similar needs, and the intergenerational aspect has been able to work with both of those, with education.

As many of you have talked about already, there is a training process. You don't just go into involvement with a senior without some background training. For sure, that is in the education field, but the health benefits are amazing.

Now, what is it specifically? It's been very hard to get quantitative data, because everybody wants to have numbers, but of course, when you're dealing with health, privacy issues are huge.

First of all, there's mental health. It's incredible. There are so many things that I noticed in my last 20 years of working in this field. There's a small thing that's bothering someone, and it becomes a big thing because they muddle it in their head, and then they have to call to go to the doctor, and they can't get in, and that's upsetting. When you have somebody sitting with you who is a friend—and they consider the children friends because they are relatively non-threatening—you just talk. You talk about other things, and pretty soon what we found was that they would talk themselves right out of their concerns. They felt like they were being seen. They felt like they were being heard. The problem wasn't so much medical as it was just feeling mentally isolated, having a lack of purpose and so forth.

There are some very specific examples. They did a research project in New York several years ago. They took seniors from a care home and split them in half. Half of them went on a bus and went on various tours around the town. The other half worked one-on-one with young artists. Afterwards, they were able to get the quantitative data, and after a certain period of time, they measured how much medication the seniors were taking before and after.

For the group who went on the bus tours, everything was the same, but the people who had that intimate relationship and spent time with these artists and talking were taking less medication for depression, and they were having fewer falls as a result of it. That's one of the few actual quantitative studies that have been done.

Medically, to see it qualitatively and to see the difference, you just talk to the people in the care homes, for example, the people in the community or the families. They say attitudes are so much better because these people are connected and feel they have a friend.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

You just spoke about care homes. I know that as part of the confidence and supply agreement between the Liberals and the NDP there is a project around long-term care homes and national standards. I wonder if this intergenerational volunteering is something that should be part of national standards.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: I most certainly think that it should be, for sure.

It should be systemic. I think we really in a way disconnected community with so many interest groups, and we have so many people who want to have attention to their particular situation, which is great, but now I think something like intergenerational is something that could pull us all together.

In fact, across Canada only 6% to 11% of the senior population is actually in care homes. I think intergenerational volunteerism is really important, because it reaches out into the community, to seniors who are in apartments or elsewhere.

• (0905)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

I'm going to move to Ms. Cassaday.

You mentioned sustainability. I did want to get from you, around pay and pensions, whether pensions are a reality in your organization or in not-for-profits you might have worked at in the past, and how many employees you have.

Lastly, if some of your programs are running on grant funding, if those grants dry up or are not renewed, are your employees eligible for employment insurance?

Ms. Kascha Cassaday: We currently have nine full-time employees. That grew out of COVID. There was a lot of funding that was given to us throughout COVID, because we were able to go virtual. There was this need for older adults to get online during everything that was happening in COVID, and they needed access.

As that time leaves and we are moving into more tricky economical situations, funding is harder to find; it's less guaranteed. We don't have a pension program at our organization, but our employees are eligible for EI if something were to happen, which I hope it won't.

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Ms. Cassaday, what is the gender split in your organization, for employees?

Ms. Kascha Cassaday: It's about 90% female and 10% male.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Falk is next, for five minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

Specifically, in listening to you, Ms. MacKenzie, and some of your testimony, it really triggered a lot of thoughts I have regarding family. I think it's interesting that we're at a place or a time in society where we are now trying to get younger people to be involved in older people's lives. It's crazy to me, because I think that when we look at the breakdown of immediate families and the breakdown of extended families, it is something that culturally...that many cultures have, with intergenerational families living in the same house. Those children are being taught the importance of caring for, glean-ing wisdom, asking questions and learning from experience, and it just saddens me a bit that we are in a time in society where we don't have that. We now have organizations coming to the federal government and saying, "We need money to create this," when it's something that should be natural. I believe it was intended to be like that.

When we look at the past recent years, with the COVID pandemic and how government policies actually forced isolation on our seniors, forced isolation on our children and further exacerbated that problem, and now we have.... I talk to some parents whose children won't even leave their bedrooms to have relationships and community with their own family, let alone what we need for the intergen-

erational.... I believe there is such rich fruit that comes from the younger generation, the older generation and really just the different intergenerational levels, in having those relationships, conversations and experiences.

I think, too, that when we look at the current climate of where we are in society with the affordability crisis, we've heard throughout this study that the affordability crisis is making everybody stretch thin, so how can people take time out of the busyness of their lives when they need to pick up extra shifts and more jobs? How can they take that time to go into their community, go into their children's classrooms, to go into care homes...to have that opportunity? It just seems that it's so far out of reach.

I really want to thank my colleague, MP Van Bynen, for bringing this forward, for bringing forward the conversation and having a conversation on how we can do this, because I think it's so much more than funding. I honestly don't think that government funding is going to help the situation. It's a societal shift that has to happen. We have to definitely exhibit that and show our children the importance of being involved with those who weren't born at the same time and who've had different life experiences, because that's so important.

Chair, with that, I'd like to pass my time to MP Gray.

• (0910)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you very much.

Thank you for the great conversation here today.

What I wanted to bring forth was that we do have some unfinished business from the last meeting, and rules to adjourn this committee clearly weren't followed. We were discussing a motion on housing brought forth by the Conservatives in light of the housing crisis getting worse in Canada and of new information that was just released that, in fact, housing starts in 2023 were down.

Therefore, I move that the committee resume consideration of debate on my motion on housing from January 29, 2024.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gray.

That is a dilatory motion, so I need approval of the committee by vote. Does the committee agree to proceed to the order? When we adjourned, we were in discussion on an amendment to the motion.

Clerk, we will have a recorded vote on the dilatory motion of Ms. Gray.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The motion is defeated. We'll now return to Mr. Long.

You have the floor for five minutes.

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

Good morning, everybody.

Again, I apologize to our witnesses for these delays. Thank you so much for your testimony this morning.

One thing I want to touch on is programs that we offer for seniors, and I want to touch on the New Horizons for Seniors program. I think most of us have used it or have had organizations in our ridings that have used it. It's a great program. It promotes volunteerism among seniors and other generations. One of its streams funds community-based projects that are led by seniors and our volunteer base with up to \$25,000 per year. I know that in my riding, two or three different organizations have used that to promote intergenerational volunteering to put seniors with youth. It's a wonderful program.

I'm wondering if each of you could tell me whether you've participated in the program and give me any thoughts or feedback as to how the program was delivered.

We can start with Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Christian Harvey: Yes. Around bringing people, volunteers, we have found...

I'm sorry. I heard you talking about the volunteering. Could you repeat what you were saying there?

Mr. Wayne Long: Sure. It was a question for all three of you about the New Horizons for Seniors program, asking if you have used it, if you have participated in it and for any feedback that you can give us.

Thank you.

Mr. Christian Harvey: We have no experience with the New Horizons program. I apologize.

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Cassaday.

Ms. Kascha Cassaday: Yes, we recently were part of some grant funding—specifically in the Smoky Lake, Alberta, area—through the New Horizons funding, which was wonderful. We've just recently applied for the pan-Canadian program as well, so we are hoping and eager that it will go through, because we really believe that it is a project that will work.

• (0915)

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. MacKenzie.

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: Yes, I'm very familiar with it, actually. In 2010, I approached the National Seniors Council to have the word “intergenerational” added to its grant process, so that we could start that dialogue. I've been involved with the pan-Canadian program, and I've also been involved with quite a few smaller grants.

I think that what was spoken about earlier, just the whole idea of episodic grants... It's actually quite a small grant. It's great for small projects. Part of that application states that it would like that to have sustainability, so you have to show that you can keep it going. That's not always possible, so it kind of fades away.

The smaller grants are really good for some things, and for some things they just absolutely don't work. They're not an answer to the

kind of work that we're doing where we're trying to work nationally, encouraging people to train for intergenerational activities.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you very much.

I just want to step back and talk about volunteerism in general.

In my previous life, I had a lot of experience with volunteers. In major junior hockey, we couldn't have run our organization without volunteers, putting on the Memorial Cup or special events. My wife Denise was actually chair of the Saint John volunteer association.

I'd like each of you to comment, if you could, on how you recruit, train and retain. One of the issues that we always had... You know, I've seen so many organizations—my own organization included—that would recruit volunteers but do a terrible job of training them and matching them, and then they would lose them. It really wasn't the volunteers' fault. It was the fault of the organizations for not putting in the proper time.

Maybe we could start with you, Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Christian Harvey: I think that's a very good point. We have found that the recruitment is just getting out there what we do. People want to be a part of making something exciting in their community. That part is just getting that out there, and it's about having opportunities that feel meaningful to people. We have to be clear that this means something, that this makes a difference in this operation.

We've also found that it's not just training on the very practical pieces. We actually do a three-hour training on the values and vision of the organization. We've found that by doing that, even if their volunteering is doing maintenance at one of our houses, people are able to see what they do as embodying the mission and values of the organization. Even with smaller tasks that sometimes can be seen as menial, we can position them and say that they're not menial at all, that they're actually part of these values and this vision.

We find that that's how we are able to retain volunteers. We have probably around 80 to 100 volunteers, and that is how we are able to retain that group of volunteers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey.

Thank you, Mr. Long.

We will conclude with Madame Chabot and Madam Zarrillo.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Witnesses, I wanted to finish this round out of respect for you.

The committee has asked many questions about housing, and rightly so.

Mr. Harvey, you clearly said that we need to invest in public policy and that, despite their role, their mission and the importance of their volunteer work, community organizations cannot singlehandedly change fundamental aspects of our society, like housing. So I'm sure we'll come back to it.

However, given our significant delay, I think it's important that we finish the discussion. So I'm going to ask my questions based on my knowledge of things.

Each of you talked a lot about funding or programs, but your main mission is normally funded by existing programs. In any case, that's how it is for community organizations in Quebec, and I imagine it's also like that in the other provinces. However, are the federal programs well known? Do you use the existing ones?

Ms. Cassaday, would you like to respond?

• (0920)

[English]

Ms. Kascha Cassaday: Yes, funding from the federal level would also be great. We are a North America-wide organization, but we have a Canada-wide focus. We pull our volunteers from all across, because we are virtual and we have programming in person all across Canada.

Having funding at a federal level so that we're able to keep our operational costs going but also able to support the volunteers we have across Canada would be incredibly beneficial.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Lastly, many people are talking about national standards in all kinds of sectors.

Do you really think that national standards will resolve the situation when the provinces are responsible for organizing volunteering and our community organizations?

My question is for Ms. MacKenzie.

[English]

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: I'm not really certain that I understand the question. I'm sorry.

Could you repeat that, please? Is it about the national standards? Is it the pan-Canadian standards?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Let me explain, Ms. MacKenzie.

You seemed to support the idea of Canadian national standards. However, I told you that Quebec and the provinces are responsible for organizing community organizations and their missions, as well as health care. Given that, what do you think national standards would change?

[English]

The Chair: Give a short answer, Ms. MacKenzie.

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: Thank you. I appreciate your comments.

In Quebec you do a wonderful job of dealing with these things. I don't see that across the rest of Canada so much. I think that by try-

ing to gather together the territories and provinces and share what's going on, it gives a....

Again, I really think our focus has to be schools. We have to start with kids who are very young, and then it becomes systemic. It becomes part of the schools and the school system to work with seniors. Because of those positive experiences within the community that young people will have, I think that could then go forward to increasing our volunteer interest as those people age.

Yes, I think it's positive.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. MacKenzie.

We'll go to Madam Zarrillo to conclude, for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much. I'm so pleased to be able to get these extra couple of minutes.

I wanted to start with Ms. Cassaday and explore this gender lens a bit more. The federal government has an obligation to apply the gender lens to the work that it does.

I was wondering if you could share about volunteers.... With this being an intergenerational study, do you see a gender differentiation between the young volunteers who come and the seniors? Is there a gender differentiation?

Also, staff-wise, you already mentioned that 90% of your staff are women. I wonder if you had other experiences in this sector that you can share your view on. What should the gender lens look like in a report like this?

Ms. Kascha Cassaday: Yes.

Actually, I need to correct myself. I misspoke: 80% identify as she/her, 10% identify as they/them and 10% identify as he/him in our organization. I wanted to make that correction, so thank you for bringing that up.

From a volunteer standpoint, I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, but we do get a good mix of all identifying individuals at our organization.

From a seniors standpoint, our older populations do identify mainly as female, but we also try to support an initiative for the LGBTQ+2S population as well, which supports not only our younger individuals who want to learn more and understand more but also our older generation, so that they can understand what that community means, whether they're a part of it or just interested in learning more about it.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

Ms. MacKenzie, I'll ask you a similar question. If the government needs to apply a gender lens to intergenerational volunteering, then in this report, what would you like it to know?

● (0925)

Ms. Sharon MacKenzie: In the work we've been doing, I think there has been quite a broad acceptance of people. Again, really the only thing that connects the people within the projects we've been doing is aging. We're talking really about generational things. I think there's an awareness now within all the groups across Canada that this lens has to be applied, or should be applied, and that all people should be treated equally who are coming into the area of interest.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have a very quick minute—

The Chair: No.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: No? Okay.

The Chair: You're a little over, Madam Zarrillo.

That concludes the witness round for this morning's meeting. I'd like to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

Before we go in camera, I want to report back to the committee on a ruling I have made.

At the December 4 committee meeting, Madam Zarrillo raised a point of order and expressed her opinion that the motion moved by Ms. Gray on that day constituted a contempt of Parliament. She further explained her perspective that this motion asked the committee to influence, intimidate and block fellow parliamentarians.

I committed to take her point of order under advisement. I am now ready to render my decision to the committee. In terms of the timing, I wanted to do this when Ms. Zarrillo was here.

In making my decision, I was guided by a few principles. First, a motion is a resolution. This means that it is the committee's opinion and it does not require any action to be taken. As such, this motion is not binding on anyone.

Second, page 794 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* says, "The rules of one House cannot be applied to the other, nor can one House compel the other to conduct its work in a specific manner or according to a specific timetable".

Consequently, I considered that the motion is a resolution. It expresses an opinion of the committee and is not binding on anyone. The motion in no way obliges the other House to carry out its work in a particular way or according to a specific timetable.

Finally, committee members are free to vote for or against this motion.

That is my ruling, as requested.

At this stage, we will go in camera for the business portion of the meeting.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>