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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1600)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call this meeting to order. We now have quorum, so we can begin the meeting. This is the 150th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study of settlement services across Canada.

I apologize for our late start today, which was due to the votes in the House of Commons. My hope is that we can go a bit longer on the meeting today to make sure we hear from all the witnesses, but we won't go overboard. We'll see how the questions go, but I don't want to cut down the presentations.

I thank the witnesses for coming. We usually begin with the video conference presentation. Just so the committee knows, the theme of this first hour is settlement services that are provided by non-traditional providers of activities. They are organizations that deal with newcomers but aren't necessarily settlement service agencies.

Welcome, Ms. Hutchings, as a member of the committee today.

[Translation]

Welcome to this committee, as well, Ms. Laverdière. We are very happy to have you with us.

[English]

We're going to begin with Mr. Roberts, who is coming to us from California. You may begin your presentation.

Mr. Fredric Roberts (Director, Fredric Roberts Photography Workshops): Members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Fred Roberts, and I am the president of the Fredric Roberts Foundation, which funds and operates the Fredric Roberts Photography Workshops.

In March 2000, after more than 30 years in the finance business, I retired. Not knowing how I would spend the rest of my life, I recalled the positive reaction to some photographs I had taken in 1986 on an extended trip to Asia. Although I had not touched a camera in over 14 years, I decided to take some photography workshops to see if I was actually any good.

Four years later, I was approached by a prominent art gallery to do an exhibit and a publisher to do a book, which won several awards. This was followed by two more books and more gallery shows, more awards and several museum exhibits.

My photographs are primarily environmental portraits of villagers in third world countries who have very rich lives that are not defined by monetary wealth. I loved my new work. I loved the message, and I loved the process of travelling the world and being with these people. Strangely, though, after about 10 years I felt less fulfilled.

Then in 2011, I set up what has become my new life, a series of photographic workshops for third world high school students. This program is patterned after another initiative which I built in Los Angeles for high school students gifted in the arts, The Music Center's spotlight awards. Spotlight is now 30 years old and has had more than 70,000 participants whose lives have been changed by the program.

The photography workshops are far smaller and more intimate but no less powerful. To build the photography workshops, I recruited a remarkable and unique faculty, created a curriculum, purchased professional-level cameras and computers and established relationships with NGOs around the world.

In partnership with these NGOs, we offer an eight-day workshop of professional-level photography instruction to 20 students at a time, ages 14 to 17, half of them boys and the other half girls, half city and half rural, who have never before touched a camera. In addition to teaching them how to use these cameras exclusively on manual mode, we teach them to tell important stories in their communities. It gives them a voice and permanently empowers them.

At the conclusion of each workshop we leave behind cameras and software so the students can continue their work. In addition, we have created an online community for them to receive assignments and to submit their photos for further education.

We then return within 18 to 24 months to give advanced training to previous students and have them join us as teaching assistants as we instruct a new class of 20 beginners. They go on to become teachers, photographers, photojournalists, social activists, doctors, lawyers or whatever they want to be, now armed with a new skill and a new language. Their work is really quite remarkable, as I think you will soon see.

While these workshops are nominally about photography, they are actually about far more. They are about self-expression, self-fulfilment, self-confidence, empowerment, vision and a profound sense of accomplishment, often for the first time in their lives. Superficially, the students learn the skill of photography. At the very least, it's a form of vocational training, but it is far more.

The fact is that the students create both art and powerful messages, giving them the ability to see the world in new ways and to create real social change. It comes from within them. We use photography as a catalyst to help them open their minds and release their "genies". As I often tell students on the first day of the workshops, this is not an art class.

To the point of this committee, we have recently conducted workshops in first world settings, specifically in Lisbon and Toronto and soon in Athens, teaching students who are recent immigrants and refugees. They have come from such locations as Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and African nations, among others. Similar to our traditional workshop participants, the students often don't speak English. We teach them through translators. The results are remarkable. The changes in our students are profound

•(1605)

While it is critical to give new arrivals the basic skills they need to survive, I believe we also need to give them the foundation for a higher vision of life, not just survival, but a sense of creative freedom and the confidence to change their communities and the world. It lights their way to a better path and a better future.

Can it be done? Will the efforts of a small organization like ours or a powerful government like yours actually change the outcomes for these young people?

I would now like to show you an example of actual results. The images you are about to see—a short piece of photojournalism shot in Toronto—were photographed by our students. These are their ideas and their images. I want you to remember, as you see their work, that this is the result of less than one week of instruction to young people who had never before touched a camera.

•(1610)

Thank you.

[*Video presentation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Stay tuned. You're probably going to get some questions about what you do and why you do it.

We're going now to our second set of witnesses. From the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, we have Colleen Mooney and Hena Izzeddin.

Ms. Colleen Mooney (Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada): Mr. Chair, honourable members, committee and staff, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and contribute to this important study on settlement services across Canada.

Community-based services, positive relationships and life-changing programs: As Canada's largest child- and youth-serving organization, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada provides vital programs and services to over 200,000 young people in 700

communities across Canada. During critical out-of-school hours, our clubs help young people develop into healthy, active and engaged adults. Our trained staff and volunteers give youth the tools they need to realize positive outcomes in self-expression, academics, healthy living, physical activity, mental health, leadership and more. Since 1900, boys and girls clubs have opened their doors to children, youth and families in small and large cities and in rural and northern communities.

I'm the executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, but I'm here speaking on behalf of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada. Here in Ottawa we first opened our doors in 1923, so we're looking forward to celebrating our 100th anniversary very soon.

If a young person needs it, our clubs can provide it. Our clubs welcome diversity, serving over 12,000 newcomer youth and over 14,000 children and youth last year alone for whom English is a second language.

The Canadian Council for Refugees describes the refugee process as a continuum, beginning with settlement services and concluding with integration. Our work here in Ottawa and across the country focuses on ensuring young people feel a sense of belonging by helping children and youth adapt, giving them the opportunity to improve or acquire language skills, and giving them a sense of community. As families settle, clubs help with full integration and a feeling of belonging.

Today we want to highlight a few points specifically related to the challenges facing immigrant youth trying to integrate into Canadian society. I have a youth with me today, Hena Izzeddin, who is a member of the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, who will speak to you shortly about her experience.

According to the UN High Commission on Human Rights, youth who arrive as refugees tend to have experienced trauma and display higher than average rates of post-traumatic stress disorder. Young people have often seen their schooling disrupted or many have not had access to formal schooling at all or in many years. When these young people arrive in Canada they are facing these additional barriers on top of all the issues that other Canadian youth face, including feelings of isolation, mental health challenges and bullying.

Our recommendation to this committee is that government should invest in programs that support the successful integration of youth, starting with youth for whom immigration integration will be the most challenging.

Thank you for providing this setting where Hena can share her lived experience as a recent immigrant to Canada.

I'm going to let Hena continue at this point.

•(1615)

Ms. Hena Izzeddin (Student, Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada): Good afternoon. My name is Hena, for those of you who didn't hear it.

I am 18 years old and I am from Syria. I came to Canada three years ago. My mom used to work as a farmer in Syria, and my dad worked as a train conductor and electrician. My siblings and I aspired to study, do well and exceed in school. We left Syria for Turkey and applied to immigrate to Canada.

I will never forget the first moment in Toronto's airport. The moment we arrived, we found people waiting for us with big smiles on their faces. We spent three days in Toronto, and then we came to Ottawa.

The first year in Ottawa was very hard for me, because I knew very few English words. In the first two years, my family and I focused on learning English as soon as we could. There were interpreters who translated information into Arabic, which is my first language. We wanted to learn English, because it's needed to continue our education and to work here.

In my first year of school, I started learning English in ESL, English as a second language, classes, but now I am in a regular English class. In the second year, I started learning French, even though my English was not good enough. I still wanted to learn. In the third year, I continued learning English, French and my other subjects.

I have done so many activities with others, such as joining the Forum for Young Canadians. I have represented the Minister of Finance.

I have also joined a group of Syrian girls who do paintings and sell them under the Humans for Peace Institution. After we sell the paintings, we donate the money to the blood centre. I have donated blood to the blood centre, which is also under the Humans for Peace Institution.

These activities have helped me develop my speaking skills. The place that helped me to develop my speaking skills the most was the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa. I first started going there as a member of their community. After that I started working as a volunteer. I have been volunteering there for two years to the present time. Then I started a program every Monday that was called Leaders for Life. It was also one of the most helpful activities in developing my English.

When I was a little girl I always dreamed of being a neurosurgeon. When I was in Syria I didn't really think that my dream would come true for many reasons. When I came to Canada I found out that my childhood dream could still come true. Now I am very determined to become a neurosurgeon. I know that if I work hard I will reach my dream, because I believe nothing is impossible in Canada.

I am so thankful to the Canadian government and its people, and to the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa. I am so grateful to be in Canada, but it has been a challenge for me and others, trying to figure out how everything works in Canada with papers and customs, just to name a few things. I can see why other immigrants have a hard time. My family and I made family decisions, and we're not afraid to ask people we meet for help. This is not easy for everyone to do if they don't work hard.

Thank you.

Ms. Colleen Mooney: I'm just going to finish up.

Canada's immigration plan is focused on families, and boys and girls clubs across the country help facilitate successful integration for children and youth, as well as support parents.

Clubs across the country have welcomed refugees to their communities, integrating children into regular after-school programs, as Hena described. Clubs also work in conjunction with local settlement agencies and local immigrant organizations to support newcomer children and youth across club programs.

Our universal approach to services ensures that everybody is welcome at the club. No one is turned away from our programs due to financial barriers. In addition, we run specific programs for newcomers, such as our newcomer youth advancement program. This program runs in clubs across the country, supports the healthy development of newcomer youth and assists their families in building strong social and community connections, acting as a launch pad for youth to build skills, develop friendships and support networks, and gain self-confidence. This program offers academic engagement, help in finding employment, leadership development, civic engagement, recreational sports and more.

Investing in newcomer youth when they arrive is a more effective and less expensive way to encourage successful integration than implementing reactive measures to address negative behaviours of youth who are disconnected from their communities. We encourage the government to give some thought to how existing programs, such as the youth employment strategy or the Canada service corps, can be bolstered to better engage newcomer youth. Such programs foster connections between youth and their new communities and help them gain the linguistic and cultural knowledge they need to succeed.

Anti-discrimination programs that foster connections between refugees and the receiving population, such as community engagement and recreational activities, can be further promoted and facilitated.

Thank you again for inviting Hena and me to speak. We look forward to your questions.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Izzeddin, thank you once again for learning French, like me.

[*English*]

We will now continue with New Circles.

Who is going to begin? Ms. Smythe.

Ms. Rosie Smythe (Executive Director, New Circles Community Services): First of all, thank you all very much for this opportunity.

My name is Rosie Smythe, and I'm the executive director of New Circles Community Services in Toronto. I'm here with Diana Gibbs, our development manager.

New Circles was founded in 2005 by a social worker by the name of Cindy Blakely. When she saw students whose basic needs were not being met and who were not able to focus in class, she was led to start New Circles Community Services to provide free clothing to those in need. It began in Flemingdon Park, one of Toronto's highest-need neighbourhoods with large numbers of low-income households.

Over time, New Circles has steadily grown, and today we offer a range of programs, including social groups, settlement support and employment training, in addition to the clothing. We now focus on five high-needs neighbourhoods in mid-Toronto, including Thorncliffe Park, which is known across Canada as the launching pad for new arrivals. These neighbourhoods make up our catchment area of about 88,000 people, and child poverty rates are among the highest in Canada.

The majority of the residents are immigrants, most having arrived within the past five years. As you know, poverty and unemployment rates for newcomers are among the highest in the overall population. We may not have started as a settlement agency, but we have increasingly focused on supporting the needs of new immigrants, who are among the most vulnerable in our city.

How do we do this? We now run the largest clothing bank in Toronto. It's called GLOW, Gently Loved Outfits to Wear. We serve 15,000 individuals a year. About 75% of them are newcomers. Our catchment group also includes Syrian and government-sponsored refugees in Toronto. We are often the first stop for refugees, but we are also available to anyone in need of clothing.

We created a unique and innovative design when we moved to a larger space in 2015. We set it up to simulate a real store. We now use it as a platform for our clients to develop employable skills. Our primary users are low-income immigrant women with challenges in finding paid work; that is, they lack Canadian credentials, experience in social networks, and are uncertain about how and where to look for jobs.

To address these barriers, we developed two training programs. The first focuses on retail sales and customer service skills, in partnership with the Retail Council of Canada. The store setting is very supportive, and it helps them to understand employer expectations and learn soft skills. We also launched an office skills training program in partnership with Centennial College. It teaches digital literacy, business communication and office administration with work placement as part of the program. We enrol 70 women annually in this training. I'm very proud to say that within six months, 70% of our grads find employment or enrol in further training.

We also run social support groups. We have volunteer opportunities and a settlement case management program.

GLOW has become a natural gateway not only to introduce newcomers to these programs, but also to refer folks to a range of settlement services that are offered in the community.

I'll turn it over to Diana now, and she can explain further.

• (1625)

Ms. Diana Gibbs (Development Manager, New Circles Community Services): Yes, and I want to speak about the gateway model, which is really best described through the story of Olu.

Olu is a young, very determined single mother who fled Nigeria due to domestic violence and arrived as a refugee. She was struggling alone with two small children, one of whom was severely disabled. She came to New Circles for clothing. She heard about New Circles when she was shopping at Value Village and met up with a friend of hers, who told her where she could get free clothing.

She came to us for clothing, and then she began volunteering when she met people there who welcomed her. Subsequently, she heard about and then enrolled in our retail training program. After she graduated, she was able to leverage that to get employment at Lowe's home improvement store, where she still works today. It's not far from where I live and I often run into her when she is on her shifts, which is always nice.

In coming for clothing, GLOW served as a gateway enabling Olu to break down her isolation, build a social network, gain Canadian experience and credentials through her volunteer placement, get references, register with an employment office and then break into the labour force.

One of the strengths of this gateway model is that clients maintain consistent relationships within our agency. They see the same staff and volunteers in GLOW, which is largely staffed by volunteers who may either be clients or established Canadians, so there is a lot of integration there. They see these same people, whether they're shopping for clothing, volunteering or doing their placement as part of the retail skills training program. This helps build trust, and when we are referring and suggesting other programs, either within New Circles or out in the community, there is more openness to hearing and to seeing how this may be relevant to them. Clients and our graduates often tell us that they feel like they have found a second family at New Circles.

Another key strength of our model is accessibility. Everyone is welcome to walk through and enter the GLOW gateway. While many of our users are new to Canada, their status ranges from temporary worker to refugee claimant, permanent resident and citizen.

It also means that among our clients and volunteers we have a diverse community of cultural and social backgrounds. I like to think of it as a mini UN. We serve 160 different countries through our client base. This helps break down silos and build community connections.

We are going to speak today about one of our greatest challenges, though, which is financial sustainability. We are a young organization that was founded by someone, and we are largely funded through the philanthropic community. Currently, we have to raise 85% of our annual budget from private sector donations and grants. This happens year after year, so we are hopeful that we can form a partnership with the federal government and join the network of IRCC-funded service providers to continue the work on a more sustainable footing.

We are currently participating in the recent call for proposals, and we're especially encouraged by the pilot initiative to support the success of visible minority newcomer women in joining the labour force, which is an area that we are focused on, and in particular the invitation to new agencies to apply. We certainly felt very welcome to participate in that process. However, we noted that the 12-month funding period for this pilot initiative limits what it is possible to achieve in such a short time, so that was a limitation in terms of what we could propose.

We also feel it could be helpful if the funding allowed service providers to work with people before and after receiving their permanent resident status. In our experience in particular, we see a need among immigrant women who have spent their initial years in Canada, after arrival, focused on their family responsibilities rather than looking for work. They come to us now ready to join the labour force and face the same barriers as someone who may have just arrived—language capacity and lack of Canadian experience, current skills and social networks—but as Canadian citizens they are not eligible for this type of funding even though with support from us they have exactly the same potential to make the positive contribution that women newcomers have.

We wanted to raise a couple of those points.

Thank you again for the opportunity to tell you about New Circles. We'd be happy to answer any questions. We hope that our model might be one that could be replicated in other urban centres in Canada to contribute to the successful settlement of immigrants.

Thank you.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you to all the witnesses for three very different kinds of perspectives on non-traditional settlement services and for opening our minds to them.

Committee, regarding the timing, my proposal is that instead of doing a seven-minute round, we try a five-minute round. We have four questioners, and then we can cut the difference and try to end just about 10 minutes late. Would people agree to that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, it's unanimous.

Mr. Sarai, you have five minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): First of all, I want to thank Hena. It's always great to see somebody who came here for new hope—somebody young—and to see them happier and getting a warm welcome and succeeding in their life. All I can say, on behalf of all of us, is that the doors are wide open for you in Canada, and I think your opportunities will be really great.

As for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, there is a great boys and girls club in Surrey. Particularly in my riding, they help a lot of young folks with summer programs and after-school programs. I visit them from time to time, and I notice that the students are quite mixed. There are some inner-city youth, youth whose families have been living for generations in Canada, first- and second-generation immigrant kids, and refugees as well.

This question is for Ms. Mooney. How have you adjusted as different waves of immigrants have come in and how have your services catered to them?

Ms. Colleen Mooney: I have visited the clubhouse that you're referring to, and it is a wonderful spot. The mission and vision of Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is that we're open to everybody and provide services for everybody at no cost or low cost. For example, at the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, all of our programs are free of charge. We don't charge anything. We try to eliminate any barriers. That financial part is often an issue for newcomers.

I was asking Hena on the way here how she found her way to the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa. She said that one of her younger siblings' teachers referred them to the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, so it's working with the schools and with the school boards as they adjust to different waves of immigrants, and trying to integrate.

You know, we take that very seriously at Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, and I can speak for the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa. We think integrating newcomer youth into Canadian society is a really important function. In fact, many parents will tell me they've sent their kids to the boys and girls club to learn how to be Canadian, which I take as a really great compliment. It's something we take really seriously.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Smythe. At New Circles, have you helped women with getting, let's say, business or workplace attire, similar to what some charities in Vancouver do? They help men who are looking for employment, who are coming from homelessness, who are coming off the street and needing a business suit and a tie for their first interview. They help them with their resumé and interview skills.

Do you do similar types of work to help newcomers with their first employment opportunities?

Ms. Rosie Smythe: Absolutely. That's a big part of what we do, especially when people first come to us and we provide for the whole family for a few years. Yes, a big part of what we're doing is really trying to help people to integrate and settle with the right attire. Many people aren't able to come with winter clothing, especially. A lot of people come with one suitcase, so we help them.

We can see it as something really important to someone's settlement, to be able to dress the way they feel and to dress for job interviews, as well as dress like other Canadians. That's what a lot of people coming in want to do. They want to be part of Canadian society, with Canadian dress, or with their cultural dress as well. It's really up to the people.

• (1635)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What specific needs do youth have when they come to Canada as refugees or immigrants? In your experience, are their needs adequately attended to by your settlement service agency or those that are around in your area?

Ms. Rosie Smythe: Yes, when we do our intake, when we first see people, that's a big part of it. We also have staff who can go into the store and meet with people. We make it a big part of what we're doing, to make sure that our clients coming in understand that we're not just about the clothes, but that we can also provide one-on-one case management settlement services. We have a worker who does that. We have two different employment program. We're looking to expand on that as well. We do that in partnership with other organizations, so if there are other needs, we refer people to other community services as well.

The Chair: I'm afraid the time is up.

Mr. Tilson is next.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Roberts, you certainly have a unique approach, and it is one we're interested in at this committee.

How do you assess the success of your own programs?

Mr. Fredric Roberts: Well, right now it's more or less just looking at the population afterwards and watching their individual transformation.

If we have one great need, it's to have a more studied analysis of outcomes. We are now talking to a Yale campus in Singapore about having them follow our program and track the outcomes of the students on a more comprehensive basis and more scientifically.

The feedback we get specifically from our NGO partners is that the students have all been profoundly changed. In many cases we see that those who would not have graduated from high school do; those who would not have gone on to college do; many of them have gone on to careers unrelated to photography, to medical school, as an example.

It's not exactly scientific at the moment, but we are hoping to solve that problem.

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you.

Ms. Smythe, there is evidence from the IRCC and from newcomers themselves that language training is failing large numbers of people, particularly those lacking in language or literacy skills.

Do you have any thoughts as to what's behind this and what we can do to improve the success of newcomers?

Ms. Rosie Smythe: I'll let Diana answer as well, but we see people who want and need to learn very specific skills. For example, in our business program we offer a language skills program that focuses on business skills. If you read any of the reports put out by the LIPs, the different integrated partnership programs, they've found that the way languages are taught right now is too broad. They're recommending that we do more specific teaching that is related to what people are enrolled in.

We also have an excellent program on which we're partnering. They help people by using something called The Stories of Us. I think they're funded by the IRCC. It's a really great program. We just started working with them. They come in and teach people language skills by telling their story. They can tell their story in their own language and then have it interpreted in English. That kind of thing really seems to be working much better than traditional—

• (1640)

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you.

Ms. Gibbs, you talked about women, and I'd like to ask you a question particularly about women who remain at home, who look after children and seniors and then seem to have difficulty getting their language skills up to the required level of proficiency for citizenship.

You've given some suggestions and recommendations to the committee as to what we should do, but do you have other suggestions or recommendations as to how we can improve the outcomes for this particular group of women?

Ms. Diana Gibbs: My sense would be that in terms of social integration, we need to reach out to them, to connect socially into their community. That's the need we have seen, as opposed to pre-economic attachment to the labour force.

We have run groups, for example, that bring women forward to mix with other people where the common language will be English, as opposed to perhaps going to a cultural centre where the language still remains the same.

Mr. David Tilson: Do you have recommendations as to what the government should do?

Ms. Diana Gibbs: Well, it could support those kinds of programs, I suppose—

Mr. David Tilson: Funding. Money.

Ms. Diana Gibbs: —but, no, I don't particularly....

Well, money, sure. Everything comes down to money.

Mr. David Tilson: It does indeed.

Ms. Diana Gibbs: But it's a question of where you're going to put your money, and that would be the recommendation.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with Ms. Laverdière for five minutes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank everyone for today's very insightful presentations.

Congratulations to Ms. Izzeddin on learning French and on her community involvement. That's very good, and I congratulate her.

My first question is for Ms. Gibbs, who mentioned that the—

Can you hear me?

[*English*]

Are you receiving the interpretation?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Diana Gibbs: No, not right now.

I can understand a little bit, but—

[*English*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: If there's a problem with the interpretation, I can do it....

[*Translation*]

The Chair: No, it's not a problem.

Mrs. Diana Gibbs: Ah, thank you.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: You talked about inherent difficulties with the experimental program you wanted to participate in, and a time limit of—

Mrs. Diana Gibbs: I cannot understand.

[*English*]

I'm so sorry.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'll speak in English for time purposes.

You did mention this experimental program, this new program—I can't remember how to say it in English—with a time limit of 12 months, and the difficulties it presents to you. Could you explain a bit more what kind of challenges that time frame poses for you?

Ms. Diana Gibbs: Yes. We are hoping to partner around our employment training programs for immigrant women, newcomer women, visible minorities in particular. We wanted to participate in this program, but it wasn't possible to put it in our budget. What we did with this proposal, which I hope will be successful, was to supplement with some additional enrichment to our base program, but we couldn't put it in for our base program operating budget because with one year of funding we can't really...and it starts now.

We already have that funding in place. That was the type of challenge we had with this particular call for proposals. It was to enrich the program. We can certainly use that enrichment by increasing our relationships with employers in particular. That's what we want to do, but again, we'll only have one year to do it, and it

does take a while to build relationships. That's the type of challenge, but we're happy to accept it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay.

The Chair: I must stop you for a moment, so that we can check whether the interpretation is working. It is absolutely necessary to have access to both languages during the committee's meetings.

● (1645)

[*English*]

Ms. Diana Gibbs: Also, I'm not used to it, so....

Okay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: We know that the ability to predict and anticipate is absolutely necessary for doing a good job.

I have another question for both of you before I come back to the witnesses from the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, if I have time.

Do you provide child care services to the women who attend your training?

[*English*]

Ms. Diana Gibbs: No. We have two types of training. The retail skills training is planned so that women can either drop their children at school or take them to day care. It's for a short time during the middle of the day, which is intentional for women when they have these free times because we do want people to use the other services that are available in the community. That's how we try to be flexible so that when women have.... We organize the training around the availability of our clients.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mooney, you welcome 12,000 young newcomers per year. I have two questions for you.

First, do refugees make up a large proportion of those newcomers? Second, are you also making a special effort to attract those young people?

I agree with you that integrating women and young people is a form of prevention. It is much more effective than taking action after the fact.

Ms. Colleen Mooney: I understood your question, but I would like to answer it in English.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: No problem.

[*English*]

Ms. Colleen Mooney: On a point of clarification, we're a boys and girls club, Repaires jeunesse du Canada, not necessarily scouts and guides. I just wanted to clarify that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay.

[*English*]

Ms. Colleen Mooney: They are very different.

Sorry, but I'm just trying to remember your question.

[Translation]

Ms. H  l  ne Laverdi  re: I was asking you what the proportion of refugees was and how you were raising awareness to attract newcomers.

[English]

Ms. Colleen Mooney: Yes, we do see a lot of refugees.

Over the years there have been different waves. In the last 10 years, there have been a lot of Somali refugees and refugees from different parts of Africa, especially in our urban clubs across the country. Most recently, there have been a lot of Syrian youth, again in our major urban centres across the country.

We actually do a lot of outreach. We work very closely with the school. The schools are trying very hard with English as a second language classes, but honestly they are overwhelmed. When you come to this country and you're in grade 1, you're learning quickly and it's your first time in school, but it's different when youth come. Someone like Hena, who came only about three and a half years ago, was all of a sudden thrust into high school. High school is challenging enough for most kids, but they don't know the language. So much is new, so we work very closely with the schools.

Here in Ottawa, two of our clubhouses are located in schools that are in particularly marginalized neighbourhoods that attract large numbers of refugees and immigrants.

[Translation]

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, but we have to stop here.

We will continue with Mr. Ayoub, in French, I believe.

[English]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Th  r  se-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Most of my questions will be in French. You can answer in English; there is no problem with that.

[Translation]

I am a Quebec member of Syrian origin. I listened carefully to Ms. Izzeddin's story and I noted hope, work and welcoming. This is the best kind of testimony we can have. That does not take anything away from your very important work, ladies and gentleman, but Ms. Izzeddin's testimony is truly refreshing and confirms the fact that we are doing things in a certain way and that we are doing them well.

My question is for Ms. Izzeddin.

Among the services you have received since you came to Canada three and a half years ago, what aspects have you felt are good and what would you do differently? Without saying that things went wrong, what would you do differently or would improve? What services has your family received? You have received services through Ms. Mooney, but what other services have you received and what do you think about them?

• (1650)

[English]

Ms. Hena Izzeddin: I would say that the ESL classes were the best services that helped me at school.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Would the language be the first thing you gained as a service and that was the most important in order for you to be included, to make some new friends and to participate in life in Canada? Would that be the first and most important thing for you?

Ms. Hena Izzeddin: If I had spoken English, life and school would have been way easier.

My dad was a train conductor and electrician, so he would have worked, but he's not working now because he is still in school. So is my mom. If we had spoken English, we could have done many things. I could have graduated from school by now, but I can't until next year because I'm not done with my subjects yet. I'm still learning.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

Ms. Colleen Mooney: One thing Hena mentioned to me on the way here was the number of forms from the government that her family had to fill out on multiple different things. That was very challenging for her family, because they were in English or French, and a lot of them were not available in other languages. It's something that we see a lot of at the boys and girls club. It puts the burden on someone like Hena to be the translator and take on a lot of family responsibility far beyond her years.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I understand.

As for you, Ms. Mooney, what kind of interactions do you have through the services you provide? You talked about schools. What more could the government do to improve the services you provide and promote consistency among the services offered by schools and non-traditional services like yours?

My question could also be for Ms. Smythe.

[English]

Ms. Colleen Mooney: Well, for lack of a better word, certainly we could use more financial help. Across the country, we don't receive very much money from the federal government for the services that we do provide, which we think are pretty essential.

We put a lot of emphasis on education. Across the country, we have scholarships, and in all of our clubs, we run homework clubs, after-school programs and leadership programs. Those are really key, I think, as part of the integration and helping kids to finish high school and to move on to be productive taxpaying members of society. Also, we're putting a lot of emphasis on good citizenship and giving back, and what it means to be a good citizen.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Madam Smythe, I will ask you the same question.

Ms. Rosie Smythe: Yes, I would say the same thing.

Were you asking about what we would need to be able to do an even better job than we're doing now?

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Yes. What is your need? What's lacking right now?

Ms. Rosie Smythe: Most definitely, it really has to go back to funding and to government funding, especially in the programs we offer, because we depend on private donors, and that can be very difficult to function with.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: What kinds of services would you be able to give new families that you're not giving them right now?

Ms. Rosie Smythe: I think what we would like to do is offer more of an array of services. Right now, we are providing both a retail program and a business program, and both of them require a pretty high level of English. If we were able to provide other services or other employment programs where somebody with lower language skills could still participate and then perhaps move up into better employment, that's something we'd really like to do.

• (1655)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I think my time is up.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end this panel here. I feel like we just started.

The committee will consider your testimony today, obviously, but also, if you have anything else that you would like to send to the committee in writing, especially in terms of recommendations on pushing new ideas towards settlement services.... You're all non-traditional providers of these things from very different perspectives. If you have anything else you'd like to submit to the committee in writing, we would very much appreciate it.

Thank you very much. I'm sorry that we were shorter on our questions than normal.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes while we change witnesses for the next panel.

• (1655)

(Pause)

• (1655)

The Chair: We will reconvene and hear from our next panel.

We're going to begin with Ms. Reimer from Edmonton.

Because you are coming to us via video conference, Ms. Reimer, I'd like to start with you, just in case we have a problem, and then we can fix it later if we need to. Then we'll hear from the witnesses who are in the room.

Take it away. This is your time to make your opening remarks.

Ms. Jan Reimer (Executive Director, Alberta Council of Women's Shelters): Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I'm speaking to you on Treaty No. 6 territory and that the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters works in communities in Treaties Nos. 6, 7 and 8.

Your request is timely as this issue has been weighing heavily upon women's shelters in our province and indeed across the country. Women's Shelters Canada will be hosting shelters from across Canada in late May with a focus on navigating immigration systems and on access to services with immigrant and refugee survivors of violence against women.

In Alberta just two weeks ago we launched a campaign in response to the New Zealand massacre, "Alberta Kind", as we felt we could no longer stand on the sidelines to bear witness to the crescendo of racism, hate crimes and violence directed towards Muslims and the anti-immigration sentiment in general that is being increasingly expressed. This is directly related to settlement issues, as racism is a barrier to employment, housing and feeling safe in your community. Women and families should feel safe to worship in mosques in Canada, and often they do not.

One of the beauties of Canada is how people of many lands have come together to forge a shared identity: that we can practise different faiths, or none, yet share respect of our laws and our country. We know that we need strong national action on this, and we know that it is a responsibility for each and every one of us.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters supports 37 members from across the province. These members provide a range of services to women, children and seniors facing abuse, through emergency shelters, second-stage shelters and seniors shelters, to provide a safe haven. In the last three years, members in Alberta have provided shelter to more than 30,000 women, children and seniors, and outreach services to more than 17,000, while at the same time turning away more than 47,000 women, children and seniors due to a lack of capacity in our system.

In Alberta, shelters work with women to use a tool called the danger assessment, developed by Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell of Johns Hopkins University, which helps to assess the likelihood of women being murdered by an intimate partner, in order to better appreciate her level of danger and inform safety planning. Research shows the danger assessment has the highest predictive validity of all actuarial risk assessments researched to date. Danger assessment scores show that almost two-thirds of women who complete the assessment are at a severe or high risk of being killed and definitely require the safety and supports provided by women's shelters. Women are in this category because, in part, they are being threatened with a gun or are being subjected to strangulation.

We are hoping to work with Dr. Campbell on fine-tuning the DA specifically for immigrant populations and Women and Gender Equality has given us the green light to develop a concept paper on this.

I had the opportunity to consult with ACWS members in advance of this meeting. My comments today reflect the views of our membership, rooted in many years of experience in providing supports to immigrant women, as well as our safety from domestic violence initiative, which outlines evidence-based and promising practices with respect to women's safety.

In general, committee members, the experience of an immigrant woman facing abuse is similar to that of most women in many ways, but certainly not all. What I mean by this is that every woman who faces abuse from her intimate partner requires certain essential supports to allow her to transition out of that relationship to safety.

The dynamics are the same: the desire of one human being to exert power and control over another. In recognizing this, we know that women across Canada need an effective and responsive legal system in both the criminal justice component, where perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, and the family law area, where officers of the court understand what domestic violence is and how to navigate this issue with a clear sense of what is before them by promoting the safety and well-being of a woman and her children.

• (1700)

We know that she requires trauma- and violence-informed care in a safe environment where she and her children can begin to heal. We also know that she requires the various arms of government and relevant community organizations to develop and employ effective mechanisms for collaboration, so that her wishes are at the centre of the process and information is shared to help enhance her safety. One example of that is the interagency case assessment teams, or ICATs, which originated in B.C. and are now being piloted in Alberta, with support from the RCMP and provincial government bodies.

These supports are required for women facing abuse. That is why my first recommendation to you is to develop a national action plan for ending violence against women. The federal plan is a welcome start, but a national plan that can integrate all these concerns and considerations into one overarching strategy is an essential part of solving this issue and will of course have to incorporate the settlement needs of newcomer families from an intersectoral approach, which I will now address.

I would like to illustrate some of these supports with a story from one of my colleagues in the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association. The story was provided to us as part of the research project we conducted to create an inventory of promising practices. This story focuses on Joanne, a young divorcee from India. She arrived in Canada in 2010 as a self-sponsored permanent resident. Her family in India was concerned about her marital status, and in 2012 she returned there to marry a young man. She was touched by his willingness to marry a divorcee despite cultural norms.

He came to live in Canada with her. When he arrived, he became controlling and abusive. He didn't allow her to contact her family, and he monitored all her movements. She gave birth to a baby boy in 2013. Joanne hoped this would change her husband's behaviour, but in 2016 he punched her in the face in front of the child. Children's Services got involved with the family. Joanne was referred to the family conflict program by her multicultural broker. When the counsellor first spoke to Joanne, she was very determined to make her marriage work and not divorce again.

The culturally sensitive support made it very easy for Joanne to open up to her counsellor about the importance of keeping her family together. She mentioned to the counsellor the respect she had for her husband due to breaking the norm of marrying a divorcee. She knew that he needed a shift in perspective to see the impact of his behaviour on their son. Joanne was very keen to receive couples counselling in their first language with someone who understood the cultural dynamics.

Despite his initial reluctance to do this, Joanne's husband joined the counselling sessions to learn co-parenting skills. The counsellor worked closely with them, and after a few sessions Joanne's husband

realized his mistakes. He concluded that a sense of powerlessness from their move to Canada had made him feel inferior to his wife and drove his behaviour in that way. Gradually, the counselling for co-parenting focused on the marital relationship.

• (1705)

The Chair: I'm going to need you to advance to the end, as we're over the time now.

Ms. Jan Reimer: What I'd really like to talk to you about, then, are our recommendations to you, which are at the end of our presentation. They are the following:

We really do need legislative and policy changes that meet Canada's international human rights obligations and prevent the separation of a mother from her children when a woman is experiencing family violence and abuse, has children who are Canadian citizens and is being forced to leave the country, as well as a co-application process for couples that ensures women are aware of their rights when they arrive in Canada.

We also need flexible funding models that include a national fund for women's shelters to access in order to address the needs of immigrant, refugee and trafficked women. Also, shelters need specially trained staff to work with immigrants and trafficked women and cover the basic needs of abused women without status, as well as housing programs geared to the needs of immigrant and refugee women fleeing violence.

We also need standardized programs, including translation services, settlement supports with both a rural and an urban focus, and programs that increase the awareness of men with respect to the effects of domestic violence upon themselves and their children.

Finally, we need a strong national campaign against racism, anti-immigration and Islamophobia, with tools that can be shared across agencies and programs. All Canadians should have the ability to feel safe and respected in their communities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I know that you missed part of your presentation. With your permission, I will ask the clerk to consider it as a submission, and the committee will get it.

Ms. Jan Reimer: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Niazi, we'll go to you for your presentation.

Ms. Adeena Niazi (Executive Director, Afghan Women's Organization): Thank you very much for this opportunity.

I'm here on behalf of Afghan Women's Organization, known as AWO. The mission of Afghan Women's Organization is for immigrants and refugees, as well as those who have experienced war and persecution, to lead self-sufficient and dignified lives in a socially inclusive society.

AWO was established 28 years ago in response to the particular needs of refugee Afghan women. We began by offering English and settlement programs, after which we expanded our services and the scope of our projects. Today we serve clients from all over the world—women, men and children. AWO, as a sponsorship agreement holder, or SAH, has sponsored more than 5,000 refugees from several countries in the past three decades. Today, thanks to our funding from IRCC and others, at our four locations in the greater Toronto area and itinerant services in southern Ontario we offer access to much-needed settlement services. As a sponsorship organization, AWO is the first point of contact for many refugees who arrive under the private sponsorship of refugees. This combination of our experience as a SAH and as a settlement service provider makes us extremely well positioned to assist refugees who are entering Canada through private sponsorship, government sponsorship and the inland refugee process.

AWO is led mainly by former refugee women. More than 97% of our clients are refugees or from refugee families. The AWO provides multiple culturally competent and linguistically appropriate gender-sensitive services, including one-on-one supportive counselling, orientation sessions, housing, parenting programs, employment and employment-related training, health and mental health services, and much more.

In our service provision we take a holistic approach. We work closely with the entire family in partnership with our community partners. We usually initiate a first meeting at the homes of marginalized women, where we provide initial information. This in-home outreach enables us to encourage the women to participate in our programs, including language. Our women-only classes provide a safe and comfortable place for women who are isolated and housebound. The classes help them learn the language, bridge the gap, and socialize and connect with the larger society. Sadly, due to lack of funding some women on our waiting list have to wait more than a year to be enrolled. Even when they are enrolled, we have to close the classes in the summer.

The needs of refugees, particularly refugee women, are distinct from those of immigrants. The majority of these refugees are highly skilled. They have skills for surviving. They are talented. They have amazing transferable skills and potential. They need support to utilize their potential. The underutilization of skills of refugee women leads to a missed economic opportunity for Canada and increased dependency on social services.

We are concerned that the voices of women's centres are not represented at the various decision-making tables, most notably at the National Settlement Council. There are many other challenges facing the settlement of women and refugees. These include the lack of adequate and affordable housing for refugees, the lack of adequate childminding support for women, the lack of support for mental health services, the lack of support to small racialized women's organizations that have lost their IRCC funding, and the lack of access to settlement services in rural areas and isolated communities.

• (1710)

This year the Government of Ontario made deep cuts to their financial support for refugees and immigrants, and the number of immigrants in this province continues to grow.

We have a number of recommendations to make. Increase support for year-round language and literacy programs for women and for all refugees. Provide adequate housing support. Provide adequate support for specialized services for women and refugees. Provide support to establish culturally competent mental health services for all women, particularly refugee women.

In closing, I would urge you to keep in mind that if the newcomers are provided with the support that organizations like ours provide, they end up making significant positive contributions to Canadian society economically and socially. I would also like to say that through sponsorship agreement holders' contribution to settlement services, an exceptionally high standard of settlement practice is maintained during the intense period of settlement and resettlement of refugees. Our experience is that privately sponsored refugees become self-sufficient sooner than government-sponsored refugees, because SAHs contribute their money, their financial resources and their time. They do a great job of resettling refugees.

Thank you.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cimbaljevic.

Mr. Zdravko Cimbaljevic (Human Rights Advocate, As an Individual): Honourable Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I first would like to acknowledge the Algonquin nation, whose traditional and unceded territory we are gathered upon today. Also, in becoming a convention refugee in Canada, I am broadly thankful for all the nations across Canada for allowing me to grow in this country and live on their lands.

My name is Zdravko Cimbaljevic. I was born in a small country called Montenegro, in the Balkans. About five years ago, I arrived in Canada seeking protection on the grounds of sexual orientation. As the first openly gay man in my country, I had started fighting for my community, which needed a voice. We all needed a voice at that moment. I managed to open the first LGBTIQ shelter in the region, and that gave me the broader spectrum of what kinds of settlement services that region needs, apart from the state's, which are really lacking. Unfortunately, after three years of fighting for and leading my community, I was forced to leave my country due to hundreds of death threats, attacks and a lack of state protection—none.

Before I came out as an openly gay man, I embraced LGBTIQ2 activism as my core responsibility in human rights advocacy. I was already actively working in building education, housing and other settlement services for Roma communities in the Balkans. I also have a broad knowledge of international settlement services that I gained at the international level while working with homeless youth in the U.K. and Venezuela. After my arrival in Canada in 2013, I started volunteering for organizations such as Rainbow Refugee and Foundation of Hope, two organizations that I admire for their incredible work in supporting LGBTIQ2 refugees and newcomers. I also had a great chance to work for settlement services in B.C., such as MOSAIC and the Vancouver AIDS Society.

With the professional and personal knowledge that I have gained in providing settlement services, I want to say that I'm very grateful to be here among you as an individual and a human rights advocate. It gives me the opportunity to speak from the heart, without any political intent or interest, as a human being who cares for others and a proud resident of this great country that I now call home.

In working and volunteering with LGBTIQ refugees and newcomers in Canada who are settling here, I'm happy to see the settlement providers and organizations that are here today as well, with social workers and fieldworkers improving their practices and providing equity throughout their services. They are individuals who spend many of their days talking to people, spending time with those in need in order to present them with opportunities, and giving emotional support while back-to-back trying to improve the quality of their lives in the entire process. That can be really hard sometimes, and I can tell you why.

While I am confident about people and organizations that are willing to help in running settlement programs, I am deeply concerned about the insufficient resources these settlement services receive from provincial and federal fixed funds—not one year, not three years, but fixed funds—that provide uninterrupted support to newcomers, immigrants and refugees in getting over barriers they may face, plus making sure that the clients go through minimum stress on top of the stress they already have.

Vancouver is my home, and it is already known that the cost of living and the cost of housing are unimaginable for many of us. A friend of mine who works as a social worker in the Surrey hospital shared a frustrating reality when it comes to referring a patient to case management in settlement services. When they call for a referral, settlement services are not even able to take names anymore for the wait-list, because they are maxed out and can't provide any help. Their resources can't support any more people, and then the hospital has to discharge their patients who have need of settlement services, sending them back into the community and the streets without any further guidance.

• (1720)

As already mentioned in previous speeches from other fellow colleagues, funding is paramount for organizations to be able to expand their services and provide enough help for newcomers and refugees who are already struggling to start their lives from zero. This is mainly for settlement services that are working in the core areas where I live and where many newcomers settle, such as Surrey, Burnaby, east Vancouver, Downtown Eastside, to name a few.

Funding for translation services, which we heard from Hena, helped her and her family in the first days after arriving in Canada. I will echo that and say it is both translation services and documentation, but also outreach and support in hospitals, schools, dentist visits and stuff like that.

We are working with newcomers and refugees who don't speak English or French, and translation services are one of the first challenges we face. How can anyone know what someone needs or present what we can provide for service, if there's no clear understanding on both sides? It's very hard.

Also, faster and streamlined logistical processes that were mentioned previously are needed for addressing the needs of newcomers and refugees for legal, medical and other help. Many lawyers and doctors are sometimes unable to react fast and help because of the long process with the logistical requirements.

Last, there is a need for increased support for mental health for newcomers and refugees. The adjustments are frequently far more difficult than anyone realizes. Many of us use behaviours...and come from the countries and cultures where little positive attention is paid towards mental health. For example, in Montenegro, to admit that you are struggling with some mental health issues profiles immediately as crazy. Many people hide it within their families, as it is considered as an embarrassment.

That culture is inherited. It arrives with us here, and we need to show that this is not the case here. Mental health in B.C. definitely needs more attention than ever. We can make sure to spread the message and tell newcomers and refugees who suffer from mental health that it is okay and we are here collectively, as a society, as a country, to help them.

As someone who is passionately involved in this work, I hope that these recommendations and my statement will trigger some conversations, and that my points will be considered within this survey. I am confident that my statement will not be too far from all of the others who have provided this support to live in B.C. and across Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Members, it will be a five-minute round.

We're going to begin with Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses. Thanks for all the work you are doing for the most vulnerable in society.

My first question is for Ms. Niazi.

I want to take a moment to especially thank you for all the work you are doing in Scarborough and the catchment area of Scarborough. You offer many services to newcomers, but there are certain programs you have which are specifically focused for women. You also run some women-only classes. I understand that newcomer women have some specific needs, and they need some specific programming and support for them to be successful.

Could you discuss why it is important for newcomer women to be able to receive certain services in a women-only environment?

• (1725)

Ms. Adeena Niazi: It's based on our experience of many years, realizing that some of the women will never come out of their homes if not for women-only classes or programs. As I mentioned, certain women are housebound and won't come out. We initiate meeting with them inside their homes, encourage them, and bring them to the women-only programs. It doesn't mean they will remain in those women-only programs. They're not segregated. It's just the first step for them to come out of their isolation.

From these programs, they meet women from different communities and backgrounds. Our programs are open to women from all backgrounds—Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, and so on. They get to know other women from other programs. Gradually, as I mentioned, they connect with the larger society. Settlement is a process. Newcomers, especially refugees, will not settle into society overnight. They need gradual steps and layers to get them into the larger Canadian society.

We find that some of the women who never came out of their homes and were encouraged by us to come out and join the language programs are now doing very well. For instance, one young refugee woman who was being abused and was staying at home was enabled by our programs, and she is now working in a mental health organization as a counsellor. We encourage them to go to school. She had talent; most of these women do. They just need culture brokers to get them out.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: When I talk to many women in my riding of Scarborough Centre, I usually see that they are the last ones to think about themselves. First it's about their husbands who are trying to find jobs. Then it's about getting their kids into school and settling them. For the majority of women, they're the last ones to think about themselves.

Do you think, by the time they are ready to receive some settlement services, we have enough time for them so that they can get all of those services or do they cross those time periods?

Ms. Adeena Niazi: I think as a settlement organization, not only Afghan Women's Organization but all organizations, if you want to provide the best type of services, you have to take a holistic approach. That's what we do. When we work with women, we don't isolate them from their families. Especially in the culture that we're working in, it doesn't happen. We work with the entire family, with the husbands and the children too. We look after all of their needs.

For the newcomer family, one need is around the intergenerational gap that is created when they come to a new country. Children go to school in a completely different culture and world than those their parents are familiar with. If this gap is not bridged, it creates a big problem for youths and also parents.

These are the programs we are working on, which, because of the time limitation, I didn't go into. The programs are about bridging the gap and working with youth, such as helping them with homework. We also do parenting programs. All of these programs involve the entire family. We don't isolate a woman from her family, but the first step is to work with her.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Many newcomers in my riding are also seniors. Do you do any women's programs that are specific to seniors?

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Yes, we do. Actually, we had a very good program for seniors, which the province has unfortunately stopped, so it won't continue. With seniors it's good if they're learning something that's practical. For example, we had a cooking program for seniors that involved them learning about nutrition. They learned about food that is nutritious. They learned how to shop and how to cook. When they went to the grocery store, they were escorted by volunteers. They learned about shopping carts and about nutritionally healthy food. The program brought them out of their isolation. They connected with senior women from other communities and made lasting bonds. They made friends.

Another program we have for seniors is peer leaders. The peer leaders are senior volunteers who work with a group of seniors in different communities. We have one in—

• (1730)

The Chair: I know you would like to go on, but I'm afraid I need to stop you there.

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis and then Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I have a brief question and then I'll hand it off.

Thank you to all of you for your testimony. My question is for Mr. Cimbaljevic.

In 2011, former immigration minister Jason Kenney was involved with the launch of this rainbow refugee program, and I know international human rights was a passion of his—in particular, standing up for the rights of LGBT people facing persecution around the world. The model for this program is an interesting one because it uses blended sponsorship. Much of our refugee sponsorship comes in the form of either government sponsorship, where it's all government bringing people here, or private sponsorship, where it's a private organization and the government isn't engaged, outside of administration.

However, this is a program where you have the government coming to the table, reducing the fiscal burden on the private sponsor, but you also have that private sponsor involved, supporting the process of integration. In a way it makes it easier for the private sponsor to step up, but it also makes it easier....

I think it was an innovative model put forward in 2011. I'm curious for your thoughts on how well the blended sponsorship model works and if this is something we should be expanding to other areas.

Mr. Zdravko Cimbaljevic: Thank you for mentioning that.

It is a model that is quite unusual around the world, and we're all kind of proud of something that we have in Canada, that we can privately sponsor a refugee. Not many countries, or none, have that model where citizens can sponsor privately.

When it comes to blended sponsorship, yes, that's true; we have that support from the government. However, a private sponsorship group, if it is sponsoring one person, has to raise at least \$20,000. They have to raise 70% of the funds and confirm to government that they have 70% of the funds in order for government to even start the process. There are a lot of timelines there. It's not as if you have the group and then suddenly the refugee comes here. It's a process where there's lots of work while someone still waits in a camp or in some kind of shadow to be rescued.

When it comes to that support, there is support, but as you know, it's very limited support. When it comes to housing, the government provides a certain amount for the furniture and for maybe three months of the 12 months that refugees are provided in Canada, to be supported by this group and the government for the first year of their stay. However, nothing happens after a year. It's not as if someone can really be fully settled in a year.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm going to jump in to hand it over to my colleague, but I guess what you're saying is that it's great that the government came to the table, but from your perspective, it could ideally give more. I will say that it's more than exists in other contexts for private sponsorship.

I'll hand it over to my colleague now.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, and thanks to my colleague as well.

I have a question for you. You've been here for five years, I believe you indicated. Since you've come to Canada have you been able to continue to do any work in development back in Montenegro? What have you been able to accomplish in the Balkans since you left?

Mr. Zdravko Cimbalevic: Yes, I'm still connected to my country because my whole family is there. I'm the only one who left the country. I'm connected from that point of view but also from the activism point. I think my leaving the country also spiked a little bit of other types of activism, that more people came out enraged that the only person who was out had to leave, and internationally, I think that triggered this talk, let's say.

I am involved more now internationally. Because I'm here, I cannot be there locally to support my community and colleagues who I kind of left behind, but I'm very much involved and give support whenever I can, especially in the region, because the whole region is similar.

• (1735)

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's great. Thank you.

Ms. Reimer, you indicated there was a tool to assess the level of danger, and you mentioned a particular name, Campbell.

Can I just get the name of that group from you again?

Ms. Jan Reimer: It's Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell from Johns Hopkins University.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Okay, and two-thirds of the people coming in were at risk of being killed.

Ms. Jan Reimer: That's right.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Can you expand on that?

Ms. Jan Reimer: Yes, it really illustrates how women really need shelter. There is that risk of their being killed, so that's why they're there, and they need that security.

Ms. Jan Reimer: The federal plan, as I understand it, addresses federal departments. It's not national, so where women live is a postal code lottery in terms of the services they get and the responses they get to domestic violence.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there.

Madam Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your presentations.

What struck me, in the three presentations, is the lack of resources, the lack of capacity or the lack of funding.

Mr. Cimbalevic, you talked about the level of funding, but also about the funding model, which is not always stable and predictable like it should be.

Ms. Niazi, are you seeing the same problem? Is the funding of your activities too short-term? I am not talking only about the level of funding, but also about the type of funding. Does it meet your needs, or are there improvements to be made?

[*English*]

Ms. Adeena Niazi: Actually, we are receiving funding from two levels of government and also from other funders, foundations and others. The major funding comes from IRCC. The type of funding excludes refugee claimants and citizens. They are not eligible for that funding. When the claimants come here, at the first stage, they miss the opportunity to receive the services. That will be very difficult for them to catch up later, I would say. The province is funding, but it is very small funding.

Also, like my friend mentioned, the duration of funding for IRCC is three years. It's a huge application. There's a lot of work being done. There is no core funding available for that. If there were some core funding available for organizations such as ours and others, it would build their capacity. It would also give them some peace of mind and provide some certainty, because they don't know what will happen at the end of the funding cycle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Ms. Niazi.

Mr. Cimbalevic, I am the proud representative of the Laurier—Sainte-Marie riding, in Montreal, where the village is located. Our community is enriched by many LGBTQ+ community individuals who settle in our area, in Montreal. Those people have often gone through very difficult situations.

I have a two-part question for you that does not directly relate to the topic we are discussing.

I know sexual orientation can cause difficulties when people apply for refugee status. Those applicants often do not have access to the refugee commissioner because their request is not based on grounds related to a crisis or a war. It is often difficult for them to declare their sexual orientation and apply for refugee status based on that. I would be very interested in hearing any comments you may have on this situation.

I would also like to know whether you think special programs should be established for LGBTQ+ communities.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Zdravko Cimbalevic: Thank you for your questions. I will be very quick.

I do believe that, when it comes to LGBTQ cases, every case is individual. It's very personal. Every claim has to be its own, and that's the part where mentioning countries and their reports of progress on LGBTQ rights can be very questionable, because we have Canadian international reports and U.S. Department of State reports where they can mention that a pride event happened in the country, and then suddenly a refugee and immigration board member can take that as a positive development and say, "It's safe in your country; there was a pride event last year."

Pride doesn't represent stability in the country. Pride represents fighting for the LGBTQ community. That cannot be measurable as progress in the country. Progress in a country is the protection of human rights in the country when it comes to the judiciary, law and police departments, and to any first contact that a citizen is confident to approach if their rights are violated. If they are not, that should be a measure to take as the Immigration and Refugee Board.

When it comes to camps and people who are outside of Canada, not inside, it's a totally different story with the UNHCR and the IOM and how they process these cases. Also, of course, locals who work for these agencies can push away these cases, because they can also be homophobic or transphobic in those cases. There are a lot of things that are streamlined. Every case is an individual case, and the reports, those human rights reports, shouldn't be seen blindly as proof.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Do I have five minutes?

The Chair: Well, you get six, because everyone else had six. Five is six at this committee.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thanks to all of you for coming and giving us insight into the various programs you have.

I'll begin with you, Mr. Cimbalevic. This committee has heard several times about people who've identified as LGBTQ+ and are often persecuted and must flee their homelands, sometimes very quickly. What are the specific needs of refugees who are LGBTQ+ that may be different from those of other refugees that we are traditionally accustomed to? Also, as a follow-up, I'll just ask if you

could say which needs we haven't addressed, perhaps, and which ones are being addressed.

Mr. Zdravko Cimbalevic: Because of the time, I will focus on one particular group of the LGBTQ, and that's the trans community inside the LGBTQ refugee process, and the newcomers who are coming, but definitely refugee claimants who are going through or have been through the sex reassignment process or who wanted to go through it. I think there's a lack of services there.

When someone is coming from Iran, for example, or countries where even being just a closeted gay is not allowed, and where you have a transgender person who cannot really hide it, they want to show that they belong to a different gender, the gender they feel. I think that community has to have a much larger attention in the process, because there's a language barrier and there are medications they have to receive immediately after arriving in Canada where, as a claimant, you—

• (1745)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Are you saying that they probably need a more specialized social worker type of training or psychologist type —

Mr. Zdravko Cimbalevic: Exactly. I believe that as soon as they start the process as a refugee claimant, they should be flagged as someone who doesn't have to wait to be accepted in order to get medical support or benefits from the government because they have to wait until the hearing. Now, as we all know, all the hearings are postponed because of all the cases that are coming in, so there isn't much promise that the hearing will happen, and then they also have to postpone their medical treatment, their hormone treatment and things like that.

I believe that as soon as the person is profiled as a refugee claimant who is a trans person they should be allowed to get the medical treatment with the hormones and hormone therapy immediately and not have to wait for the hearing, because that can also reflect on mental health and everything else when it comes to settlement services.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

Ms. Niazi, you deal with a lot of immigrants specifically from Afghanistan, say, where gender equality may not always be as strong, especially in rural areas. How do you think settlement services differ for men and women when they're newcomers?

Ms. Adeena Niazi: How are settlement services different for women?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Yes. How do you think they differ for men versus women from the same regions? How can we better cater to them to help women in particular and then also men get the services they need?

Ms. Adeena Niazi: I see women's needs as very special and distinct from the needs of men.

We are not working with only the Afghans, as I mentioned. We are working with refugees from other countries, like lots of Syrians, Iraqis, people from Iran and other places as well.

Also, there is a lack of support they got back in their country. I don't believe it's a culture, but because they have gone through war and violence and they have gone through losses in their lives, women have more responsibility. They have to look after their children, they have to do their house chores and they have more responsibilities. Also, some of the women, because of the war and because of these things, feel threatened, and somehow they prefer to be housebound, and they don't come. They need more encouragement.

Also, abuse happens everywhere and because of the lack of systems in the countries with their wars going on and with the culture of war, they haven't received support for abused women. Somehow they have internalized it and because of many factors, they don't talk about that. They need more encouragement to open up and....

Abuse is a taboo in most of the communities. We need more encouragement to talk about it if there is violence and abuse against them in the family, more information and more support.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What tools have been effective that you've found to encourage those who are abused to come out more and get the benefit of settlement services?

Ms. Adeena Niazi: The first thing is to establish a rapport and trust between the settlement worker and them. Mostly the settlement workers come from a similar background, and they are sensitive to the services and don't push them, and they allow them to be open. That works a lot.

Usually there is also one-on-one counselling and also small group supports among the women who have gone through this abuse, violence and similar difficulties. There are support groups. They are open and they see that they are not alone and everybody talks about that. From there, information is provided and also they are given the choice to have an informed decision of what they want to do.

Similar to immigrant women and with refugees from other countries, as was mentioned before, the solution for their problem is not just separation. We have to work with the entire family. We usually work with the entire family, with the husband, the children and all, to reconcile.

We also have separate workshops and programs for men. When you work on the issue of violence and the special needs of women, men have to be involved, so we do it through that aspect.

● (1750)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

The Chair: We need to end it there.

I want to thank the witnesses. Again, I apologize for the somewhat shorter meeting than usual due to the vote. Thank you for your time and your testimony.

If any of you have anything by way of specific recommendations you want to submit to the committee, please do so in writing. If you have friends who want to do that, please let them know as well.

The meeting is adjourned.

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