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Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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● (0845)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. This is the 66th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I'd like to welcome Stephanie Kusie to the committee. She will be with us until the end of June.

Welcome, Stephanie. We are very happy to have you here.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Our witnesses this morning are the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia and Catalyst Canada, both by teleconference. Welcome to both of you.

We'll start with the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Watts (Director, Settlement and Integration, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia): Thank you.

My name is Jennifer Watts. I represent the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, the only multi-service settlement agency in Nova Scotia and probably the largest one in Atlantic Canada. We've been providing services to refugees and immigrants for over 38 years. We are happy to be here to address you this morning. I am going to speak rapidly, because there is a lot of information we'd like to convey to you but I also understand that there will be time for questions and answers.

We know that women's experiences are very diverse generally, and that is also true of immigrant women who are settling here in Canada. We know that many immigrant families come here in a small nucleus, which is perhaps different from the experience they've had in their home country. They are relying on family and friends, if they have them here, who may not be aware of services. Generally, there is a lack of information around settlement supports and networks that may support them during this time. Therefore, if a crisis situation happens to them, it often happens very rapidly and in isolation within the community. Particularly, women who face abusive situations do not report that, partly out of fear and partly because they have no money. If their situation changes, they see their economic security very much tied into that family relationship. It is very often a difficult situation.

We also know that immigrant women's economic needs need to be seen through the lens of social determinants, which include family status, race, education, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, and pre-arrival condition, to name a few. This will affect their ability to settle and to feel financially secure. Immigration status affects their economic security. When women become citizens, they lose their ability to access settlement resources. If during the time when they are moving toward their citizenship they are not actively engaged or connected to settlement services, once they become citizens they no longer have access to that. In terms of the transition, it may take them time. They may be at home with child care and taking care of families. They may in fact become citizens without necessarily having the full support for integration. Also, conditional family class sponsorship can be problematic, particularly if it breaks down, because women fear being deported and therefore choose to stay in relationships that are not safe for them.

We know that child care is a very large issue, since women tend to be the primary caregivers for children. If they don't have access to child care, that limits their ability for language learning and employment, increasing isolation and reliance on their spouse. As an organization, we do offer child care, but our resources are limited. Particularly for families arriving with large numbers of children within their family unit—as we experienced with the Syrian refugees who have come—it is very difficult to provide the range of child care that is needed to adequately address their needs. The lack of affordable, subsidized, and appropriate child care makes it difficult for women to break out of the cycle of poverty and have economic security.

The child tax benefit has been very positive. We'd like to thank the government for the recent changes. It has a significant impact on our folks. One of the issues we've seen is that the benefits can take several months to be given to some of our clients, particularly if there are questions around the global income, or if a refugee has filled out the form wrong or has not realized the importance of having that document in on time. Then it takes a significant amount of time to go back, work through all the details of the application, and get that form filled out. It often leaves families without access to the child tax benefit. That's a real problem with the bureaucracy around that.

We've also seen that during the first three months of coming in, refugees don't have access to the child tax benefit and there is no longer RAP funding to support people during that time. Having access to food is very difficult for people during that time. We know that income assistance rates have not risen very rapidly, if at all. There is difference across provinces, but speaking from the Nova Scotia reality, the housing shelter is woefully inadequate. It does not meet the needs of people for finding safe, accessible housing. We also know that, if you are on income assistance, it is difficult to find the opportunity to go to school or to access resources, and therefore to move out of that program and into greater economic independence.

• (0850)

We have recognized in our new strategic plan that if we're going to be champions of an inclusive and welcoming province, we need to be involved in looking at the systemic issues that affect affordable housing, accessible health care, and poverty. Those are real issues that are affecting women, in particular, in our community. We also recognize that women who are living with disabilities or in families that have disabilities or women from the LGBTQ community face further difficulties having a successful economic integration.

Specifically, looking for adequate and appropriate language opportunities, therefore having increased support for tutoring and child care and being able to access services after women become citizens.... Interpretation budgets are huge, particularly for agencies that are not actually immigrant-servicing. We would love for our clients to be able to access the great resources that are now in the community, but they can't, because these organizations either don't have the cultural competency or do not have budgets to support interpretation of their services. They tend to rely on us, when really, if we're trying to be a community that is broad, diverse, and inclusive, we need to change ourselves in all aspects of our society. Interpretation budgets are key to having that happen.

Access to affordable and accessible housing is a huge issue, as well as appropriate and adequate economic support during the person's time as a refugee, and also—if they have to—being able to move onto income assistance so that it actually supports them. We would certainly be interested in any discussion around a guaranteed annual income and the possibilities for supporting women.

Refugee women in particular may find employment in places where it's evenings, overnights, and weekends. Often they're entry-level jobs, and the women tend not to move out of those jobs. Also, there often isn't oversight and protection in those jobs to support women, so it can be a vicious cycle of staying in a place that's not healthy, safe, or appropriate for them, and always at a minimum or low wage.

In closing, I'd like to say that last year we did a program looking at underemployed professional immigrant women. We noticed six areas we felt were important for employers to consider. One is looking at the credential recognition—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Sorry, that's your time.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: I'd be happy to answer questions about that afterwards.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

We're now going to turn to our friends at Catalyst Canada, from Toronto.

Ms. van Biesen.

Ms. Tanya van Biesen (Executive Director, Catalyst Canada Inc.): Good morning, and thank you for inviting Catalyst to be part of the discussion this morning. I've had the chance to speak with some of you before.

Catalyst is a global not-for-profit that advocates for the advancement of women in business.

I'm going to talk about three areas, specifically the gender wage gap and occupational segregation; tools to strengthen women's economic security; and ways to increase women's entry, participation, retention, and representation in leadership and in high-paying positions.

I'd like to take a minute to set the stage in Canada. As many of you will know, among some, not all, of the reporting 710 companies listed on the TSX, which represents about \$2 trillion in market value, only 12% of board seats are held by women, and 45% of those companies have no women—zero women—on their boards. Further, 43% of these companies have zero women executive officers, and then another 28% have only one. Finally, fewer than 5% of CEOs of Canadian companies are women. The Canadian stage is not quite what it could be with respect to women.

Let me talk a bit about this first issue of identifying the problems that affect women's income: the gender wage gap specifically. Catalyst's research, along with that of many others, shows that wage inequality starts early in women's careers and worsens over time. In fact, studies we've done show that Canadian high-potential women earn \$8,000 less than men do in their first post-M.B.A. job and are more likely to start at a lower-level position despite same levels of experience and education. Earning less over a lifetime means that women receive lower pensions when they retire and are at a greater risk of either poverty or a reduced lifestyle than are men.

In our view, the pay gap and other gender gaps exist for a number of reasons, including entrenched systemic barriers and unconscious biases, not because women are less qualified than men. I would point to a couple of things.

The majority of talent recruitment, development, management, and compensation systems are not designed to correct early inequities. They're built on the notion of meritocracy, which I think we love to latch onto in Canada. Many research projects have shown that merit contains a significant amount of unconscious bias, because merit is defined by those in power.

I would also note in the area of gender wage gap that some groups of women experience much larger wage gaps than others, notably racialized and indigenous women, newcomers, and women with disabilities. I have some facts on that.

Indigenous women earn 18% less than indigenous men, and 36% less than non-indigenous men. Women with disabilities earn 16% less than men with disabilities, and 48% less than men without disabilities. Racialized women earn 19% less than racialized men, and 34% less than non-racialized men.

This should be a real concern for Canada, as our mix continues to change and we have a government that is very pro-immigration. Not only are women being left behind, but racialized women are being even further left behind.

On the subject of occupational segregation and lack of access to key growth sectors, I would say that social norms and stereotypes continue to influence girls' and young women's educational paths, and consequently their professional careers. These stereotypes start very early in life, at home and at school.

I know that education sits with the provincial governments, but to the extent that the feds can influence what's happening provincially, this education at home and at school from a very young age is critical. Further, biases in the workplace that cause women to leave industries such as high tech—and we're seeing a lot of news around that, for instance, Uber, and Salesforce, and many other companies—have to be addressed through strong leadership, training, process, and systems changes.

Turning now to identifying possible tools to strengthen women's economic security, the following actions by both business and government will help.

One way is to adopt pay transparency policies. Government mandates requiring companies to publicly disclose salaries and/or gaps between women and men's wages, such as the U.K. government's regulations and Australia's legislation requiring companies to do so, are examples of ways to achieve pay transparency.

The second way is to re-evaluate negotiation policies. While women negotiate both promotions and compensation as much as men do, research shows that women are penalized when they do so.

● (0855)

The third way is to adopt a prohibition on compensation based on salary history. Several U.S. states and local governments have already proposed or passed this type of legislation—notably Massachusetts, New York City, and Philadelphia—because basing salary on previous salaries leads to a continuation of lower pay for women.

The fourth way is to conduct internal pay equity studies, analyses, and audits to eliminate and ensure you don't have a gender wage gap. Another government policy example of this is the recent Iceland legislation requiring large companies and government agencies to undergo audits and prove that they are in compliance with equal pay rules.

Finally, as ways to increase women's entry, participation, retention, and representation in leadership and high-paying positions, I would point to evaluating recruitment, retention, promotion, and talent development systems for gender bias. Analyze pools of candidates for both hiring and promotion decisions; are they reflective of a broad pool of candidates? Bring an unconscious bias spotter into promotion and high-potential discussions. That can apply to business and government, and not-for-profits for that matter. Challenge recruitment partners to bring forward a diverse set of candidates, and above all, monitor and track progress for compensation, promotion, and hiring decisions, because the data will give you the truth.

From a board perspective, in our view there's no one right way to accelerate progress for women on boards. What does matter is that companies set goals for a percentage of women as board directors, and that boards use at least one mechanism to facilitate board renewal, such as age or tenure limits, coupled with board evaluation processes. We believe governments should reinforce the setting of targets, renewal mechanisms, and written policies, and should track and publish progress. We do believe the government should adopt comply-or-explain legislation, such as has been proposed in Bill C-25.

Finally, we encourage government to seize on the opportunity to leverage groups, like the gender and good governance alliance, previously referred to in a prior testimony by Beatrix Dart, which is a tremendous alliance of like-minded not-for-profits that can be used as a think tank by governments across the country.

Thank you.

● (0900)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We'll turn to questions now.

Our first set of questions is from Sean Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thanks very much.

I'll start with ISANS. Thank you for joining us remotely from Nova Scotia.

There were a few items you hit on about which I would like to get additional information.

You mentioned the Canada child benefit and the fact that newcomers sometimes struggle with the administrative burden due to tracing their global income, or potentially with the new kind of paperwork they may not be accustomed to, coming from a different background.

What can we do as a federal government to help minimize this administrative burden, to make sure the families are receiving the benefits we intend them to get?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Our experience right now is that when there is a difficulty or a problem it takes an inordinate amount of time to have them reapply, fill out the forms, and prove that their children are registered in school. This is so for the families who may be suffering from trauma and trying to understand what their situation is, but also for the staff at ISANS who are trying to scramble, particularly if we have a large number of people coming in. It raises a huge amount of administrative work and leaves the families, most importantly and unfortunately, without access to that tax benefit. In turn, this means that we have to supplement with some of the donations we receive, and people end up going to food banks. They end up desperately trying to negotiate with landlords to prevent evictions, so there is a whole series of things.

I think a simpler process is, perhaps, just working out and making the link with ISANS by explaining the situation and telling them what has happened. Let's move forward. Certainly, funding can be withdrawn afterwards if something is found to be irregular. The majority of times it's a simple mistake that did not get caught soon enough that ends up causing this to occur.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Another point you raised was the fact that sometimes when a person becomes a citizen, they aren't necessarily fully integrated into the community and could still benefit from settlement services. In terms of the delivery model, I know you are deeply involved, but I'm wondering from the federal perspective how we can assist people in accessing settlement services in the provinces that they're living in after they become Canadian citizens.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: It is my understanding that's a question of funding. We could certainly offer the services. It's not that we don't have the services, it's that we do not receive funding to be able to do that. If there were some acknowledgement and allowance to say that they do count as clients and we understand and recognize that in terms of your service delivery, that would make a difference.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent.

Shifting gears here, you mentioned, Ms. van Biesen, that you're a supporter of a comply-or-explain type of policy when it comes to promoting women to get on corporate boards. We've heard differing opinions on this issue. Some witnesses have suggested that a quota system is the right way to go. We've heard a number of things. Why is comply or explain the right way to go, in your opinion?

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: I would say that it's one of a number of ways to go. As I mentioned, I don't think there's any one right way to get there. I do support what's being proposed in Bill C-25 as a step in the right direction. I think comply or explain, as currently defined in the OSC, could be tightened up. As you've heard from others, there are a lot of companies explaining with weak explanations.

So I'm a proponent of Bill C-25. I think it's the right step for us to take, at least as a first step.

• (0905)

Mr. Sean Fraser: You also mentioned that there's a real problem when it comes to the promotion and recruitment of women in not just high-growth sectors but also high-paying positions. I saw this repeatedly in my previous career. When we started our careers, the firm I was with was quite good to recruit young women out of law school. Within the first few years, a lot of them fell off the partnership track. I'm sure there were a hundred reasons why.

Again, from the perspective of the federal government, how can we encourage private sector companies to monitor what's happening in-house and do a better job of ensuring that women share equally in the economic benefits of those positions?

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: I think the first and most important thing for government is to model through your own behaviour. I think establishing targets, and demonstrating that if it can be done in government it can be done elsewhere, is job one.

Second, through government, I would encourage companies to set their own targets and to reinforce that. Frankly, one of the things that I do think is missing in Canada is that while we have things like comply or explain, we are very Canadian and polite. We never want to shame any companies. There are lots of companies out there doing nothing, making no efforts, and making no strides in creating a discussion around the need for quotas. I think those companies should be named and shamed.

Mr. Sean Fraser: With respect to the mechanisms available to the federal government, is potentially one way to do this to introduce legislation that doesn't just look at corporate boards but also looks at the promotion of women through the ranks, from the entry level right to the senior management?

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: Yes. I think it gets harder and harder to get all the data, but I do think this should be well beyond boards. We should look at the pipelines. At a minimum we should look at the senior executive suite and boards, and if we can go down several levels, fantastic.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Turning to ISANS now, you got cut off at the very end of your statement when you were talking about the underemployment of professional immigrant women. I was very interested in what you had to say. If you want to take my remaining time for questions, I would love to have you finish.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Thank you. I really appreciate that.

This follows up from what the other speaker was saying in terms of looking at women who are in professional jobs but immigrant women are unable to move beyond a certain level. We have a study, and if anyone is interested, we have an employer tool kit to look at strategies.

One of them, as I mentioned, is credential recognition and how to go about doing that. There's helping immigrant women become prepared for navigating the application process for promotion, and looking at issues of communication and what employers can do around addressing issues of language proficiency, accents, jargon, and all of those things that may make it difficult for women to feel secure when wanting to advance but not having the opportunity to do that. It looks at promotion subjectivity and information gaps and feeling unwelcome and undervalued. Then there's the one-size-fits-all approach to recruitment and promotion. Some of the strategies that were previously mentioned would look at women in general, but another lens would look at the situation of immigrant women and how to move forward on that. This would include having diversity and inclusion committees, making sure they're staffed up and trained properly, and making sure there are cultural competency workshops in the workplace, with training and education and mentorship programs.

There are also the appropriate orientation packages so that, for women who maybe don't have the cultural work experience in Canada, it's very clear what things they need to be aware of. Providing specific English in the workplace training would allow for a step up in terms of some of the specific—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Sorry. I hate to cut you off again—

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Certainly.

I have a few more, if anyone is interested.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Actually, could you send us the tool kit you referred to? If you could provide that to the clerk, that would be great.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: For sure. It has quite a bit of detail in it.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Vecchio for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

Jennifer, I will be coming back to you, so we'll be discussing some of those great things.

Thank you also, Tanya.

I'm going to focus especially on the immigrant women coming into Canada, because I think this is something that we're missing here.

I just sat down with a lady from Medicine Hat the other day, who explained that they had about 15 new families come to their area. One of the biggest issues that they have is the language barrier. Some of the women are actually pulling their children out of school so they can take an interpreter with them to help them throughout the community.

Jennifer, I want to focus on things like the prior learning assessment tools that you may have, as well as what sorts of language barriers they have. What are we doing to get over those barriers? I think the number one thing is if they want to integrate, we have to help them understand the language. Can you advise me on what your association is doing when it comes to language skills?

● (0910)

Ms. Jennifer Watts: We try to provide a whole suite of language opportunities. Again, it's not the one-size-fits-all that needs to be understood. It's sometimes very difficult for women who have come into the country, who have large families, and are really struggling. Again, this is the child care issue: finding spaces for babies, spaces for toddlers, and needing to get home to pick up kids after school because of schedules. It's very complex, and if you have eight kids, and are trying to negotiate that, it's very difficult.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I totally agree with you, but what I'm really looking at is the language barrier. We recognize that a lot of children are now being put in a role of interpreter. Within my own community we have a very strong Mennonite community. We have had a number of young girls who will come and interpret for their mothers on a child tax benefit application, and they're between the ages of 10 and 12. I see that within our own communities, regardless of where people are coming from.

I think we know that one of the barriers is getting the language requirements. What can we do? I know funding is lacking, but what sorts of programs are available to them now? We could look at it as an entire wraparound program, where you come in, and the children can have play dates and things like that while the mothers are interacting with other women trying to learn the language. What sorts of programs do you have that help?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: I think one of the critical things is the actual language training with trained EAL staff, who are constantly trained. If anyone is going to advance through to get the competency and to get their CLB 4 or 5, to be able to move into the workplace and work, it's going to require specifically being in classes with trained educators. That's number one—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay, I appreciate that. I think sometimes we have to look at formal, but also informal education.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Yes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I know for myself I'm looking at learning French. One of the things is I will be put into a family's home, where that informal education is also strong. I do understand where we need to get them to, but what sorts of informal, affordable programs are we currently setting up in those communities, where the children can be a part of that as well?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: We have conversation circles that are run by volunteers. We're also beginning the HIPPY program, which is looking at having trained staff go into the home and work with women and their children. It's working with children in terms of literacy, but also helping women. There are a variety of different options in doing that. We also promote programs such as sewing classes and gathering places where women can come with a focus, and even gardening projects. All of these things bring people out into the community, help them link with Canadians who were born here, and support their language development as well. There's a series of things that we can do.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Awesome. I don't mean to be rude about child care. I'm just trying to stray away from that because that has been a huge focus of our entire study.

When we're looking at the prior learning, at the skills.... I know a lot of times these are associations under the province. If someone comes in as a doctor, he or she has to come under the Ontario Medical Association to get licensing. Can you share with me what sorts of skill sets you see coming in that we can build upon with our immigrant women? What sorts of association barriers do we have to break down, so that maybe their credentials are recognized and they have a chance for greater employment? Or do we see a lack of any employability there? What do you see?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Women are coming in with a variety of different experiences and backgrounds. Certainly the issue of international qualification recognition is very important. I must say that Nova Scotia has been a leader. I think we now have 13 specific groups we work with in engineering, pharmacy, health, financial services. They help not just women, but men as well, in terms of looking at their previous skills and experience in their country of origin and how that may translate into the pathway of options. There's not necessarily one specific way. If you were a dentist in another country or becoming a dentist here, there are certainly many pathways. We have had a lot of success, and I must say we're unique in looking at the program that supports that international qualification recognition.

• (0915)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: When I was travelling with the HUMA committee, I recall being out in Medicine Hat talking about immigration. There's a fund there that immigrants can get to help them for one year. Can you share a little bit with the committee so they understand what the fund does, and can you tell me what the uptake in your community for that fund would be?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: I'm not sure about this exact fund, but we do have a fund that is supported through the government to allow people who have come, who don't have the funds, to be able to get their qualifications to study for exams, or to do certain things. It's a loan fund: they can receive a loan to be able to work on their qualifications whether through exams, tests, or whatever, and then pay that back. It's been very useful and successful and there have been practically no issues in terms of payback. That's been a huge resource.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I know my time is getting very limited. That's one thing I understood as well, that the payback is extremely high.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: It's very good.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Very good. Is there enough money there? Is that something that the federal government should look at bumping up, so that we have resources like that? We do know there has been excellent success from that program.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: We would certainly support the continued use of that resource. I think we're entering into some negotiations right now, but that has been very valuable. Also I would say support around the international qualification recognition program is really critical as well. I understand that will be reviewed over the next year.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's your time. We'll now turn to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both of the witnesses. This is extremely helpful and will inform our final recommendations.

I want to turn to Ms. Watts from the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia.

I'm elected on Vancouver Island, so exactly the other side of the country, but the stories you're telling are resonating with me. In my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, I've heard that the language barrier is one of the biggest challenges facing new Canadians, and women in particular. The Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society is doing fantastic work and they are providing language training, but we're seeing that it's just not up to them alone to carry the whole load, and, as you say, they're not funded to do this.

We're also hearing from them that, even if language training is available, their female clients have difficulty finding transportation to be able to access that training and have difficulty accessing child care. I would like to hear you say really clearly whether you see that increased federal investment in both public transportation and the universal child care system would remove some of those barriers to immigrant women being able to attend language training class, which would then allow them to get into the workforce.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Certainly we would see great public transit systems as being very important in supporting all Canadians, but particularly people who are coming into our country as newcomers and being able to access resources and child care as fundamental things that help support women integrating into the workforce. We'd definitely support those advancements in looking at greater economic security, not only for immigrant populations but for Canadians as well.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Where does language rank as far as the hurdles that immigrant women are facing in accessing reliable employment go?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: It would rank very much at the top, absolutely.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

You also talked a little bit about domestic violence. We've been hearing from previous witnesses at this panel that paid domestic violence leave is starting to be implemented by some unions such as the United Steelworkers in Manitoba, and it's starting to unfold, we're hearing, somewhere in the Atlantic region. I can't remember where, but certainly in British Columbia and Ontario domestic violence leave has been proposed so that women can get paid time away from work to resettle their lives and families and perhaps not have to leave that job while they are making this transition in their life. Is that something you're hearing about from your client base? Do you agree that paid domestic violence leave as a protected right would allow women to avoid some of the discontinuity that results from employment in relation to domestic violence?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: I certainly think that we'd support that. Probably what we're hearing about most right now, in terms of immigrant women facing domestic violence, is the lack of resources within the shelter community to be able to respond adequately to their situations. Immigrant women may be choosing not to leave situations because, as much as they would like to, the shelters are just unable to provide adequate resources for their cultural context. That's probably what we hear most of right now. Certainly I think the program you're speaking of would be of benefit, but I think for us right now the critical aspects in those situations are having adequate supports, cultural competency training, and interpretation services for shelters. There are also the complexities of having very large families that include young men, and not wanting to split those up but the shelters not being able to respond to the family unit. Understanding that complexity but not being able to respond is very problematic.

● (0920)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That's good confirmation. We've certainly heard from other witnesses that in addition to the complexities posed by the makeup of an immigrant family, the lack of shelter space and then the lack of affordable housing to transition out of shelter space means that women have to make the impossible choice of whether to return to an abuser and an unsafe situation for themselves and their families, or to put themselves and their families into real poverty, having to live in completely inadequate housing. It's a double whammy.

I'd like to turn to Ms. van Biesen from Catalyst Canada and follow up on some of your comments about pay equity. We have been hearing a lot about this at this committee. We heard from Oxfam Canada that there are no barriers to legislating pay equity to break down the gender wage gap. This is federal legislation that we're looking at. The United Nations committee to end discrimination against women also called out this government for not having legislated federally. A year ago, a special committee of Parliament recommended that pay equity legislation be tabled in our Parliament this month, but the government's saying 2018.

Have you heard within your community whether there are any barriers to legislating now, given that Ontario and Quebec did this 20 or 30 years ago?

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: I haven't heard of any barriers. I think, as with everything else, you'd get push-back from the business community with further legislation. That being said, these are the kinds of issues we've been talking about for so long, and they still exist, so I do think the government needs to step in and take a harder point of view on this.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I appreciated your comments earlier—I think in your initial testimony—that the government should model through its own behaviour. Would you like to expand on that? It feels to me that if government's not legislating and requiring it for federal employees and federally regulated industries, there's a bit of hypocrisy. Then there's pressure on corporate Canada or small-business owners to close the gender wage gap.

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: This government has really set a positive tone, certainly for women within the public service. It has taken a positive step in demonstrating that women should be part of leadership roles and that their representation is very important.

I do think, though, as I've spent more time with DMs and ADMs, that there's still a need for greater representation of visible minority women, indigenous women, people with disabilities, LGBTQ communities. Those equity-seeking groups are still under-represented in the government. That needs to be acknowledged and worked on.

But once—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Sorry, that's your time. Thank you.

Next we'll have Ms. Nassif, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you.

I would like to thank our two witnesses.

My first question is for Ms. Watts.

I am an immigrant. I had a career, I was a licensed nurse in my country. I also faced obstacles, even though I was trilingual when I arrived in Canada and had a profession. After having my children—triplets—I decided to go to university to do a bachelor's and a master's. In the end, I decided to go into politics and be involved in society. I don't think that all women do what I did.

I would like to ask you a question. In your opinion, what would help immigrant women climb the ladder? What steps could the federal government take to help immigrant or refugee women in their job search in Canada?

● (0925)

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Watts: We could continue to support the programs, for example, that many settlement organizations like ISANS are offering now, across the country. Employment workshops, job resumé workshops, language training. Specifically, it depends where you come in. In our language training, we deal with a range of people, from those who are illiterate in their own language to people who have university degrees and speak English very well but may just need a tune-up, as it were, around some of the language used in their specific profession.

Providing a wide range of opportunities for language training is important. We found English in the workplace to be really helpful, where a teacher will go into the workplace and work with the employer and either a group of employees or a specific employee, dealing with specific language issues that need to be resolved.

Certainly language is very important, as is having a variety of opportunities. Employment counselling services, which we offer, are very important. Again, they run the gamut from learning how to write your resumé to having people come in from HR departments around Halifax, for example, to give the client the opportunity to go through a job interview. There are mentors, and there are Bridge to Work programs that are very successful, giving people training in the specific skills they may need for a job and then an opportunity to have a placement in a workplace to gain that experience.

We have a whole variety of tools, so continued and enhanced support for that would be very important. Also, we can do all we do as an agency, but what is really important is that the workplace itself also changes. Resources that support us—or support workplaces in demonstrating cultural competency and learning how to deal with these issues of barriers and successful integration—are also very important.

Again, I can't underestimate the work of the international qualification recognition program, as well. For someone like you, who had specific training in your profession, being able to have that translated and moved forward when you come into the Canadian context is very important. We need to find those pathways to enable people to do that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. van Biesen.

In your opinion, what would be the best childcare strategy to help women be more independent and climb the ladder in order to secure a position on a board or move up in their jobs?

[English]

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: I would point to two things.

One, Canada should look at some kind of a universal child care model, whether it's the Quebec model or another.

Two, through the influence of government, companies should look at making leave mandatory for men. We need to rebalance what child care means. It is that both parents care for children. Attaching that burden to women only is preventing companies from seeing women as full partners in the workforce.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: That did not exist in my day. When I had my triplets, I looked after them. My husband was doing his doctorate and working full-time as well. For my part, I was looking after my children full time. I had to leave my career in nursing, but I don't regret it. I have good children who I raised myself with help from some people who came in to help me. When they started school, I went to university to do my bachelor's and master's. So I did not miss out. Oh, oh!

I have another question for you, Ms. van Biesen, regarding the LGBTQ community. What would you recommend to help them secure board positions, pursue their education, and take other training in order to move up in their workplace?

[English]

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: What our research has found is that the barriers that hold women back are many of the same barriers that hold visible minorities and people from LGBTQ communities back.

One of the first things that needs to be done, whether it's government, not-for-profits, or business, is to acknowledge that there is unconscious bias out there, that we need to be aware of it, and we need to figure out how to deal with it. We are not going to eradicate it, but we need to be trained on how to be more inclusive leaders. That kind of awareness and training needs to be put in place.

Further, I would say that, within any organization, whether it's public sector or private, we need to ensure that there is, as I mentioned earlier, an unconscious bias spotter or that kind of a role when hiring decisions are being made and promotion decisions are being made so there isn't this bias that creeps into people's opportunities to excel. I think that applies as much to LGBTQ communities as to anyone else.

I also think organizations—again, public sector or private—can leverage very strongly their own employee bases. Employee resource groups like LGBTQ communities that form pride groups end up being a fantastic window for the organization to that community of potential buyers, and they also can shed light to the organization on how these people want to feel included. Greater embracing of employee resources groups, I think, is a very positive step.

• (0930)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We'll now turn to Ms. Kusie for five minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll take a moment and apologize in advance if any of the questions I'm asking reveal testimony that has been given by previous witnesses.

Thank you both very much, Ms. Watts and Ms. van Biesen, for being here today.

My first questions are for Ms. van Biesen.

What other developed nations—specifically, G7 and G20 countries—have used quota systems for executive boards, particularly corporate ones, but you can also certainly reference government as well?

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: The ones that are most talked about would be France and Norway. Norway has had the system in the longest, and they had quite a, I would say, draconian system in that they insisted that companies achieve 40% female representation on their boards by 2008, and if they didn't, they would be delisted. There was lots of backlash, as you can imagine. The country now has 40% female representation on boards. A couple of companies chose to delist and re-listed, and the dust has settled.

France has a similar situation with a 40% requirement.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Is there any information in regard to how this has affected national GDP performance, national indexes, for example, the equivalent of the TSE or NASDAQ, or corporate performance, specifically stock prices, etc.?

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: I do not know of information that looks broadly at GDP or national performance. Again, it's impossible to achieve causation. There is correlation, but not causation. My understanding is that performance has been as good, or better, certainly not worse.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That leads into my next question, which is, are there any metrics available, specifically tying quotas to quantitative results? When you talk about causation versus correlation, I'm guessing the answer is that presently there is no such information available in terms of specific metrics of women being on boards and the types of quantitative results that it provides for the corporations, the indexes, and the GDPs.

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: There is a tremendous amount of data out there. Again, it's correlation because you can't isolate women on boards and take out all the environmental factors that are happening to the company at the same time, but there is a tremendous amount of data there that shows improved financial performance, greater corporate reputation, greater ability to hire and retain talent, and greater performance in terms of corporate social responsibility, so there is certainly that information.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Having designed a multi-regressional analysis for Merck in an effort to use this as a tool for retention, metrics are certainly very important to me.

I would move on to the qualitative aspects. What qualitative aspects have we seen in terms of having women on boards? Of course, these are always difficult to measure as well, but what types of things have we seen from a qualitative perspective, in having more women involved in these executive positions?

• (0935)

Ms. Tanya van Biesen: Our research and the research of many others has shown that the quality of decision-making at the board level has gone up and the quality of discussion has gone up. We have seen a greater regard for two things: risk management and corporate social responsibility.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That's very interesting, risk management and CSR.

Thank you, Ms. van Biesen. I really appreciate that information.

Ms. Watts, I wanted to talk about the sectors in which immigrant women are succeeding. Can you talk a little bit about the sectors, the areas of employment, where new Canadian women are having the most success?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: They're having success in a broad range of sectors. Certainly, we see women with many different experiences integrating into the workforce. One of the really big challenges is women who come without any language other than their own. That is probably one of the biggest struggles they are facing now. In terms of a particular sector, I'm not sure that one stands out over the others.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you both very much for your responses and your time today. It is much appreciated.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Ms. Sidhu.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and my thanks to all the presenters. This is a very important issue for all Canadians.

Ms. Watts, I notice that your organization offers a variety of language training, including English in the workplace and in-class training. Have you noticed a difference in the number of women enrolling in different programs? I know there's a move towards credential recognition and workshop classes, and there are also bridging programs available. Do you think there is still a lack of

resources? If there is a lack of resources, how would you describe it? Can you suggest what kind of bridging programs we need more of?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: As to resources, we need to look at where women are coming from and be able to support them in their journey. Some of our programs adopt a pathway approach. This means giving people, particularly if they're coming from jobs they've done in their own country, the opportunity to move forward and providing them with adequate support. Being able to do this is really important.

We have a continuum of programs. It's hard to speak to one specific thing, but we favour providing a continuum and using a case management approach. We try to learn about the individual, who they are, where they are coming from. We do a strength-based analysis of what they need, what they see as their potential, and how we can provide them with pathways and choices that will help them move forward.

To be effective, the program requires flexibility in the resources from our funding partners. If we try to do one specific thing, it's never going to address the reality of our clients and allow us to fit that reality to our programs. One of the programs we're working on right now is career explorations, which involves a youth group between the ages of 18 and probably 25. We have a number of young women in that program. The program includes the language training they may need, and helps them figure out the best pathways. Do I need to go to community college, university? Do I want it? Do I want to pursue a job in this area? This is really about supporting them and helping them move forward.

It can take more time to be able to do that, but for us as an agency it is critical for this program to have that flexibility, together with the support of the federal government. We need to be very responsive in applying our case management approach. We want to provide an authentic response to who this individual is and how she can integrate so as to be able to offer her strengths to the community.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

It is important, generally, to promote women so that they can achieve economic security and success, but it's also important to ensure that we deal with the intersectional differences that women face. Intersectionality is the idea that age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and many other factors of diversity can impact our daily experiences. Could you tell us how intersectionality is applied to the programs and services you offer?

• (0940)

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Sure. I can respond.

Again, I point to the reality, particularly working with this youth program, of providing that broad range of topics and being very open in discussing them. It has been our experience that young people have been very interested in learning about what the Canadian reality is. So looking at issues of gender, sexuality, and all of those issues becomes very important for people to be able to understand what the discussions are within the Canadian context and within their own community, how they see themselves as understanding those different realities—if they are differing—and certainly for people coming here looking for opportunity, particularly those from the LGBTQ community who are arriving as refugees, that there is the opportunity to feel safe and welcomed here and to understand what opportunities there are for them.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

I would like to thank both of our witnesses for being here today. I know you are both leaders in your field. I have been familiar with Catalyst for many years, and I want to thank you for the advocacy you have done for decades and continue to do, and for the work you have done with new immigrants as well.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes as the new panel gets set up.

• (0940)

(Pause)

• (0945)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Would everyone take their seats, please? We're going to begin.

With us we have the Métis Women's Council on Economic Security, here in person.

By teleconference, we have the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security.

We'll start with you, Ms. Lee and Ms. Poitras, for seven minutes.

Ms. Tracy Lee (Chair, First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security): *[Witness speaks in Cree]*

Good morning. My name is Tracy Lee. I am from the Maskwacis Cree Nation, and I am coming to you from the traditional lands of the Plains Cree Nation.

I am thankful for this opportunity to present to you today.

I'll quickly allow my co-chair to introduce herself as well.

Ms. Marlene Poitras (Council Member, First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security): My name is Marlene Poitras. I'm a member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation in Northern Alberta and also a fellow member on the First Nations Women's Council.

Ms. Tracy Lee: I would like to start out by saying that we're coming forward to you, and the recommendations that we bring to you are really built upon the foundation of the following frameworks that current and future initiatives for first nations people and women will be built upon. That includes the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. Much of what we are speaking to fits within the framework of that piece as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and our treaty rights.

The Government of Alberta formed this council to provide advice and recommendations to the province to improve the lives of

indigenous women in Alberta. The council provides a unique perspective on matters impacting indigenous women and communities. Past recommendations include developing educational tool kits for indigenous parents, developing and supporting much-needed anti-violence programs, and leadership and empowerment programs for indigenous women and girls. These anti-violence initiatives use traditional values and engage men, women, and boys with the hopes of ending violence against women and girls. However, much more remains to be done, and the federal government is integral to this work, which is why we are here today.

I'll tell a little story to give you some context. Recently a single mother came to our council members wanting to gain employment. She had to decide between a higher-paying job off-reserve that had potential for growth, or a lower paying, less fulfilling job on a reserve. If she took the off-reserve job, her child care benefits would decrease, she would have to travel more one way, and she would require child care. If she took the on-reserve job, she would have a less fulfilling job without the same opportunities for career growth. However, she would save in child care and fuel. A large number of our women are single, and they face challenges such as this quite often. This woman was more fortunate than others, but still faced difficult challenges and choices.

Indigenous women in Alberta are forced to make hard choices every day, and 29% possess no educational certificate, diploma, or degree compared to only 10% of non-aboriginal women. Their unemployment rate is nearly 11% compared to 4.5% for non-aboriginal women. At the time of the 2006 census, based on before-tax income, more than 36% of women, compared to 17% of non-aboriginal women, were living in poverty.

Indigenous women on reserve face even greater challenges. They are less likely to possess an educational degree. As we see current trends evolving, even as they do gain more education, finding employment is very hard. I know one of our colleagues made reference to a situation in Blackfoot country, Kainai area, where the Blackfoot names are very distinct, like Black Water and Weasel Head. After they graduate, they feel they just don't get hired. Maybe there's a tendency to not hire women with distinct Blackfoot names. Yes, there's difficulty finding education.

When looking at the numbers, it is clear that barriers to economic security for indigenous women continue to exist. Research by Blue Quills University found that the western concept of economy measures success through monetary and personal gain; however, indigenous women focus more on how we take care of each other. It's about reciprocity, sustainability, and collective success.

• (0950)

Ms. Marlene Poitras: The first nations and Métis women's economic security councils have defined economic security as having access to the resources and supports that contribute to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Economic security gives women the ability to provide the basic needs for their families in safe and secure communities, and access to opportunities to participate in the provincial economy.

Indigenous women and girls deserve the same opportunities to build healthy, successful, and safe lives as all other women in Canada. In Alberta, indigenous women have lower rates of education and employment, and are more likely to face violence than non-indigenous women.

Some areas in drastic need of attention include the following: improving access to quality health services, including mental health services, for indigenous women; increasing educational opportunities by working to improve high school graduation rates for indigenous girls; countering societal narratives that devalue indigenous women; and providing support for indigenous women who move to urban centres.

Communities and governments have a role to play in creating greater success and improving the lives of indigenous women. All levels of government should engage indigenous people in the establishment of indigenous indicators for success. Funding and programming should not simply follow market trends, but should consider safety, family, health and wellness, and relationships. Education systems should reflect traditional and current models of knowing and learning. Canada can and should change the way it delivers and evaluates programs and services for indigenous people, in keeping with our values and indigenous world views.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you. That's your seven minutes.

We'll turn now to our colleagues here in Ottawa, and you have seven minutes as well.

Ms. Phyllis Steeves (Co-Chair, Métis Women's Council on Economic Security): Good morning. We are honoured to be here.

As background, Statistics Canada reports the largest population of Métis people is in Alberta, where approximately 97,000 Métis live, fully 21% of all Métis in Canada.

The council was formally established by ministerial order to provide advice and recommendations to the Government of Alberta on strategies to improve the economic security of Métis and Inuit women in Alberta. The council provides a unique perspective on matters impacting Métis and Inuit women and communities, utilizing research, in-depth discussions, and exploration of potential initiatives.

The council has made a seat available for Inuk women to bring an Inuk perspective to, and participate on, the Métis Women's Council on Economic Security.

The council has presented two reports and recommendations, one in 2014 and a second in 2016. Recommendations have been accepted, accepted in principle or accepted with modifications by government. The government has prepared annual progress reports for the council.

The council is mindful of the importance of process and has developed and revisited its terms of reference to ensure its mandate remains relevant to the lives of Métis and Inuit women.

The council also recently engaged in a facilitated session where we determined how best to work together. We decided together what constitutes respectful discussion, how consensus will be reached, and how best to develop recommendations. Recommendations of the

council are sourced from the lived experience of Métis and Inuit women, drawing from personal, professional, academic, and geographical aspects of our lives.

Council members bring a diversity of backgrounds, and come from urban, rural, settlement, and non-settlement upbringings.

The council recently transitioned from inaugural to current members; all are role models and leaders in their communities.

Recommendations of the council generally focus on addressing systemic concerns, an indicator of the council's desire to work with government and, if possible, other bodies on the front line of service provision impacting Métis and Inuit people. While expedient, this approach also reflects the challenges of envisioning outside of existing frameworks to enhance the economic security of Métis and Inuit women.

As a core principle, the council recognizes the interconnectedness of sex, gender, gender alliances, and the dependency and ties to well-being. This includes recognition and appreciation of connectivity to family and its role in well-being, including economic security.

Relationships are key to the success of indigenous communities, and to the success of the council.

• (0955)

Ms. Valerie Kaufman (Co-Chair, Métis Women's Council on Economic Security): Past recommendations of the council include improving the existing link to indigenous programs and services, fostering and supporting indigenous tourism, and improving cultural supports in Alberta's health care system.

The government has responded by creating and maintaining a web portal for indigenous programs and services and providing funding to Heritage Park Historical Village to highlight the traditional roles of indigenous women.

A research project funded by government is currently under way on authenticity validation approaches for indigenous arts and crafts.

The government is providing \$100,000 to the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada to establish an indigenous tourism organization in Alberta. This is an opportunity to help create jobs for indigenous communities, help strengthen Alberta's overall economy, and give visitors a meaningful experience.

Funding of \$33.5 million through the Alberta jobs plan will be used to build the Indigenous People's Experience and three other key initiatives at Fort Edmonton.

The Alberta government is providing \$100,000 for a national gathering of elders in September 2017. Representatives from 623 first nations, Métis, and Inuit groups have been invited to dialogue and collaborate on critical issues facing indigenous people.

Recommendations for 2017 are under development, with priority given to education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, child welfare, and safety and justice.

In terms of national, provincial, and municipal action, the council fully supports and calls for implementation of Jordan's principle, which says that no first nations child should be denied welfare services because of jurisdictional disputes.

Supporting and publicizing Canada's indigenous artisans and tourist attractions will help make the country a premier destination for unique indigenous tourism experiences.

One important recommendation for your consideration is the establishment of a national indigenous women's council to provide advice and recommendations to federal ministries. The federal government can also play a role in encouraging provinces and territories to create their own indigenous women's councils to make space for the voices of Métis, Inuit, and first nations women.

In closing, Minister Richard Feehan, Minister of Indigenous Relations, which supports the Métis Women's Council on Economic Security, has stated:

There are real and pressing issues facing Indigenous Peoples in Alberta and throughout Canada and increased communication and cooperation—between governments and between communities—is essential when addressing these challenges head on.

We encourage collaboration and engagement with indigenous communities, peoples, and organizations to ensure that we are not forgotten in the creation of government policy. We also acknowledge the contributions of all council members, past and present, and those of the office of indigenous women's initiatives and staff engagement.

Thank you for inviting the council to share aspects of our work as it relates to the economic security and well-being of indigenous people.

Marsee.Mahsi Cho.

● (1000)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you so much for being here.

We're going to start our first round of questioning with Mr. Colin Fraser for seven minutes.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Thank you all so much for being here today and for sharing your stories and your good information, which will be useful to this committee. We really appreciate your time today.

I'd like to start with the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security. You spoke about domestic violence. In the context of domestic violence, often, as I understand it, there is a cycle of violence that perpetuates itself and makes it difficult for some person in that situation to extricate themselves from the violent situation because they don't have economic security, are not able to get a job, and are not able to stand on their own two feet without some support.

Can you comment a little more on the economic security element of domestic violence and what can be done to help alleviate it? What is some of the work that's being done already by your organization?

Ms. Tracy Lee: Thank you for raising that concern.

In terms of domestic violence, yes, it's very real. I'll just speak about my community of 20,000 people. We have a women's shelter

that is always full. We have one shelter, so our women often get turned away from our own shelter.

In terms of economic security for those women, one of the other trends in the communities is that women will often seek education, but they don't go from high school directly. They're more likely to enter post-secondary education as mature students.

In terms of programming, how can we help these women who are often living in a cycle of poverty, violence, and addiction? Even if not directly dealing with addictions, how do we build more bridge programs for those women who want to remove themselves from that cycle and begin on a pathway towards self-sufficiency through education? We need programs that support women, more programs for domestic violence in the way of shelters, and more accessible programs.

Ms. Marlene Poitras: I want to add that the one aspect that's lacking is mental health services. In terms of the programming, a focus on mental health services would help tremendously for those women.

Ms. Tracy Lee: In my community, for those using the emergency department of the hospital, the second-most responsible diagnosis is mental health, addictions and violence-related. The demographic within that is primarily women.

Mr. Colin Fraser: I wonder if I can expand a little. When a woman is leaving a domestic violence situation and uses the services of a shelter to get back on her feet, and hopefully in a way to leave that situation and not have to return, do you see affordable housing as a barrier to leaving that relationship? What more do you think can be done with regard to affordable housing?

● (1005)

Ms. Tracy Lee: Definitely that's a barrier. Looking at the on-reserve communities, housing is very overcrowded. I know in a recent survey in my community there was an average of three families per home. With the housing situation that exists on reserves, definitely there's a shortage. Where do they go? They often have no choice when there's no shelter and there are no homes available to them. There definitely are real barriers all around when trying to move beyond those cycles.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Can you talk a little about some first nations women living in an urban setting? I assume that there are some, of course, who live in rural areas. Can you talk a little about the different challenges in both of those situations that women would face with regard to finding jobs or getting economic security?

Is there a difference between living in a city and in a rural area?

Ms. Marlene Poitras: There are certainly a lot of barriers for women in the urban areas to find affordable housing or jobs.

Tracy mentioned earlier that women do get educated, but then they have problems finding employment within their field of expertise. There certainly are a lot of barriers when they come to the urban settings.

Ms. Tracy Lee: Definitely, on first nations, there's overcrowding, and when they do get educated, it's hard to find employment, on and off reserve.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you very much.

I'd like to turn now to the Métis Women's Council on Economic Security. Thanks for your presentation.

You talked about indigenous tourism. That's a wonderful initiative, and I think that can be applied right across Canada with all kinds of indigenous groups and organizations. Where I come from in Nova Scotia, there's a rendezvous at Grand Pré this summer between the Mi'kmaq and Acadian peoples. We're hoping that will not only identify the cultural heritage of our area, but also welcome tourists to come and celebrate that experience.

I wonder if you could talk a little about the culture and identity piece that goes along with indigenous tourism and why that would be important for your community.

Ms. Valerie Kaufman: Personally, it's a part of who I am and of who we are. As Métis, first nations, and Inuit people, our culture is first and foremost. In my own home, my granny lived with us. I learned all the traditional arts and crafts. They are really important. As a council, we are really considering the authenticity part of it, based on the same thing that perhaps the Northwest Territories and the Government of the Yukon have done, with an authenticity tag on arts and crafts and that kind of thing. Involving the cultural or spiritual side is also an area that people are considering. They're trying to determine how best to do that, particularly in first nations communities. So, yes, it's a huge priority.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to Ms. Vecchio, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That was a great answer.

Thank you very much for coming today.

I want to start off with the First Nations Women's Council.

I really appreciate hearing you speak about the different challenges that you face. I am also the critic for families, children and social development. I have had a number of student organizations come and talk to me about funding for post-secondary education for first nations.

Can you share with me your thoughts on that? Is it just the fact that we have this cap when it comes to post-secondary education, or is there a gap in what we're doing for education at the primary and secondary levels as well? Can you share with me your thoughts on the education system available to you?

Ms. Tracy Lee: For post-secondary education, funding is available. It's minimal, and it's not enough for a family to survive on. In terms of education from K to grade 12—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You just mentioned the family. I'm looking at people who are graduating from high school. You're referring to, let's say, a woman who has children using this funding. Is that what you're referring to when you talk about the family?

Ms. Tracy Lee: Right. As I mentioned before, as a previous nation board member, I know that most of the women enter education as mature students. Direct entry from high school to university is not the norm. That's the minority. When you get into post-secondary education as a mature student, you are forced to live

on this allowance that's provided through the educational treaty right, which is insufficient.

I just want to say, too, that pre-grade 12, there's a funding inequity that exists between on-reserve and off-reserve students. An on-reserve student will get approximately \$5,900 less than their off-reserve counterpart. That means fewer resources, etc.

• (1010)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

This is for both groups. I would like to start off with the Métis Women's Council. We've talked a lot about mentorship. Karen Ludwig, who has been a big part of this committee, says, "If you can't see it, you can't be it."

Can you share with me, from your own work, what opportunities there are for mentorship by some of the women in your council, or even by the men in your council, where they could do outreach to help our youth and young women, to give them greater opportunities? Do we have any mentorship programs working with our Métis women, or things of that sort?

Ms. Valerie Kaufman: I can't name a specific mentorship program for you, but all of the people on the council are committed, each in their own way and according to their own circumstances.

We have someone who works for Suncor. Suncor takes young Métis people and has them serve internships and that kind of thing, so she speaks a lot about that. Some of us are retired, but in my career I worked with the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres Initiative and had great successes in mentoring those young people; they still come back to me. It's about a personal commitment around the mentorship.

In Alberta we also have the Métis scholarship fund, which is the Belcourt Brosseau funding. That helps a bit. They mentor people to get ready to go on to post-secondary education. That's part of the priority of the Belcourt Brosseau scholarship funding.

So, yes, it's there.

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: I would reiterate that the notion of mentorship is embedded in our communities. It's part of the culture. All of us on council are role models within the community; we take it up professionally, and personally as well.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Excellent.

I just want to stay with the two of you for a minute. There has always been the discussion of division between first nations and Métis. What are your thoughts on the impact on the Métis women? Is there, in effect, a difference? Is there some sort of inadequacy? Do you find something is different between the two groups?

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: There are many similarities because, of course, we have first peoples blood, as well. There are many similar cultural...but in terms of specifics, people have talked about education and funding.

As Métis people, we have far less funding available to us, so when we are looking at taking up post-secondary education, unfortunately, as limited as first nations funding would be for students on reserve, Métis people don't have that available.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I didn't know how to ask that question without directing you to the answer I wanted, so thanks for reading between the lines, Phyllis.

Carrying on with the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security, I have similar questions when it comes to mentorship. What specific programs or training and what different opportunities have you offered to women in the community, from either male or female mentors? What sorts of programs go on there? I recognize that there may be some that are informal.

Ms. Tracy Lee: Again, it's very limited. The ones that are out there that I am aware of really speak to building resilience, building capacity with that individual through the re-instilling of culture and language, because that's the foundation that has sustained our people for years. With the residential school disruption and the interruption of those values, programs are working to revitalize that and to re-install that. There are programs that focus on young men and young women around that type of mentorship, which are proving successful.

• (1015)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I have about 30 seconds left, so I want to stick with you and ask you about the graduation from secondary school.

I was just at a place in London not too long ago where there were many people doing their GEDs who were in their fifties. What is the percentage of women who graduate from secondary school in your area?

Ms. Tracy Lee: I'll just speak to my area as a former education board member. It is very minimal. About three years ago, there were three students who graduated with college-ready transcripts, and the year before that, there were none.

Again, this points to the inequities of on-reserve versus off-reserve funding, which provides resources and support. Very few go directly from grade 12 to university.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We'll now go to Ms. Malcolmson, for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all four witnesses.

To the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security, back in my riding on Vancouver Island, I was talking with members of the Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre, and they said that one of the biggest barriers to indigenous women being able to accept job offers was the access to safe and reliable transportation. In northern B.C., especially, we've seen the terrible story of the Highway of Tears and the consequences of inadequate transportation.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on whether you would like to see the federal government make a deeper investment in public transportation,

especially in the areas that would help indigenous women get to work safely.

Ms. Tracy Lee: Transportation is the number one barrier to accessing health care, accessing educational opportunities, and accessing employment. Our roads are very substandard. When you're living in a community that is at or below poverty, people are living from one junker car to the next junker car. If the roads were better, their cars would last longer. If they had reliable cars, they could drive to employment, health care, and those educational opportunities. The roads are very substandard on reserve.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That's confirming a lot of other testimony we've been hearing, so thank you.

To both of the witness panels, I'm interested in your advice to us around recommendations we could make about government procurement. We heard evidence early in this study from a professor from Simon Fraser University, who said that the last time the New Democrats were in power in B.C. they tied into contracts for building a major highway on Vancouver Island the requirement that a certain percentage of the jobs and apprenticeships had to go to women and indigenous people. They bumped that up from 2% of employment to 20% of employment. Even though the contractors didn't want to see it and had never been able to get beyond 2% before, when it was a requirement it worked out really well.

I would like to hear, from an economic standpoint, whether you would like to see those kinds of measures built into infrastructure procurement, since this government is about spend so much.

Ms. Tracy Lee: Definitely. I think the recommendation is more collaboration, more partnerships.

Ms. Marlene Poitras: There are a lot of aboriginals who are entering into their own businesses, in all fields and in all areas. They often have to compete against these larger, well-established companies for any types of jobs, because they're at a disadvantage, whether it's financially through the bank or with the numbers of people they have employed.

It is certainly an issue and I think those barriers need to be considered, looking at ways to employ more aboriginal contractors, the aboriginal men and women who want employment in those areas.

Ms. Valerie Kaufman: The Métis Women's Council in 2016 made this recommendation to the Government of Alberta. There is a set-aside currently for aboriginal people in Alberta. However, it is not enough. We can always see an increase in that.

We are fortunate that in some areas of Alberta, in Fort McMurray for example, there is inclusion of first nations and Métis and Inuit people. Métis people are not only living in the urban settings of Edmonton and Calgary. In Alberta, in particular, there are eight settlements, so there a lot of rural people who are underemployed or absolutely not employed, so some of that procurement in jobs needs to be focused around the rural communities for us.

That's the piece that's really missing and that's the piece that we recommended to the Alberta government, so it would be similar to the federal government.

•(1020)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

My third question, again, is to both witness panels. We heard in a report issued by Pauktuutit, the Inuit women's organization in Canada, that they recommended the government invest to ensure that all indigenous women—they were talking about Inuit women, but I would imagine all indigenous women—have reliable access to computers and to computer literacy, so they can have better access to the job market and to economic security.

Do you have any quick advice on access to reliable computers and whether the federal government should be investing more in providing access and literacy training for indigenous women?

Ms. Valerie Kaufman: I would say resoundingly yes, especially in the rural communities, again, and focusing on current technology, current social media, that kind of thing. There's a lack of information about that kind of thing out there, so it would be important to focus on things that are missing. The gaps have been well identified, especially by young people.

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: That would really assist in terms of education, because for people who do not want to leave their communities, if they have Internet access they can do online training in so many different areas.

Ms. Tracy Lee: I'll quickly add that not everybody has access to the Internet. Communities that live below the poverty level don't. A lot of everything that is built still makes the assumption that you have access to Internet and computers, and really there is a great need for development and that capacity building in the communities.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: For rural members of Parliament, that's the first infrastructure they'd like to see, so there are some strong partnerships needed on that for sure.

Ms. Tracy Lee: Thank you.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you to all the witnesses. Your work is really helpful.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We'll now turn to Ms. Vandenberg for seven minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): I want to thank all of you for your testimony today.

My first question is to the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security. In your testimony, Ms. Lee, you mentioned the dilemma in terms of not only getting a career but also career advancement because of child care, as well as the on-reserve and off-reserve opportunities.

I know there are head start programs and other early learning programs, but could you tell us a little about what existing programs there are and what is working in those programs? Also, where the gaps are, on reserve or off reserve. My understanding is that there seems to be a concern that as soon as a woman goes off reserve she loses some of that early learning and child care funding.

What is working well and what would we need to do to improve that?

Ms. Tracy Lee: I think what is working well are programs like head start that really honour who they are as indigenous children. They are allowed to have that foundation that's rooted in their

culture. They learn the language. Those programs, as I said, are re-instilling that resiliency and that strong cultural foundation of who they are. Programs like that definitely work. Definitely, more of those programs are always welcomed and very much needed.

Ms. Marlene Poitras: When women come to the urban centres, they don't always have access to the services provided on reserve. So they end up having to pay for their own child care, which oftentimes runs anywhere from \$800 a month.... Poverty is certainly a huge issue and I think that needs to be addressed, as well as looking at more services, like the preschool programs, for women living off reserve.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: If there were additional funding available, where would you see it best used? What kind of programming?

Ms. Tracy Lee: I personally think really developing...and teaching people how to be healthy families. Again, the residential school and the history of colonization really disrupted that notion of healthy families. So it's really rebuilding those foundations in the community.

•(1025)

Ms. Marlene Poitras: Of course, you need to look at transportation and child care. Those are huge barriers for employment success.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Now to the Métis Women's Council, it's the same question, although my understanding is that there are gaps in terms of the programs that are available for Métis women. If there were more resources, where would you see those resources going?

Ms. Valerie Kaufman: The one that I would like to personally see happen in all communities for our populations, whether it's Métis, Inuit, or first nations, is parent link centres. There is an aboriginal parent link centre in Stony Plain, which works really well with parents and young children. It's not necessarily re-teaching parenting skills even though it's called a parent link centre. There are all kinds of things there. It shows parents the value of their children's education. It gives the parents an opportunity to spend time with their children that's not necessarily in the home, and perhaps is an activity that they may not have an opportunity to do. Parent link centres are working well. We only have one aboriginal one in Alberta, in Stony Plain. We would love to see more focus on those parent link centres.

I don't know if you have anything to add.

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: I would totally agree with that, Val.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Recognizing the differences in culture, both in early learning but also in employment, in my constituency, the federal government just put \$22 million into an innovation, entrepreneurship, and learning centre at Algonquin College. It includes a specific centre for indigenous entrepreneurship, but also makes links in the community, recognizing that the way in which indigenous students—in this case, women—go about building businesses and networking is different.

I know you mentioned entrepreneurship as one means towards better employment. How can we ensure that this is supported?

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: If I can interject here, while \$22 million is great, I think one of the key things that are often lacking is the accountability and how effectively those funds are administered. We would find that—and I think my colleagues on the first nations council would agree—from kindergarten to grade 12, through post-secondary training programs, funds that are earmarked for indigenous peoples are often not necessarily directed to indigenous peoples. I think if the funds that were to be specific to our communities were actually directed there, that in itself would be a huge step forward.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: In this case, it's infrastructure funding to build the centre. Yes, I can see...because it is part of a larger learning centre.

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: Even in terms of infrastructure, if you're going to build a building to service indigenous peoples, consult with us on what works for us, what kind of space we need to learn effectively.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Lee, you mentioned the distinctive names that indigenous women have, and that when they put this on a job application, there may be some stereotyping or a reticence among some employers to hire on that basis.

The federal public service is looking right now at name-blind hiring practices. Do you think that would be helpful in this regard?

Ms. Tracy Lee: Definitely, definitely, especially in the small rural communities, because in a small rural community on reserve there's a limited business structure to get employment. Most people are trying to seek employment in the neighbouring rural communities where, just like small towns, people are going to hire their own. They'll hire their own. I think that practice would really strengthen the equality.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay.

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: Sometimes the opposite holds true. If you have a name like Crowshoe, you might be preferred because the hiring committee wants to be perceived as hiring indigenous. How better than to have someone called Crowshoe as opposed to Steeves?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We're going to go to Ms. Kusie for five minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Ms. Steeves, Ms. Kaufman, Ms. Lee, and Ms. Poitras for being here today to testify.

My first question is for the First Nations Women's Council.

I'm a very big advocate of mental health. I believe that belief in self certainly allows one to have greater efficacy within the world. What specifically would you say the obstacles are to receiving good mental health treatment and programs? What are you lacking? What are the obstacles?

•(1030)

Ms. Tracy Lee: The main obstacle is access to services. When you're in a first nations community, the health services that are provided do not reflect the same services that are available in the off-reserve community. Mental health off reserve has counsellors and therapists. On reserve, those services are not mirrored, so they're not as accessible.

Also, funding around mental health prevention.... Provide mental health prevention that's culturally appropriate and community mandated and developed, all the way from prevention along the continuum to treatment, and then also treatment including.... Suicide is very high in our communities. Once community members leave a mental health facility, if they go off reserve, they're going to have a community health nurse who makes sure they're following up on their care. If they go on reserve, they literally almost fall off the grid.

There are different privacy acts that each jurisdiction is bound to. My colleague mentioned Jordan's principle and the jurisdictional barriers. Those barriers appear everywhere. If people were to go off reserve, they would have access to mental health supports. In the community, those are limited.

Access to equitable services would be my answer.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much for that.

My next question is directed to the Métis Women's Council.

You discussed industry that is specifically designed for indigenous women. I'm interested in where the merging is between the mainstream economy—mainstream sectors as we know them—and these indigenous sectors. How do you see those coming together? Certainly, I think it's very important to find employment. I'm a very big believer in the potential of all citizens being used to the greatest potential. Where do you see the merger of what we would consider the mainstream economy with these more indigenous sectors, or are they not compatible? Are they parallel? I guess I'm trying to understand ultimately how we merge the two.

Ms. Valerie Kaufman: I would like to think they are compatible. We certainly have high hopes for that. I think our excitement around indigenous tourism right now is very high in Alberta and, I think, in other provinces. We are seeing a real resurgence in that we are very proud of our strong history in this country, and we want to be able to showcase it to the world. I think that's an opportunity.

The hospitality industry is an opportunity. We have wonderful, outstanding new aboriginal chefs who are coming on TV, and all kinds of things, so we're really excited about that.

These are some of the high-profile things, but then there are always the industries our men traditionally go to: construction, oil rigs, and that kind of thing. They've always done that.

I think it's there. I think we just need to let people know we are there.

We're the highest-growing youth population in this country. We're going to have an awful lot of young people who are well educated. Our education numbers are increasing, certainly even in my own personal experience. I remember six graduates in about 1960 from the University of Alberta. We're at a couple of hundred a year now, so they are increasing. Don't quote me on the numbers because I could be wrong. That's a personal memory.

I think there are some positives there—I really do—and particularly around tourism. We are really going to hit this one hard as a council this year. We want to see our government take a huge surge forward with this area.

• (1035)

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: The intersection between industry and indigenous peoples will continue to increase, in large part as industry becomes aware of our capacity. I think that industry is really underinformed about what we could possibly bring, and what we do bring to many professions.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you. That's your time.

Our last round will go to Mr. Sean Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Fantastic, I wasn't expecting to get another round. This is excellent.

I'd like to follow up on some of the questions from my colleague Ms. Vandenbeld for the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security.

You mentioned near the beginning of your remarks the dilemma that indigenous women are facing when they're presented with a more fulfilling career opportunity off reserve. They lose some of the supports they might have, whether it's the cost of fuel or access to child care. They might take a potentially less fulfilling job that's more convenient, for lack of a better word.

I'm trying to figure out how, as a federal government, we can help encourage indigenous women to take part in what they view to be their most fulfilling career opportunity without undermining them by cutting their supports. Is there a strategy that the federal government can employ to make that decision easier?

Ms. Tracy Lee: It's a great question. Programs that are more accessible, education programs that are more accessible, whether they be online....

One other thing, too, is to recognize that with a lot of indigenous women, maybe the grandmothers are raising the children, or they're very young parents. Child care is definitely a need.

More access to educational opportunities is a need, whether they are online...and maybe more partnerships with universities with local institutions. A few first nations have colleges on reserve, so it's maybe more partnerships with those colleges. For example, you can get most of your education degree, your social work degree...but it's more partnerships, such as those with major institutions and local institutions, and then for those that don't have those colleges, to have more access to online learning.

When I advocate for online learning, I'm also advocating for that centre, that capacity on reserve. There is very limited access to that on reserve.

Ms. Marlene Poitras: One area, too, is that there could be more on-reserve and off-reserve partnerships. We found one that is quite successful through Creating Hope Society, which is an organization that I do contract work with. They give women bus passes. They try to help them out in accessing the educational institutions.

A lot of women when they come from a reserve have numbers of children. They don't just have one or two, some of them have four or five. Child care is a huge barrier. Even in terms of some of them getting their driver's licences, there are a lot of barriers in getting their identification—

Mr. Sean Fraser: If I can jump in quickly again—I have a minute or so left—your organization released a report in 2016 that indicated that about 40% of indigenous people between 25 and 64 have no post-secondary education, or diploma, or certificate, compared to 11% for the non-indigenous population.

Are there different barriers to accessing education for indigenous women than are faced by indigenous men or non-indigenous people that we could be focusing on as a federal government?

Ms. Tracy Lee: It's definitely what my colleague pointed out around women coming to school as mature students. They're coming with their families. A really nice program would be subsidized housing for women with families. That would be a recommendation.

• (1040)

Mr. Sean Fraser: I think I'm brushing up against my time limit here.

Thank you very much for your answers.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We have time for one very quick question from Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

As I listened to all of this and the resources required, and of course the resources allotted.... I'm a very proud Albertan, and I'm shocked to hear of the number of Métis. My husband is from Winnipeg, and of course...exactly, so this is wonderful.

The lack of affordable housing, etc., begs the question of transparency. Could each group please address in 20 seconds how we could address this problem of transparency? What can we do to see the results that we so desperately need for both of your organizations?

Ms. Phyllis Steeves: I would reiterate the notion of accountability. When funds are given, who makes the particular bodies accountable for their distribution? How long is it taking to get those funds out there? Who's overseeing the distribution of funds? Who's determining which applicants are considered worthy to receive those funds? There are countless ways once the funds are committed before they are distributed and when they are, how do we know they're being used as intended?

I always think about an example. When my grandson was in school, my daughter was aware that as a Métis child he had funds allocated to him, and because she knew as a parent that was his right, she went to the school and ensured that appropriate books were purchased for him, whereas if parents are not aware that's available for their children, the funds just go into the general....

Ms. Valerie Kaufman: We really notice it. We do presentations on Métis heritage and culture in the schools in Edmonton, particularly at this time of year because of National Aboriginal Day. In the past we would do maybe 20 presentations in the month of June. Schools have now taken maybe one or two of us to present in a day to six schools, with perhaps 600 students. This has become really unfair.

I'm certainly more than happy to share our culture. The kids show such pride, saying they're Métis too. It's exciting to see that, but it's difficult when you start to take advantage. All those schools have a

school-based budget, which has allocated dollars specifically to increase aboriginal cultural components. Sure, they're paying for the bus for them to get there, but that's it. There is no accountability. There is no ability to say they're not spending their budget in the right way, and because it's a school-based budget it can be reallocated wherever they choose. It's difficult.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I'm afraid that's our time. We're going to have another group come in right now. I'm sorry not everyone got an opportunity to answer that question. If either group has any comments they'd like to provide to the committee, if you think of something afterwards, please don't hesitate to send it to us in writing.

I want to thank all our witnesses for being here today. It's been very helpful.

The meeting is adjourned.

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