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Ms. Marie-Claude Morin

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP)): Good afternoon, everyone. I know we haven't all arrived yet, but since we have quorum, we are going to start.

Welcome to the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today we are continuing our study on improving economic prospects for Canadian girls. Something has been added to our agenda: a vote needs to be held in the House. The bell will begin to ring around 5:15 p.m. I suggest we give each group of witnesses 50 minutes. Does that suit everyone? I see that no one objects.

Nancy Southern, president and chief executive officer of ATCO Group, is joining us by videoconference from Calgary, Alberta.

Good afternoon, Ms. Southern.

Also joining us by videoconference is Elyse Allan, president and chief executive officer of GE Canada. She joins us from Mississauga, Ontario.

Welcome to our committee.

This is how it will go: you each have 10 minutes for your presentation, then we will move into questions.

Ms. Southern, you have the floor.

[English]

You have ten minutes.

Ms. Nancy Southern (President and Chief Executive Officer, ATCO Group): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Perhaps I will save you some of the time that you're losing due to the vote. I don't think I'll take the full ten minutes, and I look forward to the questions.

Members of the committee, it is a great honour for me to be asked to appear before you on the status of women and specifically on improving economic prospects for Canadian girls. I'd like to commend the government and the parliamentary process for addressing such a worthwhile and all-encompassing subject.

I think it is worthy to recall where we are in Canada in terms of benchmarking our progress on this issue against other OECD nations. The statistics say we are relatively successful on employment equality vis-à-vis our peers, and we have improved somewhat in terms of pay equity, albeit perhaps too slowly for many of us. We are doing better than we were, and I believe with the sense of

purpose this committee brings, we will continue to improve our ranking in gender equality.

Key to the task of improving public policy on the status of women is our ability to measure our outcomes. Whether it's government, commerce, the judiciary, constabulary, or education, it is critical that we are able to measure fact-based results to make objective decisions and choices regarding our future.

In that vein, my first recommendation to the committee is that we reconsider what information is relevant and important to Canadians. And while I completely understand and agree with the need for efficiency in streamlining the long-form census, I also believe that statistical information is required to determine whether our nation is achieving results from the financial and human implementation of our programs directed toward the disabled, impoverished, gender-biased, and first nations, to name just a pressing few.

No doubt the questions need refinement, but good critical analysis is not possible without the right information. So reinstatement of a modernized census that will provide these data sets is, in my mind, vitally important.

My second recommendation and thought for improving the economic prospects for Canadian girls and women is education. I know that Tracy Redies identified education in an earlier hearing, and I couldn't agree more.

In general and on an equal gender basis, our public school curriculum must continue to innovate and evolve with the dynamic world we live in, and our education system is not keeping up with the geopolitical and economic power shifts that are occurring as we speak.

In order for Canada to retain its position and move up the global competitive scale, education of our most precious resource, our children, is paramount so that our girls and our boys can take advantage of future opportunities.

Included in this upgrading and updating of our curricula should be the way women's and men's roles are portrayed. Just as we have educated the public on the health risks of smoking so the knowledge is ingrained and second nature, so should the systemic stereotypical roles of women be abandoned, and the acknowledgement of women in our society from all walks of life, in all job sectors, should be celebrated. And the way to do this is through our public and private schools, K through 12.

As my third recommendation, I'd like to commend Minister Ambrose's strategic plan and encourage the gender analysis contemplated across all levels of government. We in business, academia, and the judiciary should be motivated to do the same. But in doing so, the analysis needs to be transparent and action should be taken, if warranted, in a meaningful way.

I'm personally very disappointed and disturbed by the case of RCMP Staff Sergeant Donald Ray and the lack of or perceived lack of ability that our government and their agencies have to address gross misconduct. Our inability to take actions that match harmful deeds such as this is a significant setback, not just for women but for our society in general.

This leads me to my final point, and that is that inclusion, empathy, and compassion are fundamental characteristics I believe Canadians aspire to. And I believe the world views these qualities as an important aspect of how we are defined. This country was built on determination, integrity, hard work, courage, and enterprise. Against all odds, we have held a vast nation together. Yes, we have made mistakes, but as evidenced by this committee, we strive to learn from our mistakes and correct them.

• (1535)

We cannot be all things to all people. We cannot tolerate the misuse of the public's trust. Consequences for actions are a fact of life, and laws, regulations, and programs that fail to strive for the highest standards will only serve to harm this great nation. Acceptance of anything less than the very best we can be breeds entitlement and promotes mediocrity.

Having said that, I am a big proponent of the Canadian child tax benefit, but I believe it should be available to those who need it most and on a sliding scale, as was proposed in another hearing earlier. Medium- to low-income households need this benefit, especially single moms. If we could increase the value of this benefit it would solve many budget-pinching and economic hardships faced by these families. It would put the decision-making on how expenditures are made where it belongs: in the household. It would free up money for food, education, shelter, and clothes where it's needed and when.

I am passionate about our country, and I am passionate about providing the very best opportunities for our children, both girls and boys, to ensure a vibrant and sustainable Canada for generations to come.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

• (1540)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony, Ms. Southern.

Ms. Allan, it's your turn. You have 10 minutes.

[English]

Ms. Elyse Allan (President and Chief Executive Officer, GE Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is a great pleasure for me to appear before your committee today on a topic that is so important to the future of Canada.

GE has been established in Canada for over a hundred years. In this country we have over 7,000 employees in businesses that include oil and gas, equipment for power generation and transmission, health care, transportation, and lighting. We operate over ten manufacturing facilities. You may know that GE Capital is one of Canada's largest non-bank financial institutions.

Across Canada we invest heavily in technology development. Here in Canada and around the world, we employ engineers, computer scientists, medical technicians, and many highly skilled workers and trades. When we look at Canada, we see not only its vast natural resources but the skills of its people. We can be proud of our education system, which according to the OECD PISA report—the program for international student assessment—ranks among the best in the world.

But one of my greatest concerns is the looming skills shortage in Canada. We have remarkable opportunities before us as a nation. Canadians are privileged to live in a country with a bounty of resources that the world needs. But our economy and our social fabric is at risk if we cannot educate and train the people here in Canada that industry needs. While immigration will certainly help, it will not solve the skill shortages we will be facing.

So what has to be done? We certainly need to graduate more students with advanced degrees in science, engineering, and applied technology. We need to encourage young people to also consider the skilled trades. One of the easiest ways to do this is staring us in the face. We need to encourage more girls to go into these disciplines as well as to learn skilled trades. Unfortunately, girls are under-represented in science and technology programs in secondary and post-secondary schools. As the committee knows from its previous work, the supply pipeline for university graduates in science and engineering or for technical colleges often begins early in the elementary school, when children are exposed to and form their opinions about mathematics, science, and about people who might work in manufacturing jobs.

According to the report *Women In Science and Engineering in Canada*, produced by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada in 2010, the odds of a female child enrolled in first grade going on to receive a PhD in the sciences or engineering are approximately one in 286. The odds for a boy are one in 167. Today, in an average-sized Canadian elementary school, only one child will go on to receive that PhD, and it is likely to be a boy. By secondary school, girls report lower levels of confidence in their ability to solve specific mathematical problems, lower levels of their perceived ability to learn mathematics, and higher levels of anxiety in dealing with mathematics. Girls were also less likely to believe that mathematics will be useful for their future employment and education and they were also more likely to report lower levels of interest and enjoyment in mathematics.

Science and engineering disciplines rank near the bottom as a discipline of choice for women as compared to men. While women outnumber men in most non-science disciplines at university, the ratio drops off dramatically for the major science-based disciplines, and it is only above men by 1% for the life sciences. In any technical colleges, the representation of young women learning skills is actually no better.

I would like to make three recommendations on how to address the gender gap specifically in an area I think is very important to our country and our country's future, which is sciences, engineering, and the trades. The first recommendation is to build more partnerships between industry and schools. Industry needs to do more to build partnerships with schools so that girls can better understand how studying science, engineering, and trades will lead to higher-paying jobs. One way of doing this is through collaborative alliances so that girls know about the many ways in which scientific work improves our well-being here in Canada and globally.

• (1545)

For several years now GE has helped to fund Actua, a national science education outreach organization. Their science, engineering, and technology education outreach, programmed for Canadian youth, including their national girls program, has been a terrific association for us and for what they do.

We have seen first-hand the benefits of working with girls at a young age. We know from our own employees' direct experiences as mentors to these girls that given the opportunity to thrive in a positive, supportive environment, such as what Actua has designed, girls will rise to the challenge.

Few girls actually have the opportunity to meet with female scientists and engineers in industry who demystify their work, make their career choices accessible to girls, and inspire them to stay in school and learn. Actua is making excellent progress in changing this. We strongly recommend that the federal government consider ways to support programs such as those offered by Actua, which will inspire girls to achieve their full potential in science and technology.

We in business, of course, need to show girls what the opportunities are for skilled trades people in our plants, factories, and businesses. GE plants, producing aircraft engine parts, water treatment equipment, and smart grids all right here in Canada, are among the most modern in the world. These facilities have robotics and computerized machinery. They're creating a different environment and skill set from our old-fashioned views of what these industries used to look like.

Why shouldn't girls consider a career in sciences, engineering, or skilled trades? They need to know what these contemporary opportunities look and feel like, and the opportunities they hold.

Another recommendation is around remote communities. In January 2011 we launched a partnership with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce to focus on Canada's remote communities through a business lens. As the committee knows, remote communities are on the front line of resource development, but frequently the people living in remote communities cannot participate in this development for want of skills, training, and basic infrastructure.

Through 11 cross-country round tables and an online survey, we heard from over 500 business stakeholders. Issues raised by business operators in remote communities included current and future skills shortages. It was noted that along with a shortage of labour there is also a significant high school drop-out rate. For instance, in Nunavut barely 25% of youth actually graduate high school.

Over the next decade, 400,000 aboriginal Canadians will reach working age. It is imperative to improve graduation rates to help Canada develop a highly skilled home-grown workforce. Special attention must be paid to the graduation rates of girls and also their advancement in science, technology, math, and the trades.

We support the recommendation made by a number of organizations for the federal government funding for first nations schools to be equal to that of provincial funding levels. Mentorships with business where girls can connect with women in science and technology are also beneficial during high school.

Additionally, girls in remote communities who want to pursue post-secondary education must often leave home to do so. This can be costly and stressful, a big disincentive. Supporting community and post-secondary programs that support girls in their transition away from home, including provisions for child care, we believe is well recommended.

In closing, my third recommendation is building a national science strategy that targets science education in the crucial K through 12 years. There is a great deal of skepticism about the usefulness of developing sometimes national strategies for every problem Canada is facing. I am aware that too often strategies are little more than pious hopes, but the current federal science and technology strategy is a very good start. It has useful recommendations on how business and government-funded research institutions can better collaborate to drive innovation in our economy and workforce. Part of the strategy is to create a culture of science and technology in Canada.

As a country we can do more to encourage children, and especially girls, to study science and math in the crucial K through 12 years. The provinces will have a lead role here, but federal support for post-secondary education can also help out. For example, we should improve the linkages between universities and technical schools and high schools.

• (1550)

[Translation]

The Chair: I will have to stop you here, Ms. Allan. Your time is up, unfortunately. Thank you very much for your testimony.

We will now start the period of questions.

[English]

Ms. Elyse Allan: Great, thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. O'Neill Gordon, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to thank Nancy and Elyse for joining us this afternoon. It certainly was a very interesting presentation, and one that had lots of information for all of us.

I was especially interested in the four points that Nancy put out first for us to consider. All of them certainly carry a lot of weight. Being a former teacher, I want to say how very much I too support your words on the need for education. The part of education on this matter starts not only in the school system and the education system but starts immediately at home, because we have seen in other studies we've done that sometimes by the time girls get to grades two or three they've already had their minds made up on what they should be and that these other ways of working are not meant for them. They've had their minds already made up for a girl type of job.

I want to say that it's those years of schooling, in the early years, that this kind of education, if it's not already done in the home, has to form some focus on those kinds of teachings. So it is very important. It's not only important for the girls, but it's important for boys and girls as well, because they learn much from what they see and hear from their surroundings in those years.

As you also know, the committee's study is on prospects for Canadian girls with regard to economic prosperity, economic participation, and economic leadership, and what changes can be made by Status of Women Canada in its approach to improving them. But at the same time, we also heard from a witness about the importance of having mentors for girls. Young adults or teenagers may have more of an impact on young girls than mentoring of them by older women. Does any of your experience or work support this idea?

That question is for Nancy.

Ms. Nancy Southern: Thank you very much.

I think mentorship is a vitally important aspect of developing self-esteem and confidence and also in helping to plan career paths for young women. The problem is, if we talk about what you were expressing, that the early stages of development for young women, for young people, is so critical, and as we've seen in so many studies it's very difficult to break a cycle. If you have an impoverished mother with a relatively low education, then there isn't really a role model for the young girl to aspire to. So I think that the whole aspect of mentoring has to begin very early on. In my mind, it's part of the education process.

I don't think you can remove men or boys from the equation. I struggle very much with that. Many of our businesses are heavily laden with engineers, and while we're seeing enrolment increase substantially for women in engineering programs across the country, the mentality in our own companies, while it's unspoken, is that it is a man's world, and the job is for the boys in that club.

I'm really struggling with how we actually break that. The only thing I can come up with is celebrating at a very early age what

women can accomplish and what pride they can take in their accomplishments. And I'm not sure that we really expose our children to those kinds of real-life stories and real-life women, whether they're young, middle, or older. I think we can learn a lot from the heritage of our first nations cultures, where in the matriarchal society oftentimes—I believe Paige said it best—the women set the rules and the men regulated on the rules.

Women need to know that they're strong. They need to know that they have the ability to do whatever they want. They can be carpenters. They can drive big dump trucks. They can be scientists, as Elyse said.

I think this whole thing has to start very early on, but we can't forget that we have to educate the men and the young boys along with this.

• (1555)

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Thank you very much.

I notice that you have been the president and CEO for the ATCO Group. Along the way, you've certainly overcome probably a lot of challenges to reach where you are. What challenges did you personally face when you pursued a career in business and became a leader in the field, and how have you overcome those challenges?

I know that along the way you certainly would have had to work on building up your self-esteem and you have probably done a great job of that, but are there are other areas along the way that you had challenges in?

Ms. Nancy Southern: I am very fortunate to be in the position I'm in. The biggest challenge I had was skepticism—that I wasn't able to do my job and that I wasn't able to lead men in this organization—but I'm a firm believer in situational leadership, whether we're in a family setting, on a job site in the field, or in my position or your position. We each take leadership.... When we have to make decisions, we make our decisions, and that's situational leadership.

I believe that if we're able to demonstrate consistency and integrity, and if we're able to prove we're willing to do what we ask of others, then we as women can be successful and we can gain acceptance.

[Translation]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Southern, but I need to interrupt you because Ms. O'Neill Gordon's time is up. Thank you very much.

We now have Ms. Ashton.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you.

[English]

Thank you very much, Ms. Southern and Ms. Allan, for your presentations. I want to thank you for your very genuine combination of recommendations, I believe, but also for connecting that with inspiration, perhaps, from your personal experiences. I think that certainly makes our whole discussion here far more powerful.

Ms. Southern, in your last response you made reference to how difficult it is for girls who grow up in a cycle of poverty. We know for a fact that for children who grow up in poverty, particularly in single-parent households, the chances of their going on to continue to live in poverty and in single-parent households are much higher than not.

Recognizing that obviously the situation of the mothers helps define the future of their daughters in the case of what we're talking about here today, what are your thoughts about some of the ways we could look at breaking that cycle of poverty and ensuring that women who are raising children have the stability—the economic stability—to better provide for their own daughters?

Ms. Nancy Southern: Is that directed to me, Member Ashton?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes.

Ms. Nancy Southern: I believe that we can go a long way with my final point, which was about utilizing the Canada child tax benefit so we can actually free up more available income for these people so they can make their own decisions. They may choose to go back to school. They may choose to get a better education. They may choose to provide tutoring and mentoring for their children so that they can try to move out of the circumstances they're in.

I'm a firm believer in putting the decision-making right back in the homes, but obviously having the opportunity to make wise decisions. By restricting people, not by paying people to have additional social support, but actually allowing people to use their own earned money to make decisions for their children.... I think this is very important, and I think it will help us get out of this cycle.

• (1600)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Just to that point, certainly I think what you bring up is very important, but I recognize that in places like Calgary—where I know you're based—in cities across Canada, and actually in some northern areas, the child tax benefit is nowhere near what women need—

Ms. Nancy Southern: No, exactly—

Ms. Niki Ashton—for money for child care and for raising their children. Would you agree that there's a disconnect or perhaps a need to look at those kinds of real supports, and obviously supports that are in line with our economic reality?

Ms. Nancy Southern: Yes, I agree. I also should say that I believe that we need to have a much higher tax benefit available to those low-income families and the types of families we're discussing that you brought up.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

I'd like to move on to Ms. Allan.

Ms. Allan, you spoke of the work of GE and your involvement in northern and remote Canada. I'm one of those women who grew up in northern Canada, and I'm honoured to represent my home region, where I come from. I firmly agree with your assessment of some of the challenges girls face in our parts of the country.

In talking about that, of course, perhaps the most stark inequality is faced by aboriginal girls. Of course that inequality can be seen in terms of educational funding and the kind of imbalance we see when

it comes to funding schools on reserve compared to schools off reserve.

Do you think it's important to see adequate funding for education on reserve?

Ms. Elyse Allan: Yes, and that's why we were recommending that the funding be equal for those schools. A lot of it obviously involves the metrics in place with respect to performance and how the money is being spent, just as we would have in any other location. There are metrics related to good performance and good operations.

I think what you're having now is a transfer of a lot of mothers, in particular—going back to Nancy's comments about women often taking the lead for the family—leaving the reserve, many times with the children, to try to get the children into school systems elsewhere, where they think they can get a better education. That comes with a whole host of other challenges in some of the cities they're moving to. They can't get adequate transitional support, or perhaps the mothers have to leave the young children, boys and girls, in the city, in a new environment, perhaps without the full care they should have, so that the mothers can go back to the reserve to sometimes take care of other children. We had exposure to this in some of the work we did on Premier Stelmach's committee in Alberta.

I think there are a number of challenges in that area. But obviously if the funding went to the schools on the reserves, we wouldn't perhaps be having that challenge in the cities and in those other urban areas.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Ms. Allan, you made reference to the importance of child care. In fact one of our witnesses, who works specifically with women in engineering, said that one of the largest deterrents to ensuring that women stay in the field once they've been educated is the work-family balance and the challenge of finding child care.

Perhaps you know this from your own workplace and the women who work in your sector. Do you believe that supporting affordable and accessible child care across the country, including in rural areas and northern areas, is something we ought to be looking at?

Ms. Elyse Allan: I think the solution will actually come from everybody playing a role. I think business has a role in terms of a flexible work life and work styles for both men and women. Similarly, I think in communities there are different solutions, and yes, I think there's a role for government. But I think it's not one or the other. I think we actually need multiple programs available, because different people will have different needs. We don't have to provide one solution for everyone, because the fact is, some people will use more and some people will use less.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Allan. I have to interrupt you.

Ms. Ambler now has the floor.

You have seven minutes.

• (1605)

[English]

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here this afternoon.

Ms. Southern, this is sort of a general question, but it fits in with our study. What are the economic prospects for girls in the business lines your company pursues?

Ms. Nancy Southern: Well, as you may or may not know, our company is quite diversified. We have manufacturing. We make industrial workforce housing for remote sites around the world. We have power generation, electricity transmission and distribution, gas transmission and distribution, mid-streaming of gas products, and logistics around the world.

There isn't any job I can imagine that wouldn't be suitable for a woman today. It doesn't matter whether it's working for us in Afghanistan, or working in Iqaluit providing fuel, or working in Chile or Australia or Fort McMurray. Every single one of the jobs we have today can be taken by a woman.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you. I'm glad to hear that.

Ms. Allan, would you say the same thing, that the economic prospects for girls in your line of work in your company, GE, would be equal for girls and boys?

Ms. Elyse Allan: Yes, it is, very much, and—

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you.

Sorry, go ahead.

Ms. Elyse Allan: That's all right. I was going to say we welcome them all applying.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That's great. I'd like to ask both of you this. How should girls be prepared and trained in order to participate in those business lines? You touched on, of course, education and situational leadership, but specifically what can be done by this department? What would you say this study should recommend that we can do as a government, through Status of Women Canada, to help girls be prepared and trained in order to go into businesses such as yours?

Ms. Southern.

Ms. Nancy Southern: I think I'm saying again what I was trying to say earlier. I believe it's educating young women, saying, "You can do it. You have all the capabilities. There is nothing that should stop you." We could do that with our public programming and advertising. We talk to kids about not taking drugs. We can tell women that they are capable and there's a whole world of opportunities available to them. I think it really boils down to just developing and creating and sustaining self-esteem and confidence.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you.

Ms. Allan.

Ms. Elyse Allan: I would just look through the programs that currently exist and those that are focusing in any way around the education side at the federal level. For example, we were talking about the national science strategy and how it was focusing on building science in grades K through 12. Where might there be

opportunities for that to make sure it is not biased in one gender towards the other, but actually focusing on encouraging girls equally with boys to continue to go through the sciences?

I think equally important are skilled trades. I appreciate that some of this is provincial versus federal, but in the areas of the apprenticeship programs, there are some wonderful programs throughout Europe that do an excellent job of integrating into the earlier years, starting in perhaps grade eight or nine, an interest in skilled trades for both genders and getting them involved with the sciences. So do we make sure that girls are equally aware of apprenticeship programs and opportunities as boys? Are there any inherent biases in any of our programs we maybe need to be sensitive to?

For me, it's very much around education. We talked quite a bit about the sciences, but equally so, and maybe even more so, there are many girls who want to work in what we would have called the trades, with their hands, in shop. They have those interests. How do we encourage it and provide the tools and the skills training for them to do it?

Similarly, for people who might be losing their jobs, what types of retraining programs do we have available so that women who might be out of work or whose husbands have lost their jobs could enter the workforce and perhaps learn some of these trades and go into trades areas? Those would be areas I would suggest you look at.

• (1610)

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That's just a fantastic answer. You made me think about the small-arms museum in my riding, which in World War II employed almost exclusively women. As you can imagine, they were the only ones left behind. So when the munitions and arms had to be made and the men had all gone to war, the women were the ones who were left. When they came back the women didn't want to stop working there, so they didn't. It's a great story. There are still women in my neighbourhood today who worked there in the forties and then in the fifties and sixties. You're right, they worked with their hands. When it had to be done and the work was there, it was the women who did it.

Anyway, it just reminded me of that, so thank you for that.

Ms. Elyse Allan: We've forgotten that.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Yes, I know. It's true, we have.

If I might ask you both a slightly more personal question, what are the challenges you face as a woman leading a major business organization?

Ms. Southern.

The Chair: Go ahead very quickly.

Ms. Nancy Southern: Okay, it will be very quick.

Initial lack of respect would be the biggest challenge.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: You mean overcoming it right at the beginning.

Does Ms. Allan have a short answer?

Ms. Allan, I don't know if you can answer that quickly, but the chair will allow you to if you can.

Ms. Elyse Allan: Let me support Nancy's response, because I think when you come in as the CEO it's hard to get that initial respect that you're equal to the men. You might have a different approach, but you can make decisions in the same way, and there are multiple approaches...sometimes a woman's style is equal on balance.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Allan.

Ms. Ambler's time is up. We will now move on to Ms. Sgro.

You have seven minutes.

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Southern and Ms. Allan, it's great to see both of you.

Elyse, it's always nice to see you and to hear your voice and your excellent comments. Thank you for that. We very much appreciate the guidance you're giving the committee, which is coming from the perspectives of two very successful and very respected women. Welcome to our committee today.

Elyse, what was it that got you into the line of work you're in? Who encouraged you, and what made you decide? Did you know you were getting into an area that was so predominantly male when you made that decision?

Ms. Elyse Allan: The answer to the last question is no. I don't think I thought much about it back at the time, Judy. I originally was actually interested in pre-med. I was always interested in biology and life sciences, moved towards pre-med, and then learned about health economics and actually made the transition from sort of pre-med and a strong interest in health care. I learned that I loved the economic side of the equation, and one rolled into the other. After I learned that I enjoyed economics and kind of commerce, actually the interface of economics and public policy, I decided maybe I should look at this beyond health care. That's when I went back to business school and started with GE actually right after business school because of the breadth of their careers.

In retrospect now, 30 years later, maybe I missed my calling as an engineer. I guess there is still time to do that. But I did learn that I loved the stuff. I love the interface of business and technology, and quite honestly, my role now in public policy. It's been a wonderful career.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Did you have anyone initially encouraging you, Elyse?

Ms. Elyse Allan: I guess it was my early science teachers. I loved the sciences. When I think back to even middle school, junior high school, there was a strong interest from science teachers. They saw my interest and passion.

Quite honestly, I wasn't always the best math student. I'll be the first to put it out that physics wasn't my first love. But that said, I found there were many places you could enjoy technology and science, which is what I found I liked. Professors helped me, and teachers helped me carve the path that kept me successful, which of course helped me to want to keep going and also helped me to find

where my passion and interest were, which I would say is still in the sciences.

•(1615)

Hon. Judy Sgro: I find it very interesting, Elyse, when you mention that, because some of our other witnesses here at the committee have indicated that it's really important to get young women interested very early on, in grade three, four, or five, especially if they get the right teacher who encourages that, which is exactly what happened to you.

Ms. Elyse Allan: We've worked with Actua for many years. I must say we've learned through their mentoring program as well as their young girls science program. They have statistics that actually show how working with a lot of the younger girls helps them to develop a passion that helps them overcome some of the hurdles. When you like it and love it, then when it gets tough you're motivated to get through those difficult times. That's what they are finding through their science programs for girls in early ages and their entry programs.

Hon. Judy Sgro: They were a very impressive organization when they came before the committee.

Ms. Southern, what was it that encouraged you to end up pursuing an area of work that is in a predominantly male world?

Ms. Nancy Southern: As you know, I do have a little different circumstance. Interestingly enough, it was my father who really encouraged me. I didn't initially have an inclination towards leadership. I always liked commerce. I was always very keen to explore the world of commerce and of creating value and creating products and being able to actually sell and commercialize them. That was always a keen interest of mine. But it was my father who encouraged me to develop leadership skills and who actually provided me with the confidence that I could do this.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Ms. Southern, what is the ratio of men to women in your company?

Ms. Nancy Southern: ATCO Electric has our largest complement of people, about 2,000 people. In our last two years our hiring policy has been 50-50, and 50% of our new engineers are women. We have about 33% women out of the 9,000 employees.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Very good.

Elyse, do you know what it is with GE, the ratio of men to women?

Ms. Elyse Allan: I'm thinking it's between 25% and 30%. A couple of the plants are heavy capital, and that's where we have a tougher time with women.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Do you have a policy at GE of trying to reach those kinds of numbers, as Ms. Southern mentioned?

Ms. Elyse Allan: We have now put in an internal quota. We have targets that we set for each of the businesses. We do our HR review every year. We tend to focus on retention rates right now. We've been trying to retain the women we're getting. We keep bringing them in, and if we're losing them two or three years later, we want to understand why. We've started a program this year focusing on retention rate, investing more in our GE women's network and doing more education about flex time, flex hours. We already do that a lot, but sometimes management doesn't know how, so we have to always work on it.

To answer your question, we have not set a quota of 50% of all hiring at this point.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I have one other question. The issue—
[Translation]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Sgro, but your time is up. Actually, you have about five seconds left.

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro: On sexual harassment in the workplace, can you briefly give me an answer on how you deal with it in your companies? Do you have a policy on that?

Ms. Nancy Southern: Zero tolerance.

Ms. Elyse Allan: We have zero tolerance and a strong ombudsman process so that you have complete privacy with respect to reporting anything, and a complete, open reporting system.

• (1620)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Good, thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would like to thank our two witnesses who shared some very interesting information with us. Thank you very much, Ms. Southern and Ms. Allan. Have a good evening.

We are now going to move on to our second group of witnesses.

We have Bertha Mo from the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization. We will then have Ashley Julian from the Assembly of First Nations. She should be here shortly.

Ms. Mo, it will work like this: you will have 10 minutes, after which your colleague will also have 10 minutes. Then we will have questions.

[English]

Madame Mo.

Ms. Bertha Mo (Manager, Counselling Program, Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to speak before the committee about ways to improve the economic prospects of Canadian girls.

My name is Bertha Mo. I am the manager of the counselling program at OCISO, the Ottawa Community Immigration Services Organization.

Canada is a nation of immigrants and refugees. None of us, except our aboriginal brothers and sisters, originated in this land, so the things I'm saying should not be a surprise, except for the fact that in the last 20 years the demographics of immigrants and refugees have changed. Previous to the last 20 years, most immigrants and refugees came from Europe. Some of them spoke French, some of them spoke English, and some of them spoke other languages. But this has changed. Today, most of our immigrants and refugees don't speak either English or French.

For the last 34 years, OCISO has been providing settlement and integration services in Ottawa. Our mission is to support immigrants through the journey of making Canada their home by providing creative and responsive programs that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, by building community through mutual respect and partnerships, and by fostering healthy and inclusive spaces for open dialogue and healing.

In the last fiscal year we served 30,335 people. Our staff and volunteers speak over 50 languages. Specifically, OCISO provides community integration services, meaning job search, social support for immigrant women, youth, and seniors, housing support, legal aid, and refugee sponsorship. One of our major programs is English language training for adults. We also provide clinical counselling for individuals, families, and couples; in particular, we specialize in those who have experienced war trauma and torture. There is support for students, families, and school administrators through our multicultural liaison officer program. We offer economic development, through our well-known career mentoring program. We also provide volunteer opportunities for newcomers, Canadians, and students.

Here are some national demographics for immigrants and refugees. In 2010 we welcomed 280,636 immigrants to Canada, of whom 25,000 were refugees. I'm going to focus now on the special challenges of immigrant and refugee children and youth. First, there are some national concerns.

These young children 18 and under who we welcome to Canada are under enormous pressure to quickly integrate into the new culture; however, we haven't really thought about the supports that they and their families need. These young people have to resume their studies very quickly. They face a different school system, and in many cases they have to learn a new language. Additionally, the adolescents are under peer pressure to fit in while trying to negotiate their identity between two cultures. We all know that youth in general, but particularly immigrants, experience a very difficult transition from school to work.

● (1625)

Immigrants face greater barriers than their Canadian-born counterparts to acquire the skills and training they need to compete in the labour market. In 2006 the unemployment rate of recent immigrants aged 15 to 24 was 18%, compared with 13.8% among their counterparts in the general population. Furthermore, it is noted that immigrant youth in low-income families may feel compelled to get jobs that conflict with school schedules in order to contribute to family income. This situation creates great stress and compromises their academic progress. Many immigrant and refugee youth work part-time or full-time in addition to attending school and drop out at a higher rate. In 2006 in Ottawa, 14% of young adults aged 15 to 24 who did not complete high school were immigrants and refugees.

There are several ways we can help immigrant youth to stay at school and enter the labour market. These include guidance and tutoring at school, parents' ability to have jobs so their children can continue studying, income support for working-poor families, and access to recreational programs for youth where they can relax and meet Canadians of their own age, so they can actually develop a level of comfort and belonging in Canadian society. Equally important is adequate access to labour market information, training, and employment programs.

I have spent quite a lot of time in Ottawa high schools. One of the things I have noticed is the real lack of guidance counsellors, who are not only supposed to be providing guidance around behavioural issues and academic excellence, but also counselling on what you are going to do after you graduate from high school. If you can imagine how this situation is impacting all Ottawa youth, think about the impact it has on immigrant and refugee youth whose first language is neither English nor French.

I want to talk about a very successful program at OCISO—the immigrant and refugee program for high-risk youth. Approximately 18% of Ottawa's youth aged 15 to 24 are newcomers. Of this number, two thirds are immigrants. Pre-migration and post-migration, as well as settlement experiences, places enormous stress on families and directly affects the overall health and well-being of immigrant and refugee youth. The ability of these young people to integrate into society is often negatively affected by difficulties such as gaps in education, dislocation, family disruption, limited prospects for employment, poverty, and discrimination in the community. Personal or intergenerational exposure to war and trauma during the pre-migration period results in re-traumatization when immigrant and refugee youth experience racial discrimination, bullying, and sexual harassment upon their arrival in Canada.

Approximately 20% of the counselling program's individual clients are youth. In total, 20% of all counselling program clients are survivors of torture and war trauma. OCISO's multicultural liaison officers who are working in Ottawa schools report that immigrant and refugee youth experience the highest rate of suspension from school. The school system and school counsellors find they do not have the language, experience, resources, time, or mandate to respond appropriately to the complex needs of immigrant and refugee youth. Consultation with principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, and MLOs confirm the need for the support project for immigrant and refugee youth.

● (1630)

The goal of the support program is to build a protective support network for youth through the schools and service providers by offering a safe space where at-risk newcomer youth can make a healthy transition and integration into Canadian society while increasing their ability to meet their full-time academic potential.

[Translation]

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Mo, but your time is up. I could give you a few seconds to wrap up.

[English]

Ms. Bertha Mo: Okay.

OCISO works with the educational system to actually fine-tune what's already there to accommodate immigrant and refugee youth.

One of the other programs I wanted to mention, which is quite successful, is our career mentoring program.

The Chair: Very quickly.

Ms. Bertha Mo: This program provides matches between internationally trained professionals and Canadian counterparts. Together, they help the newcomer manoeuvre through the Canadian job market. This is a very successful program and recently we received a small amount of money to actually replicate it for youth.

Thank you very much. I look forward to answering questions.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Mo.

Since our second witness hasn't arrived yet, I propose that we start the period of questions.

Yes, Ms. James?

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): On a point of clarification, has the witness cancelled? If that witness does arrive, will they be given the ten minutes? Is that how it will work?

[Translation]

The Chair: Actually, it isn't clear what happens with respect to the other witness. She is probably on the way.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will start the period of questions, and when the other witness arrives, we will give her 10 minutes for her testimony.

Ms. Young, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Ms. Mo, I'd like to thank you very much for coming today and for your presentation. It was very broad and interesting.

I'm a little bit aware of the work of OCISO, having done a fair amount of work on developing settlement programs across Canada, so I want to give you the extra time you didn't have earlier to talk about the career mentoring program. Since you wanted to focus on and share a bit more of that with us but ran out of time, maybe I'll start off with asking you to tell us about it, how long the program has been going, how many people have been through it, and how you measure your success.

Ms. Bertha Mo: I have some notes here.

The program has actually been going for about five years. We have worked with 200 Canadian mentors and matched them with internationally trained immigrants. What we try to do is match sectors and even job descriptions. The mentors share their knowledge of the Canadian workplace, cultures, support network development, and advise on job-search prospects. Over 60% of mentees exit the program with jobs in their field, and another 15% pursue further education toward attaining employment goals.

We actually do a lot of informal mentoring at OCISO. I was talking to one of my colleagues about his Burmese community, and he's been one of the supporters of our group counselling program. I always wondered, because we hear that newcomers definitely are not interested in counselling, whether it is group or individual, and he said, "Listen, you have these incredible university graduates. Look at Renée, she has her master's degree and she's been working five years for you. You have Christy and you have Chris and all these are students who have actually manoeuvred their way through university. They're very successful. They did an internship with you and now they're running your support groups. I want my Karen kids to actually spend those eight to 14 weeks with your interns. They're mentors. We don't see you as doing group counselling. What you're running is a group mentoring program."

I thought, wow.... Because many of our programs are actually designed for individual groups of refugees and immigrants, we're able to tweak them and provide things we might not have thought of. In fact, the immigrant and refugee youth program on the street is actually called career pathways. Because these are also high-risk kids, we don't want to stigmatize them by saying we're really doing mental health counselling.

• (1635)

Ms. Wai Young: Ms. Mo, I'd like you to take the success of your program then and perhaps scale it back to a younger age group, because the purpose of this study is to look at improving the economic prospects of girls—so maybe not those who have finished university or an accreditation or whatever. What can we do to start these girls off earlier on this successful path?

Ms. Bertha Mo: I'm sorry, I'm actually talking about two programs. The career mentoring program is with adults, but the immigrant and refugee youth program is for the 13- to 18-year-old child in school.

Ms. Wai Young: Can you tell us a little bit more about that program?

Ms. Bertha Mo: We work with high schools, and right now we're at four high schools. It's usually the high-risk child, the child who looks like he or she is going to drop out, the child who's fighting, so it involves both boys and girls. The group meets for 10 to 14 weeks.

The environment of the group simulates a Canadian workplace. There's a time schedule. Someone in the group is targeted and trained to gather the people in the group when it's time for the group to meet. Someone is the timekeeper, there's a facilitator, and they talk about issues such as time scheduling, conflict management, résumé building, and how to present yourself at a job interview.

During the course of the 14 weeks different people representing the professions come in and talk about what it took to get into their profession.

Ms. Wai Young: Ms. Mo, can I just stop you right there, in the interest of time, and ask you what the ratio is between boys and girls? Is it 50:50, 60:40? What is the ratio?

Ms. Bertha Mo: There are slightly more boys than girls, and that is because it was funded—

Ms. Wai Young: That's okay. We don't need to know that.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Okay.

Ms. Wai Young: My next question, then, in the interest of time again, is from the girls' perspective or what you've observed from the girls' perspective and the outcomes, are there any particular things you think we can do as a government or in the status of women programs to support more success in girls? Do you find that they are as successful as the boys are, coming through the program? Are there any particular indicators we need to know about?

• (1640)

Ms. Bertha Mo: Girls are very interested in relationships. So what we try to do is have the demographic profile of the facilitator fit that of the girls or the boys.

[Translation]

The Chair: I need to stop you there, Ms. Mo, because Ms. Young's time is up.

We now have Ms. Day.

You have seven minutes.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): I'm pleased to be able to speak to you. Welcome and thank you for your presentation.

I have a number of questions to ask. Our study focuses on girls and women. What is the percentage of girls and women compared with boys among the clientele you serve, which is made up of immigrants? Is it 50%?

[English]

Ms. Bertha Mo: The young immigrant women we serve are in larger numbers than men, and that's because it's easier for women to ask for help.

I have an immigrant women's program that is matched up with iSisters technology. We provide two levels of computer training to immigrant women. They just flock to the classes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: I'm particularly interested in the relationships and interrelationships. Are the young women who use your services subject to some form of violence? Are they discriminated against compared with other Canadians?

[English]

Ms. Bertha Mo: Yes, they are. In fact, one of the reasons we had the groups in the schools was that the students felt isolated. There's subtle bullying and racism. You'll see that there isn't a lot of mixing. The students felt isolated. For example, at one school we have a group of largely Nepali-speaking girls. Because of their limited English, teachers couldn't even communicate well with them. So they had nobody to listen to them, nobody to bring issues to.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Do they experience violence—

The Chair: Ms. Day, I'm sorry for interrupting you. Do you mind if we stop the clock and come back to you after the testimony of our witness who just arrived?

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Not a problem, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You have four and a half minutes left. So, you will have the opportunity to ask the other witness questions, as well, if you wish.

Good afternoon, Ms. Julian, from the Assembly of First Nations. We were waiting for you. Welcome.

You have 10 minutes for your testimony. We will then continue with our questions.

The floor is yours. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Ashley Julian (Member, Youth Council, Assembly of First Nations): Thank you.

Good afternoon. *Kwe.*

[English]

Wela'lin for inviting the Assembly of First Nations to appear today.

[Witness speaks in her native language]

My name is Ashley Julian. I'm a Mi'kmaq woman from the Indian Brook First Nation community in Nova Scotia. I am here for the Nova Scotia and Newfoundland representative for the national youth council for the Assembly of First Nations.

The Assembly of First Nations is a national political organization representing first nations citizens in Canada. The Assembly of First Nations' role is to advocate for first nations priorities and objectives as mandated by the chiefs.

The Assembly of First Nations National Youth Council was created by a charter under AFN. The role and function of members of the national youth council is to represent first nations youth perspectives in all political, social, economic, cultural, and traditional manners.

I want to begin my presentation today by stating my appreciation for this study the committee has undertaken. Too often, policy development overlooks the early stage of life and focuses on addressing problems once they arise, as opposed to proactively understanding and planning for better outcomes.

I have identified three main areas of focus to improve the economic prosperity of first nations girls: education, employment, and safety and security.

First and foremost, first nations children deserve quality education. Since 1996 there has been a 2% fall in annual increases in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada programs for first nations, including education. This has not kept up with inflation or population growth. The Assembly of First Nations estimates that there is a \$3,800-per-child gap between funding for first nations schools and funding for other schools in Canada.

First nations children, simply by virtue of being born in a first nations communities, are expected to have a lower quality of education than other children in Canada. This is unacceptable. Improving the economic prospects of first nations girls requires fair and equitable funding for first nations schools. In addition, first nations girls have different educational paths than other girls in Canada. Among first nations girls, the most common reasons for dropping out of school are family caregiving responsibilities, whether for their own children or other members of their family, and trouble at home.

In 2006, 20% of first nations women over the age of 15 were lone parents, compared with 8% among other Canadian women. About 12% of teenage first nations girls were parents, compared with 1.3% of other Canadian teenage girls. Early motherhood and caregiving responsibilities can lead to a disruption in education, which leads to higher dropout rates. With support, these girls often re-engage with the education system later in life. Flexible programming and accessible child-care support are needed in first nations communities.

A strong example of promising practices comes from the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning, which emerged in recent years in response to the need for post-secondary programs that would better meet the learning requirements for first nations people and girls. An alternative to provincial colleges and universities, the indigenous institutes of higher learning provide programs from an indigenous perspective, including knowledge of one's identity and language. Many of these institutes are located within first nations communities, thereby improving access for students living in remote areas. They are also located in larger urban centres.

First nations girls need the tools and resources to actively engage in the market economy. But they also need opportunities and support to learn and understand the traditional roles, responsibilities, languages, and cultures of their traditional backgrounds.

Important studies by Chandler and Lalonde have looked at the preventative factor of cultural continuity in reducing suicide among youth. Steps to reinvigorate or actively support cultural learning and transferences increase individual resilience and self-confidence, which leads to economic and social success.

I will now move on to employment.

● (1645)

You are likely familiar with the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, ASETS. First nations provide employment services as part of ASETS, many of which have specific youth, bridging, and transition support.

A specific example of one of these programs is Caldwell First Nation Employment and Training, located in southern Ontario, which assisted one of our youth clients, Samantha. Samantha credits the Caldwell First Nation Employment and Training Office with helping her through her first real summer job opportunity. This office helped her with her résumé and provided the wage subsidy that created jobs in Point Pelee National Park. Samantha finished university, went back to school, and is now graduating from college. She just landed her dream job. She is heading out to Alberta for a park service ranger job. Again, the Caldwell First Nation Employment and Training Office provided the funds Samantha needed to travel to Edmonton for an interview and support her on her employment journey.

ASETS promotes the importance of helping clients like Samantha in making connections for young girls and young people. Such dedicated support, coupled with mentoring and role modelling, are powerful tools for first nations girls; however, they are not always accessible due to changes in funding.

Finally, I want to note a crucial barrier to the economic prosperity of first nations girls—a lack of safety and security. The incidence of violence and insecurity faced by first nations girls and women is well known in these communities, given your previous study. It is extremely difficult for girls to meet their full potential, economically or otherwise, when they are under such great risk of witnessing or experiencing physical or emotional harm.

As noted in the interim report of this committee's study on violence against aboriginal women, a much greater focus is needed on family violence prevention, anti-bullying, and gang activity reduction.

To conclude, while first nations girls continue to be more disadvantaged than their non-first-nations counterparts, we can look with a real hope to gains that have been achieved in a few short generations. For example, one of our successful statistics around first nations girls and the educational opportunities is the Coady Institute, located at the St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. It is a great opportunity for young female aboriginal and indigenous girls to attend a post-secondary institution in which they are taught leadership skills and roles and responsibilities.

Education is beginning to result in a real improvement for first nations people, but the rate and pace of change needs to accelerate, as it is simply not acceptable to leave first nations children behind.

Actions that can make a tangible difference in improving the economic prospects of first nations girls include flexible and accessible child care for first nations communities in urban and rural areas; support for mentoring in exchanges of formal economies, career development, indigenous languages, and traditional practices; and greater support for violence prevention, anti-bullying programs, and programs to deal with gang recruitment and activity.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. *Wela'lin.*

• (1650)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Julian.

We are now going to continue our period of questions.

Ms. Day, you have four and a half minutes left.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will share my time with Ms. Freeman. I have one last question for Ms. Mo. I'll be brief.

In your testimony, there was some question about the 50 languages spoken in your community, in particular by the youths in this counselling program. I imagine that you have a team of volunteers who can communicate with these youths.

With regard to immigration, do you think it would be important for the government to do something, to step in to help the communities?

[English]

Ms. Bertha Mo: For communities to...? Please complete your sentence.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: To help your youths, especially girls. You have a team of boys and of girls. Would it be important to intervene to help with the integration of those youths?

[English]

Ms. Bertha Mo: Absolutely, because we brought them here. The government brought them here through our immigration policies. We're using these policies to build Canada. We should not abandon people after bringing them here, either for economic reasons or humanitarian reasons.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you.

Ms. Freeman, I turn it over to you.

[English]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): I'd like to thank both of our witnesses for being here today. It's really a pleasure to have both of you.

My questions are for Ms. Ashley Julian.

This committee has heard again and again that the underfunding of first nations education is a chronic problem. We're seeing serious underfunding. This is fully a federal responsibility. Can you elaborate more on what needs to be done? What is the situation? We keep hearing again and again that this is really a major barrier, among many. But it's one of the major ones.

Ms. Ashley Julian: That's a great question. Thank you.

Again, from my personal experience with first nations' control of first nations' education, the Assembly of First Nations has really looked towards making more accessible opportunities at the community level and also in the urban centres. With the growing indigenous population, there has to be something that is more relevant to the needs of aboriginal girls. I find that there is also a cultural barrier that stands between the educational system and our traditional way of learning at the community level in terms of language and cultural barriers.

I feel that the Coady International Institute, which is accessible to all Canadian girls, is a good example. I think partnerships with universities allow for more opportunities in these areas.

We also have further information in our studies, with more substantial answers to your questions, that can be forwarded to the committee.

• (1655)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: I think the committee would appreciate that very much.

Is curriculum at the elementary and high school levels culturally appropriate, or is that part of the problem too?

Ms. Ashley Julian: I guess my answer would be no. We're looking at promoting more cultural awareness in terms of the curriculum. In the Atlantic, for example, in the region I represent, our schools are looking at what's called the teepee program. It's basically in elementary school. They look into the wigwam and teaching ceremonies and how they are conducted around the medicine wheel. It further uses curriculum in terms of English, languages, and incorporating more household opportunities and responsibilities. There is a different type of skill learning, I feel, for indigenous youth and girls when they are aging.

[Translation]

The Chair: I have to stop you there, Ms. Julian. I'm sorry about that.

We are now going to the Conservative side.

Mr. Albas, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Actually, I believe I gave my spot up.

[Translation]

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Bateman, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you.

[English]

Thank you both so much for being here with us this afternoon. It's very important for us to hear your perspectives.

I actually have a few very specific questions for Dr. Mo, to start.

Forgive me, Dr. Mo. I come from Manitoba. I represent the constituency of Winnipeg South Centre. I'm fascinated by your organization, but we do it a little differently. I just want to understand. Do you receive any funding at all from the federal government?

Ms. Bertha Mo: OCISO does, but the counselling program doesn't.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: What percentage of your funding comes from the federal government?

• (1700)

Ms. Bertha Mo: It is probably 75%.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Probably 75% of your funding comes from the federal government. That's interesting.

You see, we're actually changing what we're doing in Manitoba, because in the Ontario system, I believe, and in fact in all ten provinces the program is very differently structured. We don't charge clients for counselling. We actually help them. In Manitoba we have \$36.5 million that the federal government contributes, and I believe the province contributes around \$1 million. I could consult with my colleague, but I think she is not in the room any more.

We work in partnership, the province and the federal government, although we are footing about 97.5% of the bill. We don't charge refugees for counselling. We give it to them willingly, and the federal government pays various organizations. The province will organize a school group. I used to serve on a school board and we regularly would help people with EAL programming. I am just fascinated by why you would be charging people for something they are receiving for free in other provinces, and which I think it is the intention of the federal government to provide.

When we welcome people to the country, we want to give them the tools to succeed, because we all succeed if they succeed. I would just really appreciate if you could explain your structure to me.

Ms. Bertha Mo: OCISO doesn't charge people for counselling.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: It says right here that fees are paid on a sliding scale but are waived if you have limited income.

Ms. Bertha Mo: That's true.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: If you need an appointment or if you need a referral you can contact somebody, so if you need a referral.... I want to understand this. I don't understand this.

Ms. Bertha Mo: About five years ago the counselling program was actually told by the board that we had to look at social enterprise, and what social enterprise means is that you figure out a way to make some funds to run the existing program by charging people who can pay.

The way that works.... Right now we have a case of a family from Sri Lanka. There are two children who are living with their aunt—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Before you go into the details of this example, how many clients do you have for the counselling service, and how many clients do you have for your whole service? A ballpark number is all I'm interested in. I'm curious to find out what is the size of the operation.

Ms. Bertha Mo: The organization serves 30,000 clients.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: You have 30,000 people annually.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Yes.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: You have 30,000 new people annually.

Ms. Bertha Mo: They are not necessarily new.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: You might have helped somebody in 1985 and you helped them once a year right throughout—

Ms. Bertha Mo: Yes, or 10 to 12 times....

Ms. Joyce Bateman: How many new people do you help a year?

Ms. Bertha Mo: I can't tell you that. I can only tell you how many new people the counselling program helps per year.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: How many new people does the counselling program...?

Ms. Bertha Mo: That's about 500.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: How many of them do you charge?

Ms. Bertha Mo: Ninety-five percent of our clients cannot pay, so 5% or less.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Okay, you charge 5%.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Yes, it's 5% or less.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I guess—

Ms. Bertha Mo: Can I tell you, and let's not go into the details of the—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Well, I'm fascinated with the details.

Ms. Bertha Mo: I'll tell you about Ontario.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I'm here to learn about the program. We actually have a mandate for this committee, and it's not about Ontario. It's actually about helping young women to achieve economically. That's our mandate, so I'm very interested in what you have to say about how you help young women to achieve in this economic environment. And as I said, when we help immigrants or refugees to succeed, it helps us all. That is what the country has been built on.

Ms. Bertha Mo: I agree, absolutely.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: That is what we have to focus the comments on.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Counselling is considered health in Ontario, and that's provincial.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: It is funded with a 6% increase annually by the federal government, I might add, so we consider it holistically. We're here to help all people, and we don't want to think in blocks.

To get the 95% of people helped for nothing, we have to charge the health system to get a referral. Does this clinical supervisor need a referral?

Ms. Bertha Mo: No, no....

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Because it says right here on your brochure, Madam, "To make an appointment or for a referral, contact: Carmen Gloria..." and she's an M.Ed., OACCPP.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Yes, that's a master's in counselling. She's a certified clinical counsellor.

[Translation]

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Bateman.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Oh, too bad!

The Chair: If you have any truly specific questions you would like to address with the witness, you could always discuss them at the end of the committee meeting.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Yes, thank you. May the committee request some details?

● (1705)

The Chair: Yes, the committee can always submit questions to the clerk in writing after a committee meeting. The clerk will then take care of corresponding with the witness.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: So, Ms. Mo will prepare the details and send them to the clerk, for all the committee members. Is that right?

The Chair: Specify to the clerk what it is you want to know exactly.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We will now go to the other side.

Ms. Sgro, you have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much.

It's very nice to have both of you here. Thank you for the good work you do in both your organizations.

Ms. Julian, what is one concrete idea or specific thing this committee can do to help youth and women in your organization?

Ms. Ashley Julian: A concrete area under the three that were addressed here would most likely be employment in terms of helping young women to achieve economically in today's society—specifically in employment, types of funding that promote more aboriginal skills, employment training strategies that are geared to program development.

Hon. Judy Sgro: We're trying to work to achieve the goal of economic help for young women.

Ms. Ashley Julian: Yes, and the Assembly of First Nations has further information besides the three we have here. We have such a substantial number of requests from 633 first nations communities that we can provide direct links to answer your question, to follow up. Would you like that?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Where does your funding come from?

Ms. Ashley Julian: Our funding comes from the federal government, and the partnerships that we develop are to focus on the education, employment, and safety and security of young girls.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Ms. Mo, I have the same question for you. What concrete idea or specific thing can you suggest we do to help youth and women within the context of the immigrant community?

Ms. Bertha Mo: Fund more research on how the educational system is working with newcomers. For example, in Ottawa only three schools offer classes for English literacy development and English as a second language, so youth have to travel across town for an hour and a half every morning to attend school. That doesn't work. We need more ELD and ESL classes.

Another thing that I feel is absolutely necessary is that educational training needs to be improved. I'm a bit shocked that our teachers aren't better versed in globalization trends, immigration and refugee issues. OCISO, my program, does professional development for teachers. It's something extra that we do, and nobody pays for it.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Ms. Mo, what percentage of immigrants versus refugees come to your organization?

Ms. Bertha Mo: About 25% are refugees.

Hon. Judy Sgro: The remaining 75% come to your organization for what particular kind of help?

Ms. Bertha Mo: Employment for internationally trained professionals and other adult immigrants is very, very sad. If they do work, immigrant women work part-time, and they're very, very menial jobs. Many of them don't work. Where they come into counselling is after they've been underemployed or unemployed. If you're a newcomer, even for six months, by the end of year one you're depressed. Many of them come in that way.

As I said, our career mentoring program for internationally trained professionals is one of our most positive programs, and it's growing.

There are also other issues: violence, housing, difficulties with adolescent children who are not doing well at school, and cultural confidence. The demographic profile of our school administrators and teachers is not changing in comparison to the new population of Ottawa, so there are a lot of language and cultural issues with parents trying to communicate with school administration.

● (1710)

Hon. Judy Sgro: If a family is coming for counselling, generally how long do they have to wait for an appointment at OCISO?

Ms. Bertha Mo: It depends on the language. It's five weeks to two months, depending on the language.

Hon. Judy Sgro: How many counsellors do you have working in the organization?

Ms. Bertha Mo: Ten, but most of them work part-time. We have 5.5 FTEs. As I said, the counselling program gets no money from the federal government. We get City of Ottawa, United Way, and some foundation funding, and it's all because that's deemed as health, which is provincial.

Hon. Judy Sgro: So then you have five full-time people?

Ms. Bertha Mo: It's 5.5 full-time equivalents.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Full-time equivalents.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Meaning that most of the team works part-time.

Hon. Judy Sgro: It must be a real challenge to try to meet the needs of the many people who are knocking on your door.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Absolutely. We're also the go-to for clinical training for social workers, interns, and psychologists who want to work with immigrants and refugees.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I certainly very much appreciate the good work you do on that particular file, because I know the needs are enormous.

Ms. Bertha Mo: Thank you.

Hon. Judy Sgro: There clearly are not enough organizations like yours in the Ottawa area.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sgro.

We have come to Ms. James. We have two minutes left.

Do you have any questions you'd like to ask in this short period of time?

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: Yes, I'm sure I can speak and ask questions for two minutes. Thank you.

Thank you to both of our guests as well.

I'm going to direct my questions to Ms. Mo.

As a side note, I also sit on the citizenship and immigration committee, and I appreciate your comments with regard to the changing landscape of immigrants to Canada, as opposed to 20 years ago.

In my other committee, on all the studies we've done there are key words that always come out: integration and assimilation into Canadian society is key to success of new immigrants.

I think in your own testimony you mentioned it's a significant barrier if someone is unable to speak one of the official languages in Canada—English or French. That correlates with what I hear on my other committee, that it's essential for someone to succeed in Canada, to be able to integrate very quickly, to be able to get a job and give back to Canadian society. I do appreciate your comments on that.

Because this committee's purpose is to see what we can do to advance girls in leadership roles, economic prosperity, and so forth, with regard to the immigrant children your organization has helped, do you see a difference in the success rate in immigrant children by gender, so boys versus girls?

Ms. Bertha Mo: I'm very sorry to say that a lot of immigrant and refugee boys are in trouble with the law. In my work we are often sent to testify or represent parents at the mental health justice committee.

In Ottawa, if you're 18 and under and commit something, other than probably severely injuring somebody, and you come from a situation where there might have been war trauma and torture, this particular board, which has a psychiatrist on it, can kind of defer your incarceration into the—

● (1715)

[Translation]

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Mo, but I need to interrupt you. We have—

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: Can I just try to get the answer out?

Are you saying that immigrant boys are more prone to violence? I was going to ask you a question about violence in the home with respect to girls achieving success later on in life. Is that what you're saying?

Ms. Bertha Mo: I would say that it's more refugee boys, because they have often lived through several years of trauma, torture, and being helpless. Many of them are from single-parent households, usually with a mom. So due to their background, the only way they know how to deal with conflict and lack of success—and they find this in school—is through violence.

We also have quite a bit of gang violence in Ottawa, and a lot of this is perpetrated by refugee boys.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: This is extremely interesting, but I must unfortunately interrupt you, Ms. Mo. We are going to have to go and vote in the House any minute now.

This brings today's meeting to a close. I'd like to thank you for your time, and I hope you have a pleasant evening.

The meeting is adjourned.

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