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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call this meeting to order with my apologies to the witnesses. We had a speech in the House that just ended at 3:30.

Thank you for joining us today. This is our third meeting on the study we are undertaking as a committee on settlement services across Canada. We're early on in the study, so we're still gathering information and data about the way settlement services work. We're also, however, very keen on getting recommendations from you on how the government could improve its services to newcomers in the country.

I think we have two witnesses by video conference and one by telephone conference.

We understand, Mr. Cadogan, that you had your flight cancelled, so you are with us by telephone. Because you're on teleconference, I think we're going to begin with your statement. Then we will go to the other witnesses who are joining us by video conference.

You have seven minutes in which to offer a statement.

Mr. Carl Cadogan (Chief Executive Officer, Reception House Waterloo Region): I appreciate the time and I'm sorry I can't be there in person. I had every intention to be.

Reception House Waterloo Region has been around...This is our 32nd year. We were started by a group of Mennonite church folk and for the first 20 or so years the organization was run by the congregation and a few staff. We have grown since then. In 2017, we celebrated 30 years.

As I reflected on what I was going to say, I first want to highlight what I call good practice.

Since November 2015, when the region of Waterloo started to respond to the government's strategy in resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees, Reception House Waterloo Region has never been the same. In one year we went from serving 250 to 300 refugees a year to over 1,000 plus. The experience pushed us to innovate, collaborate and discover efficiencies and best practices.

What did we learn from that experience? We have learned to be creative. We have learned to be more flexible. We have learned to have enough funding to serve 1,000, but not enough funding to serve 300. We have persevered. We have done what so many organizations in so many communities have done. We have responded in ways that

focus on assisting those most vulnerable, those who are not paired with a family or church group deeply invested in their success, government-assisted refugees.

While our case managers are very deeply invested in the success of those we serve, the ratio of 1:100 versus 1:5 results in a very different outcome. We know the current government is in love with the privately sponsored refugee program as it is a way to shift the burden of refugee support to the community, but serving GARs also demands a community response, albeit a very different one.

One of the key responses we have used in the last couple of years is the family partnership program, which is a hybrid model of the privately sponsored refugee program. It's designed to create social integration and language support for refugee families by pairing them with local volunteers from the Waterloo region. The participants in the program meet weekly over the course of a year and participate in various activities together, including sharing meals, practising English and exploring their communities together. The primary purpose of the program is to provide newcomers with a sense of belonging and help build a social support structure through community networks and English language practice.

The family partnership program was recently evaluated by the community service learning project for political science at the Wilfrid Laurier University. Here are a few findings from that evaluation. The family partnership program offers vital life experiences to government-assisted refugees, including networking, employment and building mutually supportive relationships. It provides newcomers with opportunities to become more familiar with, and comfortable in, their communities, thereby helping to foster a sense of belonging. The program provides benefits to the Waterloo region community as a whole by having to counter xenophobia, strengthen community and social cohesion, and foster relationships between newcomers and local residents who may not have otherwise met.

I want to thank IRCC and we are really pleased to see that it is responding to discussions and recommendations from service delivery partners. We have been at the front lines of this work for over 30 years. Listening to our experience will help the government make the most positive impact on the people we serve. We applaud the modernization of the systems. It is certainly a step in the right direction. We look forward to the upcoming RFP for services for the next five years.

As a new member of the national RAP working group, I'm excited about the stories and opportunities we can share with all those involved in enabling newcomers to discover their potential in Canada.

I have several recommendations.

Continue to find ways to engage those organizations that are delivering services to GARs and recognize there are systems that work well. Supporting and promoting both systems is critical, especially as it relates to broadening the understanding of the public.

Recognize and establish initiatives and systems that better address systemic racism and provide support that allows organizations like ours to do more in this matter.

- (1545)

Continue to support creativity in the delivery of service to GARs, and continue to support initiatives such as SDI, service delivery improvement projects that IRCC has recently started.

Many GARs are arriving with health, mental health and physical limitations. IRCC must review the needs of these people and look to how we can better respond as they arrive. For example, our site is not accessible and this severely inhibits our ability to serve newcomers with mobility issues.

Allocate funding for initial mental health assessments and support for clients who suffer from severe trauma. It might be a first step in dealing with this very serious issue. We have seen an increase in very serious and chronic health issues. We are trying to respond in ways that make sense, but our community is a small one. The health system isn't always ready and willing to be flexible, and we want to see ways in which IRCC can have a broader impact on the provinces to do more for those people who are coming to our region.

I think that's seven minutes.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Stay tuned. You'll have some questions in a few moments.

Let's go to Manitoba next, to the Westman Immigrant Services. Which of you two is going to be speaking?

Ms. Angela Mowbray (Acting Manager, Language Program, Westman Immigrant Services): I will go first.

I'm Angela Mowbray, the acting manager of language programs. Our executive director is away on holidays somewhere warm this week, so Joy and I will cover for her and give her introductory warm-up. I'll talk about language programs, and then Joy will talk about the settlement programs and give Lois's concluding remarks.

Westman Immigrant Services envisions a community where diversity is valued and newcomers are accepted and supported in meeting their full potential. One of the greatest advantages we have as an organization is that we offer an array of services to our clients, all in one building. Clients are not required to travel to different locations for different settlement services or language classes at stage one. We're governed by a volunteer board of directors. WIS employs over 40 people, more than 55% of whom are newcomers themselves. We retain the service of more than 90 professional language interpreters and assistants, and we're supported by over 100 community volunteers.

I'll give you some statistics from the 2017-18 fiscal year. During that year, we served over 4,000 clients through our settlement program. We provided 2,315 language interpreters covering 23 different languages. We assisted 368 clients through employment facilitation, and we provided childminding services for close to 300 clients. We resettled 45 government-assisted refugees, or GARs, and 50 will be supported in the 2018-19 fiscal year. We delivered family and youth programs, providing support for newcomer families in a variety of ways. We were supported by 4,993 volunteer hours, so we're fully aware of how important our volunteers are to our programs. We maintained 20 classes for levels one to four throughout the school year, September to June, and we registered about 350 students. We conducted 496 language assessments using the Canadian language benchmarks placement test and also the CLB-LPT, which is the literacy test.

I'm going to tell you a story about one of our students to highlight some of the strengths and challenges of our language programs. I'll call her "Leila" for the purposes of this presentation. Leila is a GAR, and in August of 2016 she came to me for her CLBPT. In her country of origin, she never went to school. As the eldest daughter, she had to stay home to help her mother. Leila told me that every day her father would say to her, "I'm so sorry, Leila, no school for you today." After her test, Leila was so excited to tell me, "But now I can go to school."

Unfortunately, Leila ran up against two of our biggest challenges in providing English classes—child care needs and literacy needs. In 2016 Leila had a three-month-old son who was not eligible for child care. Luckily, we do have a family literacy program that Leila was able to attend with her son and that does have an English component, but it is not run with the same expectations as our other classes. As well, Leila is not literate in her first language. Literacy learners usually take a much a longer time to progress. Leila finally began regular English classes in September of 2018. While her listening and speaking have improved over the last two years, her reading and writing have not. She's currently two years behind where she could have been in attaining English-language proficiency.

Leila is an excellent example of how it would be of great advantage to our program if there were more child care spots and focused training and resource development for teachers of literacy learners, as students like Leila end up in almost every class.

That's Leila's story. At the other end of the spectrum we have students who have very high levels of English in comparison. In order to successfully settle in Canada, to attain advanced education and better employment opportunities, it's critical to have high levels of one of our official languages. The hospital in Brandon, for example, requires a completed level 6 to qualify you to work as a cleaner. Some of our retail businesses ask applicants to be at least a level 7. At present there are no evening or weekend classes for stage two students, in levels 5 to 8, to attend in Brandon. There can be long waiting lists for morning and afternoon classes.

Providing English classes to newcomers is one of the key factors in helping them settle successfully in their new community. We look forward to continuing to provide that service, working to ameliorate the challenges and build on our strengths.

• (1550)

Ms. Joy Escalera (Manager, Settlement Program, Westman Immigrant Services): To continue talking about the new initiative this year, we have the settlement workers in schools, or SWIS, which is a partnership initiative with the Brandon School Division that sees support staff providing guidance and assistance to students and their families as they settle into their new school.

For settlement program considerations, we see the need for support services. It is important to eliminate barriers for clients when accessing programs. We provide various support services, including child care, transportation, interpretation and crisis counselling, but we have limited capacity at present.

For child care, we provide on-site care for newcomer children 19 months and older. We currently have a capacity for 10 children. There is always a wait-list for this program. Current challenges include space to expand and lack of infant care. Leila, for example, could have accessed English classes sooner if we had a program for infants.

In Brandon, public transportation is not prolific and for newcomers our harsh weather conditions are a challenge to their leaving their homes, especially for newcomers who have young children. Providing them with access to free transportation has proven to increase enrolment and attendance in programs. Unfortunately, the demand far exceeds the funding that we have available.

Another support service is interpretation. We know that many of our newcomers arrive with low levels of English, which makes it a challenge for them to attend appointments and participate in programs. That is why language and cultural supports are offered in our agency. We are unique in having paid certified interpreters available within our organization and the community. However, the importance of interpreters is not always recognized outside of WIS. For example, we see clients go to their family doctors and use children to interpret important medical information.

The next support service is crisis counselling. It is inevitable that all newcomers experience culture shock which can lead to mental health issues. Some of our newcomer clients have also experienced significant trauma. Having our facilitators provide culturally sensitive support counselling delivered in their home languages has proven to be helpful. Increased access to professional development for our staff and a greater availability of culturally

sensitive, trauma-informed practice, with language support within the community, would help to address the specific mental health needs of newcomers.

We also see some ineligible clients. We are mandated to only provide services to clients with permanent residency status. There are non-permanent resident newcomers who seek help from our agency for language classes and settlement programs. Unfortunately, we have to deny them services as they are ineligible. We see the need and the value in providing services to these clients as well to help them settle successfully in Canada.

In conclusion, Westman Immigrant Services, together with settlement agencies across the country, work tirelessly to support refugees and newcomers as they settle in their new home, and provide supportive connections within their new community. In response to the 2019 call for proposals, WIS is proactively working to forge partnerships with settlement and language offices throughout the region to provide a regional response in delivering flexible, responsive settlement services with an enhanced focus on employment.

Limited support from provincial government funders and a disconnect between the provincial and federal government with regard to supporting newcomers has proven difficult for the entire sector in Manitoba. We continue to explore and build community partnerships that will enhance our services and provide meaningful, proactive support to refugees and newcomers in western Manitoba.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to our witnesses from the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of B.C.

Ms. Katie Rosenberger (Executive Director, Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC): Good afternoon. I'm Katie Rosenberger, the executive director of AMSSA; and I'm with my colleague Sabrina Dumitra, who is our manager of settlement and integration programs. I'm going to begin and then Sabrina will take over. We'll go back and forth.

The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia, AMSSA, is the provincial umbrella association for agencies serving newcomers. Our organization strengthens its 70 member agencies as well as hundreds of community stakeholders with the knowledge, resources and support they need to fulfill their mandates to serve newcomers and build culturally sensitive communities. AMSSA provides support to a broad range of settlement service providers and other stakeholders in B.C.

Each province has an umbrella association, with the four Atlantic provinces being represented by one umbrella. Not all IRCC-funded organizations are AMSSA members. Conversely, not all AMSSA members are IRCC-funded, as we were established in 1977 and have been working in the field of multiculturalism and diversity for over 40 years.

AMSSA works with our members to provide a common voice to funders, policy-makers, community members and external stakeholders on issues such as immigration, resettlement, settlement, integration and diversity. AMSSA works with our colleagues across the country through representation on the National Settlement Council.

As the umbrella organization for B.C., AMSSA is uniquely positioned to build the needed partnerships between the settlement sector and all four levels of government—municipal, provincial, federal and indigenous—as well as the private sector. AMSSA's funding comes from IRCC through the B.C. settlement programming, as well through an IRCC national contribution agreement. We are also funded by the Province of British Columbia to provide sector support to organizations that work with non-IRCC eligible clients and have project funding from different organizations such as Canadian Heritage, Western University and Dalhousie University, to name a few.

At this time, we are also in negotiations with ESDC for a contract to enhance sector knowledge and information-sharing for those organizations that serve temporary foreign workers.

Ms. Sabrina Dumitra (Settlement and Integration Manager, Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC): In B.C., 28.3% of residents are immigrants, which is the second-highest proportion of immigrants in Canada. In addition to having a high newcomer population, B.C. is also home to a large population of second-generation immigrants. As well, B.C. has a high population that has a significant linguistic diversity. Approximately one in three B.C. residents has a mother tongue other than English or French, which exceeds the national average. Between 2006 and 2011, 78% of newcomers self-identified as belonging to a visible minority.

Immigration is an issue that has a tremendous impact on our province and is noticeable in B.C.'s provincial economic growth and public institutions and in the growth of rural and urban centres. The opportunities that immigration provides this province necessitate a clear strategic vision for immigration, social inclusion and economic growth. Leadership and active engagement with the settlement sector is needed to harness the positive impact that immigration has on this province.

•(1600)

Ms. Katie Rosenberger: Between 1998 and 2014, the Government of B.C. oversaw the design and delivery of newcomer settlement and integration programming, with federal funding being transferred from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Repatriation happened for B.C. in 2014 and for Manitoba in 2013, so I know that our colleagues from Manitoba are familiar with this process. In April 2014, the federal government repatriated this responsibility, leaving a vacuum in B.C. as federal and provincial governments began to grapple over which jurisdiction was responsible for meeting certain

settlement needs such as mental health counselling, foreign credential recognition and housing supports, often leaving newcomers in the middle without the support they needed.

In Canada's unique model of newcomer settlement, community-based settlement organizations have developed the expertise and the capacity to serve newcomers over time. Settlement organizations and AMSSA believe that newcomers are best supported to become successful members of our communities through a robust system of settlement and resettlement supports. Settlement service provider organizations in B.C. have seen federal funding cuts for each of the previous two years, while provincial contributions have seen a slight rise only in this past year.

As with many other social services sectors, the settlement sector has seen an increase in staff turnover and staff burnout as funding challenges and the increasing stress of working with highly vulnerable groups take their toll. AMSSA believes that our current governments, both federal and provincial, understand these challenges and are working with the sector, as well as their government counterparts, to identify ways to address these issues.

Ms. Sabrina Dumitra: AMSSA works closely with settlement-providing organizations to provide capacity-building opportunities by delivering, for example, webinars and e-learning modules, and creating Migration Matters information sheets. As well, AMSSA provides the settlement sector in B.C. with convening opportunities, so that best practices can be shared, but also challenges and gaps in service delivery can be discussed.

AMSSA has heard from our member organizations about some of the gaps and challenges. For example, Canada's immigration model is built on the concept of a two-way street of integration. In order for newcomers to successfully settle and integrate in B.C., it is imperative that initiatives promoting multiculturalism and anti-racism are properly resourced.

In recent months, a number of agencies have reported increased discriminatory incidents and are concerned about the impact on B.C. communities.

Many newcomers to B.C. are not eligible for federally funded settlement supports, including refugee claimants, international students, naturalized citizens, temporary foreign workers and other newcomers who are not permanent residents of Canada. AMSSA believes that eligibility for settlement support should be determined by need rather than by immigration status.

AMSSA and the B.C. settlement sector are appreciative of how B.C. funding has been used to enable some or all of these groups to access settlement supports this way, but unfortunately, current levels of investment are totally inadequate for the demand. As an increasing number of temporary residents transition to permanent residency, it is more important than ever that these clients have access to settlement supports to enable a smooth transition.

In a just and equitable society, everyone should have access to basic supports and protections. AMSSA has heard from a number of organizations that the lack of access to language learning opportunities is a particular challenge for migrant workers. The refugee claimant-serving sector is also being squeezed, as demands for services increase. A large number of refugees who recently resettled to B.C. struggled to access appropriate mental health and trauma services, while low-income newcomers from all immigration streams found it difficult to access acceptable housing, which is one of the most basic aspects of settlement.

• (1605)

Ms. Katie Rosenberger: As the settlement sector prepares to write a call for proposal for up to five years of funding, AMSSA is working closely with our provincial counterparts to see consistency in funding for service delivery across the country, while also recognizing the unique jurisdictions that we all live in.

Engagement with communities is absolutely essential, as it is the community where the newcomer settles and connections develop through robust settlement organizations, local immigration partnerships, settlement workers in schools and our community partners, which all form the foundation for the successful integration of newcomers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to begin questioning now. We may get interrupted with bells for a vote at some point.

[*Translation*]

We'll start with Mr. Ayoub.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

It's always good to recognize your work to welcome new immigrants, who will swell the ranks of the country and contribute to the Canadian economy and culture.

My question is for all the witnesses.

How do newcomers hear about your services? Is it only once they've arrived and are being looked after? If not, do they receive any information before they arrive, either through embassies or the Canadian immigrant integration program? Do immigrants who decide to settle in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario or other parts of Canada know about your services?

Who wants to answer first? It's up to you.

[*English*]

Don't fight to answer. Just go ahead. It's first come, first served.

The Chair: We'll go in reverse order. Let's start with B.C., then Manitoba and then Ontario.

Ms. Katie Rosenberger: Excellent.

Really how newcomers find out about services depends on the pathway through which they come to Canada. Those who come through as a GAR, as a government-assisted refugee, find out about services pre-arrival through the International Organization for Migration.

We also have a robust pre-arrival program now. A pre-arrival program for settlement services just recently finished negotiating their contribution agreements. After years of really intensive evaluation, now with these new organizations being funded, there are 16 organizations that are doing pre-arrival in many different ways. They're doing pre-arrival in core countries, in China, the Philippines, India and Morocco. There are online pre-arrival services being delivered, and there are also pre-arrival services targeting specific occupations. I know the B.C. Construction Association is targeting individuals to come in and work in the construction industry. There's one for technological supports. There's one that's focusing on nursing.

There is a lot of work being done pre-arrival and the department has put a great focus on that. We're really looking forward to seeing how that develops.

My understanding is that—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I will just interrupt you, because I want to leave some room for the others also to answer that question. I have only seven minutes, so we need to be quick.

Ms. Joy Escalera: We actually have the same answer as theirs. We make use of the pre-arrival programs. Also, for the economic migrants, most of time the point of entry is where they would hear about our services.

It's the same with GARs. It's prior to them coming here. They already know about us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Do you know whether immigrants shop, meaning choose in advance where to go? For example, they may choose to settle in British Columbia or Manitoba for economic reasons or to join their families. Does this type of shopping occur?

• (1610)

[English]

Ms. Angela Mowbray: In terms of the type of newcomer who is going to be arriving in Canada, sometimes people come because they have family members already here and it is a family reunification process. Sometimes if they're a GAR or coming through a pre-arrival process such as that, they're told, "This is where there's room for you to be." Sometimes they choose because of economic reasons, because they know there are jobs they could possibly do once they get here.

I'm guessing that, in most smaller communities anyway, all the different organizations that exist are very well known. Often word of mouth is very helpful in letting people know that we exist and the types of programs we have. I'm sure most programs across Canada actively seek out immigrant groups and newcomer groups as well, to talk about the services we can offer.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay.

[English]

The Chair: I want to make sure Mr. Cadogan has a chance to get in on that first question.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: It's okay. My comments are very similar. Kitchener-Waterloo is a high-tech community, so universities and the tech community have made a lot of effort to attract immigrants and students to the community.

In terms of government-assisted refugees, as was mentioned, most of the people we see have come from refugee camps. They come via Pearson, take a shuttle to Kitchener and land at our place. As was said, sometimes people choose the community because of their family or friends or because they heard about it. However, a lot of people don't know anything about the community, so a lot of people who come here are just trying to understand what Canada is like. People don't know very much about Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

Once the newcomers have learned English or French and have integrated, do employers draw from this labour pool to fill positions? We're hearing about a labour shortage in Canada. Is this the case in Manitoba, Ontario and British Columbia?

Since I have only 30 seconds left, I would like you to keep your answers short.

[English]

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Yes, in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, manufacturing needs a lot of employees. If people have the language skills, there are many jobs to get connected to. We work a lot with employers to connect people to jobs in the community. Manufacturing is in dire straits in K-W.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Luckily Brandon, Kitchener and Vancouver all have very good MPs who happen to be sitting at the table. I'm sure they are very helpful to your organizations.

The member for Brandon is next.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you very much for that promotion, Mr. Chair.

Hi to all of you witnesses, and thanks for your presentations today, particularly Angela and Joy. It was a pleasure to have you here as well and to hear your concerns.

I know each of your organizations has federal government contact, particularly through the funding, as well as other resources that can be used.

Angela and Joy, whoever wants to answer, do you think there's enough flexibility in financing and resources in that agreement? If you think there could be some improvement, what suggestions would you put forward?

Ms. Angela Mowbray: I'll talk a little about the language part. Currently in the agreement, we know there are high targets for enrolment and attendance, and that's often really difficult for clients. Most of our clients have at least one job, some of them have two. Most of them have children to care for, so the regular attendance targets that we know are in place are often difficult to meet. I know that we feel pressure about that.

It's a different type of relationship in that, unless we talk to each other about it, we don't have guidance or support in how we could better serve those people. Often we'll seek other organizations doing similar work to ask about the kinds of things they're doing.

It's not really the funding that's the issue, but maybe there are some flexibility issues for us in communicating our needs and our challenges. Even though they're understood, they're not necessarily taken into account when it comes to funding our programs.

• (1615)

Mr. Larry Maguire: With regard to employers, would you welcome the possibility where employers bringing individuals into Canada through the temporary foreign worker program, for example, be eligible for settlement services? Would making the employer financially responsible for that training help you as well?

Ms. Joy Escalera: If they are to be eligible for settlement services that would really contribute to the economic growth of our country.

Mr. Larry Maguire: And make it much easier for you to be able to offer more accessibility to the training for others, particularly in the language levels that you were talking about.

Ms. Joy Escalera: Of course. Definitely.

Mr. Larry Maguire: In smaller communities as well, you've mentioned transportation within the city and the region. Is it an impediment to the training that's required in the smaller communities? I know many of the immigrants who have come to some smaller communities in the region as well, and I'm assuming that this is the same in Kitchener or other areas. What could be done to help that? Is it a major impediment, or could we be using the Internet and phone services in a much more appropriate manner?

Ms. Joy Escalera: Especially for Brandon, where buses run every 30 minutes to an hour, it's not ideal for clients who use public transportation. Once they miss the bus, they have to stand there for another 30 minutes or an hour in this cold weather. If you're a newcomer, you don't have any idea of how cold it is when it's minus 40, and there are health and safety risks there.

Technology is another way of providing services to newcomers, but then not all our newcomers have the capacity to use it. As Angela mentioned, we have some refugees who have low literacy levels; they don't even know what a keyboard is, or won't even be able to recognize the characters on the computer, so it won't help that much. The human one-on-one, face-to-face interaction is still the best way to help our newcomers.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Can I just get a response as well from you, Sabrina, and Katie as well?

Ms. Katie Rosenberger: Online technology is great. We're working with organizations that have been funded through SDI funding to develop apps. There is online English language programming. Our clients still need to have face-to-face with the settlement organization, but also, for us as the umbrella organization, it's critical that we have face-to-face opportunities with our membership. Those who are providing the services need to be able to come together. They need to be able to talk about what's going on in their organization, share best practices, make those connections, so that when it comes time to engage in partnerships, those relationships are already developed.

I think at every level we can use technology to supplement, but we cannot use technology to replace.

Ms. Sabrina Dumitra: When using technology to supplement, it's also important to think about the community and infrastructure. There are many settlement organizations in smaller centres that want to support newcomers using technology, but they don't have the infrastructure themselves, or they don't have the knowledge of how to use it themselves. They're not understanding utilizing technology. It's challenging for them to explain that to the newcomer within their community and to pass that on as well.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

I have one final question. It's to Angela or anyone else who wants to answer here.

In regard to the smaller communities, I know you're helping through Westman Immigrant Services. Can you provide us with some information as to what would be helpful in retention rates in smaller communities? Many will come and settle in the smaller communities but once they get trained or find jobs they leave. Do you have any suggestions as to how we could retain them in some of those smaller communities?

• (1620)

Ms. Angela Mowbray: I think there are a few things. One is definitely employment opportunities for people. People often have high expectations when they come that maybe they're going to work in the field that either they worked in before they came or the field they would like to work in, and that's going to happen immediately, and it doesn't. That can be very difficult for people. Just having employment opportunities for people within smaller communities is a really critical piece of their settling in Canada.

The other really important thing is the connections you make in a community. If you have children, it's the connection you make with the school, the teachers and the parent-teacher council, things like that. I also think a lot of it is about the education of the people who grew up in Canada on how to interact with newcomers in a way whereby they're comfortable and feel like they're a part of things. I do know, in some of the smaller communities around Brandon, they've had trouble, for instance, having newcomers on boards and things like that. Just a simple thing like giving people notes beforehand, that they can read over and feel like they already know what's going to be talked about, would be really helpful.

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

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses.

I want to first touch on the language training issue. I believe it was Joy who mentioned that, for example, the interpretation or translation services provided a challenge, whereby you have children providing translation for their parents in medical appointments and so on. This was an issue that was brought up at a committee meeting with officials who responded to say that the government funded NGOs to provide that service so we don't have to worry about it. I quite worry about it. You touched on this. I wonder whether or not you can expand on that. What is your specific recommendation to government to address this very important issue?

Ms. Joy Escalera: We are given some funding for interpretation, to provide interpretation, for us to provide services. The funding is for the settlement agency. But if they are to access services outside of our agency, it is beyond what we have or what is available for funding.

For example, in our local hospital, I know they provide interpretation for free for our newcomer clients, but if clients go to a private clinic, for instance, or their family doctor, it is the choice of the doctor to provide for that language support or not.

As for recommendations, this has to do also with the retention we were talking about earlier. If we want to retain people in our communities, we would like them to feel they are part of our community and they can actually access services. One of the barriers is language. I don't know who is responsible for providing what, but that is a need. It's not just in the medical field, even in the court system and banks, in all agencies they would access, language support is important.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The government provides funding to you as an NGO. Is this sufficient to do the work that you do?

Ms. Joy Escalera: It is sufficient to the work we do. We use interpretation in our office when we are providing one-on-one settlement appointments. When we have family and youth programs, we use the funding we get from the government to deliver those programs.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do you accompany family members to go see the physician? For example, if they come and request someone to interpret at a medical appointment, do you accompany them?

Ms. Joy Escalera: No. Unfortunately our funding doesn't allow it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

That is exactly the point. To suggest somehow that this service is provided for by the NGO is false, because you don't have the capacity as an organization to send a translator or interpreter with the family to those medical appointments.

Ms. Joy Escalera: That is correct.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I'm going to go to AMSSA with the same question, if I may, please.

First, thank you for your work as an umbrella agency.

With all the agencies that are members of AMSSA, I'm sure this issue has popped up. I've heard it numerous times. Can you also address this issue and provide recommendations?

• (1625)

Ms. Katie Rosenberger: Absolutely, Ms. Kwan. Thank you for your continued support of AMSSA and the work we do.

This is definitely Sabrina's area of expertise, so I will defer to her on this one.

Ms. Sabrina Dumitra: Yes, the lack of interpretation—particularly with medical appointments—is a challenge for some of our organizations, particularly in the rural and smaller centres. We've heard from our members that the ability for them to even have staff who are able to provide interpretation support, or have knowledge of the same language, is often non-existent.

It's a huge barrier that some organizations are facing. Clients are not understanding the medical appointments. They're not able to take part and fully receive the support they need. It also changes the family dynamic. The child is all of a sudden put in a place of power where they have to provide support and information to their parent. Often it's information that, as a child, they shouldn't be hearing.

AMSSA members have recommended that there be sufficient funding for accompaniment to medical appointments, or that there be a mechanism in place that guarantees that doctors' and physicians' offices—also outside the hospital—have access to free interpretation support, and that it be a requirement, not an option, that the doctor utilise it, particularly when English is not the first language of the client, or when the client requests it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I want to touch on hospitals as well.

Last week I had to take my dad to a hospital appointment, because there is no interpretation or translation available. The opportunities that even hospitals provide for that are very limited.

Could you expand on that?

Ms. Sabrina Dumitra: In B.C. there is some interpretation in hospitals through provincial language support. However, it is at the discretion of the doctor to utilize that. It's often overlooked because there's not enough time, they don't know how to access it or it's a bother. It's often overlooked and they utilize the child or the person accompanying that individual, instead of respecting their wishes and their privacy and utilizing that independent interpreter.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You touch on the issue around supporting people without status, such as irregular asylum seekers and so on, by whom British Columbia has been impacted. I think we are actually ahead of Manitoba in terms of numbers. The federal government has

announced a \$15-million injection for supporting asylum seekers, yet B.C. doesn't get any.

What are your thoughts on that, and what's your recommendation?

Ms. Sabrina Dumitra: We don't understand. We are unclear as to how B.C. was left out of that decision.

I know that later on today you will be hearing from some representatives from British Columbia who work with refugee claimants. You will understand that we are in a pretty serious position here in British Columbia. I don't know if it's because there has been a lack of advocacy on the part of our provincial or municipal representatives. It is definitely not for a lack of trying by the sector. Two of the people you will hear from later on are a part of the multi-agency partnership that focuses solely on the betterment of supports for refugee claimants.

We have mobilized everything we can here in the province off the side of our desks to do the best we can for this extremely underserved population.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to go to Mr. Whalen for just a few minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): I'll just stay with B.C. for a second.

Can you very quickly provide a recommendation on how to best address the issue of settlement support for asylum seekers?

Ms. Sabrina Dumitra: On providing financial support to organizations that currently provide support to refugee claimants, through the multiple agency partnership, there are different organizations; however, they do not have sufficient funding to adequately support refugee claimants with the numbers that are being received in B.C. The number one key issue is housing support.

• (1630)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much.

That's a really great, succinct recommendation.

I'll just go to the Manitoba group for a second there, I guess it's Angela. In Atlantic Canada, we have an Atlantic immigration pilot in which companies themselves have been tasked with determining their own labour market needs, but they need to provide a settlement services plan in conjunction with the settlement services agency to help the new economic migrants settle and help their families integrate.

The minister has recently announced a northern and rural immigration pilot project in a similar vein, and I'm wondering if they've reached out to your organization or if any perspective employers have reached out to your organization. What do you envision a privately funded program looking like in your neck of the woods?

Ms. Angela Mowbray: Thus far, nobody's reached out to our organization. I'm not sure if we're rural enough, maybe, to be part of this pilot project, but I have spoken to a couple of different people who have newcomers coming outside of Brandon, and they have been approached about it.

For us, any partnerships we have with employers are only going to benefit our organization and newcomers in the community, I think. That pilot project to try to encourage people to settle in more rural areas is always something we look forward to and that we want to help support.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much.

I'm just going to share the last minute of my time with Mr. Tabbara.

The Chair: Very briefly.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Yes. My question is to Mr. Carl Cadogan.

You mentioned that you were working with 100 refugees per year, and it has increased to 500. Am I correct?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: We were working with, typically, 250 to 300, and it increased to about 1,000. Now we're down to about 400 a year, and I wanted to comment on some of the things that happened, but I guess I was muted.

Yes, we are the hub for the settlement of GARs in the region, and I think all of the issues that were mentioned by others, the medical issues and the issues with hospitals and interpretation, are all issues that we deal with. They are issues that don't seem to be recognized by the federal government.

I know that hospitals are a provincial issue, and I know that hospitals have budgets for interpretation, but they don't use them, so we probably spend 70% of our time dealing with medical issues in our community, trying to help people connect to services in the community. We have very few resources for that, and the work isn't recognized.

I think that, as the government thinks about what it can do to support refugees, infusion of funds to support connection to services, particularly in Kitchener-Waterloo, primary care physicians... We probably have about 90 families right now without a primary care physician, so trying to connect people to doctors is a big part of the work we do, and it's not recognized as an integral part of the overall settlement process.

In terms of the employers, we are trying to work with employers to better connect people to the employment sector. We're working with two employers in Kitchener-Waterloo right now where we provide language training, because there are waiting lists in LINC for ESL classes in our region, and we're working with employers who hire people to provide language training on the work site, so people are working at the same time as they're learning English. We think that more flexibility in the delivery of language services is needed in our community.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to need to cut this panel off and move very quickly to our next panel, which I'm trying to get in before the anticipated vote.

Thank you very much for joining us from B.C., Manitoba and Ontario. We'll say goodbye to you.

I'm going to suspend very briefly. I ask that people not leave so that we can have our witnesses from British Columbia and from Toronto be connected. Thanks.

We'll suspend for one minute.

•(1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1635)

The Chair: I'm going to reconvene.

I'll just let the witnesses know that there's a good chance we're going to just hear their testimony and not have too many questions. We may get some questions, depending on the will of the committee.

I'm going to begin with Mr. Sinclair from Toronto, via video conference from St. Stephen's Community House.

Thank you for joining us today. You have seven minutes for an opening statement.

Mr. William Sinclair (Executive Director, St. Stephen's Community House): Thank you very much.

My name is Bill Sinclair. I am the executive director at St. Stephen's Community House in Toronto, Ontario. Thank you for the invitation to speak.

St. Stephen's Community House is a non-profit charity and a community neighbourhood centre. We are one of the 500 community service providers funded by IRCC across Canada. Our mission is to serve everyone in our neighbourhoods. We were founded in 1962 to serve our largely immigrant community called Kensington Market, and still today immigrants account for up to 60% of the residents in our core neighbourhoods.

We partner with IRCC to deliver language instruction for new Canadians, LINC, and we offer settlement counselling for newcomers with staff who speak English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Farsi and Russian. We also are the lead organization for our local immigration partnership, LIP, for our region. This partnership includes settlement services and mainstream services such as the school board, health service, legal services, employment services and municipal services, for example libraries, police and public health.

Funding from IRCC accounts for about 10% of our organizational budget. We also partner with the provincial and municipal governments and charitable sponsors such as the United Way to create a service hub in our community. We serve our whole community with a bundle of services for children, youth, adults and senior citizens in our neighbourhoods. We provide licensed child care funded by the municipality, employment skills training and placement funded by the province, health and recreational services for youth and senior citizens supported by the city and province, and more. In each of these services, we consider the needs of the whole family, and newcomers to Canada participate alongside immigrants who have been in Canada for decades as well as people who were born here.

Let me give you an example of integration of services. One of our participants, whom we'll call Connie, is a young woman living in downtown Toronto with her husband, whom we'll call Andy, and their three children aged four years, two years, and four months. Connie first connected with us when she was pregnant with her first child five years ago. She and her husband had both migrated separately from China and met here in Canada. He was an immigrant, and she was an international student. They married. Later, her husband became a citizen and fortunately became a very successful chef in a high-end restaurant in Toronto. Connie and her husband both attended LINC classes when they first arrived, and Connie continues them now through the birth of her three children.

We met Connie when she was pregnant, as we have IRCC-funded settlement workers who are physically located at five different community health centres to support pregnant women in the perinatal programs that are offered. Health Canada funds the food and transit for these group programs. The province funds the nurses, dietitians and midwives for the program, and IRCC, through us, funds the settlement workers and the interpreters. We see over 300 pregnant women a week at the five sites. We saw 900 women overall last year.

As each child was born, Connie went back to LINC classes, which had on-site childminding, but now all three of her children are in our fully licensed child care spaces alongside newcomer children and Canadian children of all incomes. Connie is eager to improve her English and to work. She'll be accessing our provincially funded employment program when her children go into kindergarten.

We believe in integrated services where immigrants and Canadians receive services together wherever possible. We believe in settlement and mainstream organizations working together for better settlement outcomes.

I want to congratulate IRCC for maintaining this robust and responsive network of community organizations to welcome and support newcomers all over the country. I want to congratulate them on their efforts, especially in recent years, to modernize our relationship with better partnerships and better contribution agreements. I would like to congratulate them particularly on the service delivery improvement projects, SDIPs, that you've heard about from other people, which have really been a great source of innovation and are really moving things forward with new approaches and working with vulnerable populations.

I have five recommendations.

● (1640)

First, settlement services should be part of multiservice community hubs. It would help greatly if IRCC allowed its service providers to work with people before and after their permanent resident status. We should have blended services, where temporary residents, refugee claimants, permanent residents and citizens can receive services together. This happens in our perinatal program that I just mentioned and that helps all the pregnant moms, the fathers and the children.

Second, we know this committee is seeking a way to measure settlement success. I urge you to use the LIP network. You fund 77 local immigration partnerships across the country to help commu-

nities define and measure success locally. LIPs work with mainstream and settlement organizations, large and small organizations, urban and rural neighbourhoods. There's no cookie-cutter approach. They should set goals for what success looks like and measure the goals together LIP by LIP. It's a case of where no one size fits all.

Third, please continue these service delivery improvement projects with a strong focus on working with vulnerable newcomers: women, youth and LGBTQ+ communities. It's an excellent innovation. It's only just begun and there will be a lot of good things coming out of it.

Fourth, our organization is committed to decent work and fighting the precarious nature of most non-profit work. We believe that our government contracts should support equitable and living wages for our employees, sick time, health benefits and retirement benefits. The success we all want for newcomers is not going to be achieved by a high turnover of staff and by a labour shortage of workers to work with them.

Finally, the majority of immigrants and refugees now and in the future are from racialized populations. Canada must address systemic racism through strong anti-racism laws and policies, including employment equity. Access to employment and professional accreditation will remain a challenge that we'll be talking about until we can counter systemic racism in the professions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to go immediately to Mr. Grunau from the Journey Home Community Association. You've asked Kinbrace to join you as a witness. You have about eight minutes for the two of you together.

● (1645)

Mr. James Grunau (Executive Director, Journey Home Community Association): Thank you so much.

Honourable Chair, vice-chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today and for the work you are doing on behalf of newcomers to our country.

My colleague and I both work for refugee claimant serving organizations in metro Vancouver, and the current study under way on settlement services across Canada is a very important activity. We're grateful to have a chance to provide some input for you today.

Just over a year ago, a study indicated that Vancouver was the least affordable city for housing in North America, making housing unbelievably difficult for the 2,300 asylum claimants who have been arriving in our city annually.

Unlike government or privately sponsored refugees, asylum claimants have no one to welcome them on arrival. As a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention, Canada has an international obligation to provide protection and a refugee hearing, but also has an obligation to provide help for asylum claimants in their access to basic human needs upon arrival.

For a combined 33 years, Journey Home Community and Kinbrace Community Society have been stepping into that gap by providing a wraparound plan for housing, support and accompaniment for these new arrivals.

We've learned some things in our work. First, living with and assisting refugee claimants all these years has helped us to understand the sector and develop some well-designed communities that have been effective in helping refugee claimants integrate well.

Secondly, we've learned that asylum claimants arrive with incredible skills, education, professional and business backgrounds, and have a strong desire to move forward with their lives and make a difference in their community, just the kinds of new Canadians we hope for. With a little assistance up front, we can set them up for success, and help them become strong, contributing members of our communities.

Today we come with some community-based solutions for how we can change the current reality into a cohesive plan for new arrivals. Our organizations are part of Vancouver's multi-agency partnership, which is a network of some 40 agencies with non-profits; businesses; all levels of government, including IRCC; the Immigration and Refugee Board; and Canada Border Services Agency. We meet monthly and the focus of the network is exclusively refugee claimants. There is a strong spirit of collaboration and goodwill.

Our vision, as a partnership, is that newly arriving asylum claimants would experience a cohesive approach for support along the whole housing continuum from arrival to something more permanent, and that no refugee claimant be without supported housing. Our immediate dream is that we develop a refugee claimant reception centre, a landing place for new arrivals where they can receive housing, orientation and support for the first few weeks of their journey, and then supported pathways out of the centre into the wider community.

Such a dream is garnering strong community interest and stakeholder support. It will take all levels of government and private funding. We have begun to see such support coalesce in Vancouver.

Allow me to read a short excerpt from a support letter of one stakeholder, BC Housing, British Columbia's crown corporation for social housing. This is from one of the associate vice-presidents of BC Housing:

It was a pleasure meeting with you to discuss Journey Home Community's desire to develop a Reception Center for refugee claimants and housing as part of this vision. We would very much like to commence exploring suitable housing options for these individuals and to that end we may be able to offer some program funding to achieve this.

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt you. We have bells ringing. They're 30-minute bells, and I'm going to suggest, if we have unanimous consent, we finish the witness testimony and that we do a quick two, two, and two-minute round of questioning. That will still give us 15 minutes to vote.

Luckily we're in this building, but it's actually the foresight of the clerk that we're in this building, because we expected votes today.

Is that okay? Can we continue with the testimony and have two-minute rounds?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Three-minute round? It's just upstairs.

The Chair: It takes you three minutes to do a two-minute round. I give her two minutes, she'll take three. I'm saying a two-minute round, and we'll see how we're doing.

Please continue, Mr. Grunau.

• (1650)

Mr. James Grunau: Thank you.

Secondly, they state that they "will be requesting Journey Home Community to approach and garner partner assistance from municipalities, the Federal Government and other sources to create as much equity as possible for this housing project."

Additional parties interested in such a concept include three churches with possible available land, private investors and a large significant foundation.

We have experienced an incredible spirit of co-operation and innovation from multiple stakeholders in Metro Vancouver as we have been pursuing this dream.

A few weeks ago, Journey Home was able to assist an asylum claimant father who had arrived in Vancouver with four young children under the age of four. He was wandering the streets of Vancouver on a winter night with four young children in tow, searching for help after he had run out of funds for hotel space. Our church partner volunteer, who had lost touch with this gentleman, had left her phone number with the hotel in case he called back. Fortunately, he did, and they were able to connect and bring him to the house for a safe night's rest, but not without considerable stress for the father.

Or I think of the family we were notified of about a year and a half ago. The family arrived with the father, so a pregnant mother and two children. They were split up between two shelters, men's and women's, and not allowed to visit each other in the shelters. Again we were able to provide a housing unit and actually reunite the family.

These situations should not happen in Canada, and they don't have to. Providing some basic level of compassionate care for newly arriving asylum claimants is neither a partisan issue nor a political issue. It's a human and moral issue, and Canada can respond.

We were encouraged with the announcement last week of federal funding becoming available for housing costs for refugee claimants. We recommend that the federal government join us in this opportunity to forge a new way for asylum claimant arrivals. We recommend that a new approach include the implementation of a reception centre, to be jointly funded by government and private funding, and that the federal government support this plan as we prove its viability in the Vancouver setting. This kind of centre is both transferable and scalable for other regions in Canada. Journey Home Community, in collaboration with the Multi-Agency Partnership, stands poised and ready to move forward in Metro Vancouver.

Will you partner with us? As this approach to assisting newly arriving asylum claimants continues to gain momentum in Vancouver, we urge you to lend your approval as it comes across your pathway. Better still, would you look for ways to approve and support such a plan?

As we finish today, if I may, I will just say that we would love to engage with any of you at a more personal level for your feedback and input. Loren and I will be around tonight and all of tomorrow and would welcome the opportunity to connect.

Again, thank you so much for the opportunity today. Both of us are here to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Mr. Balisky, do you have anything you'd like to add for a minute or two?

Mr. Loren Balisky (Executive Director, Kinbrace Community Society): It's included in that.

The Chair: All right. Very good.

I think we'll be able to do three of you, if you actually take three minutes.

Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Grunau, it's great to see people like you who do great work, but I won't take too much time on that. In the scenarios you gave, I presume they're not GARs or PSRs. They're not government sponsored or privately sponsored. These are people who may have landed here in one way, shape or form and then claimed asylum, and they don't have a welcome centre.

I assume that if you are a PSR, a privately sponsored refugee, your families would help you with all the issues in terms of housing and others, and if you're government sponsored, you should be given an agency to start work with, which helps you with housing and whatnot.

Can you give me a quick answer on that?

Mr. James Grunau: Yes, definitely. Both Loren's organization and mine focus exclusively on newly arriving refugee claimants. Any GARs or PSRs who come to us, we refer on to other organizations that have funding to help them.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: How would these refugee claimants find you? How do they locate you? What's the most common way for them to find out about your services?

Mr. James Grunau: Do you want to respond to that one, Loren?

Mr. Loren Balisky: In Metro Vancouver we have a very coordinated response that has been in place for the last 10 years, working with multiple organizations and creating a pathway of referrals that gets refugee claimants into the right spaces at the right time. This is already in place.

We've had to deal with an increased number of refugee claimants coming and with the demand on small organizations. We've had to kind of rework that pathway, but it's a process that we address every month through the Multi-Agency Partnership.

•(1655)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Pardon my ignorance. In Surrey, we have a thing called the welcome centre—the school board runs it and it's federally funded—where new refugees all come in. The welcome centre helps new refugees assess what grade their children need to get into, and what assistance or programs they need, whether they need English as a second language. Does Vancouver have anything similar where there is one central location, a conduit, or do you facilitate those services?

Mr. Loren Balisky: There are no federally funded services available for refugee claimants across Canada, so any services for refugee claimants are hosted by organizations that are either privately funded or receive some funding from the Province of B.C. I'm not entirely sure about the welcome centre in Surrey, but I know there is stream B funding available to refugee claimants from the Province of B.C. that is at work in Surrey.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What's the most sought-out service for your agency? What do people seek the most when they come to you?

Mr. James Grunau: Definitely, housing is the first and foremost. There's very little settlement that can be adequately done without having a place to live, and so that's the first driving factor. Our organization, along with providing housing—we operate refugee houses where folks come to stay for three or four months until we can help them with permanent housing—provides a complete wraparound program with all the settlement help and the accompaniment and relational care that they're looking for as well.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Maguire, you have three minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Lots of times we get spouses and refugees coming into Canada and they have difficulty with recognition of their foreign credentials. Qualifications can be obstacles for those coming in without having credentials recognized prior to their arrival. I wondered what your organization's experience is with regard to the recognition of foreign credentials and qualifications, and if you've found ways to assist your clients in having the qualifications that they've received previously actually recognized in Canada. Can you share your experiences on that with us?

Mr. James Grunau: We're reasonably small organizations, and we have only private funding, so we don't have a lot of capacity to help in every area. With some of these areas, such as foreign credentials, we would help them make the connection in the community. BCIT, a local institution, helps people with those kinds of credentials.

What we do try to provide is some connection around employment training programs, as we're able. There are some skills that are really transferable. We had a family where he had IT skill, and it didn't take long before he was off and running. Others, where the credentials are more professional, take a much longer time. We try to make those community connections, and one of our basic services to the families that we accompany is to help them find those service connections in the community.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Have you found that you're able to come up with solutions to that? How many would you be able to help in your organizations in a regular year?

Mr. Loren Balisky: Just to put us on the spectrum of welcome and help, our organizations are positioned right at the front end. We're dealing with housing and initial supports for refugee claimants. Refugee claimants go through a very long process, through the determination process and then eventually getting permanent residency. There are many other issues that they're dealing with at the front end. While we are attentive to that stuff, we don't keep any statistics in terms of credentials or anything like that. We refer them on to some of the larger organizations.

Mr. James Grunau: In terms of how many folks our organizations help, is that the second part of what you were asking?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Right.

Mr. James Grunau: We probably work with, between our two organizations, maybe somewhere in the neighbourhood of 150 refugee claimants per year in being able to provide this complete wraparound service.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Are there any that you're turning away? I'm trying to get a handle on exactly what type of staffing you have and that sort of thing, and how much more you would be able to use in those areas.

• (1700)

Mr. James Grunau: We're constantly turning people away, with an arrival population of about 2,300 the last two years consistently in Vancouver. Our organizations together, as I mentioned, are maybe in the neighbourhood of 150, so it's a small percentage. As we're looking at rolling out this kind of approach and plan, and we believe that there's funding in place, as I have mentioned.... We would look to providing a reception centre that could help the majority of newly arriving folks who come, and then help them onto pathways for the next steps of their permanent housing.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses as well for the work that you do. You receive no government funding, yet you continue on.

You've come forward with a proposal, basically, that could be a template in some ways to moving forward with a welcoming centre to provide for housing, which is a major aspect of it. In this proposal, I believe that you're inviting the federal government to be a partner with you, with the organizations on the ground and with the provincial government.

Is that correct?

Mr. James Grunau: That's correct, and there are possibilities with private investors, and a significant large foundation has expressed some interest.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The federal government at the moment does not provide resources to provinces for asylum seekers, except for Quebec, Ontario and some to Manitoba. These are inland refugee asylum seekers.

British Columbia, for some strange reason, in my view, did not receive any money, even though the government announced \$50 million for Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. Part of this initiative could also be funded from that \$50 million in partnership with all of the folks you've mentioned.

Mr. James Grunau: Absolutely. We would be happy for whichever pot of money is available and could help set up such a centre and help us with, not just the centre, but the beginning of a long-range plan. We think we should have something in the neighbourhood of five years to really prove that this concept is viable.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With respect to housing, I know that in British Columbia, organizations have been trying to do this off the sides of their desks, trying to help and support these asylum seekers, because there are no resources available pretty well anywhere.

The service that you provide is a wraparound service. We've heard and seen this in the news. For example, in Quebec and Ontario, the government is trying to put them in hotels. It is an expensive venture. It's one time only, and that resource does not come back to us. Your proposal talks about building something that is permanent and can be reused over again without the costs of hotels. Can you expand on the value of that?

Mr. Loren Balisky: This is not a new idea. Last May, we hosted a forum for the first time in Canada. It happened around refugee claimant housing issues. An amazing group of people came together, from private investors to everybody, really trying to look at solutions for housing for this population. That led to a report. I have it here—we can send it to anyone—on the key actions we can take.

The province of B.C. stepped in at that point and said they wanted to work with us on a plan that can help move them towards housing solutions for refugee claimants. That is in process right now, and it wraps up at the end of March.

What we see is a community that's galvanized. It has all the right DNA, so to speak, to do this. We just need the investment and partnership of others to collaborate with us so that refugee claimants get a welcome that brings the best outcomes for them, for our region and for Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It's efficient, and cost effective as well.

I had the signal to say that I have no more time.

The Chair: You may have one more question.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On that report, I wonder whether or not you could submit it to the clerk's office so that it could be shared for all of the committee members. I think that would be valuable to all of us.

Again, thank you.

Mr. James Grunau: Thank you so much.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is there anything else to add?

Mr. James Grunau: I was just going to say that we can submit the housing report and then our dream of the reception centre to show the wraparound and beginning stages of a more permanent plan for housing.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you to all of the witnesses.

Mr. Sinclair, we recognize that funding is related to immigrants and refugees who are sponsored either by government, privately or blended funding. If you have any experience with asylum seekers coming to your doors and seeking help and you're not either doing it because you're not supposed to, or you can't in some ways, can you provide that to the committee? I think that would also be of help to us.

●(1705)

Mr. William Sinclair: Certainly. As I mentioned, we're with blended funding from the province, municipality and IRCC, so we see everyone at our doors. The IRCC staff focus on the people who have permanent resident status.

The Chair: I understand. If you have anything, it would be helpful for the committee, because it's one of those emerging areas.

Committee, thank you. We will see you after the next constituency week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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