

Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

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OTTAWA, Wednesday, June 13, 2007

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology met this day at 4:17 p.m. to examine and report on the impact of the multiple factors and conditions that contribute to the health of Canada's population, known collectively as the social determinants of health, and to examine and report on current social issues pertaining to Canada's largest cities.

Senator Art Eggleton (*Chairman*) in the chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chairman: Welcome to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. Today we will be examining the issues of poverty, homelessness and housing.

[*English*]

As we continue our study on these issues, I want to point out that this work is completed by the entire committee as it relates to our two of our subcommittees. Our first subcommittee deals with population health, under the vice-chairman of this committee, Senator Keon, and it looks at key social determinants of health. The second subcommittee, which I chair, deals with the challenges facing our major cities in Canada. Poverty, housing and homelessness are issues that are common to the work of both subcommittees.

We are also building upon some previous work that has been done at the Senate in the matter of poverty. The 1971 report headed by Senator Croll comes to mind. It was a particularly significant report. There was also the work of another senator, Senator Cohen, who wrote a book in 1997 called *Sounding the Alarm: Poverty in Canada*. I understand she is a patron of the New Brunswick organization that is appearing today.

We are also building on the work being done by the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, chaired by Senator Fairbairn, who will be here shortly. They are dealing with rural poverty, and the study was initiated by Senator Segal. A lot of work has been completed, a lot is being done, and there is a lot to build upon in dealing with these critical issues facing the people of Canada.

For today, we are very pleased to have as witnesses two organizations. From Vibrant Communities Saint John, we have Tom Gribbons, chairperson, and Kurt Peacock, researcher.

Vibrant Communities is a collective effort by communities across Canada to test the most effective ways to reduce poverty at the grassroots level. Vibrant Communities Saint John is supported by three sponsors: the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and Tamarack — An Institute for Community Engagement. Vibrant Communities Saint John became a Vibrant Communities partner, a national organization, in 2001 as a result of a combined effort by the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, the Urban Core Support Network, the Human Development Council and the City of Saint John.

We also have some people from the Downtown Eastside Residents Association in Vancouver, right across to the other side of the country. Kim Kerr, director, and Anna Hunter, advocate, are here on behalf of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. DERA is a community-directed, charitable society formed in 1973 by residents of Vancouver's downtown eastside. Located in the poorest urban neighbourhood in the nation, Downtown Eastside Residents Association works to focus the attention of government, industry and the public on the key components of poverty and homelessness. DERA organizes around issues of concern to the community as well as providing housing, advocacy and community support programs and services. Services are available in both English and Cantonese to meet the needs of the people of the area.

Tom Gribbons, Chairperson, Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ): Thank you very much. It is a pleasure for us to be here representing our colleagues in Saint John and also the other communities in Canada that belong to Vibrant Communities. You mentioned Erminie Cohen, the retired senator who wrote *Sounding the Alarm*. As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, she is our patron and we are proud to announce that she continues her work in Saint John. She still volunteers an enormous amount of her time supporting Saint John groups such as our own, in an effort to reduce poverty in the very streets where she grew up.

Before we make any recommendations, I would like to highlight some challenges we face in Saint John and some initiatives that form part of the Vibrant Communities Saint John network.

Saint John is the oldest and largest city in New Brunswick. It has a unique historic character. Many of its residents enjoy a wonderful quality of life. They eat fresh salmon at our historic market for lunch, have a five- or 10-minute commute to a comfortable and affordably priced home, and walk along any one of our city parks and urban trails easily. Yet for close to one in four of the city's residents, the quality of life is not nearly as enjoyable. According to the 2001 Census, 24.5 per cent of the city's population live below the low income cut-off, LICO, which is the commonly accepted Statistics Canada measure for poverty. While this statistic alone is alarming, there are others that are even

more troubling and they are linked to who is the dominant face of poverty in Saint John and where the poor in Saint John live.

Among census metropolitan areas in Canada, there is one measure in which Saint John has the dubious honour of leading the country. We have the highest rate of lone-parent poverty in Canada. According to the latest data, close to six in 10 of our lone-parent families fall below the low income cut-off, and because these families are generally comprised of a young single mother and her children, Saint John also has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country, a horrible ranking shared with Winnipeg and Montreal.

The fact that far too many of our young people live in poverty is unacceptable, but the method in which we house them is equally abhorrent. Our city, like many other Eastern Canadian communities, has very old housing stock. Close to half of our rental units were constructed more than 80 years ago. Our poorest families live in older, inner-city neighbourhoods where they have very limited housing opportunities, paying rent to an absentee landlord for an old, drafty apartment or entering into an aging, government-run public housing project with limited surrounding economic opportunity. In fact, when you examine the concentration of urban poverty, Saint John appears to have a rate of ghettoization that is among the highest in the country. While our community may have a rate of poverty similar to that of other large Canadian cities, our situation is made much more severe by simple reality: Far too many of our young children are housed in extremely vulnerable neighbourhoods.

The plight of these vulnerable neighbourhoods formed the basis of our initial research report, entitled *Poverty in Plenty*. These vulnerable neighbourhoods also have been the focus of much of our community work. We have been actively working with residents in the poorest parts of the city to help renew the streets in which they live. In this level of our work, relatively small, citizen-driven initiatives such as the placement of a safer street crossing or the opening of a new neighbourhood centre offer promising hope to low-income households too often ignored by government.

We have also focused on the many working-age adults who do not have the skills or opportunity to enter into the Saint John labour force. Our labour force participation rate is far below where it should be, considering that we enjoy a dynamic urban economy. Our work here is complex. The city enjoys record lows in unemployment. The city has an unemployment rate lower than the Canadian average, yet potentially thousands more adults are on the outside looking in, in part because they live in a part of the city that is far removed from training or employment services.

We have also shared with you a policy paper that we prepared in response to the New Brunswick government's self-sufficiency agenda. We have not yet prepared a similar paper for the federal government, but we would like to take the opportunity we have today to offer some insight on how Ottawa can help Saint John reduce our rates of poverty.

First, we would like to suggest that Saint John and other Atlantic Canadian cities have the opportunity to participate in urban development agreements, such as those available to Western Canadian cities. When she was a senator, Erminie Cohen often reminded the chamber of how Ottawa should tackle the plague of poverty in every corner of the country. As a government, Ottawa often offers specific support in different ways in different parts of country. We are of the opinion that this strategy, while recognizing regional disparity, often does very little to correct it.

An example of this regional disparity can be found in the federal government's various regional development funding agencies. In Western Canada, Western Economic Diversification Canada has entered into innovative tri-level urban development agreements designed in part to promote inner-city revitalization in cities like Saskatoon, Winnipeg and Vancouver. These agreements are specific to Western Canada's major urban centres and commit government dollars to revitalization over a number of years.

Vibrant Communities Saint John has long felt that our community, with its vulnerable neighbourhoods located in the inner city, would benefit greatly from this sort of agreement. Yet, in verbal entreaties with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, ACOA, our region's own federally funded development agency, and in our research for their documentation, we were essentially told that urban development agreements were not part of their predominantly rural mandate. Of course, we find this unacceptable. We feel that if Ottawa is going to enter into a multi-year agreement to revitalize the poorest neighbourhoods of Winnipeg, Saskatoon or Vancouver, it should certainly be ready to enter into similar agreements in Saint John or Halifax.

Second, the federal government needs to develop a national strategy to reduce poverty. Like a number of other non-profits across the country, we feel it is time for the Government of Canada to establish a poverty reduction strategy that sets targets, measures progress and involves all relevant government departments. Poverty reduction targets have been adopted by countries that form the European Union, and strategies for poverty reduction have emerged in some of the Canadian provinces. Why not embrace poverty reduction for all of Canada?

In this era when Canada is increasingly short of workers, our governments need to transform social and economic policies to focus on increasing its labour force participation rates. Far too many of our families are left behind in a nation of enormous economic opportunity. A poverty reduction strategy would also enhance our national productivity and GDP by producing enormous social and health savings in areas where current spend only maintains the status quo. That leaves too many of our citizens behind.

Third — and this is a bit of motherhood, really — please recognize how relatively small budget decisions made by Parliament can have a significant impact on outlying communities. The amount of dollars Ottawa spends on programs funded through Status of Women Canada, the National Crime Prevention Centre and the Service Canada summer jobs program is relatively small when you consider the federal government's annual budget. Yet, all of these programs have recently seen changes to the way the

funding criteria is set, and the uncertainty caused by these changes put more than one Saint John non-profit in a financially vulnerable situation. In making these decisions on Parliament Hill, members and senators need to consider how they might play out in Saint John's north end or other low-income neighbourhoods or other Canadian communities with limited access to those in power.

Conversely, Saint John has had the benefit of a dedicated official from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, just one person. We used to have a CMHC regional office 15 years ago, until it was consolidated to Halifax. With our concentration on our housing issues, we asked for one official. That individual was assigned to Saint John two years ago and has been absolutely instrumental in helping us start to rectify our housing issues; that has been a small investment with huge returns and has been very helpful. It has made a world of difference. There are many other things we can do; time, obviously, restricts us.

Kim Kerr, Director, Downtown Eastside Residents Association: I want to thank the Senate for this opportunity to speak to you. I am the executive director of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. The Downtown Eastside Residents Association has been providing housing and services to people in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver for the past 34 years. We operate over 350 units of social housing for families, the elderly and those living with a disability.

DERA also runs an advocacy service, defending the more marginalized around issues of tenant and welfare rights, which Anna Hunter will be discussing in more depth in her comments.

Besides the day-to-day services that DERA provides, we also have a political voice in the increasingly heated issue of housing, homelessness and the displacement in the poorest off-reserve community in all of Canada.

The homeless count in Vancouver in 2005 was 2,000 individuals. These people were considered absolutely homeless; that is, out on the street, often in the doorway of offices and other doorways on the street where we work. It is projected that this number will double by 2010. As you are aware, the Olympics will be coming to Vancouver in 2010. I will address that later in my comments.

We believe all three levels of government are complicit in the growing crisis in Vancouver and across the country. Since the federal government pulled out of housing in 1993, the burden has been left completely on the shoulders of the provincial and municipal governments.

In 2001, the B.C. Liberals came into power under the direction of Premier Gordon Campbell, who is no stranger to the world of big development. The Liberals introduced massive tax cuts for the wealthy and their corporate friends and, in return, made devastating cuts to welfare and housing, consequently saving money for the province and corporations on the backs of poor people across the province. Although the government

has also failed to provide a basic human right for its most vulnerable citizens, the municipal government is also falling short on its commitments and responsibilities for housing.

The most pressing issue we are facing is the displacement of Vancouver's most marginalized population. The 2010 Olympic Winter Games are less than three years away. The writing is on the wall. Instead of taking steps to display a world-class city that is genuinely free of homelessness and poverty, the city is doing what is necessary to sweep the streets of undesirables — imprison them, drive them out, evict them and impose legislation that challenges even the most basic of civil liberties. The Olympics are all about real estate and this means what is good for the developers and what is good for those that will profit handsomely off the games, with complete disregard for the human costs.

Jack Poole, Chairman of the Board of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, VANOC, is friends with the Mayor of Vancouver and the Premier of British Columbia. Jack Poole stated in an edition of *The Georgia Straight*, our local newspaper in Vancouver, two issues ago, that the real purpose of the 2010 Olympic bid was to seduce the provincial and federal governments and long-suffering taxpayers into footing a \$1-billion bill to pave the path for future real estate sales.

This developers' agenda is the driving force behind the wrecking balls of the Olympics and the displacement of hundreds of people. Since Vancouver won the bid, we have lost 800 rooms. These are commonly referred to as single-room accommodation, which is the only thing that keeps most people in Vancouver off the streets. There has been no replacement housing built or provided and, with only two and a half years to go, it is clear that the various levels of government and VANOC will not come close to their so-called Olympic housing legacy, which promised over 2,500 new units of low-income social housing and promised no displacement — a promise that has been completely broken.

The Olympic games have a horrific legacy of displacement, having displaced more than two million people in the last 20 years. Already, one year before the games in Beijing, 1.25 million people have been displaced. It is clear that there will be no difference during the 2010 games in Vancouver. Poor people are being forcibly removed from their homes, sometimes at gunpoint, as was the case with the tenants of the Del Mar Hotel that were evicted; or the tenants of the Burns Block, who were evicted with 30 minutes' notice. Some of the tenants had lived there for over 20 years. The list continues: the American Hotel, the Pender Hotel, the Asia Hotel, the Piccadilly Hotel. All are being shut down and replaced with boutique hotels, high-end condos or Olympic accommodations.

The municipal government has already implemented the Project Civil City initiative, a project to criminalize homelessness and poverty and ensure that the streets are cleaned up by 2010. As far as the poor people of the Downtown Eastside are concerned, the municipal government is the enemy of poor people, not a government that is doing what

it can to alleviate the root causes of homelessness and poverty. The political crisis in Vancouver has reached a boiling point and will only be disastrous for the city, the province and the VANOC, the Vancouver Olympic committee.

It is challenging for me to be here today and paint a rosy picture of the challenges of working collaboratively with government in an urban centre when, as far as I am concerned, the municipal government is the first in a long line of political figures and puppets who are taking swings at the poor.

If governments at any level and community groups are to collaborate together, then community groups need to have the freedom to express their political perspective without fear of funding cuts or program clawbacks. Municipal governments need to listen to the experts who work in the community, not the paid consultants who have no real experience with the situation. The Downtown Eastside Residents Association has felt this threat in a real way in the last six months. As the desperation in the Downtown Eastside has become even more pressing, DERA has been at the forefront of service agencies in calling on our municipal government to do what it takes to defend the rights of poor people. The municipal government, however, has avoided genuinely dealing with the growing devastation in the Downtown Eastside and has instead cut all funding to our organization.

This funding cut directly affects 100 impoverished Chinese seniors who are directly serviced by DERA staff. The senator spoke about the fact that DERA translates its meetings and provides help to people in Cantonese. We are no longer able to do that. We have been unable to do that since the City of Vancouver cut all funding to that program. They now have no supports in place. These Chinese — and it would be closer to 1,000; there are 100 in our buildings — have no one to speak for them. We must ask ourselves: Is this the trend for working in collaboration with government? Is it implicit that we must toe the government line in order to provide the services that are so essential to those we serve? Should not the most accessible level of government, the municipal government, be the most malleable government that people have access to? The clear message that has been sent is not to question government but to obey government, even if the cost is increased displacement, augmented homelessness and further poverty entrenchment.

Despite the municipal government's efforts to silence DERA's political voice, we remain a cornerstone in the community, a housing provider and advocacy agency and an ally and supporter of resistance against the system that maintains and legislates poverty.

In closing, I would like to challenge this Senate committee and all levels of the government to stop studying poverty, stop putting out reports year after year to prove that poverty and homelessness are indicators of health. We need to stop wasting money educating wealthy and upper-class people on homelessness and instead invest that money in solutions that will make a difference. We need to stop regulating poverty and actually put an end to it.

Please understand that in the neighbourhood that I come from and work in, and in the neighbourhood that Ms. Hunter works in, people are dying on the streets. Approximately 16,000 people live in the Downtown Eastside; there are 5,000 to 10,000 intravenous drug users. I will leave this meeting and go back to Vancouver to close a building that has 76 bachelor apartments in it. Everyone who lives there is dying. All who live in that building are intravenous drug users and survival sex trade workers. They are all dying of hepatitis C and of AIDS. They will all be put into hotel rooms from which they are likely to be evicted within the next 30 days after they get in.

Anna Hunter, Advocate, Downtown Eastside Residents Association: I work as a community legal advocate for the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. I want to tell you about some of the stories that I run into every single day.

We offer legal advice and representation for people in the Downtown Eastside in matters of residential tenancy and welfare rights. More importantly and more accurately, we work to promote a culture of dignity and respect for the most marginalized in our community.

In a city where addicts are forced to use in back alleys, where slum landlords get away with changing locks and throwing tenants' belongings into back alleys, where police rule with violence and brutality, where large developers are encroaching on every available piece of land, and where women, indigenous people and racial minorities are the most vulnerable to the reality of our capitalist system, dignity and respect is not a reality for most people who walk into our office.

We work to defend the rights of Vancouver's poorest citizens with dignity and respect. I will share a few stories with you today, starting off with a quote from a man who has lived on the street in Vancouver for the past 10 years.

. . . all I want is a place to call my home, a roof over my head, a door I can lock, a place to keep my stuff safe. Is that too much to ask . . . why is it that some people have that all their lives, and I have never had it . . . I've never felt safe, the safest place I've ever been is the street . . . how do I live in a normal place after all that?

The young man who made this comment is 27 years old. He has been on the street for 15 years, ever since he was violently abused and forced out of his home in Manitoba. He lives under the Burrard Street bridge in Vancouver, and every night for the past six weeks he has been woken up by police officers who harass him, threaten him and then ticket him for \$2,000. What is his crime? It is being poor, being homeless and now being an undesirable under the new Civil City initiative, the newest piece of civic legislation intended to clean up the streets of Vancouver to make way for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

Where will he go and what are his options? Under the Civil City initiative, he has already been red-zoned from numerous other neighbourhoods in the downtown core. He will most likely never have the safety that he so desperately desires, and so he will continue to fall through the cracks of our rapidly declining social safety net.

The greatest challenge I have in my work is dealing with the completely failed system that dehumanizes people at every turn. You have asked us to come and bear witness to the challenges that we face in working with local governments, in an attempt to complete a report that will propose collaborative strategies between all levels of government and those working in the front lines of this struggle. With all due respect, the concept of partnership or collaboration with any level of government has been nothing but a farce up to this point. The system we have works to benefit the few at the cost of the majority. Those living at the very bottom of our system, the people that we talk to and work with every day, only become further entrenched in the day-to-day struggle just to eat or sleep.

The federal government has all but abandoned those without housing. Homelessness is clearly not a priority for the federal government; and programs such as the National Homelessness Initiative simply force service providing agencies to grovel for the meagre amounts of money they dole out every year and stay complacent to the stringent rules and regulations that make any sort of meaningful advocacy absolutely benign.

Moreover, the Conservative government is prepared to shut down a highly successful, world-renowned project that works with drug users and has proven time and again its effectiveness in limiting the transfer of disease and in saving lives — the safe injection site. Is this what collaboration looks like — shutting down the programs that are working and supporting projects that only work as a band-aid to the problem but never get to the root causes?

The provincial governments in British Columbia have not only abandoned poor people, they have done it in the name of big business and corporate tax breaks. We are facing a \$2-billion surplus this fiscal year, a surplus that was made on the backs of poor people through draconian welfare rates, massive cuts to social services and a further entrenchment of poverty for those living on the margin.

Jorma is a 59-year-old man who lives at the Carl Rooms, which is a rooming house in the Downtown Eastside. He has lived in the Downtown Eastside for the last 23 years. He works full time doing construction. He came into my office about two months ago with an illegal eviction notice from the management of the Carl Rooms.

I worked with Jorma to help stop the illegal eviction through the Residential Tenancy Office and discovered that the management of this rooming house was looking to evict all the tenants and sell the building to a condominium developer. The community mobilized around Carl Rooms and, with Jorma's help, we successfully stopped the illegal evictions.

Three weeks later, the B.C. Liberals came out with an announcement that they were spending \$80 million on housing in Vancouver. They purchased nine hotels, including the Carl Rooms. Now, four months later, the province is relocating all those tenants, and they have a mandate to not rent out any rooms for at least six months. Jorma is once again facing housing insecurity.

The province had justified their pilfering of social programs and welfare by purchasing nine hotels, which they are not using to house people but clearing out and keeping empty. Is this what partnership and collaboration looks like? Is this the provincial government's solution to the housing crisis in British Columbia?

Finally, and more specifically for this committee, we are discussing the challenges of working with local government. In my work as an advocate, this has been the most frustrating level of government to work with.

James McQueen was a tenant at the Piccadilly Hotel for the past 12 years. He paid his rent on time every month. He works as a binner — someone who goes through garbage cans looking for pop cans or whatever — and survives on the scant subsistence amount he receives from welfare every month. On February 14 of this year, James was given an eviction notice. He and every other tenant in the Piccadilly Hotel had two weeks to find somewhere else to live. This was not a legal eviction. The city was shutting down the building; it was not up to code. Of course, James and the other tenants should not have to live in a rundown building, but James also should not be forced out onto the street because his building lacks some minor repairs.

The Standard of Maintenance By-law is a piece of civic legislation that allows the city to go into hotels and rooming houses — the hotels we have been talking about — make the necessary repairs when the landlord refuses to do so and then charge that cost to the owner. This piece of legislation is meant to protect the low-income housing stock we presently have and ensure that tenants live in safe buildings. However, in the case of the Piccadilly Hotel and numerous other low-income buildings, we have seen the City of Vancouver repeatedly disregard their own responsibility and legislation and allow these buildings to be shut down when they could be repaired and maintained.

On February 28, James lost his housing, along with 15 other tenants of the Piccadilly Hotel. They were given two hours to collect their belongings, and then he and the remaining tenants were instructed to leave by an agent of the landlord, who carried a baseball bat in his hands when he asked them to leave. Five members of the Vancouver Police Department stood by and allowed this to happen outside of the Piccadilly Hotel.

What kind of justice is there when the police stand idly by and allow poor people to be illegally evicted onto the street with the threat of a baseball bat? The Piccadilly Hotel still sits empty, while the tenants are sleeping on the street and the owners are conspiring on how to convert this valuable piece of property into a boutique hotel for Olympics tourists.

Not only is the city falling short in their willingness to protect the existing housing we have, they are failing at their commitments to invest in new housing. The Homeless Action Plan was adopted by city council in 2004; and within the plan, the city promised to purchase one hotel a year and convert it into decent, affordable housing. To date, not a single building has been purchased by the city and they continue to avoid their responsibility and commitment to this small step in alleviating the housing crisis in Vancouver.

Is this what collaboration looks like at a municipal level? Is this how the city responds to the consistent cries of service organizations and poor people calling for real action around homelessness? How can we enter, in good faith, into any sort of partnership with the municipal governments when they consistently turn their backs on the real needs of poor people in Vancouver?

In the next two and a half years, we, the service providers and activists in the community, dread the writing on the wall of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and the legacy it will leave — a legacy not of inclusiveness and prosperity but a legacy of increased homelessness, police brutality and social cleansing. People work tirelessly against this almost unstoppable machine that is stomping on the rights of poor people and paving the way for development.

How can we work with municipal governments to ensure that we have healthy and vibrant communities? I am skeptical that this can happen. Until governments at all levels recognize the collective power and resilience of this community, we will continue to butt heads. The solution lies in community-led problem solving, not government reports or studies.

Those who live and work in the Downtown Eastside know what the solution to homelessness is — more affordable housing. Until this fundamental need and human right is met, we will continue to see not only a growing crisis but a growing resistance. Until housing is a priority for all levels of government, we will see more and more resistance from those who are most affected by homelessness and poverty. This resistance will remain peaceful only for so long.

As we draw closer to the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and see more of our brothers and sisters being displaced from their homes and dying on the street — which we see every day — I am confident that either government will be forced to comply with the demand for more affordable housing or they will be forced to suppress the righteous rage of people that will no longer stand for this blatant abuse of their rights. It is time for our municipal government to stop legislating poverty and homelessness and start living up to their commitments to solve it.

The Chairman: These are two very different presentations. The first one is a good demonstration of people working together, the community and government as well as business in the case of Saint John, to help resolve the problems. In contrast, the Downtown Eastside representatives are talking about a lack of cooperation that they suggest exists, particularly with the municipal government. I toured the Downtown Eastside about a year ago.

Let me start off by asking a couple of questions and then I will turn it over to my colleagues. To Vibrant Communities Saint John, you noted that you have the largest number of lone-parent families living in poverty in Canada on a per capita basis and there has been very little change in this over the past 20 years. Why do you think there has been such little change? Why do you have that unfortunate distinction in your city?

Please talk about how the cooperation that you have built up in the different parts of the community is helping alleviate that problem. Are you able to solve it or is it more a matter of managing the problem as opposed to solving or reducing it?

Kurt Peacock, Researcher, Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ): I will respond to some of the statistical questions and then Mr. Gibbons can deal with the questions of cooperation.

The data for Saint John indicated that there are a number of challenges, one being that Saint John is one of the smallest census metropolitan areas, CMAs, in the country. There are about 120,000 residents. What may, in percentage terms, equate to 20,000 families in Winnipeg or 40,000 families in Montreal or Toronto may actually be equal to only 4,000 or 5,000 families in Saint John. In percentage terms the numbers can be very bleak. We see hope in that it is a lot easier to move a few hundred families out of poverty than it is to move 10,000 or 20,000.

In terms of the specific challenge that low-income families face in Saint John, we have a number of issues at play. First, as family patterns shift from those of the 1950s and 1960s, the single-mother led family is more common in Saint John with each new census year. As a result, because the majority of these single-mother led families cannot get out of poverty, the ratio of Saint John children living in poverty continues to climb. Why is it that in 20 years of census data they do not seem to be moving? That is an excellent question.

At the level of policy, one of Saint John's challenges is that we have a reputation of being a blue collar city. We have a strong industrial base. We had a number of manufacturing jobs throughout the 1980s and 1990s attached to the frigate program and now there is talk of an energy hub. The challenge for the community is that most of those high-paying jobs are attached to men and few are attached to women. Therefore, the earnings that single mothers can potentially find in a traditional urban economy sometimes are not found in Saint John.

Related to that challenge is that we have an acute child care crisis. We have asked for provincial data on the number of regulated child care spaces for Saint John and we have about 1,000 fewer regulated spaces than Moncton. Of course, Moncton is of comparable size to Saint John; both CMAs are around the 120,000 population range. When one community has 1,000 more child care spaces than another, that makes a big difference in the lone-parent poverty rate. It has always been our belief that it is hard to get single mothers to achieve the earnings they need to succeed if they have nowhere to place their children.

Mr. Gibbons: I belong to an organization called the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, which was formed in 1998 and which is the convening sponsor for Vibrant Communities Saint John. That is how I became involved. Essentially, in 1998 a number of our business leaders said enough is enough. Twenty-five per cent of our population is living below the poverty line and we cannot expect this place to grow. The leaders of our

leading industrial families, professional organizations, leading lawyers, accountants, and also our unions are involved. It is quite a community-wide effort.

When the business community came on board, there was a lot of skepticism not only from the non-profit sector but also from the government. What is going on here? Why are you interested? There was a genuine interest that in order for us all to succeed, we all have to move forward at the same time. I mentioned in my remarks that because Saint John is an industrial city and we have had a number of major boom and bust cycles since the Second World War, people make money on the business side during the booms. They survive in the busts, but our more vulnerable neighbourhoods and our poor people are not moving forward. We decided that that is enough.

In 1999, with the generous support of J.K. Irving, we commissioned Deloitte to do a study of the biggest poverty issues in Saint John. That is when it came to light that our biggest problem is the single-parent family. Unfortunately, the face of poverty in Saint John is young and female and she has two children.

Much of our efforts are focused on how we can alleviate that. There is a tremendous program in town now called First Steps. It was started by the business community, and numerous volunteer agencies have contributed to it. We now have some limited provincial and federal support, mostly on the provincial side.

First Steps is a home where a young pregnant woman can go to get off the street and find safety. She can go to term with her child; the baby will be born and then they can stay in safety and live in First Steps for a year after the baby is born.

We have instituted a high school program that takes place within First Steps as well. We have discovered, unfortunately, that these girls will drop out of school because the school system is not prepared to deal with a young single mother. We opened up a small school. I am happy to announce that on June 28 we will be graduating six young ladies with high school diplomas. Last year we had our first two.

Since First Steps opened up, 58 children have been born all at full birth weight. If these young ladies were living on the street or couch surfing from one friend's apartment to another, there would not have been 58 babies all at full birth weight.

We are also starting to document the savings to the system. How much money is this program saving the province? When you deal with government and funders of organizations, you have to have the numbers and an economic argument. We may think it is the moral, correct and ethical thing to do to reduce poverty, but not everybody agrees with that in this world, so you have to come up with other arguments, including economic arguments. That is why we talk about increasing the GDP and labour force participation rates. Those arguments all work, depending on who we are talking to, but we have to ensure that we reduce poverty and that all our citizens are participating fully in what this country can provide.

The business organizations in Saint John that I represent agree with that. We have good participation and support from our municipal government. The provincial government is there. Unfortunately, New Brunswick is a have-not province, so money is tight. There is no \$2-billion surplus in the province. The federal government has been a good partner, but we have seen some changes recently in government programs that have made it more difficult to access services from the federal government. That is what we are here to talk about.

The Chairman: Let me ask the representative from the Downtown Eastside Residents Association about the urban development agreement. The people from Saint John said they would like one like it. It seems to be in several western cities but I hear quite frequently about the Downtown Eastside agreement where three orders of government came together with the community to define what they would do to contribute to improvements in the area. It identified the objectives and what each level of government was going to do.

Can you tell me about that? Has it not worked? You are quite critical of all orders of government. Is there some way that it could work? What would you suggest as an alternate collaborative arrangement amongst orders of government and the community to make things work? What mechanism would you suggest?

Mr. Kerr: You are referring to the Vancouver Agreement. While working in an area that has many desperate problems, it is not my intention to speak before the Senate as though I wish to be disrespectful. I do not wish to be disrespectful, but I do wish to be honest with you about what we encounter every day.

Many people in Vancouver and many of the poor, particularly in the Downtown Eastside, consider the Vancouver Agreement to be simply a tool to gentrify the neighbourhood, to be completely frank.

DERA runs Children Need Care Now, a program funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. This program helps mothers with their children from the time they are expecting until the child is six years old. DERA has been the recipient of that funding for many years. If you look at the Vancouver Agreement website, you will see that the Vancouver Agreement claims to provide that money. However, the money was provided before the Vancouver Agreement existed.

One of the huge problems we face in Vancouver is housing. If levels of government would come together and stop the hotels being closed and start building housing, that would solve many problems. I cannot tell you, from my day-to-day experience on the street and working with other groups in the neighbourhood, that we see anything substantial coming out of the Vancouver Agreement. It does not change the fact that hotels are being closed, apartments are being lost and we are not building more housing.

The city of Vancouver is a very different location than the location my friends are speaking to, and there are geographical pressures on the Downtown Eastside because it is

oceanfront property. You will see more and more condos encroaching. It is basically the last land available in Vancouver. There is huge economic pressure from the developers to build condos. Even the Woodwards development has condos selling at \$500,000 to \$800,000. I live in North Burnaby, a suburb outside of Vancouver. I could not afford to live in Vancouver today, having bought an apartment three year ago.

I am not familiar with anything the Vancouver Agreement is doing that is making a substantial difference on the ground. I am going back to Vancouver to put 76 more people out on the street from a building. I talked to B.C. Housing. B.C. Housing has no funds available. The nine hotels Ms. Hunter mentioned that the province has recently purchased with old money would eventually be reopened as supportive housing, which means that none of the people who live in the hotels at the time would have rights under the Residential Tenancy Act. Presumably some 800 people now on the case files of the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority would move into those rooms.

We had 17,000 of those rooms just before Expo 86. To be clear, DERA does not consider those hotels to be adequate housing. They are among the most expensive housing in the city. They are 100-square-foot rooms, often with rats. I do not know what the situation is in Ottawa, but in Vancouver we have a bedbug epidemic so people are covered in scars from being in these hotels. We are not champions of keeping these hotels open other than the fact there is no alternative but the street.

I would like to tell you that I am aware of all kinds of good things that the Vancouver Agreement is doing and that the situation is even slowly getting better. It is not. It is getting worse. We need housing. I understand that we live in a capitalist system. People should be pushed to do something simply out of humanity, but if you want to talk about money, it costs \$48,000 a year to leave someone on the street. It costs \$28,000 a year to house them. That argument has been around for a long time. It does not seem to make any difference. We need housing. Can you imagine being in your 30s and dying in the streets of Vancouver of AIDS, hepatitis C or being terribly addicted? They are about to close the safe injection site and you have nowhere to move to. It is that bad.

The Vancouver Agreement is not doing things that will make a difference. I do not see it in the hundred thousand times the door opens to the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association office every year.

Senator Keon: I had the honour of being in Vancouver over the weekend with the World Health Organization. I sat with their commission, which was treated to a ride down Hastings Street in a bus which was the bad news. The good news was it ended at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre. The programs that were described at the friendship centre were truly impressive. They have daycare for poor people. They have a large recreational centre to get people fit again, for training and so forth. They hold educational assemblies there. They have connections back to the reserves for people who would like to go back. When people do not want to go back to reserves they help them get employment, even in the oil fields if they wish, so that they can make some money.

They can then return to the reserves or to Vancouver and at least have some money in their pocket.

The two of you are very brave to walk down Hastings Street. I would never walk down there.

Mr. Kerr: I feel very safe.

Senator Keon: I do not know how you manage to move around and meet these people and I commend you for it.

Observing that scene is nothing new to me. I have seen worse in Calcutta, in South America and other places. It would seem to me that you need a lot more than housing. You need community-based programs with provisions for basic health and social services. There is no panacea. Housing is in there, but also food, money, counselling and so forth.

I do not know how successful the friendship centre really is, and I suspect they were bragging a little bit to the commission.

Mr. Kerr: They are doing good work.

Senator Keon: They showed examples of young people who were on the street and started coming to the friendship centre and they allowed them to tell their story — how they got up, got a job, got off drugs and the rest of it.

In addition to housing, there is a tremendous need for community services, which the federal government could address perhaps even through the Public Health Agency of Canada, which has a lot of money right now, to offer these people the panacea.

Listening to you, I am almost reluctant to tell this but I will. I was told once about a city in Africa — Kinshasa, I think it is called — that hosted a major sporting event about 20 years ago. The city wanted to clean up the downtown from stragglers to put forward its best face for the people who came in who were paying high prices for their tickets. The strategy was that they started picking up 100 people every night; they brought them to the police station and they shot 50 of them. They let the other 50 go and told them to go back and tell their friends that they would be picking up another 100 the next night. They continued to do that until they had no one left on the street. It seems to me the most horrible story I have ever heard in my life, but here we are in Canada and things are almost as bad on Hastings Street.

I guess you have another problem also. For us to go from Ottawa to Vancouver, it is so balmy that we could almost stay on the street. It must be a tremendous attraction to street people. I am sorry for wandering on here.

I want to bring you back to the principle. What you have to shoot for in addition to housing is community-based services, a place for people to go, such as the friendship centres but with much more than the friendship centres have. That is the only way you will ever get these people up and out of there. It is just horrible to look at, beyond description.

Mr. Kerr: The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre you refer to does good work. There are many organizations in the Downtown Eastside that have worked hard for a long time and are very involved. Vancouver Native Health Society does much work in the Downtown Eastside. There are many organizations. That is not the only one in the Downtown Eastside; it is simply one of the older organizations in the Downtown Eastside.

I do not disagree that other things are needed. Housing is simply so important. We are fortunate enough that we have real estate available, because I also operate two housing societies. Even though I have to close one building for lack of funding, we also operate B.C. Housing rent-geared-to-income properties, where people pay 30 per cent of their income or, if they are on income assistance, for example, \$218 a month for an apartment. We have bachelor apartments right up to three-bedroom apartments. We simply do not have enough of them. We do not have the only housing in the city, but we do not have enough. We have some 8,000 people in that neighbourhood on a wait list for the 350 apartments we have. No doubt they are also on other wait lists.

When I am fortunate enough to tell someone they will get one of these apartments, you can see it make an amazing difference. The psychological well-being comes from being in a place they know is theirs and they will stay there. It is not that we do not evict people either. We run the housing as it needs to be run, but we rarely have to evict anyone from the housing. It makes an enormous difference.

I went to Vancouver myself in 1980. I drank myself from Toronto. I am 52 now. That was when I was 25 or 26 years old. I have lived on the street and I have dealt with a serious addiction, but I dealt with it by going to detox. At that time, in 1983, you could walk over to the detox, and I did it many times, quite frankly often to get something to eat, watch TV and get some tobacco to smoke.

There was also the opportunity to go on to long-term residential treatment. I took that opportunity finally and was in a residential treatment program outside the city of Mission for nine months, the first three months of which I would have had a hard time looking up a telephone number in a telephone book, being what at the time was described as a wino. I do not think they use that term any more.

I came out of that and secured a job. At that time you could get into housing and rent a place because it was not as expensive as it is now, but I had many things going for me. I was brought up in a reasonably well-off family and I have always been somewhat articulate. I was 20 odd years younger than I am today. I had a lot of advantages. I am

also a gay man who could go back to what was a substantial gay community in the west end of Vancouver and find a lot of welcome there, which made a big difference.

If I phone Vancouver Coastal Health right now about treatment for people — and I am not trying to badmouth anyone here; it is just the way it is — I am told about Daytox. Daytox means you stay with family and friends and they help you get it together. The people I deal with sleep in the door of my office; the mentally ill are on the street, and people are dying. When I was 24 or 25 years old and quit drinking, I was not dying of hepatitis C or AIDS or anything else. Many people in that neighbourhood are now. I agree with you that we need far more than housing, but we certainly need housing.

People and members of my own family speak to me of safety. I feel incredibly safe in the Downtown Eastside. I guess I know a lot of people and obviously a lot of people in that neighbourhood know who I am. I have always felt safe in the Downtown Eastside.

It is a very scary neighbourhood. There are elements of society that use the fact that it is a scary neighbourhood to impose rather nasty solutions on things. With regard to your comment about Africa and its solution to that problem, I would not suggest that anything like that would happen in Vancouver, but I suggest that the police line up at a hotel, kick the door in, pull their guns and tell people to get out; the police are told that the owner has a baseball bat that he is ready to cave people's heads in with and the police will not even let us go in, and we have a legal right to go in the building and assist people.

The American Hotel illegally evicted its tenants. When it evicted its tenants we went to the Residential Tenancy Branch and we won the arbitration. Under the Provincial Offences Act, the police had the ability to go to the hotel and stop them from evicting mainly women from this hotel, who were evicted at 11 and 12 o'clock at night, but they refused to do that.

A lawyer who works in the neighbourhood told me that that is the equivalent of the police telling me that if there is a purse-snatching going on, they will come down and make sure the old lady does not hit her knees on the street as she goes down but they will not stop the purse from being snatched. That is an everyday occurrence. There is a war on the poor going on in the Downtown Eastside. There is a criminalization of poverty.

A couple have lived for two years in the doorway of my office. They are both mentally ill, drug-addicted and homeless. They live there because we have digital cameras outside and they know they are safe from the police because of those cameras. That is the reality of the Downtown Eastside.

Senator Cochrane: I want to commend you both. You are young and are you doing a task that few could even think of doing. You are working with these people; you are concerned about them; you have a feeling for them. I think you are wonderful.

I want to tell you about housing. I have known of a situation where many people were on drugs. They were alcoholics. They did not take care of their children. There were suicides

and so on. New housing was provided for them. It did not solve the problem. They are still doomed. I know that for a fact.

There must be something else besides housing. As Senator Keon said, we have to get programs. We have to get leaders. Within those people, I can assure you that there are leaders. We need these people to begin something. Like you people, they can help. These are the people who are trusted. They trust their own. If I or an RCMP officer went in, it would be a horse of a different colour.

Let us see if we can get leaders. You have worked with them. You know the leaders. Some of these people are fabulous in what they can do. They are masters, even at organizing and coming up with solutions. Let us do something like that. I commend you people.

Ms. Hunter: Amongst people who are providing housing in Vancouver, we do believe it is a continuum. Building brand new self-contained apartments is not what everyone needs. Some people do need to be in supportive housing arrangements where there are support workers to help them relearn how to take care of their kids or themselves.

Housing is a continuum. We need more treatment centres, like Mr. Kerr suggested, but we also need more self-contained apartments. We are not seeing any of that. That is part of the problem. There are numerous people who need more supports and services, but there are plenty more who simply need access to affordable housing. Whenever we talk about it, we promote the idea of a continuum of supports and services.

What is often missed is recognition of the capacity and leadership within communities, especially impoverished communities like the Downtown Eastside. As far as how we could work together, I think that is a big missing link, what these communities already have and what they are capable of.

Sometimes people suggest that residents of the Downtown Eastside should move out to Coquitlam or Surrey; however, this is a community, one of the oldest in Vancouver. There are strong social and culture ties in this community, and people have networks that they have built up over years. Those are powerful and strong. If we started building on those, and if governments stood back, supported but stood back and let that resilience and that capacity develop, we would see communities that are healthy, that take care of each other and that look a whole lot different than they do now. People are just so busy right now trying to survive and trying to deal with the brutality of day-to-day life that that initiative is not growing.

Mr. Peacock: On the question of leadership, a colleague in our office, Gail Taylor, has spent much of the last two years organizing the poorest neighbourhood of Saint John, Crescent Valley, which is dominated by New Brunswick housing units. She convinced a group of about 10 or 12 women, many of them single mothers, to knock on every door in the neighbourhood and canvass residents to find out what the community needed to help turn things around. It was a fantastic survey. We are still trying to use it locally.

When we see such resident leadership and low-income leadership, one challenge is that government also has to step up to the plate. When residents answered the survey, there was an expectation that this sort of canvassing would help change things. Because we have a municipal government with limited funds and a provincial government with limited funds and because we are not quite on the federal government's radar, all of the expectations of these low-income households may in fact be dashed, despite their own leadership.

It is absolutely critical to development low-income leadership. A number of non-profit organizations throughout Canada do that, but at the same time, there has to be recognition by government at all levels that they need to come to the table as well with real solutions.

Senator Cochrane: I totally agree with you. If I did not say that, I certainly meant it.

Ms. Hunter, did you say that the detox locations where people go to replenish their needles are being closed down?

Ms. Hunter: The safe injection site is a safe place where people can obtain clean needles, exchange old needles and use intravenous drugs.

Senator Cochrane: That is being phased out?

Ms. Hunter: Yes. They are proposing to close it by December 2007.

Senator Cochrane: Is that a federal decision?

Ms. Hunter: Yes.

Senator Cochrane: Have you made interventions with various officials?

Ms. Hunter: It was supposed to be closed in December of 2006, and there was quite an uproar among the community and also from various levels of government, but mostly from the municipal government in Vancouver. They have given the closing down a one-year extension to do more reports, which is part of the frustration. Many reports have been done about Insite, the safe injection site, that have proven it has cut down on overdose, dirty needle use and the transfer of disease.

Senator Cochrane: That is what we have to put in our information portfolio when we present it to the minister. Have you done that?

Ms. Hunter: There is so much information out there about the success of Insite.

Senator Cochrane: You have to keep at it.

The Chairman: It is a subject that gets onto the front pages a lot, in fact, and it is a controversial one. I believe the Minister of Health has indicated that they would not be providing further funding for it.

Senator Cochrane: Do not give up. That is all I can say.

Senator Callbeck: Thank you all for appearing today. Thank you for the work that you do.

I lived in Saint John for four or five years teaching at the community college. I have two or three questions on your brief.

You talk about the low unemployment rate, but then you say there are thousands of adults on the outside looking in, partly because they live in a part of the city that is far removed from training or employment services. What parts are you talking about there?

Mr. Gribbons: Our labour force participation rate is very low, the lowest of all the cities in Atlantic Canada. There is plenty of work for those who are looking for work. However, those who are not actively seeking employment, are on social assistance, live below the poverty line, have fallen through the social safety net or have not obtained enough education to find work are not even being counted right now. That is why our participation rate is very low. There are 17,000 people in that category living within the city boundaries. The unemployment rate is low, but the unemployment rate measures only those looking for work who cannot find any. It does not measure people who are not looking for work.

Senator Callbeck: Are you talking about the city?

Mr. Gribbons: In the city itself, the percentage of the population living below the low income cut-off was 24.5 per cent in the last census. In the greater Saint John area, I believe it is about 18 per cent. In New Brunswick, it is around 15.9 per cent, if I am not mistaken. In Canada as a whole, it is around 14 per cent.

We are concentrating on the urban core. The three richest communities in New Brunswick are the three suburbs of Saint John. The poorest large urban centre is the city of Saint John. There has been a flight to the suburbs, not unlike what you see in other areas of the country. It is not unlike Winnipeg or perhaps Ottawa. People live in the suburbs if they have the opportunity. That is concentrated and magnified in our city.

Mr. Peacock: The geography of the city complicates the situation. In the 1960s we had the major highway divide the south end of the city from the north end. In fact, a great number of the poorest residents of Saint John live in the north end area, either in the old north end or in Crescent Valley.

When I was a teenager visiting my grandparents in the north end, I was able almost always to find summer employment simply by going to the local jobs office, essentially

the local EI office, when it was in the north end. It has now been moved closer to uptown Saint John, and it is not on a very convenient bus route. There are literally thousands of unemployed or underemployed Saint Johners who are not anywhere near the federal government job centre, whereas 10 or 15 years ago they were within walking distance.

That is a relatively small administrative decision in terms of office rents and that sort of thing. These relatively small government decisions can have a hugely negative impact on hundreds of low-income families.

Senator Callbeck: I agree with you. You said you have the opportunity to offer some insights to Ottawa to help Saint John and you talked about small decisions. You say you have an official from CMHC and that things have started to develop there. What has that person been able to do in two years?

Mr. Gribbons: We first held a meeting in the old north end of the community, which is commonly called Indiantown, to engage the community, to get participation and to find out what people living in the community wanted to do. They wanted to make the streets safe again and make it a liveable community and to improve parks, curbs and street lights. The police have been good partners in this. They have put a community policing office in that neighbourhood. Bringing these services and people together was instrumental.

The teenagers in the neighbourhood received funding from the local electrical utility to go around and winterize homes. Many of our citizens live in 80- or 100-year-old tenement houses with single-paned glass. When you rent them you have to pay for your own heat. The teenagers went around the neighbourhood and helped insulate the houses. Little things like that got the kids involved and got them to take some ownership.

We are now starting to construct new housing developments that have built into them low-rental accommodation. The genius of it is that when you walk into that apartment building, you cannot tell which apartments are rent-subsidized and which are not.

We have to break away from the old 1960s concept of building neighbourhoods of subsidized housing. That is an abject failure in our community and perhaps in others. We need to create mixed-income neighbourhoods again, where young children grow up and whether they come from an affluent or a poor household they have mentors in their neighbourhood and people are going to work every day. They have someone to look up to. When you have concentrated, extremely poor neighbourhoods where 70 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line and where the average income per household is under \$13,000 per year, as we have in one of our neighbourhoods, there is nothing to aspire to or look up to.

One of the participants in the survey that Mr. Peacock alluded to commented, "We do not hear cars turning on at eight o'clock in the morning, because people are not going to work." That is what we are working on and that is what this gentleman is helping us with.

Senator Callbeck: He is taking a strong leadership role there.

Mr. Gribbons: Yes; very much so. Again, it is a small investment, but it is important. It is what we asked for. The minister of the day, Mr. Fontana, agreed. We have been maintaining it and it has been very beneficial.

Senator Callbeck: The third thing you have here is the federal government develop a national strategy for poverty reduction. I would like to hear more about that. No doubt you are familiar with the Newfoundland program and Quebec. I would like to hear all of you comment on that.

Mr. Gribbons: We studied both Quebec and Newfoundland. We challenged the new premier of New Brunswick, Shawn Graham, with this in our first meetings with him. In a country as rich as Canada, we cannot afford to go along with 14.5 per cent of our population living in poverty. It is both a tragedy and a waste.

If you want to accomplish something, you need a plan. If you are running a business, you have a business plan. If you are taking care of people in a hospital setting, you have a plan to run that hospital. If we want to alleviate poverty in the country, we cannot do it piecemeal, one ministry doing this and another doing that. We need to have a plan. That is our challenge to the Province of New Brunswick. That is what I would also encourage you, as senators, to urge for the Government of Canada. We need to have coordinated strategies and debate it in Parliament and in the Senate.

What makes sense to reduce poverty? I do not know exactly what it could be. We have a lot of ideas, but if you do not have a plan, you will never get anywhere. It is like not having a highway map. They accuse males of getting lost because we do not follow maps. That is what happens. If you do not have a map, you will not get anywhere.

The Chairman: Plans with timetables, et cetera?

Mr. Gribbons: Yes.

Mr. Peacock: From the Saint John perspective, there are a few key statistical indicators that we would like to see action on. We want a higher labour force participation rate. If that involves government offering targeted work supplements for certain families, so be it. Everyone wins when families are able to earn and grow their household income.

Through Statistics Canada, we track fairly regularly the income gap between Saint John families and the national norm. The fact is, for a two-parent family, a Saint John family earns about 96 cents on the dollar compared to the Canadian norm. When you consider our very affordable cost of living, 96 cents on the dollar is actually pretty good. Life is quite grand if you are a two-parent family household in Saint John. For a one-parent family in Saint John, it is only 85 cents on the dollar.

While other urban centres in the country, including a number of centres in Quebec, seem to have made significant median income gains from labour force participation in lone-parent families, in Saint John there is no apparent upward income growth. Obviously, we would like to put forward to all levels of government that that is a key indicator. We need to see significant income growth among lone-parent families if we will ever help combat the generational poverty that exists in Saint John.

Ms. Hunter: At DERA, we promote a national housing strategy. It was devastating when the federal government pulled out of housing in 1993, as well as the change of the Canada Assistance Plan to the Canada Health and Social Transfer. We definitely endorse the federal government reinvesting in affordable housing. I think that would be the first key step.

Senator Fairbairn: Thank you for being here. I apologize for being late. I missed some of your earlier comments. I have been looking at the papers. I am very much troubled that over the last several years there have been efforts to get into communities, particularly in the large cities, to try to deal with some of this horrendous need. You have referred to some of those efforts.

There are many reasons for a country to put together a big package to try to win an Olympic Games to come to their country. All of the impression given and all of the surrounding activities that go before the Olympic Games are then left in the communities to enable that community to benefit from it. This happens with the Canada Games as well periodically. In Canada it seems to work.

In reading some of your pieces, however, I am quite disturbed by the things that are happening — and probably vigorously happening — in Vancouver right now. It sounds more like a question of getting rid of something that at least is a roof over a head, or many heads, in order to bring in something that will be an integral part of encouraging people to come to Vancouver for this great event in Whistler.

Afterwards, when it is all over, will there be anything in Vancouver to ensure that these structures and all of the things being done to encourage people to come to the Olympic Games will not be torn down but will be used in order to help people who have no place to live afterwards? It used to be the thought that one reason people try to get the Olympic Games or the Pan American Games or other games was for what would be left in the area after the event. However, there does not seem to be a dyed-in-the-wool reality that when it is all over, these structures will be used to help the poor people. Am I correct in getting that sense that they will not?

Ms. Hunter: Yes. Part of why Vancouver got the bid for the 2010 Winter Games was because of its sustainability commitments, its commitments to environmental sustainability, social infrastructure and inclusiveness.

About a month ago, the Impact on Community Coalition, which is funded by VANOC, the Vancouver Olympic organizing committee, put out a report on whether VANOC and

the 2010 Winter Games are living up to their bid commitments. They got a D minus. They almost failed this report that was funded by VANOC because they have not lived up to their commitments at all.

One commitment made during the bid process was the housing legacy. The housing legacy was to include several elements. The first was that there would be no displacement, yet displacements are already happening. The second was that they would construct 2,500 new units of social housing before 2010. To date, not a single unit has been built; indeed, no construction has even been started on these units.

The third was that 250 units of the athletes' village, which is being built in the Southeast False Creek area in Vancouver, would be converted to low-income housing after the games are done. Now they have changed that 250 units to 25 units and they are not even for low-income people anymore; they are now for moderate-income people. The only legacy that will be left is displacement, social cleansing and a few ice rinks.

Senator Fairbairn: That is discouraging. I know that in Torino some attractive buildings were built and in the process many low-income housing units were taken down. However, they had a very strong agreement that part of that particular building for the games in the city would be used afterwards for seniors' apartments. This was to be signed, sealed and delivered and I believe it will be.

The Vancouver case sounds like the exact opposite of what one might have expected the basis of going for the games to be.

Mr. Kerr: Ms. Hunter mentioned the report funded by VANOC. I was on a housing table for VANOC. We came up with a large and detailed report with 25 recommendations, 23 of which were agreed upon; obviously I am part of a non-profit, but the committee included people who represented the business community and apartment owners. This diverse group of people got together and hammered out these 25 recommendations. As I say, 23 of them were unanimous. I did not bring the report with me but I can provide it to you after I get back.

It is on the Internet, but it is buried. VANOC wants no part of it even though they paid for it. They will not discuss it. I had a meeting with John Furlong; he does not want to see it. It is buried on the city's website. Otherwise, you will not see it. It was paid for by VANOC; it was a VANOC table, but they are not interested in it.

People are being displaced. You are correct. Vancouver got the Olympics based on the fact that there would be no displacement, and there have been hundreds of people displaced. It is very frustrating because, as Ms. Hunter mentioned in her comments, the City of Vancouver has the Standards of Maintenance By-law. It is taken chapter and verse out of the Vancouver Charter. DERA forced the city to come up with one 20 years ago. It allows the city to go into hotels and make the necessary repairs. If the owner will not make needed repairs, the city will make them and charge the owner.

They refused to do this year after year. They told us for 16 years that they had lost a court case. We proved recently that they did not lose a court case. In fact, we found court cases they won, but they will not do this.

This is why they are able to go into hotels now and say the fire system is not working well. DERA worked hard for years to get sprinklers put into hotels because, in the 1970s, people routinely died in the Downtown Eastside in fires. There was a fight against putting in sprinklers, but finally we got sprinklers in hotels. We are very aware of the necessity of having working fire equipment in a building.

The problem we are having is now that the Olympics have been announced, these things are concerning the city. The city is closing hotels down and VANOC is saying oh no, that is not Olympic displacement. People in the Downtown Eastside are left to think that unless you bring the stolen Olympic flag, march it down the street and circle it around the building before you throw people out, they are not Olympic evictions.

If you look at history, you will see that before Expo 86, people got thrown out of hotels for similar reasons and they said they were not Expo-related evictions. Then there was a long pause, and now we have the Olympics and the same thing is going on.

The other senator mentioned about safety in the neighbourhood. When I say I feel safe in the neighbourhood, I do not mean to imply that it is a completely safe neighbour. Everybody is aware of the Picton trial that is going on right now in B.C., and women are no safer in the neighbourhood than they were before the arrest in that case. It is a brutal neighbourhood for the women who sleep on the street; it is a brutal neighbourhood for the men and women who are thrown out of their hotels onto the street with an hour's notice.

I have stood in front of hotels when seniors have come out who are obviously suffering from dementia; with a bag full of their belongings, they are sent out onto the street. I know this sounds bizarre, but this happens frequently in the city of Vancouver.

I agree with you. We understood that the Olympics were coming and that there would be no displacement. They guaranteed that there will be no displacement. I do not know what kind of displacement they are talking about, because unless the Olympic committee is there throwing you out of your home, you do not seem to have gotten evicted by the Olympics.

The fact that they will turn your hotel into a condo does not seem to be considered part of it. It is part of it; everybody knows it is part of it. Nobody in the city government or in the provincial government can look at us with a straight face and tell us that is not part of it. It most definitely is.

The VANOC housing table I sat on was part of VANOC. The report that Ms. Hunter referred to is part of VANOC. We put a lot of effort into it. B.C. Housing put effort into that housing report, along with a lot of us, only to have it buried. The only reason it ever

made the newspapers in Vancouver is because it was leaked to the *Vancouver Sun*, and for a day, it appeared on the front page. Otherwise, it is gone. They want no part of it; they do not see it as their responsibility.

They have offered to train people to build the things that you need for an Olympic venue. With all due respect, I think that people need jobs and futures. I am very impressed with the idea of mixed neighbourhoods, but it should be mentioned that the municipal government in Vancouver cut 900 units out of social housing out of Southeast False Creek when they took over — the same neighbourhood where now we will only get 25 Olympic Village apartments when that finishes. It is very depressing to work in this field and see this continually happening. It happens all the time.

Senator Cordy: I think we could spend a lot of time discussing what is definitely a major issue. If people do not have dignity, then there is not a lot left in life for them, is there?

I would like to go back to Mr. Gribbons and Vibrant Communities Saint John. You seem to have a model that would work in almost any community, no matter the size. I think if you had that type of volunteer agency involving the business community in Vancouver, maybe you would have more public outrage about what is going on.

How did Vibrant Communities initially start? Were personalities involved? Was there a need within the community that said we have to do something to address the issue of housing? How did the business community all come together instead of what saying, as one hears in some business communities, "I do not want homeless people in front of my shop anymore"? How did business leaders in Saint John get together and say, "We have to do something positive here"?

Mr. Gribbons: In about 1997, a retired banker by the name of Bill Gale was on his second career, selling real estate. He is a gregarious former Newfoundlander. Walking down our main street, King Street, he met a panhandler. Instead of just putting money in his hand, Bill asked him the panhandler for his story, because Bill wants to know about people; he is very friendly and that is his nature. Bill was shocked and disturbed by the panhandler's story.

From that personal one-on-one contact, he decided that he would like to do something about it, so he called for a meeting. He was the regional vice-president of a major bank in his previous career, so he knew people. He made some phone calls and held a meeting one or two weeks later at our community food bank. He twisted arms and cajoled, I will not say blackmailed, but he got a lot of people out, including the top leaders of our business community. He told them the story and he also had some people working in this field from the non-profit sector, from the soup kitchen, from the food banks. They told them what life was like for people living in poverty.

Everybody in that room knew about it anecdotally. It was a personal story from a personal contact and Bill decided that enough was enough. He wanted to try to do

something. The business community rallied around him. It still continues today. This fall will be the 10th anniversary of the organization.

The City of Saint John is a major partner in Vibrant Communities, but there is an organization called the Human Development Council and they have been around for over 25 years in the community. It is almost like a warehouse of statistical data of where people can go for opportunity and where they can find help. Another organization, the Urban Core Support Network, deals predominantly with the plight of women who live in poverty in the community. These organizations came together when invited by Vibrant Communities Saint John to try to launch a site in Saint John.

I have been to a couple of national meetings of Vibrant Communities and so far we are the only community I know of that has a business group like this. I have been asked if I could talk to people about this. Not really. It is not something we can cajole another community to do. It works for us and seems to be bearing fruit now.

One of our major businesses, J.D. Irving organization, adopted a primary school that is right at the foot of their office building. The school had the highest teacher turnover rate and the lowest test scores in the city. Nobody wanted their kids to go there. Most of the children arrived at school without breakfast and brought no lunches with them. It was not a matter of putting money into the school, but organizing mentors to go in and work with the kids. We have been able to turn that school around. It now has the lowest teacher turnover rate and some of the highest test scores in the city. Parents are actively trying to get their kids to go to that school now. It is the attention in these inner-city schools that they can get.

We have learned that in suburban schools and upper middle-class elementary schools, things will get done because the parents are active. If computers are needed, the parents will get computers for the kids. In inner-city schools, that does not happen. Therefore, we have to provide more resources.

We have learned and we have measured this. The Irving organization measured it and they put together an extensive book and we have branched it out to other schools. Now four schools in Saint John have been adopted by corporations, and three more schools will be added to the list next year.

The trick to breaking this multigenerational poverty is to get to the kids. We are doing everything we can to accomplish that. If it is a model, good. It seems to work for us. This is a long-term goal. The national Vibrant Communities organization mandates that we have some short-term objectives and we try to live up to them, but the Saint John 10-year goal is to reduce our rate of poverty down to the national average — 24 per cent to around 14 per cent. We are not naive enough to expect we can reduce poverty. That is impossible. We would just like to get back to the national average. That is the 10-year goal. We are two years into that. Hopefully when the figures from Statistics Canada come out next year, we will start to see some progress.

We celebrate successes. Another thing that works for us is that, at least in the business community, when we need to have a meeting with somebody we can generally get the meeting. New Brunswick is a small province. If we need to see the premier, somebody can get on the phone and we can see the premier. It might take a week or two to a month, but we can see the premier. That is another thing the business community can bring to the table where the non-profits in the past perhaps have not had that same leverage.

The Chairman: If you can reach the national average, I hope you keep going. Do not stop there. You seem to have come up with a formula that works. Three of us from the committee were at the Canadian Federation of Municipalities meeting in Calgary. Our researcher was there as well. There was a presentation by the executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. The council helps bring different elements of the community together. They have 30 cities signed up not to manage homelessness, but to reduce it and eliminate it. A number of cities have already made progress in providing support services and housing as the basis of the formula for doing this. They bring together all aspects of community, including the business leaders. They found that works successfully.

I hope we will have them in when we return in the fall. I think it might be interesting to hear their presentation.

We are running out of time, so Senator Cochrane and Senator Fairbairn, who both still have questions, can ask their questions and then the witness can answer both questions together.

Senator Cochrane: Mr. Gribbons, you mentioned changes to the federal funding criteria that have made it difficult for you to access funds. We would like you to elaborate on that. What programs are you talking about and what has been the effect? What effects have been felt as a result of the new criteria?

Senator Fairbairn: With respect to your last remarks about schools, Saint John has long had a great reputation for its strong work in literacy. I am wondering whether that reputation is still valid and whether literacy is a central issue in many of the problems that you are having, not only in Saint John but elsewhere in New Brunswick.

Mr. Gribbons: One example is the national crime prevention program, which was a major funder of a number of projects within the province of New Brunswick. Funding was available from the previous administration, but this winter, late in March, a number of organizations, including our own, lost funding. We have been able to replace that funding from other sources, but the mandates for the national crime prevention program were changed. We found out on the last day of the fiscal year that no funding was coming. I think there was approximately \$750,000 left on the table for the Province of New Brunswick. We heard that nationally about \$18 million to \$24 million was left on the table, not spent and returned to the treasury.

They were very good partners for two years. Our argument was that preventing crime is not simply a matter of building prisons and punishing people. It is a matter of giving young people opportunity so that they are not tempted to delve into crime. That is what we hope to do.

One of the community groups in the old north end of the city is called ONE Change; ONE stands for old north end. I mentioned this to Senator Callbeck when she was here. The area we call Indiantown received money from the National Crime Prevention Centre. That was delayed and they were forced to lay off staff. This had been a successful program. That is one of the examples.

Another example was the summer student program that was in the news three or four weeks ago. Our Boys and Girls Club has received funding for summer students from the federal government for 20 years. Two hundred young children every day are taken care of by the Boys and Girls Club; otherwise they would be out on the streets during the summer. They were denied all funding. Subsequently that has been changed and rectified.

Senator Cochrane: That is the summer jobs program.

Mr. Gribbons: Yes.

Senator Cochrane: Has that been resolved?

Mr. Gribbons: In that particular case it has been.

I do not know if we are leading the country or not in the fight against literacy. It is clearly a predominant indicator of a child becoming successful. Everything we have learned and studied indicates that if children are not reading with passion by grade 3 they will have trouble reading and acquiring their education. That is where we are concentrating. They are having people read to them. In many of our suburban middle-class households, parents will read to them. In the inner city neighbourhoods parents are not reading to their children at night.

Senator Fairbairn: They probably cannot.

Mr. Peacock: We looked at in the census data regarding the divide between plenty and poverty in Saint John. In a low-income neighbourhood, working age adults were much more likely to have not finished high school than to have had any post-secondary education. In the wealthy neighbourhoods in the suburbs, the inverse was true. Because of that profound disparity, we are excited when efforts that receive little or modest government support make a huge different. We mentioned the Crescent Valley neighbourhood, dominated by public housing owned by the Province of New Brunswick. A community activist has gone into that neighbourhood every summer now for about five or six years and established a literacy tent. She reads to the kids. Fascinatingly, that neighbourhood, dominated by young single mothers, is the youngest neighbourhood in all of Saint John. We find it satisfying that so many citizens of Saint John care enough to go

into these neighbourhoods to make the needed changes, well before government is at the table.

The Chairman: Unfortunately, we have run out of time. I want to thank you all, coming from Saint John and from Vancouver, for telling stories of the work you do, the people you serve, the challenges they face and the dire circumstances so many of them find themselves in. We thank you for the work are you doing, and we hope we can help support you in what you are doing. It could be a national poverty strategy with goals and timetables. We are looking at many different models. Quebec and Newfoundland have been mentioned. Other countries have been able to measure reductions in poverty. We also are quite concerned about the House of Commons' statement several years ago that it would eliminate child poverty by 2000. Not only has child poverty not been eliminated, it is just as bad as ever. That was an example of a fine statement with no program to back it up, no targets or real commitment to do it. Hopefully we can come up suggestions for the government that would help you do these beneficial things.

The committee adjourned.