



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
2004**

Ms. Judy Junor, Chair
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Ken Cheveldayoff, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Silver Springs

Ms. Brenda Bakken
Weyburn-Big Muddy

Mr. Lon Borgerson
Saskatchewan Rivers

Hon. Joanne Crofford
Regina Rosemont

Mr. Glenn Hagel
Moose Jaw North

Mr. Don Morgan
Saskatoon Southeast

The committee met at 15:00.

**General Revenue Fund
Community Resources and Employment
Vote 36**

Subvote (RE01)

The Chair: — The item of business before the committee is the estimates for the Department of Community Resources and Employment, beginning on page 37 of the Saskatchewan Estimates book. The first item of business is vote 36, subvote (RE01), administration.

Ms. Crofford, will you please introduce your officials present with you today.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Okay. I'd be happy to do that, Madam Chair. Today, to my right is Bonnie Durnford, the deputy minister of the department. Where is she . . . directly behind me, Shelley Hoover, assistant deputy minister; Darrell Jones, assistant deputy minister; Don Allen, back here, executive director, finance and property management. Seated just up there to my left, Larry Chaykowski, executive director, housing program operations. Beside Larry is Marilyn Headland, executive director, child and family services. Behind me again is Phil Walsh, executive director, employment and income assistance division. And over in the corner, Betty West, executive director, community living division.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Vote 36, subvote (RE01), administration. Agreed? I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Welcome to the minister and to your officials. We are looking forward to some discussion today and some answers to some burning questions that we have. And I'm going to start, Madam Minister, with questions from people from SARC (Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres) have.

And basically right now, it's revolving around gas prices. There's always been a great discrepancy in the mileage rates paid out by the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan and the employees from the government. If one of SARC's clients needs to go to an appointment out of town, the mileage rate that they get paid is 18 cents a kilometre. But we know that even at 38 cents a kilometre, you're taking money out of your pocket to pay for gas.

SARC, or the clients who get \$85 a month, must make up the difference in the actual cost. If a social worker comes out to see a client, they get paid the government rate, but if SARC has to make an arrangement for a staff member to drive the client to the social worker or, even worse, coming into the city for an appointment, then they're only getting paid 18 cents a kilometre. It's really detrimental for rural clients who often have to travel to get their appointments. What's your department doing to work on this issue?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I guess what I would say on this is this recent . . . well maybe I'll start by saying I'm aware of the

ongoing concern. But this recent situation is quite recent, that the prices have jumped as much as they have. And I think if it continues for any length of time we'll have to look at what we can do about that. I mean, it will be difficult because the only way we'll be able to do anything about it is to take money out of some other area, but I recognize the concern you're raising.

We try to, in our relationship with the many, many community organizations we fund, to continue each year to improve issues around base funding, salaries, benefits, the costs of operation, the costs of travel, and other expenses that they have. And we have been able over the years to make a number of improvements in different areas. But again we'll keep an eye on this one and just see if it looks like these gas prices are going to stay here. And if it is going to be a continuing problem, we'll have to take a look at whether there's something we can do to help them out.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, even before the big jump to 95 cents we've been sitting over 70 cents for quite a while, and there was a huge disparity at that time. We as government officials are managing to get increases, which of course doesn't always cover it, but we know that 18 cents a kilometre is far below what people can do. People are taking out of their pocket. And to help people with disabilities, I think we need a clearer answer than to say if you're going to . . . if the gas price increase continues, we'll have to look at it shortly.

We need to know what your department is considering right now because we are talking about the most vulnerable people we have, the ones that the government is responsible for. So I'm wondering . . . and there must be some discussion going on around your department heads and around your area to look at the issue. Maybe you could start by telling me how much money you pay out in mileage at the 18 cents a kilometre last year.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — If I could ask for a clarification on your question, are you asking for mileage paid out to community organizations? Because there's a lot of different people that we pay monies to.

Ms. Draude: — I'm talking about the clients that actually would receive the 18 cents a kilometre, not so much the people that, the workers that, the government workers that are getting the regular mileage rates, but the clients of the departments who are only allowed 18 cents a kilometre when it comes to the travel that they will require for health appointments or appointments to meet with their workers.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'm going to ask for another clarification. Are you looking primarily at rural or urban because in the urban there's subsidized bus passes. I mean, there's a range of different ways that this is responded to. Are you looking for people who get a mileage rate for travel specifically?

Ms. Draude: — If it's not too difficult, Madam Minister, will you break it down and tell me for rural areas, and then what kind of subsidized rate the urban clients would get as well? I wasn't aware that was happening.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I can explain that the urban one although I wouldn't know the total amount at the moment. But we have a pilot project in Regina with the city of Regina where we pay them a flat amount. I think it's — I'm guessing here — around 200,000 . . . 100,000 to the city, and in return for that they provide, instead of the \$60 bus passes, they provide \$15 bus passes.

Now that would be for an able person who's able to get on a city bus. We do also provide through various grants support to the disabled transit, but that's a different arrangement then, where someone in a rural or northern area has to pay someone to help transport them.

We don't have that kind of detail here today. I mean I could go through all the different things we pay for, but that's really not what you're asking about. You're asking about the total amount of money we use to support that kind of allowable travel for recipients.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, I'm wondering what we actually spend on travel at 18 cents a kilometre, and it will be interesting to see what it would actually cost if the government was paying anywhere near the kind of rate that we will be paying to everyone else.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, and that's . . . I mean that's what you always have to do. You have to compare what you are paying to what it would cost to close the gap, and quite often those figures are surprisingly large.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, maybe you could, maybe you could also let me know . . . you said \$100,000 was paid as a pilot project in the city of Regina for bus passes. Is this a new program? The minister is indicating it is. Could you tell me what type of subsidy was paid before this pilot project came in, so we know what happens to urban clients compared to rural clients?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We would have before provided the cost of a bus pass, and what the 100,000 represents is the gap between the \$15 dollar bus pass and the \$60 bus pas. So the amount that we would anticipate saving is the amount that we've provided as a grant in order for people to be able to access \$15 bus passes.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. Madam Minister, is any money ever been paid to STC(Saskatchewan Transportation Company) as a grant for rural clients who may need to be able to travel into the city?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, although STC does have a policy of providing low-cost passes for medical transportation.

Ms. Draude: — So the Department of Community Services doesn't work in conjunction with STC to ensure that rural residents would be able to get in at a reasonable rate?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It's more Health that has worked directly with STC from the point of view of medical passes. But I do know they exist, and I do know that they're at a considerably reduced rate from the normal STC. Again, that's not my direct area, but we could ask for that information for

you.

Ms. Draude: — I appreciate it. Madam Minister, to go onto another area, one of the concerns I have is the number of people that are receiving assistance right now through your department that are considered totally disabled, people that you feel may never be able to work regardless of what kind of job retraining or training they would receive either because of physical or mental disabilities. Could you tell me what number of recipients here in Saskatchewan would fall in that category?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The most recent numbers that we have for our caseload is 29,000. Of those, 13,000 would be considered to have some kind of a disability but not necessarily one that prevents some type of employment. Three thousand are in residential type of care and I think would fall pretty firmly into the category of unemployable.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, does your department have a category where people that are receiving assistance are considered disabled to the point that they don't have to have the same kind of scrutiny or supervision with their social worker each month or a number of times a year, knowing that there is never going to be any changes in their condition?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It would be again about 3,000 that would have that kind of a designation. We've actually found with changing attitudes over time that a much wider range of people, than people once thought possible, have actually been employed. And certainly it's the desire within that community to be employed, and we've provided actually quite a bit of resources into employment supports and job search and job coaches and a whole range of things.

But there is again that 3,000 that are considered to be not in the category of active job search.

Ms. Draude: — To receive Canada pension disability below the age of 65, there's quite a stringent scrutiny that people have to go through to ensure that they can never . . . they're not capable of working in any area. Does your department have those kind of guidelines or any type of guidelines to ensure, to see if there are people that will fall in that area so that they don't have to, on a monthly basis, be checked to see if they're working?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We have a slightly different system than the federal pension system, but we actually are, as we speak, in discussion with them about having a more common way of arriving at this designation. But we also do have a policy that even if someone is designated that way under the federal designation, and they're interested in working, that we will still work with them to do that.

Ms. Draude: — If someone is considered disabled, how often do they actually have . . . are they . . . do they go through the regular monthly check to see how much money they're making or if they are . . . have looked for a job. Is there any different criteria for them than there would be for somebody who could be actively looking for work?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think the best way to describe this is, this is an area where the social workers have discretion by

getting to know the person, getting to know what they're capable of, and would not necessarily have as stringent of a requirement. Depending on the individual work plan for that particular person, what kind of things they were wanting to work on in their lives, whether it's health or job or whatever.

For the 3,000 that I spoke about earlier, I think there might be a periodic review just on things like income sources and whatnot, but really not the same as the job search.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, how often would these procedures be gone through?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll ask Phil to answer that because he's more, you know, at the operations level.

Mr. Walsh: — For people who aren't pursuing employment or independence, along that line, the regulations would require a review once a year of their circumstances. They are . . . as with any other client, any time their circumstances changes though in the meantime, they are required to report any change in circumstances, such as if they began to receive some income that they weren't receiving before. So that wouldn't necessarily wait till the annual review.

For people who are employable then, it's more likely they're going to be talking to their social worker maybe once a month or certainly more frequently.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll just mention for the sake of *Hansard*, I only mentioned Phil Walsh's first name, but that's Phil Walsh that was answering that question.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. To whoever may want to answer the question: could you tell me the amount of money that someone that is totally disabled would receive from your department when it came to the monthly living allowance, and maybe even indicate what they would get for housing and any special needs.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, given the level of detail required in this, I'll ask Phil Walsh, the executive director of employment and income assistance, to answer that.

Mr. Walsh: — Certainly. A single person, a single adult who is a person with a disability would receive a basic allowance of \$195, would receive an allowance for a person with a disability of an additional \$50, would receive a housing allowance of \$320, could also potentially qualify for an additional housing allowance up to another \$150, depending on their circumstances and their need for housing. They would also receive the actual cost of their utilities each month so that would vary from case to case. And then if there are special needs as well, they would receive, they could be eligible for allowances for special needs as well.

Ms. Draude: — For special needs, do you mean medical or what type? Give me an example.

Mr. Walsh: — Most of the medical costs would be covered through their health coverage, but they may receive special assistance for transportation or other things related to their disability.

A Member: — There's a dietary.

Mr. Walsh: — Yes, special diets, sorry.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, can you tell me how Saskatchewan compares to other provinces when it comes to: (a) first of all, the people who are on social assistance and then . . . and also those who have total disabilities? Can you just give me some comparisons? Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — In Canada we would be sixth in terms of our rates for our ranking and for a single, disabled person, keeping in mind that this doesn't take into account the lower cost of living here.

And as well it's probably worth mentioning that we have some other programs that provide support here. The residential rehabilitation program provides supports to housing accessibility. And just in this budget we've approved the new housing allowance which, of course, won't come into effect till April, but that will have an effect on improving the income rate for disabled people.

Ms. Draude: — Do you have a breakdown of the 3,000 people that are basically in the category of totally disabled, a breakdown between age and gender?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll have to provide that for you.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, how many . . . Do you hear often of people that are receiving assistance having to go to the food bank?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Certainly I have had discussions with the Regina Food Bank. One of the things that's difficult to tell with the food bank is the particular, very specific reasons why people use the food bank. I mean there's a wide range of areas. There's certainly the issue of income adequacy itself.

One of the reasons we decided to institute the housing supplement this year is we believe that the cost of housing is taking money away from people's food allowances, and so we've decided to supplement the housing allowance in order to take that pressure off the food budget.

Since we made some of the changes that we've made with providing more incentives essentially to working poor through programs like the Saskatchewan Child Benefit, the employment supplement, extended health benefits, and programs like that, the difference in disposable income for a single parent with two children . . . In 1997 someone who was on social assistance would have been receiving \$14,796 a year, and after the changes in programs it moved to \$17,040 a year. For that same person on minimum wage in 1997, it would have been \$17,756 a year, and now with the various supports to working low-income people it's now at \$23,157.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, for clarification that's for a family with two children, I believe that's what you've indicated.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, now this will include the housing supplement. These are the figures with the new housing supplement built in, which people don't have yet but will have

within I guess about seven or eight months now.

Ms. Draude: — The actual money they are receiving isn't 23,000 yet then. It will be that amount in seven . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, it would be minus the housing supplement, which I think would . . . (inaudible) . . . \$1,200 off of there.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, when was the last time your department did any kind of a study to find out whether \$195 a month would provide decent food, clothing, and any kind of recreation to someone who is forced to live on social assistance? I'm sure that any of us know that going to the store is . . . you can drop \$100 every time you go. I can't imagine what people are living on when they only receive \$195 a month, when that includes their clothing as well. When was the last time your department actually studied this issue?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — There is a federally produced standard for a food basket. And as well we support a whole range of programs in the community where community agencies provide a lot of the kind of supports that you're talking about — things like the healthy food box, the REACH (Regina Education and Action on Child Hunger Inc.) program that provides supplementary dietary assistance to schools, and places like that. So we don't just spend the money in one place. There's a number of agencies supported. There's programs that work with provision of some infant needs.

But this is an area that . . . I mean, I understand the general thrust of your question. And it is an area that I want to spend more time thinking about over the coming year because — even though I think that the way we've redesigned our programs has been very effective in supporting people to go off assistance and into employment, I mean, the numbers are very good — when before we started these programs we had ever-growing caseloads in the province. The numbers were just going up and up, and the reason was that people didn't have good supports to move off of assistance. For example, they would lose their health benefits and other things when they actually chose to work.

And money that we could have spent increasing social assistance rates has been spent across a much wider population. We used to only spend money on people on assistance. Now we spend money on at least — what? — 10,000 families outside of social assistance, to support working poor. And that's with the health supplements, the employment supplements, and now with the housing allowance.

So if we had taken all that money and put it all into social assistance rates, our social assistance rates would be much better, but we would have a lot more people on assistance. Because we chose to take and concentrate a lot of those resources on working poor, it made it much more viable for people to make the choice to work. And plus the reorganization of the department, with bringing the career and employment services and housing services together with the social assistance services, meant that we had more of the tools we needed to be supportive of people to get work and also to make sure that they have quality and adequate housing.

So this has been part of a transformation of the department that started in 1997. And now that we feel we have a very good program base that's much more effective in helping people make the choice to work . . . and we think that's better for the kids, better for everybody. The fact is, is that now I think is the time to look at whether the base is as adequate as it needs to be.

But we did have redesign issues, and Saskatchewan has not had, other than one year I think, particular surpluses of money since '90 . . . well since the '80s, since about '84 probably. The economy was in decline for a long time there and started to pick up again in the '90s. But then, you know, there were some issues.

So in order to change the system, we haven't been able to just add lots of new money in. We've had to reallocate how we spend the money. And I think it's been a very thoughtful process, and I think the people in the department have done a very good job of being thoughtful about how more people could be supported to work and to hold their heads up with pride in the community because they're working.

Now that doesn't mean that people who require support should be ashamed of that. I think that if you require support, that's what it's there for. But I do think that we're at the point in our development of these programs that we should be looking very closely at the kind of issues you're raising.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I just have to make a statement because I've sat here during most of the '90s when your government talked about all of the growth and the economy and how everything was going great, and yet people on social assistance never saw any change in the way they were treated at all.

And also, I guess choices are made every day when it comes to government spending, and there's been a lot of choices made that I'm sure people would question when it comes to money, investments out of the province.

But I do want to ask you, Madam Minister, the food basket that you're talking about, out of \$195, is that the same regardless of where you live in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I guess seeing as you've raised it I'll have to respond to it. And the first part of the question I'll respond to is the investments because I would agree there has been investments that haven't done well. But overall there's been a net benefit to the General Revenue Fund, and that money has gone to fund health and education and these kinds of things. Now that's not the debate we're here for today, but I know with my mutual funds, what I'm looking for is a net benefit. Not every single one of those funds does well, and it would be the same in investments.

I do believe that the measures that have been taken lately to strengthen the investment decision making are likely good ones. But with that I'll go to the question that you asked.

It's the same across the province except in the North where it's an additional \$50 a month per person.

Ms. Draude: — I guess that was my question. I was wondering

in the North if it's the same amount of money because I am sure you're well aware as well that the price of milk can be up to \$1 a litre more in the North than it is here. And some of the other costs are considerably more. Fifty dollars a person more per children as well?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I did live in the North for a long time, and I am aware that that is the case, but I'm also aware that many people are still close enough to the traditional economy that people also have more opportunity than urban people do to supplement their diets with other food sources.

Ms. Draude: — My question's about the children.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Includes children, yes.

Ms. Draude: — Fifty dollars a month more for children as well.

Madam Minister, I just have to remind you that no one on social assistance has mutual funds, so we're not . . . And this is the kind of thing that people . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I don't think I said that, and I don't appreciate that characterization.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, what I'm talking about is people that are at the mercy of government, people whose only hope right now is what they can get in a cheque from the government at the end of the month which is no way anybody wants to live.

And so I'm trying to determine if the choices that were made by government are ones that are actually benefiting the people who are at the mercy of your government. And so when I see that at \$195 a month . . . we know that this is starvation money. And if you have to clothe yourself in Saskatchewan as well where a jacket can cost you a \$100, we know that nobody is living high when they're on social assistance.

So my questioning is revolving around the fact that people on social assistance, especially those who are totally disabled, are going further and further and further behind when it comes to any type of an opportunity to live a life that would give them some hope or some respect for themselves. So government makes choices which makes them . . . which basically ties their hands when it comes to how much money is available.

So, Madam Minister, I'm going to turn the questioning over to my colleague from Weyburn-Big Muddy. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you. Madam Minister, I would just like to ask a few further questions about food banks in particular. I did have the opportunity to visit the Regina Food Bank in the last couple of weeks and was very alarmed, I must say, at the quality of food that is being provided and the lack of resources that they work with.

But having said that, I want to commend those people that do run it and their commitment to helping those less fortunate than themselves. And I know that a lot of the staff goes far above what they're actually paid for, and many of the hours that are committed there are totally volunteer hours. So they are doing a

very good work, and also the agencies throughout the city that assist them in delivery of the food and in keeping in touch with the people that are in need of this food.

I guess further to the member's questions — from Kelvington-Wadena — the \$195 that is being paid out in many cases does not provide enough dollars for them to properly supply food for their children. And my concern is that on several occasions now I have had people come to my office from my constituency or phone, and they have been told by Social Services to go to the food bank. And I would like to know why a government is telling people that are receiving social assistance that their avenue is not to call them and request but to go to a food bank.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think the answer to that is fairly simple: we have a budget. We have set amounts that people get. That's the amount we have in the budget. And if in fact that's not possible to live on that, there's a whole variety of community resources. There's community kitchens that do bulk cooking where the people take home the cooking that they make. There's the programs that make sure the kids get enough in school to eat. There's the programs that supplement people who are on minimum wage — which, by the way, I don't think we'd even have increases in the minimum wage if you were the government — and that would be people working, never mind depending on the government.

So I would agree that people could definitely use more. I mean, I have the same observation when I go to the grocery store that this has to be a tough go. And I know that when you're on that kind of a budget you are restricted to the basics. You can't buy your pre-packaged food, and you can't buy your convenience foods, and you can't buy any of those things because they're all very expensive.

I know that. I've lived with students, even as an adult MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly), and saw how they managed their finances. And certainly many of the people are not particularly adept at managing their finances in that way because they never learned how to do it. And many of the programs are — even at the food bank — are about helping people to learn how to manage food, how to buy food economically, how to prepare it economically. And I would say even with that, there's no question it's a challenge.

But again I say if we took all of our resources and put it all in one pile, we could accomplish what you're suggesting. But because we've chosen to provide, particularly families with children and particularly people who can make the decision and are making the decision to move off of assistance — of which 6,000 families have made that choice, including 15,000 children within those families — we have provided them with, I think, about a 30 per cent increase in resources to their incomes that are in the form of a child benefit and employment supplement, extended health benefits to cover health needs to the children. And now we will be adding the housing allowance.

Now one can argue that's not enough, and I'm glad to hear that you support those kind of things. But we have been working with what we have. And I guess, if we were to do more, we would have to know from what areas we would take that. And I know you'll likely go back to the investments issue, but again,

there has been net contributions from the investment pool to the General Revenue Fund. And I, like you, would hope that every business was a success, but that's not the history of either private or public enterprise.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Well just the comment on that our party would never consider increasing the minimum wage, I think that was most uncalled for, and I do not appreciate it. We're here talking about people that are, I would hope, on social assistance only because they cannot provide for themselves or because of disability.

And I mean, I know that that has been a concern by many people in my area — that they look around and they say, well who is monitoring Social Services? Are we ensuring that people that actually need the dollars from Social Services are receiving adequate funds, and those that do not receive it are not receiving funds, those that are able-bodied, that they can go out and get a job? And that is of certainly a concern.

People that come to my office that I indicated that are asking about why they are told to go to a food bank . . . in several cases, it is because they had not received any funds from Social Services. They were told that they had to phone the call line first, and then they had to go through the process. Meanwhile their children are at home without any food. I actually had a family one weekend that had no food in their home for the weekend. Yet their answer from Social Services, while they were waiting to receive a cheque from Social Services, was to go to the food bank.

This is absolutely unconscionable for people to have to be put in that kind of a situation where they lose dignity because they have to beg. And in one particular case when this happened and then the person went to the food bank and were told, well you can't have food here more often than so many weeks apart. So then they had no avenue where to go. What is the minister's answer to people that are caught in the system where they have . . . they're waiting for approval, they're waiting for their cheque, and they have no money and no way to feed their children?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again what I'll do is speak to the enrichments we've provided. For example in 1997, the amount for one child was \$160, and it's now at 226.41 for the child benefit which is, you know, a separate allocation of money.

As well there is, depending on the income of a family, there is a PST (provincial sales tax) rebate. There's a GST (goods and services tax) rebate. I mean, I think one of the things that's difficult is if you look at only one source of income. But you have to keep in mind there are other sources of income coming through the door. The only source of income is not this one.

The Chair: — Mr. Weekes.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Minister, approximately 18 years ago the community of Biggar established a food bank. And over the years, the Biggar & District Food for Thought Inc. has established a number of projects designed to support families in need in the community, and their main project is the hamper program which identifies families receiving food hampers on a monthly basis. This

program is sustained through the donations of groceries and some financial assistance from residents, businesses, and corporations.

And some other projects that Food for Thought has taken on are the milk for kids program, teacher's cupboard program and the baking program. Now, Madam Minister, these three latter programs have been possible through an annual grant in the neighbourhood of 22,000 to \$2,500 received from the Food for Thought from the Department of Finance in conjunction with Community Resources and Employment. This grant has been received for some years and is essential to the future of these programs.

This past year the Biggar Food for Thought did not receive a grant. After applying early in 2003, they received no money or any indication that they will be receiving any money, receiving any funding. Now numerous attempts to contact the department failed, and on November 24, Food for Thought was informed that there is no money this year and maybe next year.

And the Biggar & District Food for Thought has subsidized the school programs this year for the limited amounts of funds that they received from the monthly hampers. And they are unable to continue subsidizing these programs, will have to discontinue them if the department doesn't see fit to fund Food for Thought and the young children for their programs and benefits.

And the question that these people are asking, is this grant going to be discontinued on a permanent basis? And if so, this will mean the end of these programs that I just outlined.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — One of the things . . . And I mean, I think this is a question worth debating. Over the years government has given away a lot of its authority to make funding decisions to regional intersectoral committees and to other bodies who make these decisions that we used to make in government. I mean, I suppose one could argue if you didn't fund any of these things you could just then divide up the money amongst the people that needed it, but it's . . . We do still fund, the one we fund directly from the department, we still fund it — the child nutrition program.

The one that has not been approved I don't think was one that we directly decide about. It would have been the one that's decided through the regional intersectoral committee. That's my understanding. We could check further on that, but that is my understanding of that situation.

Mr. Weekes: — Well it is being funded from the Department of Finance but I . . . Regardless of where the money comes from, these are very important projects.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, I'm talking about who makes the decision because I can't make a decision I don't make. I can only make the decisions I do make. And the decision that we do make is that we still fund them, that wherever their funding has been cut from, it's not from a decision that we've made.

Mr. Weekes: — Well regardless, these people aren't getting that grant. And these areas . . . the Melfort kids' program in which students come from underprivileged families. We see free milk from the canteen at school. Teacher cupboard's

program which Food for Thought organization replenishes supplies for cereals, fruits, bread for children. They either forgot or were not given lunches and are once again identified as students that would qualify to receive free lunches. And the third program is the baking program which was designed to give the mentally challenged students an opportunity to develop skills in baking muffins, cakes, and the like, and supplies that this program were supplied by the Food for Thought.

I guess the question is, in these cutbacks, there doesn't seem to be any thought in, first of all, these people need these programs. And with the little . . . It's only 2,000 to \$2,500 that this group was receiving and that leveraged money out of donations of groceries and financial assistance from the local residents and businesses and corporations.

And so it's really two points here. First, the need is there, and it's also . . . with the very limited amount of money from the government, it leveraged a lot of resources from the community that go towards this very important programs.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, and I would say that I'm sure that they are doing excellent work. I mean, there's no doubt about that at all.

It's a matter of the priority setting within the grant funds. And sometimes grant funds move around. They fund one thing for a while, and then they fund another thing.

And personally I . . . and I say personally because there has been no broader discussion about this recently. But I do think it's worth examining how all these many kinds of dollars are delivered and whether we're really being as effective as we could in supporting — and I mean as a community, I don't mean just as a government — as effective as we could be in supporting the programs that affect vulnerable people because there's programs that come out of the federal government, out of the United Way, out of the provincial government, out of the municipal government. And people spend a considerable amount of their effort in filling out grant applications and whatnot. And I think it would be worth taking a hard look at whether there's a better way for all of us to co-operate in doing this.

But I just did a little calculation here. I'm going to make sure I've got my numbers of zeros right. And it's certainly true that a \$2,000 program can do a lot of good work. But you multiply that by 800 communities, and you've got a two and a half million dollar program. So, I mean, that's how the numbers start to add up in this area.

And this is only one area. I mean we have hundreds and hundreds of organizations that are providing support for disabled people, employment through recycling. There's a vast array of things that are supported through the department.

Mr. Weekes: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Well I just want to make the point again that, I mean, this money . . . (inaudible) . . . I'm just guessing, three, four, five times through volunteer work and donations.

But at issue here is . . . First the need is there, but this group has been receiving this grant for a number of years. And without

any warning, without any planning, this grant is cut. And there's no way that an organization made up of volunteers just suddenly can put this together without any notice.

I mean if these cuts are coming, I think at least the group should be warned months if not a year ahead that this is happening. And this didn't happen. They just basically woke up, and their grant was denied, and this caused considerable problems.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, and again I would say I think this comes around the question of how we fund community activity. They don't have funding in the sense of a department or somebody who's got a regular budget and regular funding. They do work grant to grant to grant, and so it's always whether they get the most current grant they applied for. And that is a very unpredictable environment to work in.

And I don't think it's particularly helpful to the work that they do, but it has gone on like this I guess for many generations. And I know that there's been several attempts for example in the inner city of Regina to grapple with the literally millions of dollars that goes into that community but doesn't seem to have the desired impact.

And it does require a huge feat of coordination because, you know, people tell me that every application has a different deadline, different reporting requirements, and quite often a huge amount of their resources is tied up in this activity. So certainly I am hoping that I have enough time involved in this work to take a hard look at this question because I don't necessarily think we're getting the most bang for our collective resources that we all put in — like I say — through the many levels of government and through our community charitable donation organizations.

That being said, we are going to very specifically check on the one that you raised and see what's going on there.

Ms. Bakken: — Madam Minister, just to ask a further question on that. I did put in a written question asking if any of the third-party groups that receive funding from the department were not receiving their funding this year, and the answer was no. I guess in light of this . . . Plus I raised another issue last week or two weeks ago when we had committee last about the same issue, and I don't understand the answer when obviously there have been cuts to people that have received money in the past.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — But you asked if we cut people. Yes, it depends whether it's a question . . . I think the one that was raised in the committee last week is about individualized funding to a person which is different than grant funding to an organization. But again, our grant funding has not been cut in this year. So if someone received a cut, it wasn't from us. It might have been from a pool of money, but that pool wasn't cut either.

In fact, a lot of the money that goes out through the CIF (Community Initiatives Fund), grants and whatnot, that's been a growing pool. So what it would be is that somebody on the regional intersectoral committee or I guess the whole committee felt that there was some other priority in the community that was more important.

Ms. Bakken: — So you stand by your answer that there has been no funding cut to third-party groups.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Where the problem may be coming in, we've retained our contributions in the different categories of funding that we do. Apparently the Department of Health did not reinstate some of its funding this year. So I don't know if that could be where the issue is.

Like there's two places it could be. One could be Health because they do a lot of grants as well. Health boards do quite a few grants. And as well the regional intersectoral committees do grants. So I'd have to know who their grant was from. But it's not our belief that we cut any grants.

Ms. Bakken: — Well, Madam Minister, I listened with interest you're talking about how all these different agencies within Regina, and certainly across the province, are in many cases trying to provide the same needs. And certainly we see that within government.

And I would hope that there would be some initiative by your government to work together so that people don't have to determine if they have to go to the Department of Health or they have to go to the Department of Social Services or they have to go to the Department of Learning, especially in the case of education for special needs and so on, that people are caught in the system. And it is to no one's benefit, and it certainly does eat up a lot of resources that could be going directly to the child or to the family. And is there any move within your government to do this so that people don't have to be victims of the system and play this game?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well let me give two answers to that. There's a fellow that's well-known and respected in Saskatchewan who works in the area of children's mental health. And he made a quote one time many years ago that stuck with me that said, "the best support system a child can have is a well-functioning family."

And many of the supports we've put in have been to help families function better. For example, the Kids First program, which is a very large investment of ours, actually makes contact with at-risk families at time of birth of the child and works directly at the home level with the child and their family to help them develop the resources to build a more predictable and more supportive life for themselves, along with helpers who get involved with them.

The role of the schools has been an effort to provide integrated services at the school level. Now this is a process that has really just begun in terms of actually seeing results, but we've designated every school in the province as a community school, which means they have community school coordinators who are helping coordinate services for those children within the school environment.

We still have a way to go. There's a committee meeting right now in education that involves people from a number of the different sectors to decide what's the best way to integrate services. And I have to tell you that one of the biggest barriers we've got right now is privacy laws because we're not allowed to share information about families. And so, anecdotally you

might know the circumstances of a family, but if you were a teacher, a social worker, or a justice worker, you would not actually be legally eligible to share that information with other people who are trying to serve that same family.

And I think this is a big hurdle that we have to overcome because I don't think it's particularly helpful to the families. Certainly we can do some things in the areas where people sign a consent form, but I think in some of the circumstances we're talking about, it requires helping agencies and helping individuals to be much better informed and much more proactive in doing this.

But like I say, we've put in a number of programs in the last few years to support childhood development, early childhood development, early learning, child care, and all of those things which would help people to be in a better position to pursue education and to pursue employment.

And one can argue whether those are the best programs or not, but we think that the evidence on all of them is that we're having considerably more success than we ever did in the past.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'll table this letter that I sent on behalf of the group in Biggar. It was dated November 28, and we did not receive a reply. So I'll just pass this on to you. I'd appreciate a response. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll apologize for that. We do have a referral system where every response is supposed to go back within two weeks. So I don't know what happened with that one, but we'll track it down.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Just further on some of the comments that you just made about that . . . you have committees. And I hear you saying that the committee is meeting to decide what the other committees are going to do, and I think this is the frustration. The frustration of the people in my constituency is when they need, they need a solution to the problem with their child in the school system, there has to be a meeting with all these different agencies and then a meeting out with them all together.

I attended one last year. There was enough people in the room and their salaries being paid for that day and their travel and whatever, that this child's needs could have been easily paid for for the year. But instead we had all these people in the room, and at the end of the meeting there was no resolution. This mother is still struggling, wondering where she turns for help. And so, you know, meeting after meeting is certainly not the solution. There needs to be someone that is going to take this issue by the throat and say let's help these people instead of wasting all the money on administration and travel.

And, Madam Minister, I've heard you say that, you know, there's been moves made within your department to change your focus. Then why are there more families in the city of Regina alone today going to the food bank than ever before, and of those families almost or more than 50 per cent of them are children?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I think I would say two things. When you live a survival-oriented life, you will make use of

whatever resources are available. I would do that myself if I had an income and there was a food bank and I could access that, I would. I mean you would have to be foolish not to. If a resource is there for you to use, then I think you would use it.

But what I'm saying is we have worked very hard to ensure that people are on a path to employment, where they're not on some bleak horizon for where their entire existence they're on assistance, but they're actually on a path to education, to employment, to having the children be able to go to school and say that their parent is at work. I think that these are very positive things.

I'm very concerned about the food bank question, and I fully intend to put considerable energies into discussing with all of the people who work in food security — because it's not just food banks; there's a variety of people who do that kind of work — and see what some, possibly more innovative solutions might be.

But if you were ever sitting in my seat you would find out that the solution that you don't have quite often is to continue to pour more and more money into a particular place. And we have made choices to provide child benefits so that it's tied very specifically to families with children. Like I say, there's PST rebates, there's GST rebates, there's employment supplements for working poor, there's assistance with child health benefits to make sure the children aren't going . . . (inaudible) . . . needed medication and whatnot. So I mean there are a number of things that have been done. This is not the easiest issue to deal with.

And I'm going to talk a little bit about my own experience for one moment with my granddaughter at her school. There was huge issues at that school with bullying. I raised these issues with the teachers and the principals. They actually got . . . Some schools actually, through the school boards, hire social workers. They're not the government social workers; they're the school social workers. And through the Catholic Church I think they might make use of their parishes to do some of this work. But they did a very good job of responding. They booked the sessions. They had the classes involved, and then they went to the parents' night for the parents to be involved. In my daughter's classroom, where I consider the problem to be fairly extreme, three parents actually came.

Now governments cannot do things either without the co-operation of parents and communities. And when I said people were meeting to figure out how to integrate services, these are not some kind of obscure administrative people. These are people like teachers, like the school social workers, like public health people who's very job it is to assist people with issues in their lives. These are not administrative people, and I don't think they would appreciate being characterized that way. These are well-intentioned people, perhaps who are working in an outmoded model of service delivery. That's the issue that's being addressed, but it is being addressed. School^{PLUS} and community schools is some of the measures that have been taken to address that. And certainly the feedback we're getting is that it is reasonably affected.

That doesn't deal specifically with the food bank question. But like I say, it's a complex question. It's not a matter of just whether you have enough money or don't have enough money.

There's many things that come into play there. And we identified one of them as being the housing allowance and we're doing something about. So I mean we do analyze these things. We are thoughtful. We speak to the people on assistance.

We say, what would make the biggest difference for you? They say, a job, quality housing, safe communities. We have our safe communities legislation. We have a group of people working within the regulatory framework — including the police, health officials, housing inspectors — to look at ways that we can deal with some of the very unhealthy conditions that exist in certain parts of the neighbourhood, not all of which are related to income. There's a number of issues there. You know, it's support for drug and alcohol rehabilitation. It's a whole range of things.

And it's always a balancing act of how much of the money you put in which of those areas in order to effect the change. And I will just reiterate that we think that some of the choices we've made are pretty effective. Because over 6,800 families and 15,000 children are now living in dignity, off assistance, and with ever-improving incomes through employment and through some real opportunities now to move forward with their lives.

So I guess we can argue whether some other program might be more effective. And I think we should have that debate because we want to do the most effective thing we can. But to say that nothing has been done would be a very grievous error.

Ms. Bakken: — Well, Madam Minister, I would just like to make the comment that most people, in fact I would say probably 99 per cent of the people that go to a food bank, do not go there because they want to. It's because it's a necessity. It's not something that they relish.

And when I attended the food bank, I was alarmed at some of the food that people were given. And if you talk to those that run the food banks, they will also reiterate that. But the people that come there are thankful to receive something to feed their children, and they do not do it on a whim.

And, Madam Minister, I'd just like to quote from Bob Pringle, the executive director of the Saskatchewan food bank, who was a former MLA in this Assembly, and who said that he was saddened and angered by the provincial budget because it did not do more to address the issue of hunger. In his words, and I quote:

“That is absolutely indefensible, and to me says something about the moral fibre of the people in charge.”

“It's pretty strong language, but I mean, what's more basic than hunger?”

He further goes on to say that he is upset that the government increased the total budget by \$180 million, yet cut \$4 million from community resources and employment.

“If the government would have said this is a tough budget, we're not going to give increases anywhere, that's one thing, but we added 180 million . . . dollars. (And yet we have people) We gave nothing to people who are hungry,”

... "Saying we can't afford to do it ... to me is a cop-out."

This comes down to the issue of priorities in this government who have chosen where they want to spend their money; who have lost millions of dollars — millions of taxpayers' dollars — and at the same time have run an economy where people have to either leave to get a job or they have to go on social assistance. And so to say that people are going to the food bank because they want to is absolutely deplorable.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well, Madam Chair, I have to counter that because I'm not leaving that on the record. I never said that. I have just outlined a whole range of expenditures we've made to support families. And I hardly need to be lectured by someone who's probably spent much less of her life working closely to the poor than I have, having been the director of an Indian-Métis friendship centre for many years.

And I would just say that I do totally agree that we have to deal with this issue, but I'm also saying that you have to deal with it in such a way that you build people's independence and dignity. And I'm saying if there is a resource, people will use it. And I don't think that's quite the same as saying that people want to, or anything like that.

I think the people who run food banks do an admirable job of assisting to supplement people's food. And in fact, I know that in Regina the food bank is working on a grocery project to provide food at cost — at wholesale instead of at retail. Some of the things that's caused a lot of pressure on food budgets in the inner city is the grocery chains have moved out and left people high and dry with no way to buy their groceries. It's like when Superstore pulled out of the inner city in Regina. Now there's people working in the community to try to set up grocery stores again so people don't have to buy their food from convenience stores.

I mean, there's a whole range of things, and to suggest that this is some simple issue I think is to not be thoughtful enough about the kind of issue we're dealing with here.

When Mr. Pringle suggested that we raise the rates by 70 per cent, I did a calculation to see what it would cost us to do that. I said, well let's take a look at that. To raise it by the amount he suggested would be an additional 100 million a year. Now maybe that would be a very good expenditure, but I haven't had that kind of a decision on my plate to make — whether I spent the 100 million here or there.

The other thing I might say is you've said we cut our budget. We have not cut our budget. The only decreases in our budget have been from people moving off of assistance onto employment — 6,800 families and 15,000 children who have left social assistance.

As well in our housing area we saved considerable money through a reduction in interest on debt. These are not cuts, these are savings. And there's no question that in this particular budget whatever surplus resources we had, we put into extending the number of people who qualified for the Saskatchewan Child Benefit. There's now more families who qualify for that \$226 amount I mentioned to you for one child.

And there's also more families who, in the course of not too long from now — I know it's always difficult to wait — but who will qualify as well for the housing supplement.

And so any statements of cuts would not be accurate. And there have been improvements in at least a couple of areas that will have a significant impact on the lives of around 10,000 families.

Ms. Bakken: — Madam Minister, you've indicated that there have not been any cuts to the budget. The budget has been reduced by four and a half million dollars. And 1 million of that is out of the department ... or the area in your department called supporting families and building economic independence.

Another 10 million was taken out of housing. And yet in the government's own words, they are promoting independence and self-sufficiency among Saskatchewan families. And housing certainly has been one of the areas that you have championed.

And I believe I asked this same question before. How can we possibly be taking \$10 million out of housing and at the same time telling the people of Saskatchewan that that is a priority? We're taking \$1 million out of supporting families and building economic independence, and yet you tell me that children and families are your other priority. So how does this balance? And you ... I have the budget document in front of me. It is reduced by four and a half million dollars.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Okay, I'll just explain the housing issue here. Since 1997 when the federal/provincial social housing agreement was signed, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has reduced its operating costs. It used the resulting savings to pay off mortgages and other debt totalling about 135 million which has reduced its interest expense by about 24 million. And then at that same time interest rates have declined, and inflation on expenses have been relatively low. So it has a lower cost.

Over time, proactive management strategies and favourable economic conditions have freed up funding to enable the province to afford the new housing policy framework, HomeFirst. And at the same time ... (inaudible) ... I've been having trouble with my lips today ... SHC (Saskatchewan Housing Corporation) continues to reduce its debt load. So I don't know any better way to explain this. I don't know if you'd like to take another run at it, Darrell Jones, assistant deputy minister, but that's ...

Mr. Jones: — I think that captures it for the most part. What basically that's indicating is that there is sufficient resources, as a result of the management and the revenue sources that we have, that we can take that reduction in the transfer and yet still provide all of the initiatives as outlined in the HomeFirst announcement.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — And housing money can't be used for anything else, right? Like it's not ...

Mr. Jones: — What the minister is referring to is under the social housing agreement with the federal government, there is a requirement that any resources coming under that agreement would be utilized for housing within the province.

Ms. Bakken: — I'm sure that you're speaking about the monies that are coming from the federal government that they are earmarked for housing, not the money that the province is putting in. We're not talking about the money from the federal government. We're talking about the money that the province has in their budget.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We have to match. It's a 25/75 matching program. So in order to get their 75 per cent, we have to match with 25 per cent.

Ms. Bakken: — So the 23 million down to 14 million from last year to this year, then there was that much less received from the federal government as well. Is that what you're saying?

Just to clarify, you indicated that 75 per cent came from the federal government; 25 per cent had to be matched by the province. So if the province is spending \$10 million less, I'm assuming then that the federal government is spending 30 million less.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, I think I might have confused things further. That's the renovation part of the housing which is a part where there's a lot of activity. But you go ahead.

Mr. Jones: — Right, the 75 per cent/25 per cent cost sharing is under the renovation programming, so it doesn't have a particular bearing on the social housing agreement. It is in fact a separate agreement.

Ms. Bakken: — I still don't believe that there's been an explanation of how you can say that you have an increase in the budget but you actually have a decrease. And further to that I would like an answer to why is there 1 million less being put into supporting families and building economic independence? What programs were cut to enable that to happen?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Okay, I'm just going to make one more little run at this housing answer. Like it's a combination of having freed up money so that even though there was less of a need to draw money out of the General Revenue Fund, we actually still had more money to spend because we saved money on interest, on debt, and on general management in the department. So we were able to not draw as much money out of the General Revenue Fund and still have surplus money with which to fund new housing initiatives. We figure we've got as much money in housing right now as we actually can have a capacity to deliver through the marketplace that we work with to deliver these things.

On the other question, of the other money, net . . . I don't know where the best place to start in this is. I'll start right at the top. For the packages of programs and services that were included in the department's 2003-04 budget, net expenses are less than they were in 2001-02. In 2002-03, government reorganization transferred housing and career and employment services into the department, and transferred young offenders programming out — a net increase of almost 39 million. Actual net expenses have increased by only 26 million. Therefore within the current package of programs and services, total expenditures have decreased by about 13 million.

At the same time, we made about 20 million of investments

since the end of 2001-02 that were new investments that we have not made before — 3.8 million of employment and income supports to persons with disabilities; 2.1 million of new community capacity for persons with intellectual disabilities; we put 5.7 million into wage gaps for people who work at CBOs (community-based organization); another 2 million to develop new licensed child care spaces; 1 million to increase child care subsidies for low-income families; and 5 million for wage increases as laid out in the collective bargaining agreement.

So when we explain how it was possible to make 20 million in new investments, transfer in 39 million of programs and services and only increase expenditures by 26 million, it was because of since our Building Independence campaign, the cumulative savings on people who have moved off of assistance and onto employment have totalled over 415 million. And over 10,000 families and individuals no longer rely on social assistance. And it seems to me actually in your campaign platform that you had identified this as a place to save money. And we have saved money, so it is possible.

By 2001-02, SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan) expenditures have decreased over 67 million from the pre-Building Independence levels. And the budget in 2003-04 included a further reduction of almost 16 million, again related to the success of this program.

Now you know we can continue the discussion about whether the reinvestments that we've made that I listed for people with disabilities, wage gaps, child care, etc. were the right reinvestments, but certainly money has been reinvested at the same time as money has been saved.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Do you have a number on how many people that have come off of social assistance actually have permanent jobs, and how many are now on student loans as opposed to on social assistance . . . or receiving student loans through social services, as opposed to social assistance?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The program has been undergoing an evaluation and a major part of the evaluation has been tracking and interviewing clients at three different periods — three months, nine months and twelve months — after they initially called the contact centre. The evaluation also surveyed department staff to see whether changes for reducing some of the administrative burden on staff and freeing up more time to work with clients.

When contacted one year later, approximately 40 per cent of the people who had gone through Jobs First were employed and independent of social assistance. After one year, four out of ten, 39 per cent of people who had attended Jobs First sessions were employed and completely independent. A further 13 per cent were receiving additional education on a full-time basis or were going to school part-time and working. Two out ten were on income assistance.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'd like to move to another area and ask a question regarding methadone and the methadone program that is in place in the province. And when I asked the question of the Minister of Health last year, in June of

last year in the Assembly, about the funding, he indicated that the Department of Community Resources and Employment social assistance program provides special needs payments for qualifying clients.

I would like to know what dollars are allocated from the Department of Community Resources and Employment to this program, and what are the qualifier . . . How does a person on social assistance qualify to receive having their methadone paid for?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We would have to get information out of the special needs program, and we don't have that detail, but we'll certainly provide it to you.

I mentioned I wanted to correct a misinformation that was provided last time. Can I quickly do that now? The committee, Standing Committee on Human Services, received this information when the department's estimates were considered on April 29, 2004.

And the information that needs to be corrected relates to the maximum benefit levels that are available under the residential rehabilitation assistance program, known as RRAP. In particular the information relates to RRAP for homeowners with a disability, RRAP for rental properties, and home adaptations for seniors' independence.

On February 27, 2004 the province did negotiate a new three-year program agreement with the federal government. In fact, it was the one that we announced with Mr. Goodale today. When department officials responded to questions raised by the committee on April 29, they inadvertently used outdated information rather than the new agreement that has been signed, that the benefit levels are effective April 1, 2004.

So I'll just read into the record that the forgivable loan levels for homeowners with a disability have increased from 12,000 to 16,000 in southern Saskatchewan, from 14,000 to 19,000 in northern Saskatchewan.

The old program also had repayable loans of 6,000 in the South and 7,000 in the North which were included in the maximum benefit levels reported to the committee. It was our view that this created unnecessary hardship for low-income people and so we have eliminated the repayable portion and they now receive these funds without having to repay them.

The second point is that the forgivable amounts for rental RRAP have increased from 18,000 to 24,000 in the South, and from 21,000 to 28,000 in the North.

Third, the grant to seniors for home adaptation so they can live more independently has increased from 2,500 to 3,500 in all parts of the province. And this would be things like grab bars and things that help people be more mobile in their home.

And I do apologize to the committee that we did not provide the updated information on April 29. But the good news is that low-income people in the most critical need of home renovations will benefit considerably from these program changes.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister, for that clarification. I'd just like to ask about third party groups that do receive funding from the department. What is the process to ensure that the funds are actually spent for what they were given? Where is the accountability and who makes sure that that accountability is forthcoming?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, this is an area that has been undergoing considerable change, as have governments, in terms of outcome-based measures for programs rather than just expenditure measures. And the community organizations, now typically rather than just grants, we tend to have more of a contractual arrangement for services. These are RFP'd (request for proposal) where grants . . . where community groups apply to provide the service. And there are contractual obligations.

And then there's an appendix that sets out, through some common work that we do with them — they work on it; we work on it together — to identify some outcome measures. And then they report on those outcome measures. And this is a process that's been in place for the sort of more focused process under career employment services for about four years now.

And so there's still work being done on making sure that the outcomes that we're measuring are measurable, and that they really reflect the success of the program. Sometimes it's a little bit hard in intangible areas that we're often dealing in here. But certainly there's a much greater expectation that people are able to show results. And in some cases organizations are not always happy about this because, you know, sometimes you're working with an individual who may come back to a program five or six times before they actually get through the hoop and succeed at their education program or whatnot. It's kind of like quitting smoking? you don't always do it on the first go round.

So we're trying to find the right balance of reasonable expectations for success, along with the resources that are required to create that success and the length of time required to do it. But it's certainly an expectation. It's certainly built into the RFP and the monitoring process with the organizations. And it's certainly a piece of work that continues to be worked on to strengthen it into the future.

Ms. Bakken: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I guess the concern is not with the up front . . . obviously I'm assuming that if they apply up front to receive funding from the department that they have to meet certain qualifications to receive it. The concern that I have, and that many people have that have contacted my office, is what is ever done after the funding is given to ensure that actually the people that were to spend the money spent it, and that they spent it for the intended purpose. And I'd just like to read to you from a letter I just received from a person who was involved in such an organization and is very concerned. And without giving any names out, her last paragraph is:

In conclusion, this letter is not out of spite and anger, but out of concern for my community. On a daily basis I see people in need and it makes me sick to know that the programming dollars are not reaching whom they are intended for because of fraudulent activities of people that are working there. Action should be taken as swiftly as possible.

And this is just one of many people who are involved in organizations who are very concerned because they see fraudulent activities, misappropriation of funds, and yet they run up against a roadblock of who do they turn to to make sure that this does not happen.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again different groups . . . I guess there would be two types of things one would be concerned about. One is the actual ability to deliver a credible service, whatever one's good intentions. And the other one would be truly inappropriate activity or even fraudulent activity. In the instance of accountabilities, they all would have to have audited reports. The contractual arrangement requires an outcomes-based assessment of whether they're actually achieving what they're being funded to do.

And when we do receive complaints of inappropriateness, certainly every single one of those are investigated and we work with organizations to deal with any weaknesses that are identified in their organizations. If in fact the weaknesses were so great as to be counterproductive to the reason why that organization exists, then there would certainly be a very real possibility that they lose their funding.

But again, we can't do it on the basis of a letter without investigating it. But we do take every . . . I mean, I've seen two or three letters since I've been in this job, and considering the hundreds of organizations that we work with, I guess that's to be expected. But I can assure you that we have program staff that go into those organizations and their boards of directors and examine the claims that are made and make a determination of whether in fact there's a basis for it. If there's actual fraud involved, certainly the police would be involved.

Ms. Bakken: — Madam Minister, is there a person in your department whose responsibility it is to actually read the financial statements, the reports that are given, to ensure that — from that basis at least — that the funds are going to where they are intended?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well actually there would be many such people because there's groups of people that work in child care. There's groups of people that work in community living division, and they all work . . . that's what they do. They work with the community organizations that are providing services and would review their financial statements.

And if a financial statement was not accurate, it would have a qualification by the auditor who audited those books. And it would be then, by that method, brought to our attention. Or again, the other method is sometimes people will write a letter, but I don't find that happens very often.

But certainly there are program staff. In all the various areas that we have of funding relationships and contractual relationships with community providers, there would be program staff working with those people.

Ms. Bakken: — Madam Minister, the reason that I question this is because, as I'm sure you're aware of the issue that I brought forth some months ago, I'm waiting for the Provincial Auditor to investigate on the Métis addiction centre in Regina, and that has offices throughout the province. This issue had

been brought forth by Métis people themselves to government for several years asking for someone to look into what was going on because they felt that the money was being misappropriated. Nothing happened — nothing — until I raised it in the legislature and raised it publicly.

And now I have another letter from another person who's concerned about another organization that is funded by government, and there's misappropriation of funds according to her. Nothing is happening. No one is paying attention. This information was filed in their annual report. I went to the library; that's where I got the information. It was in black and white. I could tell by reading that there were . . . the money was not being appropriated into the right places where it had been budgeted and where it had been allowed to be spent originally. And yet nothing was done.

So that's why I'm asking the question: who is looking at these issues? Who is ensuring that the dollars . . . These are precious tax dollars. They are going to, in most cases, what we know are upfront organizations that are doing what they are intended to do. But who is ensuring that these dollars are spent in the most appropriate way and for what their intention was?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I guess I'll say two things here. One is that there are many good-hearted people out in the community who are sometimes attempting to do things that they may not have the whole skill set that's required to do some of these things — whether it's financial accountability or management or human resources or whatever. And we do work with people to try to help them improve what they're doing. It's not so much of a judgemental relationship as it is an attempt to work together with their intent to be helpful in the community and help them improve what they're doing.

Now, there's some things that cannot be improved. And I would say that if you're aware of any like that, it's your obligation to let us know so that we can act on it as we would.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and I appreciate that, and I will be contacting your office with this particular issue that I now have received.

Another question, and this also relates to a letter that I received recently, actually May 4, from an individual in Saskatoon, very concerned because her daughter is trying to start a business as opposed to getting a job and yet has run up against roadblock after roadblock with Social Services in trying to have help getting from A to B.

She's a single mom and she's struggling. She has a business up and going, but she's been — I believe in the words of the mother — been told by Social Services, you know what, like, move on. You can't make the business go. And I'm wondering what the department's policy is on this issue?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I need more information. Is she wanting social assistance from the department while she . . . Like, why is she involved with the department at all would be my question?

Ms. Bakken: — Well my understanding is the new policy with the department is that if you're trying to . . . if you're

low-income that you can receive a supplement in order to allow you to become self-sufficient and that the department is willing to help low-income families move from social assistance to being self-sufficient.

There's a gap there, and my understanding is that you were talking about poor, the working poor and supplementing them so that they can have the dignity of work and going to a job everyday and not having to fall back on social assistance 100 per cent, because it was, life was better there. The goal, I believe, of your department is to move people to employment.

Her choice was self-employment as opposed to getting a job. But she can't make it in the interim without continued . . . she was on social assistance before. She took some training. She's now trying to be her own boss. She wants to start her own business. In fact she already has started, but she's having trouble sustaining herself and her child in the interim. And yet she's running into roadblocks.

My question is, is there assistance for people that are trying to do this as opposed to those that go out and get a job and are employed by someone else?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'm going to ask Phil Walsh to answer that question because I don't know how we involve ourselves with people who choose self-employment as a route although I must say that is a bit of a leap, but anyway . . .

Mr. Walsh: — Yes we would. As with anyone pursuing employment, the same with self-employment, there would be an individual assessment of the situation to determine if the venture was viable. And if it appeared it was going to be viable, then it is possible there could be assistance. But we would need to know more about the particular situation.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you. I will then forward this information to you as well, Madam Minister, and look forward to a response for these people.

Another question, is there . . . And I'm not even sure if this is your area because of the overlap between Health and Social Services, but I have a mother in Weyburn who has a disabled child and who is very high needs. And she oftentimes feels that she is in desperate need of a respite bed to give relief for herself. And her concern is that the only respite bed that is available to her is in Regina or Saskatoon and that she's got . . . If it's only for two to four hours, it doesn't pay for her to drive to Regina and to put this child in respite for two to four hours. And wondering what other solutions there are, if there's any assistance in order to hire someone in Weyburn to assist with respite.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Betty West will answer that question.

Ms. West: — Betty West, executive director of community living. The respite options that we have available for families begin, first of all, with working with the family on the best plan for their son or daughter. And there's certainly some options available.

In terms of the respite support that families have available to pay a caregiver, to pay someone who may come into their home

to provide that respite in the home or to provide it outside of the family home, there are a number of respite . . . what we call respite opportunities within some of our group home programs around the province. There are two specific resources for respite in Regina and Saskatoon, and those are specific respite resources. But those are the only two that are designated in particular communities, apart from some of the group home opportunities.

But certainly within the outreach respite program and some of the dollars that families can access, they can use that to provide the supports within their own home. For families where there are some very particular needs for their child, we can also begin to look at some other in-home supports where the needs go beyond what will be expected to be supported through the respite program.

Ms. Bakken: — What is the criteria around that? I mean, I know that this lady has tried desperately for assistance and help and seems to run up against roadblocks. So what would be the avenue that she would take in order to access this respite?

Ms. West: — The approach that we use with a family is to sit with them and look at specifically what the needs are. The decisions about the kind of support is made on an individual basis in terms of the particular needs of the child and the resources that the family might have available to them. And we do that under a section of The Child and Family Services Act, which is the preventative services piece.

So I mean, the criteria are that there's an unmet need. The need is above and beyond what is available to the family through the regular respite program. If there are particular medical needs, then home care and some of the services through Health also may become part of that plan.

Ms. Bakken: — Okay. So this . . . and I'm sitting here listening to you, okay, and I'm the mom that needs this care. And I'm like, okay, I heard everything you said. Where do I go? What do I have to do? What's my first step? And how many steps am I going to have to take in order to get this resolved because that is the whole problem — people are caught in the system. They have a need. They don't know where to go. They phone Social Services in Weyburn. They get told they have to call the call centre. They call the call centre. They're sent somewhere else, and there's this whole big runaround.

And at the same time these people, many of them are struggling with the daily events of life that they have. And it's very difficult for them to find the time — and in many cases, quite frankly, the energy — that they have to expend to try and find a solution.

So what I'm asking is, what is the process for this lady to get an answer?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We can work with you to give you an exact name and contact, but there is a Community Living worker who would be the resource person who would help her get the right services, and there is one in Weyburn. And I don't know why it would be that she wouldn't be connected up, or whether she did and didn't get what she was looking for.

I know that for some people who have individualized funding — because I know I've met many times with parents with this situation — one of the difficulties they have is even if they have funding there are not enough people willing to do that kind of work because quite often the people who are very high needs, it's not easy to look after them. And that's a very difficult question.

I know my Adopt an MLA visit with my family, they feel very fortunate that they have a family in the neighbourhood that's very willing to step in for them. But that is the only family they found that's willing to do that. And I think they are constantly concerned that if that family leaves, what else would they do because it's partly the resources. But even when the resources are there, you still have to find that right person to do it, and that can be a challenge sometime. But we can get her hooked up with the Community Living person who can help her sort through that.

The Chair: — Jason.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister, and thanks to your officials for being here today.

I have a question surrounding a number of individuals that have come to see me wanting to provide services for recovery from drug abuse for teenagers and setting up facilities, and the roadblocks that they've come into when approaching the government on funding for this.

So if the minister or one of her officials could outline, what is the process for individuals to set up a care home. What was being envisioned in one case was a very small one in nature, looking at three or four clients over a six-month period. It had a Christian element to it which the individuals said, in meeting with the department, caused problems. Could the minister, or her officials I would suspect, outline what the process is for service delivery groups to receive contracts from the department.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'm a little unclear because we do . . . We are involved in provision of group homes but not specifically connected to addictions. That would be Health. So was that part of the problem, that it wasn't really our mandate?

Mr. Dearborn: — My understanding from . . . There was two different groups involved. One was based out of Saskatoon which was a much larger facility — I believe based somewhere in the country — and the other was a rural setting. Both of them said that the problems were in the philosophical direction that they were going to implement. There would be rules set down in the delivery of the services around the particular religious beliefs that these organizations adhere to. And they were willing to have some level of funding put in, but they basically felt that they were stonewalled.

So again to the minister: it was a recovery program; one was female only; the other was for young men and women, you know, teenage children. What would the process be for a group that wanted to start such a facility to enter into a contract with the department and receive funding for providing the service?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I've been around long enough in the whole area of community services to know that there have been many different philosophies about how to do things, and I don't know how much of a part that did or didn't play.

But the way we typically do it is there would be a need identified for a particular type of service, and then if we did have the funding available it would then be RFP'd. A person couldn't necessarily just decide to do it and then do it. It would be that there would be a need identified and some funding available, and then they would make a proposal in the request for proposal process where we would identify the place where that service was needed, the kind of program that we felt needed to be delivered there, and the direction or philosophy driving that program.

If a person wanted to do something that was quite different than that, I think they would have to look at a more private model where the people who are there would be there by virtue of some other support system other than the public support system. I mean, it's a little bit like private schools/public schools.

But if in fact there is a need identified — and again I say, and we have funding available because any kind of 24-hour care is hugely expensive — and there would be an RFP process.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Minister. Could you identify for the committee today how many RFP proposals were put forth in the last fiscal year and how many were granted a contractual relationship with the department?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes. The only RFP we've put out in a while is for a residential facility. It was the safe house in Regina.

Mr. Dearborn: — Madam Minister, so just to clarify this, it's the department that puts out a request for proposals and then receives them and then adjudicates them. Is that the correct methodology?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — That's the most recent example and we just haven't been doing a lot of that.

Mr. Dearborn: — The delivery of the majority of the department's services then happen by the department first and foremost and, secondly, this would be a very much smaller aspect of the delivery of service through contractual relationships, with groups providing service on behalf of the department after approval through a request for proposal.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The vast majority of our group homes are people who are disabled or those kinds of things. It's not people who have, I think, the kind of issue you're talking about particularly, unless, in fact it's the safe house kind of issue.

If it was actually that we identified a need for a specific service to be delivered, there's many organizations and the problem you get into if you just give it to one organization who's come forward, then the next day you've got a question, well why didn't these people get a chance to apply or why didn't these people get a chance to apply. So you're kind of darned if you and darned if you don't when it comes to . . . I mean, I think that's very difficult myself. I've been in the situation of meeting

with people sometimes who have very innovative ideas, but that just happens to be because I've met with them. There could be a person down the block who's got an equally innovative idea who would like it funded.

So the RFP process is determined to be a fair way to let people know that there's an interest in providing such a service, and then to give people some equal opportunity to be the service provider.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Madam Minister. My final question. Through the RFP process is there an evaluation process once it's granted for evaluating the services provided, and is there a bid process at all open?

So if proposals are put forth by more than one group, is it identified what problem needs to be solved, who can solve it with how much money, and then a review process of how well the results worked. For example if it's treating individuals with addiction problems, that some of them got into literacy programs, 40 per cent stayed clean, etc., etc. Is that in place in the process and if not, will it be in the future?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Those would be exactly the kind of things that would be evaluated, both in the proposal and then in the operation. For example, the Kids First program, some of the measurements . . . the communities actually chose which organization they felt in the community would be best able to deliver that. And then those proposals were reviewed for their ability to deliver the Kids First philosophy of programming, and then they're monitored as to what kind of progress the parents are making under that program.

And I was actually really pleased when I saw the results, which is how I know there are some, because I did read the evaluation of the program. So yes, that is what's done.

The Chair: — Mr. Toth.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, just I'd like to do a bit of a follow-up on what my colleague was raising in regards to families with children with disabilities. And as you mention the Adopt an MLA program, and I'm sure many of our colleagues in this Assembly have had the pleasure of meeting with families in their constituencies and understanding the complexities and the challenges that families face. However, it's certainly by . . . I think everyone would really benefit by meeting some of these families when you see the care and the love they have for a child with a disability and the demands on their time. And my colleague from Weyburn was mentioning about some of the support mechanisms.

A question that was raised when I met with the family that I was invited to meet with was, is there any monetary support for some . . . for individuals who would provide some care? A lot of these families tend to — yes, rely on family members. In the case that I'm talking of what they find, it's very difficult while . . . If the parents are around or the grandparents, if you will, that's a real asset. But there are times when the grandparents aren't there, and it's not always easy to find someone who has the ability to come and provide some care and support so, say, the parents can go out for an evening. And their suggestion was even some monetary support at times versus just a respite bed,

whether or not that is an avenue that has been looked into or could be pursued?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I just want to be clear what you're asking. Are you talking about our ability to pay family members to provide respite?

Mr. Toth: — No, I'm talking about other . . . Madam Minister, say, other members. Like, I think in many cases they just expect as family . . . It's a family, for example, in this case the grandparents. The grandparents consider it just a part of . . . and they look forward to providing some care. But outside of immediate family members, if you have to go beyond family and try to find some . . . an individual like, paying a babysitter for example to come in and provide a bit of care, some support in that avenue on the monetary level, whether there's anything of that nature available.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Right now the policy is \$32 a day, 60 days a year. Now I would have to get Betty West to speak to whether you're able to reconfigure those amounts in different ways, but again the family that I met with was doing this. They had the funding support and they had found a family that was able to do it.

Ms. West: — For families who have children, the eligibility is, as the minister said, \$32 a day up to 60 days a year. But certainly, based on what the family needs are, there's some flexibility within that. There are some families who may need to have . . . be able to pay more for a caregiver and they don't need as many days. So we can certainly be flexible in terms of the actual arrangements with the family.

Mr. Toth: — . . . Madam Minister, because I think that is one of the concerns. Like when you say \$32 dollars a day, and let's say it's for an evening, and just . . . realization that there is the recognition that it may not be all day but that there are some support mechanisms that can be drawn on for that type of support.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll just comment that I do think this is hugely important. I have a lot of empathy for people who, aside from all the regular challenges of parenting, are prepared to stay involved in their children's lives and to not take some other road. And I do think it's . . . all of us should be as supportive as we can be, both through programming and other ways with families.

And certainly, you know, when you take over a portfolio you sort of set yourself some things that you'd like to work on in particular, and the food issue is certainly one that I want to work on in particular. But so is this issue, the issue of families with family members with disabilities because I think it's a very pressing issue for those families.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. I'd like to thank the minister and her officials. And I'd just remind you that if there's anything you're providing for the committee, any information, we would like 15 copies of it.

Now I would entertain a motion from a member that this committee adjourn its considerations for the estimates of the Department of Community Resources and Employment. Ms.

Bakken, thank you.

And now we could have a member move that the committee do now adjourn. Mr. Morgan, thank you very much. All agreed? Committee is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 16:57.

