



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Yorkton

Mr. Cam Broten, Deputy Chair
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Ms. Doreen Eagles
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Mr. Glen Hart
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Ms. Judy Junor
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Jim Reiter
Rosetown-Elrose

Ms. Joceline Schriemer
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 20:37.]

The Chair: — Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Human Services Committee for this evening. Tonight we're considering vote 36, estimates for Social Services.

Tonight's committee members: substituting for Mr. Broten, we have Mr. Forbes. And we have Ms. Judy Junor. On the government side, we have Mr. Glen Hart. Substituting for Ms. Joceline Schriemer is Mr. Denis Allchurch. We have Minister Reiter and Ms. Doreen Eagles.

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — Tonight's agenda, as I said, is vote 36, Social Services estimates. It's on page 129 in the Estimates book. I will shortly ask Minister Harpauer to open with a statement and introduce her officials. And I'll invite any officials, when they come to the mike for the first time, to please introduce themselves for the purposes of Hansard. Ms. Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the committee members tonight. The team that I have with me this evening is, to my right, Marian Zerr, the deputy minister of Social Services. To my left is Bob Wihlidal, the assistant deputy minister of income assistance and disability services.

Behind me I have Alan Syhlonyk, the assistant deputy minister of corporate services. Cheryl Senecal, the assistant deputy minister of child and family services. Don Allen, the acting assistant deputy minister of housing. Miriam Myers, the executive director of finance and administration. Doug Scott, the director of benefits policy. Jeff Redekop, the executive director of income assistance, disability services program and service design. Gord Tweed, director of income assistance and disability services operational policy and standards.

Lynn Allan, the executive director, child and family services program and service design. Wayne Phaneuf, the executive director of child and family services community services. Jennifer Colin, the director of child and family services program effectiveness. Tim Gross, the executive director of the housing development. And Glenda Francis, the executive director of Public Services Commission HR [human resources] services within Social Services.

So this year's budget, Mr. Chair, this year's budget process was a time for our government to review all of our programs and services to ensure that they were meeting a need effectively, that they fell within the mandate of our respective ministries, and that they aligned with our government's priorities and promises.

Our government has boldly committed to expenditure restraints at a time when other provinces in our country have exceeded spending. Therefore the fact that the Social Services budget has been increased by over \$34 million, the third budget increase

since we formed government, demonstrates strongly the commitment that our government has to those most vulnerable within our society.

When we first formed government in 2007, I very, very quickly identified gaps and neglect throughout all of the areas that fall within the responsibility of Social Services. Housing was not keeping pace, programs and services had fallen behind in meeting the needs of our current economic reality, and vulnerable people were facing increasing complex challenges with diminishing supports from the very ministry tasked to help them. Within the areas of affordable housing, child and family services, people with disabilities, and income assistance, our government has been very aggressive in introducing a number of new initiatives in filling in the gaps and neglect left behind by the previous government and in strengthening many of our existing programs and services so that they better meet today's economic reality.

The budget will continue to build on our commitments, many of which were multi-year in nature, and it introduces a new home ownership program called head start on a home. Child and family services will see an increase of over 24.5 million. With this increase our budget will have, in two and a half years, increased the funding for child and family services by 106 per cent — more than the funding provided by the previous NDP [New Democratic Party] government.

There can be nothing more important than our children, and yet in 2007, it was beyond a doubt the most neglected file within the Ministry of Social Services. Our government, putting children first, has committed to implementing an electronic case management system, and we will be the last province in our country to do so.

We had appointed an assistant deputy minister who will be solely dedicated to child welfare. We substantially increased supports and programs for foster families and the Saskatchewan foster family association. We initiated the family finders program to assist with the sourcing and proper matching of children to out-of-homes resources. We increased funding for family support services by 1.3 million as well as the 13.3 per cent increase that all CBOs [community-based organization] received.

We have increased funding for extended family caregivers by 46 per cent. We have increased the food allowance for group homes by 80 per cent. We have almost doubled the funding provided to the mobile service crisis services. We have provided 1 million in funding for the development of — the first in our province — emergency shelter for youth aged 15 to 18. And we have initiated or completed 144 new residential spaces across our province for children in our care to relieve the pressure on our foster families.

And all of these efforts, Mr. Chair, are showing tremendous results. The number of children in out-of-home care resources has decreased. The number of children placed in the custody of a designated person of sufficient interest — usually an extended family member — has increased, and in fact the number of children placed with extended families surpasses the number of children placed in foster care. The number of children living in

foster homes exceeding the number of approved spaces has decreased by 36 per cent, and many of those foster homes that have more than four children are fostering sibling groups.

Unfortunately, we recognize that more needs to be done, and we are looking forward to the completion of the work of the child welfare review that we launched in 2009.

In the community living division, our government has also made significant progress towards our four-year goal of eliminating the 440-person wait-list for people with intellectual disabilities that the previous NDP government left behind. To date 264 spaces have been created, 60 per cent of that goal, and we are ahead of schedule. The budget this year will show a reduction in the community living division section, but I assure you that is not a cut. We anticipate this year we will not be adding as many spaces for individuals with intellectual disabilities as we did last year because the budget document demonstrates year-over-year differences, there is a reduction over what was spent last year. But this year's allocation will continue to support our initiative of eliminating the wait-list, and with the spaces added this year — although less than last year — we will still be ahead of our 4-year goal.

This budget also supports the continuation of the development of the Saskatchewan assured income for disability, or the SAID program. The disability community has long asked for a separate, dignified, less intrusive income program, and for far too many years their request has fell on deaf ears. Our government has been very pleased to work with the community in making their dreams come true. This year the working group, largely composed of leaders within the disability community, will continue to design an assessment tool that can be used into the future in evaluating who will qualify for the SAID program.

This budget also supports our commitment to CBOs with a 1 per cent increase. That will mean that in the two and a half years of our government, CBOs will have received an increase of 13.3 per cent, well ahead of inflation and the cost-of-living increases.

[20:45]

We still recognize however, as does the member from Saskatoon Centre who has read many petitions into the public record, that under the neglect and lack of funding by the NDP, CBOs fell behind in their ability to offer comparable wages. We value the hard work of our CBOs and the vital services that they provide. So although 13.3 per cent is a start in addressing the gap created by the NDP, we know that each year we need to remain committed and focused in valuing our CBOs and the services they provide.

In housing, the population of our province, for the first time in many decades, is growing. Unfortunately our previous government refused to believe that our province could grow, and therefore they were ill-prepared for the housing pressures that growth presents.

In the past two years of the NDP government, less than 200 affordable housing units were completed. In the two and a half years of our government however, our ministry has overseen the completion of more than 580 affordable rental housing

units. During that time, we have also helped more than 300 households to achieve home ownership, and we have assisted more than 2,400 low-to-moderate income households to improving the health, safety, and energy efficiency of their homes. Presently there are nearly 1,400 additional affordable rental housing units in various stages of development in our province. And with this budget we have introduced the development of a new home ownership program called head start on a home.

For income assistance, the variations in budget allocations for programs that fall under the income assistance are largely due to anticipated client number changes, with the exception of budgeted increases to accommodate adjustments for shelter allowance and the rental supplements that are reviewed every six months. Our government increased the seniors' income plan by 110 per cent and that increase continues in this budget. Our government also increased the Saskatchewan employment supplement as well as the income threshold for those who qualify, and those increases also continue in this budget.

Since the 2007 election, our government has increased the mileage rate paid for approved travel for clients. We have increased the utility allowance for the transitional employment allowance. And we've increased and indexed shelter allowance and rental supplements, the first province in the country to do so.

But we are experiencing in our province, just as every other province is at a time of a recession, an increase in citizens requiring income assistance. History will show that is always the case in a downturn in an economy. Fortunately however, although we have not been immune to the recession, Saskatchewan has fared far better than most. From April 2008 to December 2009, approximately in an 18-month time period, the caseload increases in Ontario were 13.2 per cent. In Manitoba, the increase was 9 per cent. In British Columbia, the increase was 23.2 per cent. In Alberta, the increase was 23.5 per cent. And in Saskatchewan, it was only 3.6 per cent.

We also need to be aware that, as a percentage of population, our dependency numbers have not dramatically increased. The population numbers have risen for the first time in decades. Gone are the days where we could compare dependency numbers year over year without concerns of the population because the population was a flat line or very close to it. Now the population numbers are relevant to the dependency numbers. As a percentage of our new population reality, in 2007-08 the dependency rate in our province was 5.3 per cent. In 2008-09 our dependency rate fell to 4.8 per cent. Now it is at 5.1 per cent, higher than last year but still below the 2007-08 dependency level.

Further demonstration of Saskatchewan being better positioned than other provinces was noted in the most recent Campaign 2000 report. Campaign 2000 tracks child poverty across our nation. And the quote from the latest report is this: "As the national economy gets back on track, Saskatchewan will be ahead of the curve thanks to its above-average performance through the recession."

So in conclusion, Mr. Chair, in every responsibility of the Ministry of Social Services, our government has been very

aggressive in introducing new initiatives and in improving and strengthening existing supports.

A great deal has been asked from the dedicated employees within the ministry, and I am so proud to say that they have responded above and beyond. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work, for their willingness to co-operate through some changes within our ministry, both in reorganization and in helping to make the program changes that I have just outlined.

I thank you for that time, Mr. Chair, and I am willing to entertain questions.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. And I believe Mr. Forbes has the first round of questions.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And before we get started, I noted that we had a late start and we're now at 10 to 9. And I had asked for three hours of questions. What time do you anticipate that the adjournment will be?

The Chair: — I have us starting at 8:36, so we're here until at least 11:36.

Mr. Forbes: — 11:36. Yes. Because I did ask for three hours of time. And I'm caught by the minister's remarks — and I'll get to a question — but we're not quite yet in election mode and comparing ourselves to the NDP and what we did. And I have to say that, you know, a government that's talking about open and transparency, the number of written questions . . . And I feel that the minister was citing numbers, and I often look forward to having those numbers at my fingertips because the written questions were answered. But I've noticed that there's been a real stop on answering written questions — questions that were answered before — and I don't know why. So I will endeavour to get the answers tonight.

But I do note that not only did we start at 8:36, but the minister took, I think, an extra long time to reflect on the history. And I have some questions for sure. But I will start with the first question because she did make a statement about keeping all their promises, and so I'm looking at her mandate letter.

And one that she is silent on, silent on as we move forward, is will the minister this year, or is there a promise broken, about reconvening the Saskatchewan legislature special committee to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children through the sex trade? This is clearly a campaign promise for the Sask Party. It was on their brochures. And they, you know, trotted it around. Is it not going to happen or is it going to happen?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. And thank you to the member for the question who just began by saying that this wasn't a campaign mode, but it sounded like it to me. I want to say, due to lack of co-operation, normally every member in the House has an opportunity to speak to the budget in the budget debate, and that was not the case this year. So I was one of the ministers that was not allowed the time to speak to the budget in the budget debate because of lack of time. And so therefore this was the first opportunity I have had to be able to outline a budget that quite frankly I am very, very proud of.

The child exploitation committee is in the mandate letter. But with the shift of the responsibility of sexual assault and domestic violence to the Ministry of Justice, that obligation also shifts to that ministry.

With the report that was produced from the committee when it was convened, an all-party committee convened when the NDP were in government, produced a number of recommendations. I forget just how many recommendations were in there. Very, very, very few were enacted and anything was done with them. It became a report that collected dust for the large part.

But those recommendations also largely were Justice in nature, and that is where it more appropriately belongs, and that is where that commitment will be.

Mr. Forbes: — As a follow-up then, I should be talking to the Minister of Justice about this, that he is prepared to answer this. I know that both ministers were kind of caught off guard in December when we raised the question about the domestic abuse outreach program. Nobody seemed to know what had happened to that program, and it was only through subsequent days when they found out what actually happened.

So is the Minister of Justice aware that he is now responsible for that part of the Minister of Social Services' mandate letter?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would assume that he is. But for the sake of the comfort of the member, I will have that discussion with him again and just assure that that is indeed the case.

I do want to point out that with the domestic violence program, it was in transition when you first asked the questions in the fall. We were well aware that decisions hadn't been completely made at that time, so therefore maybe you were disappointed in the answer. And to imply that it was a lack of understanding or knowledge would not represent what was actually happening in a fair manner.

The program was not cut. It was cut, or it was cut in half, quite frankly, when you sat at the cabinet table. It was a program that was conducted by five workers within the Ministry of Social Services. Your administration, when you sat at the cabinet table and made decisions, decided to cut the program in half and you didn't make any provisions for the services to be supplied elsewhere. So I really do question why all of a sudden you're passionately championing the value of the program. But the program does have value and so therefore it isn't a matter of cutting the program or the funding.

The funding was not cut either. We have a different service provider, and in the transition of domestic violence and sexual assault — that area being transferred to Justice — Justice is reviewing the entire system to identify gaps. And during the day, during working hours, Saskatoon Family Services will be providing that service, and Social Services is providing them with additional funding.

We must remember that a lot of the domestic violence occurs after-hours and at that time the Mobile Crisis Services handled the calls, and they still do to date. The Mobile Crisis Services were dramatically underpaid, and so we have doubled the funding to the Mobile Crisis Services or almost doubled it, as

well as they also got the 13.3 per cent increase that all CBOs have received. And so that is still in place.

Under the mandate of the child and family services, if there are children involved and the phone call is made during work hours, Social Services still responds. So what we're talking about is cases where there are no children that are at risk and are during work hours, and those cases will be responded to by Saskatoon Family Services.

Mr. Forbes: — Just a real quick simple question. We have been phoned about this — while we're talking about that program — and I have asked the Minister of Justice about this, that there were concerns about the personal files of women who are clients, that the files would be I assume still under the care of Social Services, and that they will be treated with all the due process in terms of that.

Because there have been calls about what's happening, are they going over to Justice, or are they going over to a community group? But just quickly, they're staying with you?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The files will remain with Social Services.

Mr. Forbes: — Then I'll ask some direct questions about vote 36, and I know my colleague has that. So I see that the FTE [full-time equivalent] staff complement has been reduced by 57 — 57 less employees. Can you talk a little bit about that, both in terms of where the reductions have taken place and what the long-term goals are of Social Services, because we understand it is a long-term goal to manage staff reductions over the next four, five years, I understand, and that there is a larger goal eventually.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question. And for all of the human resources questions, I'm going to ask my deputy minister, Marian Zerr, to answer those questions.

Ms. Zerr: — Good evening. Marian Zerr, deputy minister. In terms of the reductions thus far — so of the total of 15 and 42, the 57 that we have been asked to address through budget — we have addressed the first 15 effective the end of March, and the remaining 42 we have notionally put into the budget in terms of the different divisions of the ministry.

And while intending to be addressing the vacancies through three or four key strategies, the first would be that as a consequence of the implementation of the SAID program, the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program, there will be some simplification in administration which will allow us to achieve some efficiency there, certainly as we look at the decreasing . . . the change in value in terms of a staffing model. So some look in terms of the staffing model at Valley View will help us with some efficiencies. And an overall look across the ministry in terms of the approach for a lean methodology, we believe will help us considerably.

[21:00]

Mr. Forbes: — Can you give me a sense of the first 15 where . . . from which branches are coming from and the 42? And then also into the outlying years, how many, when you have a staff

complement of just about 2,000, are you looking at about 160, 200 people less working?

Ms. Zerr: — The staff complement, the FTE complement was 1,967 and our target is 1,910 for this current year.

Mr. Forbes: — What about outlying years? Because we understand that there was a long-term plan; this is not just a one-year plan for the government.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — On the go-forward, our government's going to be viewing it in a holistic approach. We can't afford . . . Of course in Social Services we have to remember that a large part of our FTEs are front line. The caseloads are still there, so in essence we cannot afford to give up any front-line positions.

So it may not, in the go-forward, be 4 per cent in every single ministry across the board. We have to look at whether it's a service delivery ministry such as ourselves as Social Services. Corrections and Public Safety is another one that I can highlight as a service delivery where its front-line workers are part of the FTE complement. You won't see that in Health because the FTEs are in, the front-line workers are in the regional health authorities and therefore don't show as FTEs.

So we're going to be looking at the entire picture of government in a go-forward. So it may not be 4 per cent in Social Services. It may be a higher percentage in another ministry because 4 per cent, of course eventually if you do that with Social Services, you're going to start eroding the capability of the front line. And that is not the intent of our government whatsoever.

Mr. Forbes: — I'll be asking more questions as we get to each division specifically to understand what the staffing is for each one. But I know my colleague from Moose Jaw Wakamow has some specific questions here.

The Chair: — Ms. Higgins.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to my colleague for giving me some time this evening.

Madam Minister, I have a few questions more specific to Moose Jaw and Moose Jaw region. Going through the Saskatchewan assistant rates, and when we specifically look at the shelter allowance, Moose Jaw is classed in tier C, which can make a difference at a number of levels of shelter allowance. Just a curiosity, how are the tiers established and what criteria is used for putting us in different tiers?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The tiers are established using CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] statistics. And the reason why, when we initiated indexing them by measuring them against CMHC statistics and also revisiting it and adjusting it every six months, is for just such the situation that you are identifying in Moose Jaw.

The last time that we did an adjustment, it was identified that the rates had considerably risen in Estevan, and Estevan was jumped up a tier to a different level. I believe, and I will definitely get this confirmed by my officials, I believe Moose

Jaw is on that edge where it's now, the average rent is at a point where there is a strong possibility in the next six-month adjustment which is in — very quickly — Moose Jaw may be adjusted to a different tier. But I will get Doug to answer this question.

Mr. Scott: — We constantly review the tier structure and we're aware that with the rapidly increasing rents in some communities, that there's more diversity within tiers. And Moose Jaw is definitely a community that we've got our eye on. We've got some plans in the works over the next few months to review the tier structure more thoroughly and we may make additional moves. We did move Estevan, I believe about a year ago, in response to rapidly escalating rents.

The rates for both the shelter support in SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] and TEA [transitional employment allowance] and in the rental housing supplement are based on CMHC studies. We're about six months out of date with those studies. It's just the lag time between receiving the information and actually implementing something, but six months is, we think, fairly responsive. And we are on a sort of a six-month cycle of reviews.

Ms. Higgins: — What is the information that would be contained in that type of analysis, like just generally? I don't want specifics but I mean what are things that you look at?

Mr. Scott: — Oh, okay. CMHC conducts twice annually a rental housing survey. So one would be conducted in the fall in October. The results would be released in December. Another one would be conducted in April of every year and the results would come out in about June.

And they actually survey private landlords. It's a fairly large sample and they gather rent data that way. The study is conducted primarily on basically apartment blocks. They have some rules about the types of units that are included in that study but it's primarily sort of conventional apartment block, row housing, that type of thing. Multiple unit housing.

Ms. Higgins: — So it's just a basic canvass of what's out there and what are you paying for it, or what you're charging for it?

Mr. Scott: — I'm sorry, I'm having trouble hearing.

Ms. Higgins: — So it's just a basic what's out there and what are landlords charging? That's all the criteria is? That's as scientific as it gets?

Mr. Scott: — So they base it on the average amount that landlords are charging.

Ms. Higgins: — Well I'm kind of surprised then. Because I know, speaking from my community, over the last . . . Within the last year we've lost a number of apartment blocks, whether being torn down for new developments, whether being lost to fire.

I can just give you a few numbers here. We lost one —the number of suites is at 54. There was another couple of buildings that were lost. That was another 64. Then we had a number of older buildings that were torn down because of a new

development downtown, the multiplex building. That took out another 21. And in the meantime new suites or apartments constructed, besides taking away three that we lost and three that were built, there's one new one from 2009. And in the meantime we've had, I mean, vacancy rates that are basically negative; 2008, Moose Jaw was point six vacancy rate. I think '09 we were at point eight. But I think anything under 1 per cent or actually probably even higher than that is considered a negative, that there's absolutely nothing out there to choose from.

And in the meantime, the average cost of rent in the city went from \$556 in 2008 to 593 in October of 2009. So it's been a struggle for many families. So I'm surprised . . . like this is ongoing for, you know, ever since . . . Well the last two years it's really been a struggle for many in the community to find a place and to be able to afford to buy a place with the amount of money that they have at their disposal.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The pressure that I have been watching closer in Moose Jaw has been the vacancy rate, which isn't affordability. That's availability. And it is serious in Moose Jaw, and we are aware of that. I've talked to your mayor about it and, you know, said to him that we need to talk as the head start for a home is introduced. I see that as . . . You know, Moose Jaw is a good place for families to be able to access that. We didn't have . . . The last expression of interest, unfortunately, we had absolutely no groups from Moose Jaw make a submission, which is very unfortunate. Moose Jaw's situation wasn't as bad as it is now for the low vacancy rate but now it is.

The rents costs in Moose Jaw, however, although they've gone up, are still relatively lower rents. When we're talking about the tiers and you're talking about an average of less than \$600, that in the tier system is low. In other cities that will be in tier A, for example. The average of the rent will be considerably higher. In Saskatoon, rent averages are considerably higher than 500-and-some dollars.

Ms. Higgins: — Then when we're looking at shelter rates for single, unemployable, even in the tier A, you're saying that over \$500 would be average or normal for Saskatoon or Regina?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The shelter allowance is 70 per cent of the average.

Ms. Higgins: — I guess I would disagree on your one comment that affordability is an issue as well as availability. When you look at social housing and the wait-lists that are there, we're looking at a total wait-list in Moose Jaw of 199. And that can be broken down: 60 seniors, 71 families for a total of 139. And then on the affordable side again there is a wait-list both on . . . Well you get into family with one and two and three bedroom requests which there's another 60 waiting.

Just in the last six months we've had a couple of buildings where they have seen their rents increased to the point . . . almost double. One fellow wrote me a letter and said, now with a recent increase of my rent from 385 to 625 . . . And that's a pretty big chunk to take when this gentleman is disabled and unable to work and he's on assistance. So that would put him on the single unemployable.

But he has about \$800 a month to live on. And this amount, I mean, it's static. It doesn't change. So when he's being asked to pay \$625 a month for rent, you don't have an awful lot left to pay for washing your clothes, your phone bill, electricity, some other minor bills and plus being able to eat. And many of these folks are having to use grocery budget to pay for increase in rent.

And there's absolutely nothing available out there to move to. Or there's no options out there for them. So would an increase in the tiers or change in the tiers or . . . Could it possibly mean an increase in some support for these folks?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Two things may apply to this particular constituent that you are raising the issue. You had mentioned that he has a disability. So the shelter allowance gives you 70 per cent of the average rent for the community as assessed by CMHC. If he has a disability, he may qualify for the rental supplement, which is an additional 40 per cent, so he may qualify for 110 per cent of the rent, the average rent within the community that he lives.

The other thing that we did because yes, availability under the pressures that I described in my opening statement is, is a big concern in many, many communities. And I understand that. So we did a significant change to policy within the Ministry of Social Services that if the vacancy rate in the community that the client resides in falls to less than 1.5 per cent — which is a significantly low vacancy rate — we will provide the shelter allowance or the shelter that they have, the amount that they need for six-month intervals, allowing them time, extra time to find a different place.

And we understand that that will be more difficult for them in situations where there just is no availability. And we will revisit it every six months so that he may get his pay, his rent paid for him as it is. If he experiences a sudden increase such as you have identified and he contacts his worker, that provision has been put in place by our government to address the vacancy rate issues.

Ms. Higgins: — So that's in place now?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's been in place for two years.

Ms. Higgins: — So then rent on an individual basis, it would be looked at on a case-by-case basis?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. That is looked at as case-by-case basis and it is for those situations such as you describe where there has been a sudden, significant increase that puts them at peril, and so they need to work closely with their caseworker, and in communities where the vacancy rate is below 1.5 per cent.

[21:15]

Ms. Higgins: — But when this gentleman has an income of \$800 a month, would that be considered too high? Is there a cap on total income anyway?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would have to, we would have to know his specific file, what his . . . I can get Doug to maybe

address this more because the details of how they assess the different allowances within a file, Doug would be far better to answer this.

Mr. Scott: — If I understood the question correctly, the question was, is there a cap on the maximum access shelter available through SAP?

Ms. Higgins: — Is there a cap on your income level before you can access any of these improvements?

Mr. Scott: — Is there a cap on the floor income level? Well the eligibility would be determined by income, so they would have to be eligible for SAP or TEA. However, the higher shelter rate in and of itself would make them eligible. So if they were on SAP or TEA and the vacancy rate was less than 1.5 per cent, we could provide excess shelter up to the actual.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. Now I know we looked into a number of things from our office to see if we could find anything to help this gentleman, so any other avenues would be welcome. But it is an issue. And I understand the minister's comments that there was not any proposals put forward from Moose Jaw at that point in time. But I know there is a community-based group that has rolled into a committee of city council that is working towards some solutions.

But there's a number of people that are struggling, and it's very difficult when they're kind of just too high to qualify for anything within Social Services. Or they're already accessing what they can, but they're still struggling to make ends meet or to be able to pay rent when they have no other options open to them.

So I'm interested in this piece that you just brought up. Maybe I could get some more information off you. I know my colleague had a quick question on this topic too.

Mr. Forbes: — Quick question. What is the name of this program? It's just for clarification. Is this called the excess housing allowance or something?

Mr. Scott: — It's the excess shelter provision, in SAP policy.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So if somebody's asking about it, that's what they need to ask for.

Mr. Scott: — Yes. So there are a prescribed range of circumstances under which we can provide more than the shelter allowance on the rate card.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Good. I think this was referenced in the Ombudsman's recent report, right?

Mr. Scott: — Right.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Well that's what I wanted to get.

Ms. Higgins: — And I wanted to jump to another topic. This whole issue . . . And I apologize. I didn't catch all of what you said at the very beginning, Minister, when you were touching on the whole area of reducing numbers in the civil service over the next four years, the initiative your government has

announced, and also some of the changes that were put in place to manage the budget deficit and bring a number of things into line.

Just for clarification, are the vacancies in Social Services being replaced and filled, the positions that are vacant at this current time?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to again ask the deputy minister to address any of the staffing issues.

Ms. Zerr: — So in terms of the vacancies, what we're trying to look at is really precisely, first of all, what are the most important things to fill? And so front line is being filled quickly — I shouldn't say quickly — appropriately, as quickly as we can do it. When there are vacancies in other parts of the ministry, we are asking ourselves the question, is this the best way to do it? Do we have appropriate span of control in place? Have we looked to make sure that this is the best way to do our business? So we're just simply putting some good oversight onto our human resource policy.

Ms. Higgins: — So then more specifically to the Moose Jaw region, can you tell me what the number of positions are in child protection?

Ms. Zerr: — I'm sorry. The number?

Ms. Higgins: — Can you tell me the number of positions in child protection in the Moose Jaw region?

The Chair: — Madam Minister, if I could just verify for Hansard, that was Mr. Doug Scott that spoke previously. And just a further reminder. If the officials could state their name when they come up to speak for the first time.

Ms. Zerr: — So in terms of the number of staff in child and family services in Moose Jaw, I don't have that level of detail here. But I'm certainly happy to get it to you.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. Well what I'm looking for is how many positions there are in child protection in Moose Jaw, in family services. How many of those are filled? How many are permanent positions? How many temporary? And if temporary positions, I guess, I'm worried about the temporary positions, and if they will be filled or they will fall victim to this whole attrition and how things may go. And I'm taking the minister shaking her head as a no, I'm hoping.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — In discussions that the deputy minister and I have had as well as the assistant deputy minister of child welfare, I cannot possibly imagine that that would be a position that would be even considered. But definitely the ministry will get the numbers for you. You have to . . . You know, with the number of different areas that we have of course, it would be pretty impossible to have all that detailed information here or we'd have a room full of binders. And we have quite a few here.

Ms. Higgins: — Well, you know, you've got half a room full of people so I thought just maybe you might have the information.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You never know.

Ms. Higgins: — While you're at it actually, I was going to ask the same questions about income assistance in Moose Jaw.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — How many positions? How many are perm, how many are temps, and if those will be retained or if there's any changes expected. And even if you bring the information back through the committee, I can get it through my colleague . . . would be fine. I guess that's the appropriate way to do it.

The other thing. There has been a great deal of discussion, rumours probably more than anything, about the reorganization in the Ministry of Social Services. Is it complete?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Again I will get my deputy minister to describe the whole reorganization exercise and where we are at with that.

Ms. Zerr: — I'm pleased to answer that question for you, and thank you. The reorganization began as phase 1 last summer. And so at this point it's envisioned as a four-phase process. So phase 1 I think was really establishing the principles for how we would move forward, and we based that on four key areas.

And so what we attempted to establish with reorganization were four key things: clear line of sight for accountability, optimizing our human resources to the best advantage possible, ensuring that we integrated policy and program planning and service design, and moving the culture forward, taking that cultural shift into a high performance organization and really focusing on leadership and moving things forward. That was all done within the context of a way to improve client service. So certainly serving our clients was at the heart of this initiative.

As we moved forward over the summer, the process was to establish how the organization should look to make sure that we had the capacity and the skills within Social Services to do those jobs and to establish the organizational chart. That was completed in October and we moved into phase 2, which was making sure as we move down the chart, all the way down to the bottom by the end of December, that every employee understood where they were in the chart, who their supervisor and their supervisor's supervisor and their supervisor's supervisor was and how that pertained to their program delivery; that they had a position number and a role descriptor; and that people were assigned and moved into their new roles and began to make it live and breathe.

Phase 3, which is the one we're in right now, is about taking many of the positions that were established and ensuring that we have the appropriate job descriptions assigned to them and the appropriate classification assigned to them, that they're in or out of scope as the case may be, working through the mechanics of making that breathe and making the new units function.

And phase 4 really is stopping and taking that look and saying, and so we expect that we got a large chunk of this right and of course we'll have made a couple of mistakes along the way, and let's fix those. So it is the evaluation phase. After that, as in any organization, you need to have that constant look, always taking that look and that renewal at least on an annual basis.

So we are now in phase 3.

Ms. Higgins: — So I had always understood that income assistance and family services were managed out of the Moose Jaw region, or for the Moose Jaw region out of Moose Jaw. But I'm told now they're not.

Ms. Zerr: — The services were managed out of Moose Jaw to the level that was available in Moose Jaw.

Ms. Higgins: — Well that's what I meant. Not province-wide. I mean in the region those services were managed out of Moose Jaw. But I'm told now they're split between . . .

Ms. Zerr: — Oh you mean, are the two services managed jointly?

Ms. Higgins: — Yes.

Ms. Zerr: — Is that the question that you're asking? They are no longer managed as in one manager managing both services. They are now managed child and family services, income assistance.

Ms. Higgins: — So then where are the managers located?

Ms. Zerr: — Specifically for that particular office — so the manager for child and family services is in Moose Jaw; the manager for income assistance is in Swift Current.

Ms. Higgins: — So the manager in Moose Jaw manages family services in Moose Jaw and Swift Current, and the manager in Swift Current for income assistance manages Swift Current and Moose Jaw?

Ms. Zerr: — Yes. We have an out-of-scope person in each location, one. But more importantly, I think if we want to talk about what's the value of line of sight, why is that important, why is that establishment of accountability so critical, if you look at the old structure, what you had was five regional offices who were structured under a regional manager responsible for all of the services of the ministry. That particular manager then managed, I won't say the crisis of the day, but certainly let's just say that their attention was on a lot of files at once. And all of those regional managers reported to one assistant deputy minister.

However, for programs like child and family services, the assistant deputy minister of that particular file had absolutely no reach down to the front-line child protection workers. So if you were a child protection worker in Moose Jaw, you had no relationship with the assistant deputy minister of child and family services, nor did you have any relationship with the policy folks of child and family services. There was no line relationship there at all. And so as a consequence, the ability to implement change in the system became very difficult because you kind of had to go down the organization like this and across and over and up and back and down again. There was not a clear line of sight.

Part of the purpose of the reorganization was to ensure that there was an ability from the assistant deputy minister of child and family services, from the one, brand new executive director

of operations who could now work with each of those regions from not just a collegial perspective, but from a line perspective which is important when you're trying to make change. To bring change to the challenges in foster care, you need to have not just collegiality but some ability to enact the change. And so there's now that ability to drive down into the system the policy changes that are necessary to bring about change in child and family.

Ms. Higgins: — I'm not sure how the line of sight is improved because I guess maybe I'm thinking of this at a different level than you are. But when you have split the jobs but they're covering the same territory, have you not increased expenses and time spent on the highway as the manager in Swift Current goes to Moose Jaw to do a job there and the manager from Moose Jaw goes to Swift Current to do the job there? They're passing on the Trans-Canada Highway, I'm sure.

[21:30]

Ms. Zerr: — We have not seen an increase in the operational expenses in terms of management, and we fully expect our managers to manage to the best of their ability. But when you focus management, you focus service delivery, and we did not have focused management.

Ms. Higgins: — So did you increase the number of managers in this reorg?

Ms. Zerr: — No.

Ms. Higgins: — No? Okay. Well I guess we'll see how it works, and I'm sure it's something that many people will be keeping an eye on just to see if it does work well.

The other question, I have a quick question on more on this specific side. There was an article in the Moose Jaw *Times-Herald* a short time ago, spoke to the issue of a policy and process for responding to inquiries from elected officials and that if any one of the offices were contacted by us, I guess, and asked to provide information about ministry policies, programs, and services, they were to be referred to a department, a director of legislative services for follow-up.

Now there was an article in the paper about this that spoke to a number of issues, and there was a comment from Trish Alcorn, director of communication for Social Services, said, the aim was not to prevent staff talking to politicians, and a clarification would be issued. Was there a clarification ever issued?

Ms. Zerr: — I actually approved that policy on Monday, I believe. And so I expect that to be out very shortly. And it certainly wasn't an intent to provide staff from talking to politicians. It was about making sure that we gave accurate and consistent information.

Ms. Higgins: — Were you getting complaints? You know, I guess the reason this surprises me is we've always had a very good working relationship with the professionals in Social Services. They were always courteous, always dealt with cases in a very timely manner. So I was surprised when I even heard about this.

And I have to tell you that the very first case that we phoned about, and it was going to be referred, we wouldn't get a response. We had a very formal, stiff kind of conversation which was somewhat awkward because neither of us knew what the heck was going on.

I hate to tell you this, but I have never got a response or my office has never got a response out of the ministry, an inquiry for more information or any type of acknowledgement that this case has been dealt with. So this has been a huge frustration, you know. And I'm sure it has been because I haven't spoken to the person who . . . And I'm sure it would have been . . . We would have received another call. So I'm assuming it's been dealt with.

Ms. Zerr: — I will check on the case if you will give us that information. However in terms of the policy, it is the same as takes place in other ministries. I think the significant issue is that we are a ministry that also has client cases, and so there was a misstep in terms of whether we were talking about overall communication or specific client cases. And that has been clarified.

Ms. Higgins: — So specific client cases will be dealt with as usual?

Ms. Zerr: — Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — And specific information or unusual information . . .

Ms. Zerr: — Just a process to make sure that we're giving accurate information.

Ms. Higgins: — So can I ask for the courtesy of a copy? Can I ask for the courtesy of a copy of the policy to be sent to my office so we can have a look at it there? Thank you very much.

Otherwise, Valley View Centre — you knew it was coming, you had to have — \$1.5 million in savings is being realized out of Valley View Centre which is the home for 230 residents just outside of Moose Jaw. Many of these residents are aging and, I would expect, needing more care, not less care. Where does the ministry expect to realize 1.5 million in savings?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question. The Valley View Centre, as you're well aware — it's in your home community — there's been no new admissions since October of 2002. And since that time, the number of clients or the residents at Valley View Centre and the staffing has been realigned, both previously when you were in the government, and again. It hasn't been realigned since we have formed government and that will be what this exercise will be about.

Currently there are 10 cottages operating, and there was sort of a look at how the Valley View Centre was operating and with the thought of maybe closing another cottage. However, the officials didn't feel that was wise yet. We are currently down to only 230 residents at Valley View, and the average age of the residents is 56.1 years. So there are 529 employees at the Valley View Centre for 230 clients.

The specific reorganization or adjustment of Valley View, again

I will give the description of how the staffing changes to the deputy minister. But the current budget for Valley View for 230 clients still remains at approximately \$30 million, and there are 529 employees for those 230 residents. So every time that the residents reduce in numbers, you come to an optimal point where you need to do the readjustment and the efficiencies within the centre. This does not see a cottage closure. I would project that probably the next time that everything's adjusted, we may be looking at a cottage closure.

Ms. Higgins: — 529 employees. What's the FTE count?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 400.

Ms. Higgins: — 400?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — 429? Am I mixing numbers here? Sorry.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 529 employees, but 400 FTEs.

Ms. Higgins: — 400 FTEs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — So then the question is, how are you going to realize \$1.5 million out of the Valley View budget? That was kind of what I needed to know.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to ask Jeff Redekop to answer this question. It is vacancy management, but there is a couple contract workers, I believe. So I will get Jeff Redekop to answer this question as he works directly with Valley View.

Mr. Redekop: — Jeff Redekop, executive director, program and service design, income assistance and disability services division. The change in the staffing model at Valley View I think is something that's a bit overdue, in the fact that the number of individuals has declined over the years. And we need to of course preserve quality of care, and we need to ensure that we are using our resources in the most efficient way possible.

Therefore we have made some changes in the roles of some nursing staff to ensure that they are performing specifically clinical nursing duties. And we are also making sure that of course the quality of care is maintained and the way we are achieving a reduction is largely through the deletion of vacant positions. And I'm expecting, that as mentioned earlier, that through this reduction by not closing a cottage, we'll ensure that people have comfortable living space, access to a good amount of privacy, and enjoy a good quality of life.

Ms. Higgins: — So I apologize if I'm being picky, but I actually wanted numbers. How many jobs are you cutting? Like I want specifics; I don't want kind of general. I could have read the press release and got that. So that's why I am here is to ask specific questions.

Mr. Redekop: — Okay. I can answer that specifically. We expect a reduction of 10.5 FTEs. And no individuals who are currently employed at the centre will lose their job as a result of this change. However, we have brought an end to a number of

term positions that will end as of the end of this month; however, those individuals will return to other appointments within Valley View Centre.

Ms. Higgins: — So terms' positions ended, but they will have jobs to return to? Is that what you said?

Mr. Redekop: — Yes. All the individuals in those terms have other positions within the ministry, within Valley View Centre, and they'll return to those positions.

Ms. Higgins: — So then the 400 FTEs will now be 389.5?

Mr. Redekop: — It will reduce by 10.5, bringing it down to that level.

Ms. Higgins: — And how many actual loss of people?

Mr. Redekop: — No individuals will lose their employment as a result of this change.

Ms. Higgins: — So 10 positions isn't going to save you \$1.5 million though.

Mr. Redekop: — That's what we expect to save through the change.

Ms. Higgins: — So the million and a half is totally out of wages and positions and purely vacancy management?

Mr. Redekop: — That's what we're expecting at this point. We'll of course be looking at all of the operations of the centre to make sure that every service we offer is efficient and we're using these human resources in the best way possible.

Ms. Higgins: — So you're telling me that all these 10 people earned \$100,000 a year?

Mr. Redekop: — Some of the changes that are occurring also involve positions that were previously funded at a higher level. And as we implement the new model, they may be a different level of position that meets the needs of the organization. So we may have a position, for example, that is funded as a nurse, and it might be used at a direct care aide or group activity aide level, which will also yield the savings.

Ms. Higgins: — So then how many positions are being changed or altered?

Mr. Redekop: — 10.5 FTEs will be changed.

Ms. Higgins: — That's it?

Mr. Redekop: — There are some others that we're not, we don't have all of the variables figured out yet. It's being implemented. It's an active process, so there may be others as we move forward that, as we ensure that we staff to meet the needs of the individuals, there may be some changes there. But that hasn't been determined at this point.

Ms. Higgins: — So I may be kind of thick tonight being it's getting late, but how do you save \$1.5 million on 10.5 positions that you're telling me were vacancy management, and those

people won't actually leave, they will just fit into other jobs?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Bob Wihlidal, income assistance and disability services, assistant deputy minister. I think we're getting a little bit confused about FTEs versus conversion of positions.

If I can take a crack at clarifying this, we're estimating that we're going to save \$1.5 million and 10.5 FTE reduction in the system without any loss of individual jobs of people that are working there. There will be a number of other positions that are converted, as Jeff was saying, from a higher paying function to a lower paying function.

We don't know the exact number of those functions that we will be converting. We know that we will mete out about \$1.5 million worth of cost reductions through the system though. So we'll eliminate ten and a half FTEs. Many others will be adjusted in a salary term but without losing an FTE.

Ms. Higgins: — But then you will, if you're — I can't remember the term you used, sorry — but if you're basically downgrading or changing a job to a lower wage.

Mr. Wihlidal: — So for example, nurses being converted to group activity aides at a lower wage. So taking a vacant nursing position that has been paid in previous years as a nurse and turning that role into a group activity aide at a much less wage, getting the job done, changing roles.

Ms. Higgins: — So then there will be changeover in the jobs because a nurse isn't going to take a job as an activity aide. So you are expecting a nurse will leave, and you will have to hire someone else or someone else will bid that job?

Mr. Wihlidal: — We'll do it through attritions.

Ms. Higgins: — So then you may not, you may not realize the 1.5 million this year.

Mr. Wihlidal: — No, we will. We will realize the 1.5 this fiscal and on an ongoing basis.

Ms. Higgins: — So when do you expect these transitions of jobs to begin?

Mr. Wihlidal: — We have begun.

Ms. Higgins: — They've started already?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — And how many jobs will transition to a lower rate of pay or lower qualifications?

Mr. Wihlidal: — I don't know that we have the full scope of that planned out yet, to be honest with you, in terms of which positions will change. We just . . .

Ms. Higgins: — Then please do tell me how you will realize 1.5 million. Or is that just a target you're aiming for?

[21:45]

Mr. Wihlidal: — We are working on a plan to achieve the \$1.5 million. We're fairly confident that we can achieve the 1.5 through the conversion of positions and the elimination of the 10.5, as I mentioned earlier.

Ms. Higgins: — So then was it just a number that was selected for Valley View, or was there some rationale behind it?

Mr. Wihlidal: — The rationale around the plan is, as Jeff mentioned earlier, to implement a more appropriate staffing model for the Valley View Centre relative to its scale of operations, now at only 229 residents, compared to 240 I think it was about a year ago. So there is attrition in the resident base on an annual basis, and we have not updated the professional staffing model for quite some time. So there's, if you like, an efficiency to be had through the review and the change.

The Chair: — Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. If I may, the member opposite has done budgets. She's sat at the cabinet table. She's done budgets in the past. She's well aware of the budgeting process and knows that you are doing projections for the year going forward. Many of those, when you're in a human service delivery ministry, is projections.

And so as I mentioned before, we have 400 FTEs in a facility that only has 230 residents. We are going to be looking at efficiencies within. It is not a matter of asking a nurse to do a lower paid job. If there is a nursing vacancy, and we don't need the number of nurses that is in the present complement, there may be a need for a job in an activity coordinator so the position will be changed. It's not eliminating the nurse.

So they have identified positions of 10.5, but they are going to be looking at the entire complementary structure for 230 clients. This hasn't been done for a few years now, so therefore every once and awhile, when you have a facility such as Valley View Centre, you need to step back, and you need to adjust the client . . . or the staffing complement for the residents as they exist.

So yes, it's a projection. And I don't want you to leave here with the impression that I've instructed the officials to go out and make sure that it's 1.5 million. They are comfortable that there will be enough reductions in higher paid jobs to lower paid jobs because we don't have as many intensive — not intensive needs amongst the residents that are there — we have fewer residents with intensive needs. The residents have declined considerably since this exercise has been undergone.

So they feel that through going forward there will be this kind of efficiency. I trust their judgment on that. It is an exercise going forward. There's some specific vacancies that have been identified, but they are going through the entire staffing complement to ensure that it is efficient for now, 230 residents, where the complement that we were starting from I believe was quite a few more residents than what we have now.

Ms. Higgins: — I'm not sure when you're considering starting from. The facility in its beginnings housed about 1,500 residents. Sorry, I don't know why we're having a hard time, but I'm having a terrible time hearing you at times also. And I'm not known to be quiet so I'll . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, no. I know these are not working.

Ms. Higgins: — Well I'm surprised. I guess I'm a little, not quite speechless but I am surprised because when there was the press release come out on budget day that said you were realizing 1.5 million in savings, I thought you would have had a more definite plan and would have had some hard numbers and processes that you were going to go through, not kind of an exercise in the works.

Because no matter if Valley View is considerably smaller than it was when it first opened many years ago and is down to 230 residents, they are still people who are aging. They are people who often do not have a voice of their own and an avenue to speak their mind. Valley View is home for them. And I know I will get letters at my constituency office from some of the groups over even saying this, but I firmly believe that Valley View is home for many of these residents. They have built very good relationships with the staff that care for them on a daily basis.

So it's not just an exercise to go through to find efficiencies. These are vulnerable people in our community that care should be a top priority. So I'm sorry for getting a little angry over this, but I expected there to be a more defined plan on your vision for what was happening to realize savings of \$1.5 million. And that's it.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that. And I've been a defender of Valley View, publicly have been a defender of Valley View. I have gone to Valley View and it is their community. It is their home. This is their family and they, many of them, have lived there for many, many, many years. That is why we want to go through this exercise and manage vacancies because you're absolutely right, they're familiar with the staff.

The staff in Valley View are highly qualified staff to deal with the special needs within Valley View. We recognize that. So, you know, we're going to go through this cautiously because . . . and that's why both officials stressed this is not a loss of existing jobs. There may be a high . . . you know, we anticipate some high-level paying jobs within Valley View that will become vacant and they'll be managed. They have, you know, a feel for the future of the staffing of Valley View. I agree with the community. I agree with the home. I agree with your sentiment towards Valley View.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, and thanks for your answers to the questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Higgins. Ms. Junor, do you have questions?

Ms. Junor: — Yes. Before we leave Valley View, I have just a couple that my colleague didn't cover, and I'm looking at this from more of a Health perspective. I know it's under Social Services, but I do have some questions about . . . I understand that when a resident chooses to try to live in the community in another setting, that if they do go out and try that, if it isn't successful, they aren't allowed back. Is that the case?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being told the policy that that is not entirely accurate. There is a time period to ensure that they

are settled and doing well; that they can, if that is not the case, that they can transition back to Valley View. But the policy in transitioning out of Valley View hasn't changed since the decision was made in 2002.

Ms. Junor: — So what is the transition period? Like how long do they have to settle out?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to say that would be case by case, but I will let Jeff Redekop answer that question.

Mr. Redekop: — There is no specific policy on the amount of time. It depends on the individual and when the individual appears to be settled. It's left up to that person. Their input is very important. The care providers in the new setting, their opinion is valued, and of course the opinion of our very qualified staff within the ministry would have a role in that.

What I would add to that is that even when that decision is made, we have a very extensive network of community services. And recently of course, we've expanded our services in terms of crisis support directly operated by ministry staff, as well as through community-based organizations. So there is a network that's expanded within community to deal with situations where individuals are, it's producing difficulty.

Ms. Junor: — I have another question, that people with the type of disabilities that are the residents at Valley View now, and people that would have traditionally gone to Valley View when there is no access to Valley View, where do those people end up?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would love to answer that question. Previously on a wait list, we are working diligently to expand capacity and that is at different levels of needs within the expansion that we are working towards. So they end up under the care of a community-based organization.

Ms. Junor: — Also, thinking some of them are more severe, they have more severe disabilities — mental or physical — that I would then anticipate they'd be going into the long-term care system, which is why I'm thinking that something like Valley View having closed its doors must have an impact on some of the other health facilities. So it's a shift from a social services, the cost of social service is shifted onto the health system. That's an observation. I don't know if it's true or not. I just would think it would be.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would say it isn't yet, but it's something that I don't disagree with you. Right now we have very intensive care right within Valley View and the resident reduction for the most part is due to the residents no longer being with us. So that's why the average age is 56.1. We don't have these residents transitioning out. Very, very few of them transition out. They simply pass on.

If we do not have a Valley View, you know, if the client or the resident numbers decline to a level where it's no longer viable — and there will be at some point where that will happen — I would agree with you. There would be a number of those clients that are such intense health needs that the answer will be a long-term nursing home. Some will fit well into the community-based organization models that we have, and that's

the different things we're going to have to face going forward.

Ms. Junor: — I must say I didn't pay attention to all of my colleagues questions, but knowing the wait lists and wait times that we do have in long-term care, I'm wondering. I don't know the actual, all of the physical capacity or what situation the cottages are all in, but is there another use for Valley View, that if you reach a certain point and there is a need for a long-term care facility or 50 long-term care beds in the Moose Jaw area, is that a possibility?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — By no means am I an expert on the building of Valley View, and it's under Government Services. But I'm going to suggest that, I believe — and I would ask Government Services this question — that the Valley View Centre needs some major, major work, that it may not be a viable building going forward. But I can't say that. That would be a question for Government Services.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. That's it for that. David. Thanks.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. I'd like to focus in on housing now. And I'd like to ask just generally, I have some very specific questions about . . . [inaudible] . . . down to that, but right off the bat, tell us all about the head start program.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. Thank you for that question. And the head start on a home will be an opportunity for low-to-moderate income earners. And my intent of this program is that we reduce the pressure on the rental market for places such as Moose Jaw. And there are a number of cities and communities where the vacancy rates are low, and it's very difficult for low-income individuals to find a place to rent. If we bring in the program and we take a number of families out of the rental market, put them in a home ownership situation, that just kind of levels out the stresses on the rental market.

The new Saskatchewan Housing Corporation board of directors are consulting with stakeholders as we speak. They have begun those consultations. And I have a list of the stakeholder meetings, if the member opposite is interested in who they're meeting with. But they've started the consultation, and they're going to design the program and come forward with a suggestion to our government. I've asked that whatever they design is a minimum of 1,000 new homeowner units. If they can design a program that will create more, that would be great.

And the funding that we're going to use for the head start on a home is coming from the federal immigrant investor program, which is available to provinces for the purpose of economic activity. The government is in the process of finalizing that agreement with the federal government to access the immigrant investor program. It is funding that has always been available. When you were in government, your government chose never to access the money and the money went to other provinces. But we felt that it would be well worth our while to access this money and put it towards housing, so there will be 40 million or a little better available through the federal immigrant investor program.

[22:00]

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So I guess when you alluded to the

amount, this is . . . I might as well ask the question about the scheduled guaranteed debt. The head start on home loan guarantees is 45 million? Is that right, 45.7?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You're referring right now to the budget document?

Mr. Forbes: — Page 24.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — What did I do with . . .

Mr. Forbes: — The other one. It's the coiled one. The main one. Estimates.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. That would be correct. That's for that program.

Mr. Forbes: — That's in the budget year . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, I'm sorry. I'm just being told no.

Mr. Forbes: — No? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Go for it. We've got to hear this answer.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — This is Don Allen . . .

Mr. Allen: — Don Allen, acting assistant deputy minister for Housing. There is not yet no debt on the books of Sask Housing Corporation or the Government of Saskatchewan with respect to head start at home. The negotiations are still under way with respect to the federal government, and when they are completed, the money will begin to flow.

Mr. Forbes: — That was going to be my next point because I noticed the heading at the top was 2011. You're projecting that this will be a next year project?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No. We believe that we'll be accessing some of that money this year already. And although Don Allen pointed out that it is not on the debt ledger sheet for the Sask Housing Corporation, it's estimated for 2011 . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes. It will be not in Sask Housing though.

Mr. Forbes: — It will not be, but it will be in the Government of Saskatchewan, so that's not . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — And so that's where the confusion came in. I think Don is saying, no it's not in the Sask Housing ledger. But you're right. It is in this document we are projecting. We're estimating that's what it would be.

Mr. Forbes: — So 45 million and that will be, is that the total amount? You know, I don't know if I've heard this correctly, whether it's a five-year plan or, you know . . . I mean it's pretty hard to build 1,000 houses in one year. So it's a five-year plan?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It is a five-year plan. And the way that the program works is that in five years . . . So in year six, you begin to pay this money back. So then the program design will generate some revolving of the money so that it can become self-sustaining.

Mr. Forbes: — Now you've mentioned that, I am interested in

the list of stakeholders if you have that and if you could send that over. I don't need to see it right away. But I have seen . . . And I do support and I do think, I would have thought of some other people on the board, but generally I'm very happy with the people who are on the board. But I have been saying to people, groups, to ask to meet with these folks because in many ways the board should be the people who have their eyes and ears talking to the public, and they should be talking to everyone. And so we are . . . I'm happy to hear that they'll be talking to stakeholders.

I would ask . . . and this is a theme. If you've been listening to Environment, I've been talking about how we need to engage the public too, because some individuals don't belong to an organized group, a stakeholder group, and so they're curious to know what is happening with housing. And so if the board, in some way, could hold some public open houses to talk about head start, I think it would be a good idea just to explain to people what is this thing and how does it work. Because you know, I use the example of student housing, and we were happy to see student housing going forward.

We had called for student housing as well. It is a way to alleviate the pressure because not only this . . . And I would ask that maybe your officials take a look at this. I was pleased to hear about the excess housing supplement or that program. The problem is that I don't think that Saskatoon, people in Saskatoon qualified because I think the vacancy rate now in Saskatoon is 1.9 per cent. So it's just above, and yet we're having people in tough times there because of, you know, the way things have changed in this province. And they estimate that the vacancy rate in Saskatoon may go up to 3 per cent actually this year; I think that's a CMHC number.

But the problem is that we've seen the housing stock shrink from rental properties or rent control units from 16,000 to 12,000. There's 4,000 fewer units that are available for a variety of reasons. So the vacancy rate — and as you, as minister, alluded to — with the population growth, when you had 16,000 units a few years ago, that was a different number than 12,000 it is now in the city of Saskatoon, a city that's growing quickly.

So I would . . . If there's an opportunity for the ministry to reflect on that because there are some unique circumstances. And, you know, not only have I been calling for better wages for CBOs, I've been calling for some form of rent control or some sort of issues. How do you deal with these out outliers of huge rent increases, huge rent increases? People understand that rent does go up. That's the cost of, that's a fact of life. That's the cost of living. But when you see rent doubles and people have no way to manage. This is an issue.

And so with the fact, with this program . . . It's interesting about seniors because I've come to appreciate the fact that seniors particularly, as a group, face difficult times in rent circumstances because they're not interested necessarily in buying a home. They might be interested in buying a condo or something but they're not really . . . They've moved out of their family home, if they had one. But rent property for them is a challenge. So when will we hear more . . . so they have a . . . Did you say you had a schedule of the consultation that the folks will be meeting and talking about the design of this program?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Wow, you covered, you had a full round circle here.

Mr. Forbes: — It finished with a question.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, you did. Okay. We'll start with the schedule. Keep in mind, be mindful that the schedule that I'm suggesting on the consultation is how to design a program. So we're talking people that are able to understand the finance. You know, we're talking financial institutions because there will be a mortgage proponent to this, the municipal governments to see how they want to participate in availability of land mostly, and the industry. So this isn't a matter of meeting with groups that are going to suggest the difficulty they have in their community, or difficult finding a rental unit.

I will bring to the Board's attention that your suggestion of the possibility, at some point, of them having just community awareness, you know, on houses and different housing programs, that could be something that they could look at once they get this exercise done. But the list that you're going to see is going to extensively be people that can help design a program because I would like to see it come up as soon as possible.

The vacancy rates that you discussed, the vacancy rate is based of course on the rental market that is available. So the vacancy rate does reflect the fact that the rental market is lower. I think there's two reasons why we're seeing Saskatoon vacancy rates start to look a little better. And, you know, the golden rule of three per cent is the healthy, healthy vacancy rate for a community, does reflect that both the Sask Housing Corporation as well as the industry within Saskatoon has been extremely aggressive in bringing housing units, rental units — housing units in the case of the industry, rental units in the case of the Sask Housing Corporation. I think we're starting to see a reflection of that. We're also seeing a bit of a reflection of the natural plateau when you have the huge spike of the pressure of population increase, and I hope to see Saskatoon plateau even further once we get, like you mentioned, the student housing brought on stream.

The third thing that you had mentioned, of course, was rental controls. And I have said a number of times that I'll never say never, but at this point we are not considering rent controls. And the concerns with rent controls is that they are a short-time fix, but can create a very large problem in the long-term. Developers will view rent controls as one more reason to not build any rental units, and they're not doing a lot of them as it is. There will be less money put into the upkeep of existing rental units because the landlords will then not invest money that they don't think that they can recuperate.

We have a couple of situations where there are rent controls — when I've been reading, and I know you do a lot of reading as well — of, I forget the district in Vancouver that became basically a slum area because they were investing absolutely nothing into the rental units. I think that there will be more landlords really pressuring to do the condo conversions, and of course, that becomes a municipal decision to whether or not that's allowable.

But I do find it interesting that when you made the submission, and at that time that you made a submission to the housing task

force, you gave an extensive submission to the housing task force. And it was at a time where Saskatoon was particularly stressed; you never even mentioned rent controls. When your own party did a very last minute consultation with a couple cabinet ministers, they came forward with a report. It was never made public. The consultation was never open consultation. It was invitational only. I have a copy of that report as well that didn't see the light of day for the public and didn't have any open consultations, and it vetoed the option of rent controls.

So when you were government and shortly after when you made a presentation to the task force, this was something that you yourself seen as perhaps not the wisest decision. And so now I have to question, why the flip-flop?

Mr. Forbes: — I wouldn't say necessarily a flip-flop, but I can tell you when you're in opposition, you do have an opportunity to reflect on things that your experience, your learned experience. And you're right, and in fact I often said the very same things you said, that developers would shy away and all of those things. And I have to tell you, we don't have a policy as a caucus or as a party. We're going to a party policy development thing right now, but I have really come to understand particularly seniors, who are facing very hard times. And in fact this might even be the best time to do it, when the market is settling down, to have that rational conversation, because we don't see developers stepping up to build rental properties when they could be building condo properties which are much more lucrative.

So you are correct in those observations. If you want to characterize it as a flip-flop, all I can tell you is that I think that we need to take this as a time to really reflect. And when you're talking to seniors as we have, and I am sure you have, where they see incredible rent increases . . . You know, the group that I brought down here, their rent's going from 425 for a bachelor's suite up to over \$800. And if you saw the place you would say, this is a problem. This is a problem; I really have to rethink what my thinking is about this.

I want to move on to another issue about housing though, and this is one that I do hope that when you talk to the board, that I see this number disappearing. And it does raise a bit of an alarm when we talk about affordable housing, and that the fact that often affordable housing reflects about the income, and that 30 per cent of the income should go towards the cost of housing. And we're seeing of course places like Calgary and Vancouver, it's not 30 per cent at all. It'd be outrageous how much goes towards housing, the families who are in low-income or moderate-income that just can't afford housing. So the definition I understand, whether it's OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], I don't have it in front of me, but I'm sure you've heard this when we talk about affordable housing, they often use the 30 per cent benchmark.

Will you, when you talk about head start, reflect with the board and say, what do we mean, what is affordable housing?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, I'm sure that will be part of their discussion and their design is what is affordable, and keeping in mind that we're also looking at moderate-income homeowners or families to own a home. And so all of that will be looked at, and they'll come forward with a proposal.

And I'm more than happy to have you . . . I know you mentioned in estimates in the past that being in opposition is a great learning experience and you learn things that you never knew in government. And I'm glad to see that you're still enjoying that learning experience, and I hope to keep you learning for many, many years.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I think a four-year. . . that's where your degree is, in four years, right? That's what I want. I'm going to graduate, and I'm just seeing my graduation coming up pretty quick. So yes, I do have . . .

[22:15]

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes, if I can just interrupt you for a minute. I've got a couple of questions.

I think it's quite timely if we'll take about a five-minute brief break just to stretch our legs and facilitate any comfort breaks that we'll need for committee members and the minister and staff. And then we'll reconvene in five minutes sharp, and we'll continue on with Mr. Forbes. So we'll take a five-minute recess and be back then.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — Welcome back, everybody. We have one new substitution for the second portion of our meeting tonight, consideration of vote 36, Social Services estimates. For Minister Jim Reiter we have substituting Mr. Randy Weekes. Mr. Forbes, I invite you to take over the floor.

Mr. Forbes: — Still looking at housing under allocations on page 132, the reduction for the Sask Housing Corporation from 18.8 million, I assume that's what it is, to 2.3 million. Can you explain what happened there?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I will do this in two parts. I will begin the explanation because again we're going to continue how we . . . learn how things work. And then I want Don Allen to explain it in more detail.

But I want to begin by explaining, and I know that you have struggled, just from the questions you have asked . . . I think you're struggling with understanding the flow through the Sask Housing Corporation. The Sask Housing Corporation is a Treasury Board Crown. So it is not a year-over-year budget the way that the GDP [gross domestic product] budgets are. So the Sask Housing Corporation generates money itself because it collects rent.

It is very positive to note that the expenses of running the housing stock that we have right now is around \$4 million less than it has been in previous years in one area, and that area is in property tax. The property tax reduction that we did, which was first phase of a two-phase education portion of property tax reduction, means that the Sask Housing Corporation saves \$4 million in grants in lieu just in that initiative that our government did alone. So that money remains with the corporation.

The corporation has been going through a process which was initiated under your government, when you were in

government, and one that I support. And that is, if we have stock in communities that is not utilizing the stock for low income, there's no demand for low-income housing, we are selling that stock. The sales revenues goes into the Sask Housing Corporation. There was a land sale from the land that the Sask Housing Corporation owned and that money is retained in the Sask Housing Corporation.

And there has been substantial transfers from the federal government that goes into the Sask Housing Corporation. We made a, not through the budget process, but outside of the actual initial budget, we made the booster shot injection of revenues into the Sask Housing Corporation.

So the Sask Housing Corporation generates revenues on its own. It has expenses as well that offsets those revenues. And there is injections from the federal government, there is revenues generated from land sales and housing sales. So that money remains within Sask Housing Corporation. It does not go back to the General Revenue Fund at the end of the year and therefore you have to reinject funding into the corporation.

So right now, the Sask Housing Corporation has all of the projects under way that I have described earlier in my opening statement. That has evolved from the previous list that you would have received because of course some have been completed and so they roll out of the construction column. Some that were in development are now in the construction area, and we have brought some more in for development.

The existing projects, the Housing Corporation has the funding to cover those, so that we don't need to do an injection into the Sask Housing Corporation right at this point in time.

Housing will be a consideration. We have committed ourselves as the government through legislation that mid-year, should there be a surplus, the consideration for that surplus must or that surplus must go toward debt reduction and infrastructure. Housing is considered, you know, an infrastructure and it will be weighed on priority at that point in time should we be in the position where there is a surplus.

And so that the injections into the Sask Housing Corporation often is not within the rotation of the regular budget process. I went back in the years of announcements when you would have been in government, and that was indeed the case as well. In 2006, there was no money transferred to the Sask Housing Corporation out of the budget process but in 2007 there was. And it wasn't done at this time of year.

So with that, I would like to also get Don Allen to give an explanation for the actual line item.

[22:30]

Mr. Allen: — Certainly. As the minister indicated, Sask Housing has multiple sources of revenue. They receive rents from tenants. That's the most significant revenue source for Sask Housing. For the most significant individual source, they receive transfers from municipalities, transfers from the federal government, and transfers from the province. And these transfers are both operating and capital. The line item in

question is an operating transfer and it's only one part of the entire budget for Sask Housing Corporation.

In 2010, Sask Housing is budgeted to spend \$254 million. That's 34 million more than they spent in 2009, and 58 million more than in 2008. So this does not actually represent a reduction. It simply represents a realization of what Sask Housing needs in order to move forward in this particular year.

Mr. Forbes: — So where can a person see that budget that you speak of?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As a Treasury Board Crown, you should have received it today because I tabled the Sask Housing report. But it is a Treasury Board Crown so you should have received that today.

Mr. Forbes: — Today?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, because I tabled it today in the House.

Mr. Forbes: — No, I haven't seen it.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Then I will have to check with . . .

Mr. Forbes: — I've got the Children's Advocate report, but I haven't seen that one.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, we did. And actually now that you mention it because I handed it in, and no . . .

Mr. Forbes: — No, not that one.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm not sure where the disconnect was with myself handing it in and the Speaker's responsibility. So we need to check into that because it was tabled today. So you will see that very, very soon.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Because that's pretty significant actually.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It is and it isn't. It is not subject to questioning the details. Oh no, it's significant for you to know, but it also is not within the rules of the Treasury Board Crowns. The details within the Treasury Board Crowns is not for discussion in estimates committees.

Mr. Yates: — That's a matter of debate.

Mr. Forbes: — So when does it come up for public scrutiny then? You don't have . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's the process that's always been in place.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'm not debating whether it is or not, and I appreciate the answers you've given. I just want to know when can I see it and when can I ask about it because I think it's very important. And I appreciate the answers tonight and I appreciate that this is . . . I actually have to say I was looking around my office for annual reports for Sask Housing, you know, to bring all that stuff, and I haven't seen, you know . . . I

can pull them off the Internet, but I haven't seen this stuff.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes, sessional paper 606 shows that the Sask Housing Corporation report was tabled today. So there might be a disconnect somewhere, but the report was tabled.

Mr. Forbes: — It wasn't handed to members. It wasn't handed to members. I don't know. And I do have, you know, I do appreciate the fact . . . Well let's see if they can find it in the back or something and if we can come back to it, that would be great.

The Chair: — And, Mr. Forbes, I will, I guess, rule on this that it is a Crown. If the minister wants to answer any of those questions she's welcome to, but if in interest of time, I guess, if you want to get the other questions answered.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. Yes. We'll go on to other things right now, and if it comes back and . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I do want to give you this invitation though — which is very unfortunate, whatever happened to the Pages handing out the report — I am open to you coming to me at any time with questions once you have the report, of asking. And then of course there's the opportunity of written questions which you can ask on a Treasury Board Crown report. And there's always our favourite, question period.

Mr. Forbes: — And letters too.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Forbes: — If I want to get a specific answer, a record.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — But if, you know, at any time that you want to meet and discuss the report, I'm more than open to that.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. No, I appreciate that. So we'll see if we can find it. If we can't find it tonight, we'll find it. And then we'll go through that, and we can have a conversation about that, and if you want to have some officials there. But I appreciate that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes that's good.

Okay then let's move on because I know the clock is ticking. We are all getting used to working late, but I won't keep you folks longer than we need to. But let's go quickly to income assistance and disability services because in there lies some of the questions I feel I need to ask.

And of course the Sask assistance program, we see an increase of about 23 million, and of course you've alluded to the increase in caseloads and things like that. Now can I just ask quickly, do you have the most current numbers in terms of SAP and TEA or things? What are the current numbers, the latest? I don't know if you have April, but you might have March.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to welcome Gord Tweed to answer the statistical questions. And our latest that is very new is the March 2010 statistics.

Mr. Tweed: — Gord Tweed from disability, income assistance, and disability services. I was having just a bit of trouble hearing. Was it the social assistance caseload for the month of

March?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — He wants SAP, TEA, and SAID, but I think our SAP and SAID is together yet, but I'm not sure.

Mr. Tweed: — They are. They are but we can break it out. So for the month of March 2010, the total number of Saskatchewan assistance program cases was 24,255. The total number of transitional employment allowance cases was 3,169. There were 2,622 SAID cases. Those cases are included in the Saskatchewan assistance program rollout as well.

Mr. Forbes: — So a person should . . . [inaudible] . . . add 24 in too. Okay, good. Thank you.

Mr. Tweed: — Total. Total caseload, Mr. Forbes, for the three programs.

Mr. Forbes: — Total. Yes, okay.

Mr. Tweed: — 27,424.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you tell me how many children are in families receiving SAP? And I assume not many in SAID, if any.

Mr. Tweed: — The specific number isn't included in this package. It's an estimated number. We could provide that more precisely if you want. Children make up about one-third of the beneficiaries in the social assistance caseload.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Okay, now in terms of the vacancies . . . And we may come back a lot about, to this question, in terms . . . And I know my colleague from Moose Jaw asked about front-line staff for people working with the SAP program. Are there vacancies right now?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — There always is.

Mr. Forbes: — How many would that be? What's your general ballpark figure, in terms of . . . I know that you have . . .

Ms. Zerr: — It's a daily changing number.

Mr. Forbes: — Daily. Okay. Is it one that you're concerned about? That you're seeing an increased number of people not working in this area, or is it just something that you're managing?

Ms. Zerr: — I think you need to remember that we have a workforce that is both permanent full-time and permanent part-time. Pending caseload, hours increase, hours decrease depending on workflow. And so at any given time, there are people on maternity leave. There are people who move from permanent to full-time. There are people that move depending on their individual circumstances. So we're always in staffing mode in income assistance.

Mr. Forbes: — But are you, let me rephrase it then, are you concerned about the human resources challenge? Is this something that concerns you? Are you meeting the needs of your clients?

Ms. Zerr: — I think that are we meeting the needs of clients is a very broad question. Are we doing the best that we can to deliver the programs we deliver? Yes, we are. Are we perfect? Not 100 per cent. It's a human service industry. You're never perfect, 100 per cent, but in terms of my concern over being able to deliver the program, no I'm confident we will be able to deliver the program.

Mr. Forbes: — And that's fair enough. What I'm looking for is, you know, in terms of human resource challenges. Some sectors are more challenged than others, and this is one that I hope that you're being able to meet the needs of the clients. So you have an increased number and this has been going up. Are there any plans of how to address this? The number of caseloads is significantly higher than even a year ago. What are the plans as we move forward?

Ms. Zerr: — I'll ask the assistant deputy who's managing operationally that file to respond.

Mr. Wihlidal: — So your question is what are our plans to maintain the workforce?

Mr. Forbes: — No, we mean in terms of addressing the increased caseload for social assistance, SAP and SAID now. SAID probably is a unique challenge, but because this is increasing over the last couple of 15 months, or so many months. Does the ministry have any plans in addressing this challenge?

Mr. Wihlidal: — We do. We monitor the caseloads routinely. We have a range of, we try to keep, with our workers' caseloads, within a range of about 140-150 cases per worker. We do have challenges from time to time maintaining that in geographic areas. In some cases, we might have quite low caseloads for some workers.

Mr. Forbes: — Basically a miscommunication here. I'm not talking about the worker caseload. I'm talking about the general caseload, the number of people in Saskatchewan who are in . . .

Mr. Wihlidal: — Right. And what we're anticipating of course is what we've been talking about, is increase in the single employables in particular, those folks in the caseload who we might expect to work. And we are looking towards providing clear communication with those clients about the expectations to find employment and making sure we derive a clear commitment and decision from clients that they seek work. So that's one of the objectives we have in the coming year.

Mr. Forbes: — Now part of that is TEA. And I don't have my TEA numbers with me, so I can't compare what the previous numbers were. But that's the transitional employment allowance, and so we did see numbers go up there.

Are you, in terms of some of the strategic thinking about your front-line workers, doing more to assist these employables to find work or to support them in their transition out of SAP?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Yes. The more strategic pieces would have to do with making sure that we do an effective job of referral of our clients to Can-Sask services for example, employment services that are a part of Advanced Ed — Advanced

Education, Employment and Labour — and other services that might support the reduction of their barriers or their transition to fuller or sustainable employment.

Mr. Forbes: — Going on to SAID, and I know the minister talked in her opening remarks, the numbers pretty much are consistent, about 39 million. What is the work plans? What are the goals for this year in terms of moving that further along?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We didn't incorporate in the budget any increase in SAID. But that is . . . If the assessment tool that the committee is working on, and the committee is largely made up of course leaders within the disability community, with transitioning into SAID throughout this year — and I'm sure there'll be a projection of how many may that be this year — but it's a direct transfer then from SAP to SAID. So that the money is in the budget, but should SAID expand further this year, that will then be transferring it from SAP so that, you know, we have the allocation.

But I'll see if my deputy minister wants to direct the question of what we anticipate for more money or more clients coming on to the SAID program this year. We will get Gord Tweed to outline what they're hoping for.

[22:45]

Mr. Tweed: — As you're aware, Mr. Forbes, the SAID program was introduced in the fall of last year and was specifically targeted at a particular client group, people with significant and enduring disabilities. To initiate the program or to get it started, we began with people in residential care facilities, family homes, etc. So for this year, we expect the caseload to be relatively stable. The inflow of that client group isn't significant over the course of a year. The inflow of new clients isn't significant.

The work on SAID this year focuses more on the development of an assessment tool so that we can better understand the impacts of disabilities that individuals will have, the impact of disabilities that individuals have. And at that point, we can then begin to understand and apply the assessment tool to the balance of individuals who may qualify for the program eventually.

Mr. Forbes: — Now within . . . From what I remember reading in the literature or the material that was just coming out about this, there were going to be the staff. Some of the staff were referred to as SAID specialists?

Mr. Tweed: — Income specialists.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And so how is that . . . And how many are there, and how is that whole . . .

Mr. Tweed: — There's about 20 or so staff around the province. You have to appreciate that a great number of the SAID client group are serviced by our benefit administration services office in Saskatoon. The other sort of hubs of SAID clients are in the larger centres, as you can imagine. And then, income assistance workers around the provinces may have a number of SAID clients included on their caseload just because of geographical considerations with respect to how we're

organized — 20 offices around the province and so forth.

So on the whole, just, it's an estimate. I would say there's about 20 staff involved. Probably on the order of 10 to 15 front-line workers and then supervisors and so forth who provide direction and guidance to those staff.

Mr. Forbes: — Now are these folks, what's their, what's the expectation around their training?

Mr. Tweed: — Yes. It's a very good question. One of the things that both ourselves and the disability community was very interested in was the knowledge and skill set that staff would bring. So we didn't hire new staff to administer the program. We relied on our income assistance workers who, in many instances, indicated and expressed interest in being involved with this client group. And just recently, the training curriculum for '10-11 for the SAID staff, so the staff that we're discussing, was approved. And it focuses in four areas that we'll see. One is around the SAID program itself, the rules and the regulations and the policy and so forth. But more importantly probably is an understanding of the nature of disability and the impact that disability can have on an individual's life.

There's also a significant reference, a library or inventory of community resources and other government services and so forth that staff will become familiar with and be able to refer individuals to for other types of supplementary services and so forth to assist them with their day-to-day living.

And then the fourth element, which is I think kind of, it's new for us in terms of a very formal piece of curriculum within income assistance. And it's guided work around client service and service excellence so . . .

Ms. Zerr: — Built on the Service Canada model.

Mr. Tweed: — Yes, built on the Service Canada — thanks, Marian — built on the Service Canada model that you may be familiar with.

Mr. Forbes: — Two observations. And I know when I was at one of the workshops, we talked about fair practices and the fair practice office. And I would think that might be an interesting idea for the ministry to pursue because I've just seen great work in other departments. And I'm thinking of SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] where they've just been really well received.

But getting back to the specialist, do they have to have any kind of special . . . [inaudible] . . . Like I'm thinking, do they have to have a degree or anything, or is there a prerequisite? And where I'm going with this, you know, we've talked about this prior, about the fact that many of the social workers within the ministry are not actually registered social workers. And it's right across the board. And here you have an opportunity to start with pretty much a clean slate and say, listen we want everybody to be registered social workers here.

Mr. Tweed: — There's no requirement to have a degree.

Mr. Forbes: — A degree, no requirement for a degree?

Mr. Tweed: — No requirement to have a degree, and we are working with an existing workforce in income assistance. Although the designation would be preferred, it's not a required designation.

We do have capable staff. And for the SAID population — you may be familiar with them because, as I said, most of the operation is in Saskatoon — a very experienced group of income assistance workers who I think, through the support of the additional training regime that we're going to initiate this year, will help people in a very professional and serviceable manner.

Mr. Forbes: — So is there any paid differential for this group compared to the, you know, maybe the jobs that they were leaving or to people doing equivalent work?

Mr. Tweed: — Yes, it's the same classification — income assistance workers.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Transitional employment allowance, and we see an increase here of 8 million to 23.4. And that's just basically anticipating the increased numbers here. That's straightforward, I assume.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That would be correct. That's an anticipation. You know, it's well documented in a number of different papers that are issued on, you know, the repercussions of a recession and how long does it take before assistance, social assistance, numbers will level out. And there's usually about a year lag. So we anticipate, even though that we are not experiencing the worst of the recession which is layoffs — and of course people laid off from their jobs are competing with social assistance clients for those jobs — we have an anticipation there will be a year lag in getting the numbers levelled and not spiking again.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have an anticipated when the spike, when the top of the spike is? Or we'll just have to . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's rather unique, and I sort of read it in my opening comments. Normally I believe, and I have an article here that I could reference, that says, and I quote. This is an article by John Stapleton that was issued on April 14th of 2010 and it says:

With every recession in the past, welfare caseloads peaked after the immediate crisis was over.

The recession of the early 1980s hit Canada hardest in 1981, but the number of welfare recipients in Ontario topped out at March of 1983. The Canadian economy suffered another blow in 1991 and 1992, but the . . . [numbers in Ontario] on welfare was at its highest peak in March of 1994 . . .

And it goes on, you know, on that theme of why the numbers peak, you know, and how that can be documented a year later.

Saskatchewan's rather unique, and I mentioned that in my opening statement, in that we didn't get the full impact of the recession that the other provinces experienced. So are we going to be able to recuperate faster, as Campaign 2000 pointed out?

They believe that Saskatchewan is probably going to be able to recuperate faster than the other provinces because of the positioning that we have in our economic momentum. So we're kind, we're projecting more, hoping for less, is what we're doing.

Mr. Forbes: — And I appreciate that, and I think that we all hope that's the case.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Forbes: — Absolutely. And my only concern, and this is why I'm really focusing on front-line staff, that there is people there to help them when they need help, and especially in transitioning to employment. And I appreciate that you don't handle that. That's Advanced Ed with . . . [inaudible].

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — What about the seniors' income plan? Did they go from 24.8 to 21.9?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. The budget was reduced by 2.9 million. No changes have been made to the benefits or the eligibility criteria for the program, so there have been no cuts to the benefits. The seniors' income plan budget was reduced to reflect the forecasted uptake of the program for the upcoming year.

And it is anticipated that fewer new seniors will qualify because we trace this, of course, through Revenue Canada and our upcoming next stage of seniors have a bit higher incomes on average. So it isn't actually even different from the trend before. The program's been in place for a number of years and we just did the increase. But even in years prior, there was always a slow decrease in the number of seniors that qualified year over year.

And then of course when we made the change to the program, there was a big bump up in the number of seniors that qualified, because we increased it. But now we're seeing that slow decline again of seniors that are qualifying.

Mr. Forbes: — And so I guess, and we'd talked about this last year, and I raised the question about, how do people find out? Because you know, when I talk to groups about it, and I've raised concerns about indexing and that type of thing, and I find out actually that might not be the biggest concern. But the biggest concern people actually talk about is that they haven't heard about SIP.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's automatic.

Mr. Forbes: — It is automatic. You're absolutely right.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. SIP is automatic.

Mr. Forbes: — It's automatic. And you have to be able to phone Service Canada . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You don't apply for it.

Mr. Forbes: — So you're phoning them when you're 65 and

say, tell me all the programs I qualify for, and of course Service Canada will focus on the GIS [Guaranteed Income Supplement]. And if you get the GIS, you get this. But the problem is, you've got to make that first phone call. And so how can we get the word to seniors that this is a program? You should be phoning Service Canada. And I know that's a federal program, but is there a way we can do this? Because I do think there's gaps out there of seniors who haven't heard about this.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As far as communication go, I'm going to ask Gord Tweed to address any communication mechanisms that we use or we're lacking in using.

Mr. Tweed: — I'd say it's a good question, Mr. Forbes. And it's not a program that we expend a lot of effort on, to be frank, in terms of marketing. As you said, it's fairly routine. As seniors complete their income tax returns every year, and as they turn 65, apply for the federal Guaranteed Income Supplement, the seniors' income plan benefit follows automatically.

We can certainly take a suggestion away though, and I'll take that back if I may. Maybe I'll speak with our communication folks. But there is a potential always to include inserts and so forth in people's correspondence that they might receive. The penetration rate on SIP [seniors' income plan] is fairly significant though as it relates to low-income seniors.

Mr. Forbes: — What do you believe . . . You know, I heard a stat the other day that Saskatchewan's faring well — and this is from 2005 — that the poverty rate for seniors is something like 2 per cent. And I find that really hard to believe because that means about 4,000 seniors. Because there's about 200,000 . . . Correct me if my math's wrong and there's not 200,000 seniors. But let's round it up just to make sure — there's 150,000. So 2 per cent of 150,000, that's 3,000, I believe, right? And I don't know what they're using for measure, but 3,000 seniors. And then . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes. And I think that when you folks introduced that program, more than 3,000 . . . How many seniors came on?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — When we introduced the program, it was over 8,000 additional seniors qualified, but the income level threshold is very high for who qualifies for that program. And so in the 2009 *Covered Population* report indicates there are approximately 150,200 people age 65 and over living in Saskatchewan. Approximately 2.7 per cent or about 4,000 seniors have low incomes as defined by the 2007 *Income in Canada* report from Statistics Canada. We are covering more than just the 2.7 per cent.

Mr. Forbes: — GIS is as well and all of that. So that's an interesting place to find that stat. It'd be interesting what they use for cut-offs for low-income seniors because if we were to tell seniors there's only 4,000 of you folks that are in low income, I don't know if that would go over very well. I find this an amazing stat . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm not going to do it so I don't think there's a question in there.

Mr. Forbes: — No. And I appreciate that. How many . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I don't think I'm going to go out there and say that, you're not a low-income senior. I'm sorry.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. And that's what Stats Canada is telling me. Yes, it's pretty hard to defend.

One of the things I've been thinking about is, particularly in my own riding, there's a lot of First Nations and Aboriginal seniors who may not think they qualify. And I'd be curious to know . . . And we had heard about the reports from the federal auditor about the state of affairs to the computers that deliver old age security cheques and those kinds of things. But it'd be curious to know if there's some way to figure out whether it's a postal code check or somehow . . . find out how seniors in different postal codes, or how many seniors in Saskatoon are receiving SAID. I know you can figure out the ages, so I'm wondering, can you find out where do they live?

[23:00]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I have to say I'm finding this whole line of questioning odd. I know we've done this on other exercises when you were talking about the rental supplement and the uptake in the rental supplement and could we get better uptake on the rental supplement. And then this year you have suggested that we eliminate the rental supplement, so I'm not too sure. Are you asking us are we going to go out on the street to advertise? Not at this point in time, no.

You know, we will review perhaps some flyers or, you know, possibilities of communication. It is pretty straightforward that they qualify if they do income tax. You know, we can muse and speculate how many seniors are in a certain area in a certain city that may or may not know that it exists. We're just musing and speculating at this point in time.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I mean that's our task right now, and I think that we have to reflect. And if you're as a minister saying, I will not reflect on the best use of our money and I will not reflect on how seniors are doing in Saskatchewan . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Excuse me?

Mr. Forbes: — And if you're going to accept what StatsCan is saying about how many seniors are living in low-income circumstances, I don't think that's . . . I've asked for three hours to ask some questions. I don't think I'm going overboard here. I'm saying, how can we make sure there's good uptake on this program? And I'm curious to know, is there a way that we can find a way to make sure that happens without hurting privacy?

I'm not asking you to ask every senior. I'm just saying, are there pockets of seniors . . . And I think about seniors in my own riding and I have some concerns because they don't seem to know about the program, and I'm hearing you say that you're not willing to do that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, you're hearing me say that we're not sure how you would do that. We can increase our communication, but we can sit here and muse. But, you know, you have this high-caring attitude when you sat a cabinet table that didn't even look at this program the entire time.

For 16 years you didn't even look at how to find the seniors. You didn't want to increase what did exist. You let this languish year over year over year for 16 years and now you want to sit here and muse whether or not we have seniors that may qualify and how are we going to find those seniors. I'm telling you I'm not sure how we would find the seniors that don't qualify or that could qualify that are not filling out their income tax. I'm not sure how we'd go about that, but you are putting words in my mouth to say that I don't care. I believe I cared enough to increase it by 110 per cent, and that is more caring than we've ever seen in 16 years in your government.

[Interjections]

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes, in the interest of conversation, I am more than happy to let the conversation go back and forth, but if — and it goes to the minister, as well — if it's going to be a bit confrontational, we'll have to direct everything through the Chair which will slow down the time and take up more time for questions.

Mr. Forbes: — I appreciate that, Mr. Chair, and there is a bit of give-and-take in this. And I appreciate what the minister is saying to me, and I would just want to make one reflection. She said we have done nothing in 16 years, and I will tell you, Mr. Chair, that what we did for seniors around health care was phenomenal — \$50 million that went to seniors in the last few years of our mandate. So when she says nothing, that is not correct.

The work that we're doing, she's doing around SIP I think has a lot of merit, but I think we could do more. We could do more there. And I think seniors are facing some real challenges, Mr. Chair, particularly those who have limited incomes.

And so I'm here today. I've asked for some time to ask some questions, and I know that it's a limited amount of time, but how I frame them, I think that I'm trying to make a point that will get some answers.

So with that I'd like to move on. I would like to ask just one more question about the seniors' income plan. How many people work in that area?

Mr. Tweed: — There are two staff involved in the provincial aspect. Appreciate, Mr. Forbes, that the program is managed for us by the federal government.

Mr. Forbes: — Then with that, I'd like to move on to the child care parent subsidies, and we see a decrease here of 2.5 million.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That is correct. There is a decrease in the allocation in the budget, but no changes have been made to the benefits or the eligibility criteria of the program, so benefits have not been cut. The child care subsidy budget was reduced to reflect the forecasted uptake of the program for the upcoming year because the 2009-10 budget was underexpended by approximately 2.5 million. In 2009-10 there were approximately 10,900 licensed spaces in the province. Of these, only 3,150 spaces or 29 per cent utilized the subsidy, and on average each subsidized space costs approximately \$386 per month.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you tell me when the last increase to the subsidy occurred?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — To the amount? No, I can't. We have not increased the amount since the election, so the last increase would have been prior to that and I couldn't tell you right now . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . And my deputy minister is telling me the last increase was 2006.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, thank you. And so we see the rental supplements. That's going up significantly and I assume that's because of the costs of rent. What is the uptake of this here, of this program in terms of number of people or number of families and . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We have 5,100 families under the family housing supplement and then 2,600 households with the disability housing supplement.

Mr. Forbes: — Now again this may be an opportunity for the minister just to illuminate this . . . 122 million was last year's budget for the disability CBOs and it's gone to 114, and I think you may have alluded to this in your opening remarks. Can you just review why that program . . . This may be part . . . Well I don't want to speculate on this. I'll get the answer.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Within the disability community-based organizations, I did explain this in the opening remarks. The budget last year was extremely high to accommodate a very aggressive expansion of disability spaces and day programs, and that is of course going through community-based organizations. We anticipate not as many spaces being expanded this year, although some will be, but year over year that's going to look like a reduction even though we're still rolling out the four-year plan.

Mr. Forbes: — And as we're just working ourselves down this page here, and I go to salaries and I see that there is about a three . . . or about a \$2.8 million reduction in salaries in this area. How is that arrived at?

Ms. Zerr: — Sorry about the delay. It took us a couple of minutes to get sorted out precisely what you were talking about. So the difference between the two numbers is accumulative salary decrease, and it includes the 1.5 million for Valley View. So there's 1.255 that is the overall salary reduction target for the whole income assistance branch and then the 1.5 for Valley View.

Mr. Forbes: — So then there will be some staff lost in this area, not necessarily front line. Is that what you're thinking?

Ms. Zerr: — Not necessarily front . . . I mean we have a target established of an additional 42 FTEs, and so we've allocated that out.

Mr. Forbes: — And the 42, yes, when we were talking about that earlier . . . and that's sort of spread out through the whole ministry. It's not one particular area. Okay, so that's there.

I'm wondering if this is the place to talk about, in this area, is this where we should be talking about CBOs? I know you've increased the 1 per cent, but there's been other pressures that

have come to CBOs. And of course the big one . . . and perhaps you can't answer this. But I know that you were the lead minister when it came to the CBO summits, but around the CVAs [central vehicle agency], that now we're seeing a lot of the CBOs having to look after their own vehicle needs where it was done prior to this through the central vehicle agency, and it was much appreciated.

We're having calls about that continually because it's a new pressure, and they definitely appreciated being able to use the CVAs. It was a way to have good vehicles and a way to have some accountability in terms of how do you . . . Some of these CBOs can't afford it. So any comments on this? I anticipate it is a Government Services issue, but I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on this.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, and you're right; this falls under the Government Services. However, I think we need to be clear with the public. These CVAs weren't just without a charge. They paid the lease or, you know, they made payments. They made payments on the CVAs.

There is 21 organizations that serve the community living division that were accessing the government lease programs. And for organizations that serve both the child and family services and CL [community living] clients that access these vehicles, my understanding and from Government Services is, they are, you know, talking to these groups and negotiating a very, very good deal for them to have the vehicles. So I don't know what those deals are right now.

I haven't in my office — and perhaps the deputy minister can say further — I haven't had a call on it, not one, no.

Mr. Forbes: — I had a call this morning.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Pardon me?

Mr. Forbes: — I had a call this morning.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Did you? Yes, see I haven't had one yet, and I know even with the community-based organization which isn't under this ministry that is affected at home in the constituency, I haven't heard from them. So I'm not sure if the deputy minister is hearing calls, but I definitely haven't.

Mr. Forbes: — And of course CBOs are right across the government base. But the feedback we're hearing . . . And you did allude to the lease and all of that, and they actually appreciated that because they don't have the capacity to manage yet one more thing. And vehicles is one more thing. And they appreciated having the fact that the vehicle . . . [inaudible] . . . It was a vehicle they could count on and all of that. But you're right. It wasn't free, and they were well aware of that, but it was well worth the cost.

[23:15]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The other thing that was odd — and I don't know the history of why and you probably don't either; I don't know — I'm not sure why it was so piecemeal. Like it was not a . . . There was no rhyme or logic as to who had this offer, who had that opportunity. It wasn't fairly accessible to all

organizations. So how that all came about, I truly don't know.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. You were working on some other initiatives with CBOs, the extended, I think, of the core contracts. And you were doing some surveying, I think. There were surveys about . . . You were doing some initiatives to see how you could strengthen the CBO sector. And how is that work coming along?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — And I'm going to have to get my officials to help me with this. We initiated last year the first offer of three-year contracts with CBOs. And not all were interested, but some were, so that was sort of the phase 1. Phase 2, which would be within this budget and the go forward, I don't have the details of that. Who does?

Ms. Zerr: — In terms of the actual number of CBOs that are in multi-year versus year-by-year renewals, I don't have the number at hand. What I can tell you is that we're in a transition process. We do have CBOs now that are in multi-year contracts. And at this point in time, it's a process that some CBOs have put their hands up and been willing to try, and some haven't. And so this is really, I think, an exploratory phase for both parties.

Mr. Forbes: — Now from my notes, I see that . . . I wanted to just reflect a minute on the Ombudsman report, that actually the numbers of concerns have gone down, but he has or he's working with the ministry around the issue around overpayments.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you talk a little bit about what's happening with that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. The ministry's working with the recommendations with the Ombudsman, as always and has been done in the past. One of the reasons of overpayments is because the client comes to you. He's in dire straits. You give him his initial money, so he's not on the street, based on what he's telling you he has for assets and income. And when he actually brings in the materials, you may find that then he's in an overpayment position.

There are other situations. Some of it I think can be resolved. I'm not sure entirely that it can be resolved. Of course the children . . . Or the Ombudsman's going to be looking at the ideal. But we're working with vulnerable people. And you know yourself, because I know you work with them a lot, that in order to be right, do you shortchange him initially, or do you give him the benefit of doubt, give him what he needs to get started? And yes, you may find after that you've overpaid him.

So that is part of that, that I'm not sure I want to change because it is problematic for when you first do that assessment. I'm sure there's other things that the ministry's working on with the Ombudsman to address this issue. And Marian can describe those activities.

Ms. Zerr: — So we very much appreciated some of the comments from the Ombudsman because they help us to improve our practice. We've undertaken some very specific

activity as a consequence of his observations in order to improve the service we provide to clients.

And so three of the specific things we've done, one of them is that we're now making sure that the Saskatchewan social assistance handbook is provided to every client when they apply, and as simple as one might think, that wasn't always a practice in the past. So it's sort of that. And here's the rules of the game, making sure that that's provided to them right off the hop.

As well, we're making sure that when there is a decision regarding an overpayment, that a client is advised by letter of that decision taking place, not just by telephone. And we're following up in addition to providing the letter in terms of ensuring that — and again, as inane as this might sound — making sure that it goes to the right address because our clients are clients that are transitional and move frequently.

So there's different levels of follow-up that we are putting into the system to try and make sure that we're as diligent as possible in ensuring clients understand both their entitlements and the situations that occur when there are overpayments.

Mr. Forbes: — I appreciate the comments. It is a challenge, and I do think it's better to err with, you know, a bit. I mean you have to be careful. You are dealing with taxpayers' money and that's always an issue. And I know that when mistakes are made that there has to be something done about it. So I appreciate the Ombudsman's work.

And someone has come forward. And I've just written you a letter. I don't know if you've seen it. And it's an interesting one, but he has quoted some of the recommendations. And I think that if there's some way to do it ahead of the game, it sounds like that's what the Ombudsman's saying, to let people know ahead of the game what's going to be coming . . . and before the overpayment's posted, that if there's something that can be done because once that's done, it's pretty much cast in stone. And you know the ministry's out to collect the overpayment. Anyways I think that's an important area, and we look forward to hearing more.

What kind of range are we talking about? What kind of collection? How much is collected each year in terms of overpayments?

Mr. Tweed: — On closed files, Mr. Forbes, which was really the focus or large part of the focus of the Ombudsman's work, there are about \$3 million annually collected in closed files, about 2 million of those as the result of the refund setup program that the Ombudsman was observing.

Mr. Forbes: — What was the second number?

Mr. Tweed: — Two million.

Mr. Forbes: — Two million. And that would be, if I'm looking at this to get a sense of proportion, I'm looking at probably at transfers to individuals. That number at the bottom, transfer . . .

Mr. Tweed: — I'm sorry I didn't hear you.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm trying to get a sense of proportion here and how much is going out to individuals. And so I'm looking at what the anticipated transfers to individuals will be, which is \$346 million.

Mr. Tweed: — Yes. Now the Ombudsman's report was only a review. The appeal process is related to the Saskatchewan assistance program so that would be your budget of 199.2

Mr. Forbes: — Yes so it's 3 million out of . . .

Mr. Tweed: — That's collections on closed files.

Mr. Forbes: — Which is over many years. Could be over a series of years.

Mr. Tweed: — Could be.

Mr. Forbes: — Right, not necessarily many but a few years. Okay. And, Mr. Tweed, just so I don't make the mistake of overestimating or underestimating, when you said one third of the caseload may be children, could you actually just figure out, while we have other questions, what number is that?

Mr. Tweed: — I can give you a specific answer to that in the morning.

Mr. Forbes: — If you would, that would be good. I just don't want to be wrong in doing my math and make that mistake, okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We'll follow through with that.

Mr. Forbes: — That would be great. I appreciate that. Okay, I just want to touch a bit on the child and family services which is hugely important. I know my colleague has a few questions. And if the minister's willing, what I'd like to do . . . We did get these now, but I prefer to actually talk to the minister later about this.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Tonight?

Mr. Forbes: — No, no, over the next week or two.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, we could do that.

Mr. Forbes: — Over the next week or two. I'll to have to read it.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Absolutely.

Mr. Forbes: — And I'll send you a note and we'll do that, okay? But child and family services, this is one that I know is a huge emphasis and there's a lot of work. And we look forward to seeing what's going to be coming up. I understand that there may be an interim report this June, are we on schedule for that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm sorry. I was busy collecting the relevant information. You're saying an interim report from where?

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, I was reading, reviewing the Children's Advocate report today, that he was talking about an interim

report in June. Is that . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — He's going to do an interim report.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, he's going to do one. Okay. Well that's good.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — This is why we ask these questions, so I'm not on the minister's case about where's that report. So okay, I'll be looking for his report then. I have a question about the Linkin system, the computer system. How is that going?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — My understanding is that hopefully . . . And it is on schedule as near as I know, and I'll definitely get my officials to give more details if you like. But the first stage of implementation should be later this year. But I have Cheryl Senecal, the assistant deputy minister for child and family services, and I'm sure she can give a better answer than that.

Ms. Senecal: — Thank you for the question, Mr. Forbes. Certainly we're making very good process on the Linkin system. We've just completed the fit/gap analysis. And we are diligently working towards the pilot implementation by the fourth quarter of 2011, so we are fully on target with that.

We are later this month . . . Or later in the month of May, we will be doing some travelling throughout the province, going to all of the regions to actually do the first live demo of the system. So this is the first chance for our staff to actually get a real sense of what the system will provide them and how it will help to expedite their work and reduce the amount of time that they are having to, you know, search manually through paper files and allow them to spend more time with their clients, and as well at the end of the day, be able to better manage the information that we have to deal with in very, you know, a large number of cases with a number of complexities. And at the end of the day be able to report more timely and more accurately on our cases. So we're very pleased at the progress that we're making.

Mr. Forbes: — Is this computer system only for children in care, or is it across other support or programs in the ministry? Who does it all apply to? Who will all be in the database, if I can call it that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's only our children in care. But my understanding is that it's compatible. It can talk to education, I believe. And Cheryl can correct that.

Ms. Senecal: — What might help to explain at least part of this is the phases. We have three main phases of development. Phase 1(a) is the phase that we're in right now, and that focuses on developing a registration and basic case management system. So this will provide a client registration that will track the removal and placement of children going into, out of home care.

Phase 1(b) will focus on payments and basic financial reporting, so that this phase will replace our existing system that we use to make payments to foster parents, let's say, and it will be used to issue payments and process provider invoices. So as I

mentioned for foster parents, for example, that will allow us to make payments to them and to expedite those payments.

Phase 2 will complete the development and implementation of a case management system to provide enhanced functionality, to support the complete case management process that will include intake, investigations, assessments, case plans, case reviews, adoptions as well as the legal processes that surround adoptions.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. To Mr. Chair, when are you planning on calling adjournment here? My colleague wants a couple of minutes, and I do have a couple of questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes, the timekeeping I have, we've got till 11:56 will be three hours, taking out the minister's comments and the break. But we can allow you some more time . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Well no. We've got just a couple of quick questions. The other one, when I was reading through this, one of the documents was talking about the Pringle review. The budget is \$830,000. Have I got that . . . Can you give us a sense of how that is going to be spent? What is the budget, in general terms?

[23:30]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — [Inaudible] . . . through the contract agreements, meals and travel, accommodations to hold the consultations.

Mr. Forbes: — Is there going to be any that will be going to any others, I'm thinking of First Nations or Métis organizations, who need support to participate in this process?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, there will be support for First Nations and Métis people. And they are accessing that support through a fund in FNMR [First Nations and Métis Relations].

Mr. Forbes: — Oh okay, so basically this 830,000 is to support the four panellists?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — In their travel and . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — And their travel and their meals and their accommodations for the different venues they're going to need. We have a writer hired as well to travel with them to write the report, and a staff member that is available to book the different, like you know, for the entire process and the logistics of the panel. As I said, the funding for the First Nations to participate in consultation and Métis people is through FNMR.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, I understand that. Is that the \$3 million fund?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, that's for economic development initiatives. So that is totally separate from a fund that FNMR has for consultations.

Mr. Forbes: — Now this writer, is it a writer/researcher? Is that the kind of thing that that person does?

Ms. Senecal: — There is a writer as well as there will be research capability provided from within the ministry, but we also have some contractual arrangements in order to ensure there is an appropriate support for the independent panel.

Mr. Forbes: — Out of curiosity, is there out-of-province travel, whether it be some of . . . And I think that's a good thing to see what's happening in Canada or that the panellists may be checking out other provinces, what are the best practices.

Ms. Senecal: — We are looking at the potential. Bob Pringle, the Chair has had some initial conversations with us about his desire to have a reference panel, at some point in the summer probably, that may involve bringing in some individuals with extensive knowledge of the child welfare system, you know, possibly from an interjurisdictional perspective. So bringing in some of those individuals in order for the panel to have some conversations with them and to understand some of the most recent trends, some of the best practices elsewhere may involve some . . . you know, in order to support them coming in. They may be coming from out of province.

Mr. Forbes: — And I think that's a good thing. I think that it's almost like an external examiner. But I think some fresh eyes are always a good idea. I think that's a good thing.

I have a question about the Children's Advocate's report today. We still see, and while the trends are, there are some trends that are encouraging, the caseload that he cites is still going up. And I'm curious to know, one of the things that in, I think it was his previous report, and the ministry talked about how they were going to make sure they had a quality assurance unit — I think that's the term — to make sure when foster children are in care, children in care, that there's a standard of care that's being followed. I hope I have the terms right. Is that unit in place, and how are things going with that?

Ms. Senecal: — Certainly we do have that unit in place. And actually, Jennifer, would you like to speak to this question? I just want to be clear on what you've asked because I think I might have misinterpreted it. So would you mind just . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Well as I understand, and I don't have the *Breach Of Trust* report with me tonight, but what it was calling for was some sort of way to check on the standard of care that children who were being placed in care were receiving. And they were going to do it; the Children's Advocate office felt they should do it. And I may have this not, that part incorrect, but the ministry decided that in fact they have people within the ministry who could do this because they serve a quality assurance . . . [inaudible] . . . that could assure that different standards were being met.

Ms. Senecal: — Right. I mean certainly as part of the reorg we have actually, you know, we do have dedicated resources that are focusing on that nature of work. You may be referring, if you're referring to the *Breach Of Trust* report, you may be referring or thinking about the possibility that we considered at one point in terms of having a foster advocate?

Mr. Forbes: — No, that's . . . I'm not looking for that. No.

Ms. Senecal: — No. Okay. So certainly we have made

significant progress through the reorg.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm told there is a unit.

Ms. Senecal: — No. There are dedicated resources.

Mr. Forbes: — And how many people would that be?

Ms. Senecal: — Five.

Mr. Forbes: — Five? Because I was thinking six or something, but it could be five.

Ms. Senecal: — There's five individuals. Actually when we take the whole unit, there's a total of 10. So there's five consultants, three program effectiveness consultants — I didn't want to use the acronym — plus the director, Jennifer, who's with us this evening.

Mr. Forbes: — Well that's encouraging to hear that's it in place and it's fully staffed and operating. I think that's an important feature that the ministry have. I'll turn it over to my colleague from Saskatoon Eastview who has a couple of questions.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. I had actually had these questions written out and then I was, while I was listening attentively to all your comments, I was reading the report, and it just so happens on page 12 it talks about my question. And it talks about Juniper Manor in Saskatoon, and it offers seniors the opportunity to age in place by accessing further services as they're required while still maintaining their independence. Explain to me what that means. Is that an assisted living component of Juniper Manor?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I don't know what report you're using. I have no clue what you're reading from. Oh, the housing one. Sorry. The one we didn't get but just . . .

Ms. Junor: — The one we didn't get but just now we got it?

Mr. Forbes: — I had said that we were going to talk about that later.

Ms. Junor: — Well my question was still . . .

Mr. Forbes: — You could just ask the question if you want.

Ms. Junor: — My question was still going to be that but I haven't . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I didn't even bring that in. As we described before, it's a Treasury Board Crown and not subject to the . . . I don't have it . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay, if you don't reference it and just . . . Just ask the question.

Ms. Junor: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay, and . . . [inaudible] . . . page 12.

Ms. Junor: — In my riding is Scott-Forget towers, and they have asked for many years about adding a piece on to their unit, their two towers that would be more of enhanced assisted living

than there is now, not just a common dining room. And I see reference somewhere that this is happening. So I'm wondering if, when you talk about enhanced services to let seniors age in place, that's exactly what they're asking for at Scott-Forget. They need that transition.

There's some like the Palisades in Saskatoon has several floors of . . . This has not anything to do with you or your ministry, but it is a building that has several floors of residences and then one floor of where you would go to in the transition between that and long-term care.

Scott-Forget has often asked, and I think has had a receptive ear for a few years, if there's a possibility of doing that. They have the land. It's something like Cheshire Homes where it's right in the back there which is, by the way, coming along quite nicely. It's coming up quite fast actually. But Scott-Forget, I think, has a very good case. That's a really popular seniors complex. It has a lot of seniors in it and a long waiting list. And they have a good case when they talk about, there's nowhere for them to go. They have to go to a personal care home. And if there's something that could be built or added on to that. And I know that there's different models you're looking at, different partnerships you're talking to and with, and I'm wondering if that's something that is in the future.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that. And yes, right now we're not looking for additional projects in Saskatoon. We've invested between 30 and \$40 million is dedicated right now to Saskatoon. So there are other communities that . . . Saskatoon is starting to see the vacancy levels come back to what is considered to be optimal, and the waiting list in Saskatoon is coming down on social housing.

Is it at any time in the future? I would never say never. I have another submission — I can't even remember the group — of just that kind of model of the assisted living of the seniors so they have the different sort of transition as their needs get greater. I know that is being built now in Humboldt. And it's totally being paid for by the developer. So that more and more communities . . . And it's because of that gap in between. And I do recognize that.

Is it a focused effort of Sask Housing Corporation right now? No. Like we're not focusing on looking specifically for that type of model.

Ms. Junor: — Why? When my colleague was talking about seniors and low-income seniors, there are other options for seniors who have some money. They can go into personal care homes for that gap.

Seniors who don't have, who are low income, don't have that option. So they stay in places like Scott-Forget longer than they should. And their neighbours say, you know, she shouldn't be there or he shouldn't be there, and yet there's no other place for them to go because they can't afford it.

So I would encourage you, I think if you're getting a presentation for one model, I think there's probably more. And there was some conversation . . . I mean, I would encourage you to look at them and hopefully plan that for a project for Saskatoon.

I think there was some discussion at one point with Scott-Forget that . . . And I don't think there ever is any vacancies there but if there were, there could be conversions of some of the units to a more concentrated assistance. But I think it's better if it was built separately or added on separately. And just enhance the dining capacity or the cleaning capacity or whatever it has to be . . . And it is the only housing unit — in fact it's the only anywhere — that has a dedicated primary health care centre for seniors on its site. And it serves all, probably four other seniors complexes around there. So it's probably a good one to look at that is unique, I think, actually.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. And I have no doubt that that would be the case. And we do have a seniors review under way and under Health. And I know the Health minister and myself has jointly met with some groups that do do different models, but no decisions has been made to this point.

With the particular facility that you were just, you know, talking about, I'm not sure, would they qualify for some RRAP [residential rehabilitation assistance program] funding for changes, modelling? And I don't know that they would or if they would be interested. But presently that isn't a model that we are looking at.

I know that it is not — again not — unique to Saskatchewan. Many provinces are struggling because you have that area that is sort of a level 1 care. And no government to my knowledge in Canada is supporting that. But there is a need.

Ms. Junor: — And can I just ask that somebody makes a note that on page 12 there was a mention of Juniper Manor and that I'd like to know what exactly you meant by aging in place and accessing further services. I'd kind of like to know that, if you'd follow that up, if you wouldn't mind. Thank you.

[23:45]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's connection to home care and like just the . . . But we will get to back to you.

The Chair: — Ms. Junor, you have no more questions?

Ms. Junor: — No thanks. I'm done.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — I have no further questions. I want to thank the officials and the minister for coming out tonight. I know it's late, and I appreciate the answers. And we look forward to a year in which poverty gets reduced and we have a lot of successes. So thanks a lot for coming out. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and committee members.

The Chair: — Thank you Mr. Forbes, Ms. Junor. If there's no more questions we'll now vote the estimates.

Vote 36, Social Services on page 129, central management and services subvote (SS01) in the amount of 40,803,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Child and family services subvote (SS04) in the amount of 182,330,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Income assistance and disability services subvote (SS03) in the amount of 507,758,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Client support subvote (SS05) in the amount of \$14,969,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Housing subvote (SS12) in the amount of 11,429,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Amortization of capital assets in the amount of 1,014,000. This is for informational purposes only.

Social Services main vote 36, \$757,289,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — I'll now ask a member to move the following motion:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2011, the following sum for Social Services in the amount of \$757,289,000.

Mr. Hart. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Vote 36 agreed to.]

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — November
Social Services
Vote 36**

(Subvote SS03)

The Chair: — And now we also have supplementary estimates from 2009. Vote 36, employment support and income assistance, subvote (SS03) in the amount of \$13,388,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Social Services, vote 36, \$13,388,000. I'll now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2010, the following sums for Social Services in the amount of \$13,388,000.

Ms. Eagles. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Vote 36 agreed to.]

The Chair: — That concludes our committee work for this evening, the voting off of the estimates. Before we do conclude, I'd like to thank all committee members, and especially the legislative staff, Clerk Kathy. And our Page has gone home for the night, sticking out for quite a while. And I'd also like to thank the employees of Hansard for the work they've put in as well. And Madam Minister, would you like to make any closing comments?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. And I too would like to thank committee members and all of the officials that have helped out this evening. I want to thank them for their dedication for tonight and throughout the year.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And I'd also like to extend my thanks to the officials for coming out at such a late hour and helping us to complete this very important work. With that, we will adjourn the Social Services estimates for tonight. And I'll have a motion for adjournment. Mr. Weekes. Thank you and have a good night.

[The committee adjourned at 23:51.]