



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Batoche

Mr. David Forbes, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Centre

Mr. Mark Docherty
Regina Coronation Park

Mr. Greg Lawrence
Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. Paul Merriman
Saskatoon Sutherland

Ms. Laura Ross
Regina Qu'Appelle Valley

Ms. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 14:59.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. The time now being 2:59, we will begin this meeting. My name is Delbert Kirsch, and I'm the Chair of this committee. With us today is Mark Docherty, Mr. David Forbes as Deputy Chair, Mr. Greg Lawrence, Mr. Paul Merriman, Ms. Laura Ross and Ms. Nadine Wilson.

This afternoon and evening we will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Social Services. We now begin our consideration of vote 36, Social Services, central management and services, subvote (SS01).

Minister Draude is here with her officials. Madam Minister, would you like to introduce your officials and make a few opening remarks?

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to you and to all my colleagues. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. Before I open, I would like to introduce some of the individuals I have with us from the Sask Housing Corporation. First of all, Deputy Minister Ken Acton. And with the housing officials, we have Don Allen who is the president of Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and the assistant deputy minister of housing; Eileen Badiuk who is the executive director at program and service design; Dianne Baird who's executive director of housing network; and Tim Gross who is the executive director of housing development. And Kim Blondeau is here, the executive assistant to the deputy minister, and Kim McKechny, my chief of staff.

The 2013-14 budget contains the province's commitment to the Saskatchewan advantage housing plan and supports the housing initiatives identified in our Saskatchewan plan for growth. The Saskatchewan advantage housing plan was announced in 2011 with an investment of \$344 million to create 12,600 new housing units around the province by 2016. In the two years since the plan was announced, the province has already made commitments for about 6,500 units. Of those, 1,700 are already completed and another 1,100 are under construction.

Our growing economy and the growing population have created more demand for housing. Our government has responded to this demand by partnering with the private sector, with municipalities, and the federal government in implementing a strong foundation, the housing strategy for Saskatchewan, which was released in August of 2011. The objectives of the housing strategy are achieving three main goals: the first one, increasing housing supply; the second one, improving affordability; and thirdly, supporting individuals and families in the greatest need.

As we've often heard in our consultations for the housing strategy, one size does not fit all. In response we have

developed different programs to work with different sectors and meet different needs. Our suite of targeted programs and initiatives gives the housing sector tools to respond to the local needs and then ultimately increase the supply of housing across the province.

And we know that the programs are working. In 2012 total housing starts in Saskatchewan reached 9,968, more housing starts in one year than in any year since the 1970s. Also in 2012, rental starts hit 1,072, more than in the years 2002 to 2009 combined. At the same time, vacancy rates in five of Saskatchewan's nine largest centres saw some improvement.

Private market rental and home ownership options are increasing for low- and moderate-income households. Housing programs and initiatives are addressing housing needs across the spectrum, including the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. These are the people with low incomes who cannot afford rents in the private market. Some also face a number of health, addictions, or other challenges, and they have difficulty housing.

We listened to the input and expertise of our stakeholders on the design or redesign of the housing programs, and as a result there are successes. Many of the programs and initiatives support multiple objectives. For example, in 2012 over \$4 million was committed to the redesigned secondary suite program, representing commitments for over 206 new affordable rental suites. In addition to increasing the supply of affordable units for renters, homeowners are also able to use the income from these secondary suites to make their own homes more affordable.

Using funds from the sale of the older social housing rental units, we will build 300 new units. This will ensure the continued supply of government-owned rental housing for low-income households in the greatest need.

At the same time, the older units that are being sold will create even more opportunity for affordable home ownership. Sask Housing Corporation is implementing changes to the social housing program that were announced last July to better target this important provincial resource to those that need it the most.

These changes will not come without some challenges. For example, tenants with higher incomes are going to see rent increases. We worked with the office of the rental tenancy in designing the new rent structure, and we'll work with the office and the Ombudsman before the first round of rent increases takes effect this fall.

In northern communities and smaller centres in the South, there are few, if any, market rentals available. Representatives from Saskatchewan Housing Corporation travelled the province over several months discussing options and alternatives with hundreds of representatives of housing authorities. These changes that we are making to social housing in the North and small-town Saskatchewan are almost unanimously endorsed.

I am confident that our new social housing program will provide better access to housing for Saskatchewan people most in need, including those fleeing from domestic violence, those

who are homeless or living with low income or permanent disability.

In closing, with the 2013-14 budget, the Sask Housing Corporation will have almost \$29 million to support the creation of new homes. In this fiscal year alone, Sask Housing will invest \$10 million in a 605-bed student residence at the University of Regina. We'll construct 1,300 new rentals under the rental construction incentive with a funding of \$6 million.

We'll develop 240 new home ownership units through the affordable home ownership program with a funding 1.2 million; support 70 secondary suites with a funding of \$1 million; construct 40 new homes through Habitat for Humanity with \$2 million in funding, double that we provided last year and the highest increase in funding to Habitat anywhere in Canada.

We'll repair 275 existing affordable housing units to keep them viable with the \$3.2 million from the Saskatchewan repair program, and will construct 140 new government-subsidized homes with \$5 million under the federal-provincial cost-shared rental development and capital rent subsidy programs.

In addition, Headstart on a Home program, a provincial initiative delivered by fund manager Westcap Management Ltd., has approved the development of 864 new home ownership units in 11 Saskatchewan communities. Since this program began in August of 2011, 172 households have already been able to move into their Headstart-funded home.

The federal government has announced a five-year extension to the investment in affordable housing agreement which will give Saskatchewan continued flexibility as we implement our housing strategy. As I said earlier in my remarks, our government has partnered with the private sector, with municipalities, and the federal government to create and implement the housing strategy for Saskatchewan. We know that housing is a shared responsibility. We'll continue to consult with our stakeholders and build on our successful partnerships.

To that end, the Sask Housing Corporation is supporting a number of housing summits and forums this year in Regina, Saskatoon, and in the North. We learned at the first provincial summit in 2011 that these forums provide an important opportunity for housing stakeholders to meet and to discuss not only planning for housing but moving that plan into action. And two weeks ago, we had our first non-profit housing forum in Saskatoon. And there was 110 organizations that came to that forum, and they brought forth some very important questions and ideas.

I'm proud of the progress that we've made, but of course there's still more work to be done. The 2013-14 budget is going to allow us to continue to work with our partners to achieve the goals of the housing strategy and secure a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people. At this time, I'd be pleased to take your questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. We now go to questions. Mr. Forbes, you have the floor.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. And thank you for the review of comments. They are good starts for some of the

questions I have. And I also want to thank the officials for coming in. And I know that from my past experience you've been very helpful in answering, and it's been a very productive afternoon. And I know that a couple of my colleagues will be coming in later because of northern issues, but they have another committee right now, and so I think they may show up around 4. So we'll see what time they get here, but they know the housing people are here right now.

But right off the bat, I want to ask about staffing. In terms of how many people will be in the employ of Sask Housing this year in terms of the budget, what's the go-forward number that you will think in terms of FTEs [full-time equivalent]?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Excuse me. Is this staffing just for Sask Housing or right across?

Mr. Forbes: — Just Sask Housing.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Okay.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — A lot of these questions, because they are technical in nature and they're just numbers . . . I shouldn't say it that way. Their numbers are important to all of us, but I want to, I'm going to ask Don to answer the questions. You'll get the specific answers.

Mr. Allen: — Thank you. Don Allen, assistant deputy minister for housing and president of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. Our FTE allocation for 2013-14 will be 94.

Mr. Forbes: — Ninety-four. You know, when we started, when I was first appointed the housing critic, we were at, I think, 130-some FTEs in Sask Housing. Now we're at 94. Now part of that, I assume, is through the lean initiative. What kind of things have happened that you've been able to come to 94? I think that's a decrease of 12 FTEs from last year.

Mr. Acton: — Yes. It's Ken Acton, deputy minister. There's a couple of things in terms of, that have occurred over the past year that has changed that number. One was the decision of Living Skies Housing Authority to handle their own accounting process. And that was a decision that was made last year which resulted in a reduction of FTEs on the ministry's books of six positions.

And the other that has occurred was a transfer of housing technical services. Some of those were already being provided by Living Skies Housing Authority where they provide technical support whether it's, well, for boilers or elevator inspections or the expertise, those types of things. Some of that was being provided by Living Skies, and the rest of the technical services folks moved to Living Skies late last year as part of that. So there was a total of 28 staff in total that moved there. Some of that will include part of our workforce adjustment numbers for this current year.

Mr. Forbes: — So who else . . .

Mr. Acton: — So they're in . . . We moved them to the housing authority.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And so, I'm not sure I follow you. They were under Living Sky?

Mr. Acton: — Some of them were under Living Sky and some of them were within the ministry. Now they're all under Living Sky.

Mr. Forbes: — They're all under Living Sky, Living Sky Housing Authority.

Mr. Acton: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And where is Living Sky based out of? Is it based out of Regina or is it . . .

Mr. Acton: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And it does all sort of the global . . .

Mr. Acton: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — What does it do?

Mr. Acton: — It provides supports. I'll let Don maybe build a little bit on this. But it provides support to other housing authorities and non-profit housing organizations.

Mr. Allen: — Thank you. Just first a point of a clarification. I think we may have referenced that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, how many employees it has. By legislation, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has no employees. It contracts for all of its services and contracts, in my case with the Ministry of Social Services, for those.

Living Skies Housing Authority, as the deputy indicated, was performing and continues to perform a number of very specific technical supports for the housing authority system across the province. The ministry was also providing certain technical services for the housing authority system across the province. To more effectively and efficiently deliver those, we merged those two units under the Living Skies Housing Authority and the 28 FTEs moved from the Ministry of Social Services to Living Skies and took their collective agreement with them. So they're still, you know, members of the SGEU [Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union] and under the collective bargaining system.

Living Skies has offices in several communities across Saskatchewan. Its three primary offices are Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert, and that's where the technical folks are located. They also have what we call regional offices a little closer to the action out in, you know, where they support small towns.

Mr. Forbes: — So would they be doing housing inspections? I'm sorry if you said that. If you felt there was a house that needed to be inspected to see if it qualified for the rental supplement, would that be something they would do?

Mr. Allen: — The rental supplement? That is correct. In smaller centres, the technical services people do inspections for the rental housing supplement.

Mr. Forbes: — Now the governance of Living Skies, how is that . . . What is the governance structure of Living Skies Housing Authority?

Mr. Allen: — Living Skies Housing Authority has a staff to begin with. So it has a general manager and managers, you know, experienced staff. And there's also a board of directors appointed by the minister to oversee the activities of Living Skies.

Mr. Forbes: — Now I'm not sure how, you know, different cities and towns and villages, when they have their housing authority, who they file their reports with. Do they do annual reports?

Mr. Allen: — They produce annual financial statements.

Mr. Forbes: — And so with Living Skies, how will they report out each year in terms of their work?

Mr. Allen: — If you were to look at last year's annual report for Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, you would actually see the results of Living Skies Housing Authority in the consolidation statement. So there's an appendix in the annual report . . .

15:15]

Mr. Forbes: — We may end up referring to that. Yes. I have some other questions based on that. Okay. So now Living Skies has how many employees altogether now?

Mr. Allen: — That's a good question. I believe the number was 43 before the transition, so it would be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 70 today.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. All right. But I did see that your . . . that there are salaries. And it's gone down from 7.6 million to 7.1, which would represent the transition or the transfer of those employees to Living Skies. So we have lost . . . There were 12 that were positions that . . . We went from 106 to 94 that are still within the ministry. And the 12 went over to — just to review — went over to Living Skies? All 12 of those positions?

Mr. Allen: — Yes. When the budget for 2012 and '13 was created, we knew that this was an activity that we were intending to undertake. But we also knew that we wouldn't make it effective April 1, 2012, that it would come in partway through the year. So only a part year's budget was removed from 2012-13. And then what's happened in this year's budget is the remainder, the annualization, as we call it, has occurred.

Mr. Forbes: — And the point I wanted to get at was that essentially there's still the same number of people working at housing, whether they're working for Living Skies or for the ministry.

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, good. Then I wanted to just . . . I always find this interesting in terms of just . . . And so maybe it's a bit of review for housing, but I am looking at vote 36 on page 122. So just to make sure I understand, and folks if they're home

watching this, what this follows. When you talk about allocations and the \$8.6 million, what is that for?

Mr. Allen: — So that pays for the staff of the housing division. So that pays for the officials behind you, their operating expenses. Basically the 94 FTEs that we just talked about are paid for out of that number.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Because I'm looking at two things. I'm looking at, under classification by type, salaries 7.1 million. You're telling me that's part of the 8.6 million?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then I guess goods and services, that'd be their office space and different things they need. That's part of that.

Mr. Allen: — The travel costs. That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Okay. And then so . . . And then it says transfers for public services. What is that?

Mr. Allen: — That's the amount of money that goes from the GRF [General Revenue Fund] directly into Sask Housing for programs, programs that are either cost-matched with the federal government or, you know, solely funded by the province. So it could go for the rental development program or the repair programs or the rental construction incentive. But that's the provincial contribution to Sask Housing programs.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Right. And the other part that Sask Housing could either make up through the sale of the houses that's happening or the sale of the land or federal transfer, that type of thing?

Mr. Allen: — Yes. So the Sask Housing has a number of sources. So the sale of the houses, the 300 single family homes is different in that the proceeds are totally being used to fund the construction of new social housing.

So to fund other programs, Sask Housing has a number of sources of revenue. Transfers from the General Revenue Fund in the current year, transfers from the General Revenue Fund in previous years. And some of that is about, you know, program funds that were specifically allocated for a purpose, for example RCI [rental construction incentive]. Or it may be that funds that were provided and the program has been completed and the results achieved but there's still some unspent funding, so the province has decided to use it for other purposes.

And then there's other own sources — as you mentioned, land sales. And there's also contributions from the federal government, the two funding streams there: the social housing agreement and the current investment in affordable housing. And there's also sometimes municipal contributions towards programs.

Mr. Forbes: — Now is there any money coming out of Sask Housing into the GRF?

Mr. Allen: — In 2013-14, to my knowledge, no.

I stand corrected. The changes to the social housing program have meant changes to the social assistance shelter rates, and Sask Housing Corporation is returning that 1 million or \$1.2 million to the General Revenue Fund to keep the GRF whole.

Mr. Forbes: — And the reason I'm asking is, I know sometimes the federal government in its programs allows some flexibility in terms of what the government can choose to do with that money. And I'm not sure how it flows to the province, whether it flows through the GRF first or how it goes. So there's 1-point-some million coming back, you're saying?

Mr. Allen: — Yes. What happens is the social assistance system pays Sask Housing the rent for those social assistance recipients, and because we've made changes to the rent structure, we're collecting more rent for the same tenants. So it's sort of the government paying the government, and so we're just returning that increased rent. There's no federal funding plan to be transferred to the GRF from Sask Housing Corporation.

Mr. Forbes: — What about the rent supplement? Do you know how much Sask Housing units or the different authorities around the province get through the rental supplements?

Mr. Allen: — We would estimate, I believe, a number of around a half a million dollars in total.

Mr. Forbes: — But you don't know for sure?

Mr. Allen: — I don't know for sure but the last time we checked it was \$461,000.

Mr. Forbes: — I do note that the . . . And this is probably the only other area I'll go into is the rental housing supplements. It's 34 million. And I'm just curious, and maybe you don't have the officials here to ask this question — I could ask it tonight — but whether the government's done any tracking in terms of the larger landlords that may be getting that. So Sask Housing's getting about 400,000-plus of that. I'd be curious to know if you've done any work in terms of figuring out who's getting some of that \$34 million.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm just going to comment on that. The rental housing supplement goes to the tenant, not to the landlord.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. No, no, I'm quite aware of that, and I know we've had this conversation before. And it's not that I feel it's a . . . But I do feel it would be prudent or be at least interesting to know if there are some landlords who are . . . And I'm not talking about the mom and pop landlords or even, but Boardwalk. How much is flowing through them? How much is through Mainstreet? And that, that would be of interest, you know, I mean because we're seeing more of that type of major landlord in our province than ever before. But I'll leave that. That wasn't one of my main questions.

I'm just curious: is Sask Housing or the ministry under any kind of lawsuits in terms of housing?

Mr. Allen: — To our knowledge, the only lawsuits that we have against us are what you would expect from a very large

property owner in terms of slips and falls, people slipping on ice and falling or falling down stairs. That's all that we're aware of.

Mr. Forbes: — How many would you have in that?

Mr. Allen: — We don't know precisely, but to the best of our knowledge it's two.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And have you taken any . . . That just gets me to another question in terms of safety, especially with seniors in terms of I know some other provinces have launched major initiatives in terms of safety for seniors, particularly when it comes to falls. And I know it's been a particularly tough winter for ice, but I'd be curious if you've had any initiatives around seniors and safety, that type of thing.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I just meant to comment. I'll let the officials look at anything else that might be done. But I know that the carbon monoxide protector was something that we looked at last year, the security alarms that we're putting in for seniors, and I'm going to give you more specific information on it, but we have free home security devices for low-income seniors. So nothing in particular that I'm aware of for actual safety.

But I do think the importance of the authorities and the board members in checking on our tenants on a regular basis is very important. I'm more aware of what's happening in rural Saskatchewan personally. So I am confident that even though it's not a paid position in many cases for our authority members, they are watching very carefully for our seniors.

Mr. Forbes: — Thanks. Now, Minister, you had raised the land sale, and I'm just curious that I think the deadline for the land that was to be sold — I think it was in the northwest part of Regina — the deadline for RFPs [request for proposal] was the end of March. How is that going?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There was a request for offer that was issued in November and it closed in January. And we have finalized an offer, but I think the member's aware that there's confidentiality constraints with a buyer, and we're not able to release the details of it. But I can say that this was an important part of what we're doing as we're moving forward. You've got something you want to add, Don?

Mr. Allen: — Nothing other than to say that the sale is closed. We're no longer the owners of that land.

Mr. Forbes: — So there was one interested party in this land?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm not sure what kind of information I can give you. And I'm sure the members are aware that we have to make sure when you're dealing with developers and business people that I have to be really careful about that. Don, if there's something you can, I can add that . . . I guess, obviously, there was more than one offer.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And now where will that money show up in terms of your annual report? I'm looking at this and I'm looking at the back and I will probably see a blip in the next one or maybe not.

Mr. Allen: — That's correct. Similar to a blip you'll see when the results come out for 2012. There will be a proceeds of land sales go in there, and it will then find its way through to the bottom line to net income.

Mr. Forbes: — So I see, like in 2011 there were \$334,000 worth of land sales. Now would that include the housing as well, the building, or is that just land?

Mr. Allen: — To the best of my knowledge, that would be just land.

Mr. Forbes: — So what land was sold in 2011?

Mr. Allen: — Sorry. No, I stand corrected. It would include certain buildings and property sold around Saskatchewan.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. So was there significant land or real estate and property sold in 2010 and 2011?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. There is some of these questions that we'll gladly answer all we can, but some of them will be the Sask Housing report and that's when we deal with them through Public Accounts. So some of them, if we are . . . I'm not trying to be evasive with them, but the annual reports comes up through Public Accounts and we'll be able to give you that information. So if there's anything that we can give you right now, we will, but I'm advised it's sort of . . . it's borderline.

Mr. Forbes: — I appreciate that, and the time is limited. It's lots of questions.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Ask the questions that you can right now and I'll give you what I can.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm just curious that we're looking at this line and I'm going . . . Because I know that the statement that I think was made in the press, that this would be used in this year's budget — the land sale. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — It doesn't say that it'll be actually in this year's budget. We will be spending the money on housing but it doesn't necessarily say this year. What we're doing right now between the land sale and the selling of single units is . . . There's a lot of investment in Regina right now, so we will be working towards building as many units as possible in the time frame.

[15:30]

Mr. Forbes: — But the press release says that they were doing an RFO [request for offers]. And this is from November 5th:

. . . for proponents to purchase the land. As part of the upcoming budget process, the government will examine how best to use the proceeds of the sale to facilitate the construction of new affordable housing units for low-income and moderate-income earners.

So you've made that commitment very publicly about the 300 houses that that's going to turn around. But this was dealing with the 336 acres of land. So that's why I'm curious about how

we're going to see that turn around in terms of new housing.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Well as we move forward and look at the housing needs here in Regina, I can't say it's going to be all spent this year, but we will be watching and making sure that the money is spent on affordable housing. We'll be keeping track of it and I'm sure you will as well. And that's important to us.

Some of the things that . . . The projects that we have under way at this time is the U of R [University of Regina] residence. We just talked about \$10 million that would be going into that residence which would be, could be part of that monies that we receive from the land sales as well.

Mr. Forbes: — So how many pieces of land are similar to this across the province that are a significant number of acres?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to answer briefly and then ask my officials to follow up. I believe this is the last large piece of land that we had in the province. And we made the determination last year or the year before that the province wasn't going to be involved in land development. But at the same time, we were well aware that there is a need for housing, so giving land into the hands of the private sector was important to us. So I know for sure this is the last big one in Regina. And I'm just going to ask Don to underline for me if I was correct.

Mr. Allen: — It's the last big one in totality. We do have the occasional lot or very small parcel in different centres, but this was the last piece of land of any significance that we own.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So we'll look forward to seeing that and we'll look forward to reading the annual reports that say that, or to the public accounts. But we have more questions, no doubt about that, as we go forward.

Now I wanted to ask a little bit about . . . So you had the last land sale, and we'll watch that. I wanted to ask about the social housing changes, and you've alluded to that. You've said that essentially that'll be rolled out over the year. What's the official plan? Because a year ago in the summer when it was announced, you said that the changes were to be coming up into the larger cities, and they've done that. And now we're going to be looking at the rest of the social housing through the province?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And that's correct. So the phase 1 was the major cities. And at that time there was approximately 5,000 housing units, and the notice of change was in October of 2012. Phase 2 is 22 smaller market communities. There, there's approximately 3,500 housing units, and the notice of change was in February of 2013. And phase 3 is the non-market and northern communities, and there, there's approximately 8,600 housing units. The notice of change, we are expecting it to go out in July of 2013.

Mr. Forbes: — And will that be similar to what happened in the larger centres or will there be any unique adaptations for the smaller centres?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We acknowledge that it is different in the rural and northern centres so we're looking at . . . Right now

we're working on the ideas to see if it should roll out exactly that way. So I can't tell you exactly what it is right now, but there is an acknowledgment that it can be different in these other areas.

Mr. Forbes: — Now has there been an . . . Obviously it looks like there will be an increase in rent or income to Sask Housing. Is that correct? Or is this a net zero gain for Sask Housing?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to ask Don to give you some more information because I know that, David, you're interested in some of the facts. So I'd like you to get as much information as possible, okay?

Mr. Allen: — So with respect to the social housing program changes, we're fairly sure that what we've heard and discussed from the housing authorities is what we'll be going forward with in the smaller communities and the North. And that would be that everyone will still complete an application, everyone will be income tested, and everyone will be asset tested just as it is happening in the other 26 communities.

The difference will be that in the smaller communities, if you are a senior and don't qualify for social housing, you can still move into social housing. You're prioritized in the same way. So if there's no one in the queue ahead of you who does qualify for the social housing program, you can move in. However, the rents will not be based on a percentage of income. The rents will be based on what we call community market rents, which is not specific to that community but to the province. So it will be a higher rent that will allow seniors to stay in their community, whether it's in the North or in the South, and we'll still test income, test assets so we know who all is in there and what program we're actually providing, whether it's social housing or market housing, in small communities and in the North.

With respect to the question about rents, we do expect over the short term that revenues will increase slightly in Sask Housing as the new rent structure takes hold. But we also know that we have a significant number, several hundred tenants, living in social housing who can afford the market. And we expect and in fact are seeing these tenants begin to leave our social housing. And as they leave, we're replacing them with tenants with much lower income who pay much lower rents. So any increase in revenues will be, we're expecting, will be short lived.

Mr. Forbes: — So I think there was a feeling, and I know that . . . I have the news release here and I'll just read it:

Keith Hanson, Sask Housing Corp. board chair . . . [says it was about] . . . rather using the existing housing stock in a "respectful" manner.

"To build another 800 units to meet the (housing need) is going to cost \$160 million in today's market," Hanson explained. "It creates a bit of a problem in supplies. It makes sense for us to utilize those 800 units for the lower-income individuals in Saskatchewan who need them."

So it sounds like he was out of . . . Now it was about 16,000, you have about 16,000 social housing units. Is that, am I right in

that? I'm drawing that out of my head.

Mr. Allen: — We have 18,000 units that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation itself owns in total, but that is for two programs. The social housing program is the larger of the two and it's about 14,800 or so social housing units, and then another 3,500 or so affordable housing.

Mr. Forbes: — So for these 800 units, it sounded like they were going to be freed up. How many people have now left these units and how was that, how's that going?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that while the information is being gathered, I just want to remind the member that we have more social housing units per capita in Saskatchewan than any place in Western Canada. And really the policy hadn't changed since the 1950s. So the program changes mean that we're going to be targeting those who need it the most. We had, in our social housing, we had 15 tenants who were making over \$100,000 a year. And really there was a cap of \$800 a month. So by removing this cap, it's going to be encouraging people who will end up paying more money to go into the private market.

So Keith was actually alluding to the fact that if we needed to build 800 more units to fill the need for the 800 that may come into these spaces, it would cost a lot of money. So this is going to give us the opportunity to supply units for people who are most in need with the units that we already have. So it's really not going to mean a big change for our lowest income tenants. Everybody was given a year's notice. There was no evictions due to the program changes. But it just gives us an opportunity to make sure that the housing we have is there for the people who need it the most.

Mr. Forbes: — So were you . . . Well now he used the number 800. Did you have a sense . . . And then you did talk in the press about the people who had over 100,000. But that was a dozen or . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There was about 15 that were over 100,000. But we know that overall there's about 800 people whose income was higher than our income threshold.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay . . . than your income threshold. And were many of those couples? How many of those 800 units would have been couples?

Mr. Allen: — Just offhand, I don't know how many were couples. I mean in social housing and in affordable housing there would be a considerable number of families who are single parent. In seniors' housing there would be a considerable number of single-individual households. But what we have, our income thresholds are adjusted based on family size. So, you know, a single-parent family with one child, you know, has, you know, I shouldn't say a different income, but it does acknowledge that household size matters.

Mr. Forbes: — But in social housing, the new threshold you have is not flexible, is it?

Mr. Allen: — It's flexible based upon family composition, on bedroom need.

Mr. Forbes: — A single is 32,000, is it? Or what are the thresholds?

Mr. Allen: — If I may, I'd like to go back and say one thing with respect to, you know, what the effect of the change is. And what I'm about to tell you, I would not suggest that the social housing program changes are alone responsible for what we've seen. But in the quarter ending March 31st of 2013, in the large four cities we placed 155 families in social housing. A year ago in the same quarter we placed 82. So there has been more departure from social housing in this year than there was a year ago. Some of that would be about the program change. Some of that would be other options available to families around and about.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — As Don is looking up some information, I just wanted to give you some information that I think is important. We sent about 5,000 letters out to tenants in phase 1. And out of those 5,000, only 6 per cent of the people called back to even get clarification on the letter, and less than 1 per cent called to complain about an adjusted rent. And many actually called to say that they understood they were no longer part of the targeted group that were . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . There was a number of calls. I can't give you a . . . And we know that for most of the 5,000 who received the letters, the impact is going to be very minimal, and in fact in northern Saskatchewan, many rents are going to be reduced due to the changes in the heating allowance alone.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Mr. Allen: — So the income maximums. If a household requires one bedroom — so that would be a single individual or a couple without children — the maximum is \$32,000 per year in adjusted income. Now there are certain things that are excluded from income in our calculation — the seniors' income plan, the Saskatchewan employment supplement, federal child tax benefits, and such. A two-bedroom family or household would have an income of \$38,000 is the maximum; a three bedroom, 48,500; and four bedroom, 57,000. Now that's provided there isn't a disability associated with that particular family. If there's a disability, then you would add 15 per cent on to each of those numbers.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. We've heard from some folks though that the 38,000 is difficult for . . . It can be a challenge for a couple in terms of income. Are you hearing anything like that, that they find that that is a tough barrier for them, and it's hard for couples to . . . I mean when they hear what that is, they're just not applying? They may be right around that level.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think one of the things it's important to understand is that Don mentioned that there's some of the monies that individuals may be eligible for that are not . . . that are exempted. I think there's about 26 different monies that are available that people could get that we don't look at, like the child tax credit and Saskatchewan income supplement. And I can give you a list of the other . . .

[15:45]

Mr. Forbes: — I actually have the list — I can't find it — because one fellow did come in and had a concern. And it's I

think schedule C or something. Is it?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm sure I can get it for you, but there's a large list of incomes that are available to people that are not included as part of their basic income. So we do acknowledge that there's some needs.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. But back to this other question because I don't want to get too many questions going out there at one time. But the 38,000, what is that based on? And what kind of level for seniors, a couple, because we're hearing that's to qualify for social housing and for senior housing. In some of the smaller centres, is that a problem?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Are you talking mostly about seniors, David?

Mr. Forbes: — I am talking about seniors who found themselves in, you know, whether it's social housing . . . Because this is what the dilemma is you're facing — right? — people who are in social housing who shouldn't have been in social housing. That's the problem you're trying to fix.

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And so now you're telling seniors that with this new income, these benchmarks, that to qualify to come into social housing or into senior housing . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Can I just mention to the member that the seniors' income plan is one of the programs that is an exempted money, so that means that we have upped the amount of money through seniors' income plan \$2,100 a year more for seniors through the seniors' income plan and that after the changes in July, we know that seniors in Saskatchewan will, with our benefits, will have the most benefits from the province of any province in Western Canada. So we are trying to adjust and ensure that our seniors that are most in need will be receiving the funding. And the seniors' income plan not only increased their benefits, but we doubled the number of seniors that are eligible for it as well.

Mr. Forbes: — But that's not the question I had for you. The question I have, and I don't have the — and maybe this would be interesting — the information, is in terms of seniors, especially couples. What is their most like . . . Now what we're hearing is the 38,000 is disqualifying an awful lot of seniors who may be looking for Sask Housing for a place. But they come in, and when they find out it's \$38,000 . . . And I don't know what it was before.

Mr. Allen: — So the 38,000 is equivalent of \$950 a month in rent at 30 per cent which is, you know, fairly close to the average market and on smaller units actually does very well. The one thing I can say about the household with \$38,000 a month in income, if they're applying for social housing, they're unlikely to get in because . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Well that's what they know. They know that they're not likely.

Mr. Allen: — No, this is even before. So if you were to take a look at December in 2011, the three months ending December

2011, of the 106 seniors who entered social housing in the four major cities, the average income was \$19,000 a year. So they're prioritized for entry based upon those households most in need. An income of 38,000 would have probably put them at the back of the pack in any event. So most of the seniors or families who are living in social housing today entered some time ago as opposed to entered recently.

Mr. Forbes: — Where this was raised to me was actually in one of the smaller cities, not one of the four larger cities, where they don't have a choice for other . . . It's very limited in terms of places to rent. And they may seem like, with the three different phases, they're caught literally in between. They're not in phase 1. They're not in the four cities. So they're very limited in terms of choice. They're not in phase 3, where you seem to have more flexibility. But they're in phase 2, where they're saying, with that 38,000 . . .

And then there was also this issue around \$200,000 worth of assets, which really we were hearing some concerns that's very tough on them because that's not quite the value of a house now say in Prince Albert or Yorkton or, you know, those cities. They might be averaging 250 or 300,000. So they'd have to sell that house for sure, have to get cash, but they're disqualified.

So I guess what I'm saying is, have you heard this feedback? We've heard this feedback, and I want to share it with you, Minister, that this seems to be a problem in that phase 2 group.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I've had a discussion with a number of seniors who are making, like they do make in the 38 to 45,000, and they understand that government can't build houses for everyone. They understand that there are a number of seniors who are making less money than they are. But the question is, where do they go to? And mostly what I'm hearing is that they need someplace to go to, and that's where . . . And they need a unit. And over time, the first thing that seniors usually thought about was going to government-subsidized homes when they retire; they'll go to social housing.

Now when our government . . . We believe that the housing should be there for those that need it the very most. So the discussions that we've been having — and that's why the summit has been important — is to talk to developers who are interested in going to places they weren't looking at before, places like Humboldt and the Melforts of the world, are saying, okay, we have opportunities here. And there are seniors that have income that's above some of these other . . . that are above our income cut-off. And they have the opportunity to say, okay, if we build it, there'll be an opportunity.

Okay. And I guess I'm going to name the community because, out of the discussion I've had, the one that I've had the most opportunity to speak with is Nipawin. And in the last little while they have had a number of developers say, you know what? There's opportunities out here, and let's look at what we can do. And they're looking to us for some of the other programs that we have, like the rental construction incentive, the affordable home ownership program. How can they build units that will encourage people or allow them to stay in their own community and not necessarily just in government-subsidized housing?

Mr. Forbes: — Well I think that, you know, I would encourage the government to sort of monitor if they have lots of vacancies, how this is doing, and all of that. I would say — and it is a compliment to the government and the people who work in Sask Housing — it's because Sask Housing units are often a very good place to live. And they look at these places as if I can get into this, I'll be with a group of friends, and I can socialize with them. And they look forward to it.

Unfortunately . . . And it would be something that I would encourage private industry to think about too, is to do some of that, you know, like have the coffee meetings in the mornings. I have, boy I have about a dozen places in my ridings. And you can see they gather for coffee, and they love that. They're getting ready for Telemiracle. And so it's a positive, and they're hoping that they can continue that positive because we know, especially for seniors, that that's a big part of their life, the social aspect. So I would just, you know, share that with you.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I agree with the member that part of where our seniors want to live is with some of the other seniors that they've spent a lot of their lives with. And it does get to be part of their community. So again in Nipawin for example it wasn't so much that they couldn't afford the units. There wasn't one there, and they wanted to stay in their own community.

So we'll go to Tisdale, where they just opened up a couple of seniors residences — absolutely a wonderful location. They used I think it was the rental construction incentive to build the units there, and have a number of seniors when, if you want to have coffee in a friendly place . . . That was absolutely great.

So I understand that. Thank you. I'll pass on your compliments to Sask Housing because that's what they are trying to do. But we do have the opportunity to make sure that we are serving the clients that need us the most.

Mr. Forbes: — And I think it's positive but, and at the same time, you're absolutely right. Those with the lowest income or most vulnerable need a place for sure. We need to make sure of that.

But now I want to . . . So a couple years ago, there was affordable housing rent increases, and we raised a lot of questions about that. Do you see in the affordable housing that there will be rent increases this year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Again I'm going to make sure that you get the numbers directly. But we increased the rental supplement last year in October. We're going to do it again this year. And as far as the affordable housing right now, there is no plans.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. Now you had alluded to the federal budget, and this was one question I was asked to ask. And so somebody may be watching on TV. You never know. I told him to watch because we were going to be on. And so we'll see what they think of this.

And I'm just taking a look. When I did a quick search about this, there were three actual areas that were money set aside for housing in the federal budget. And one is the affordable housing initiative with \$253 million annually. What can we expect to

. . . Have you had talks about that? What can we expect to see out of that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to again ask Don. But I wanted to let the member know that I'm actually meeting with the Housing minister. I'm going to . . . federally. I want to make sure she's aware of the issues that we have in Saskatchewan and the need. I think Saskatchewan is fairly unique right now in our opportunities for housing, both for affordable and for the market housing. So it's the opportunity to show that Saskatchewan shines in a number of ways. So I will be meeting with her and talking about some of these issues. But I'm going to ask Don to follow through.

Mr. Allen: — We were very pleased to have the federal government announce the extension to the investment in affordable housing. However to this point we have yet to be contacted about negotiating a new agreement with the federal government. So we're not sure what changes, if any, will be included in the agreement.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So when does it expire? It's the last year and expires what date?

Mr. Allen: — It expires March 31st of 2014.

Mr. Forbes: — So there is some time before those things have to be ironed out?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then the other initiative was the national homelessness strategy that was due to expire next year, 2014. They had 119, which is a little . . . 119 million. It's a little less than what it was before. What can we expect from that?

Mr. Allen: — Again we've not heard from the federal government with what their intentions are, so we're waiting to hear just as the general public are.

Mr. Forbes: — Now what kind of things did we use the homelessness . . . the national homelessness funding? Did that come through the province?

Mr. Allen: — So the homelessness funding doesn't flow through any of the provincial housing bodies, to my knowledge. I mean the homelessness funding in Saskatchewan has been allocated by the federal government directly to projects. So it would flow from the federal government to a homeless shelter that was being developed.

We have been a part of the prioritization process. So if a community wanted to do something and wanted to make a proposal, we would be a part of the process in that community to look at it and, you know, give our views. But that's as far as the housing corporation came in being involved in that.

Mr. Forbes: — So I thought that was the case, but I wasn't sure. But the affordable housing initiative, you did receive, the provincial government did receive some share of that money?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct. It was a three-year agreement, just a little over \$9 million of federal funding each year,

provided that the province matched that funding.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. And what kind of things did you use that for, and would you be wanting to continue that? What were you using it for in the last couple of years?

[16:00]

Mr. Allen: — Well there are several things. I mean some programs that the Housing Corporation provides don't qualify for use of federal funding. But many do: the rental development program, it's where we go out to stimulate the creation of brand new affordable rentals; the capital rent subsidy program where we buy down the rent on private market rentals, down to the point where a low-income house can actually afford that brand new private market rental; the secondary suite program, which is another supply initiative; and then the repair programs.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. And then the other one that this particular article's talking a lot about, a refocus on Housing First. And there has been some discussion around that, particularly when it comes to issues around mental health, addictions, that type of thing. And I know Saskatoon is working very hard on this initiative. Can you talk about the kind of work . . . First, are you involved in those discussions? And what is the province's take on Housing First, and how might you be championing that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There's been ministry officials that have been working with the places like United Way in Saskatoon, talking about it, and the health officials as well. We understand the importance of it. I think the last discussion I've had with some of the leaders, we talked about developing something that would work well in Saskatchewan. I don't always like to say we should have a uniquely Saskatchewan program, but I think we are pretty unique in the needs when we're looking at often the ages of our citizens, the weather that we have in our province, and some of the, as you talked about, mental health and addictions issues as well. So there's ongoing discussions.

I went to Calgary and Edmonton last year and talked to people that were involved in Homes First and Housing First, had discussions. I looked at some of the models in other provinces. What we need to do is make sure that we can deal with individuals that may not be able to enter some of our shelters or meet with, you know, some of our needs, the needs that we have on a more daily basis, if they have issues that don't allow them to come into some of our other shelters. So it's an issue that I'm looking at carefully. The ministry staff is involved in both cities, I believe.

Mr. Acton: — Yes they are.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes. So if there's any other comments . . . It's something that we are . . . we believe is important to us as we move forward — again to look at it from our perspective, not necessarily the way they're looking at it right across various jurisdictions. But some of them are important ideas.

Mr. Forbes: — And I would . . . When you say both cities, I'm assuming you're talking about the two larger cities. But I would really urge you to consider . . . You know, we've had the situation in Prince Albert where we had four deaths this year,

and that . . . Very difficult, because the folks were actually known. And it's a tough, tough situation. So it'd be very interesting to have a provincial policy on this in terms of . . . And especially unique needs, but you had . . . You know, you have Prince Albert that has a vacancy rate of 6 per cent, so there's lots of . . . You know, there's a place where vacancies are high and rent is fairly reasonable. Then you go down to Estevan, where it's point six, but very different type of economy. You know, it's just red-hot, but yet now they have a, you know, a shelter in the United Church down there has taken something on. And again, other social issues that come with that kind of stuff. So I don't know if you want to comment, but my comment would be, are you putting money aside or even seed money to help these folks in their planning for this type of thing?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Ken?

Mr. Acton: — We are involved in these communities, working with the community agencies so, you know, including Prince Albert. And we'll have officials here later this evening that can provide more detail. But I take your point and we . . . From a program perspective, there isn't anyone that we would leave outside. It's a question of how we work with the other agencies — with community agencies, police, health officials — to make sure that we identify folks and make sure that we've got a spot for them and we can encourage them to come in out of the cold. So we do have officials working in those communities with the agencies to . . . including Saskatoon, but Regina, P.A. [Prince Albert] as well.

Mr. Forbes: — Now are you tracking or . . . Who tracks people who die of exposure? I guess I'll just leave it at that. I mean clearly this gets . . . You know, we don't want anybody left outside, especially in, you know, the kind of winters and how long they can be that . . . Is there any way of tracking . . . Do you know, as a minister — and this isn't really maybe a Sask Housing question, but it's a shelter question — in terms of when people die of exposure in this province, that somehow that you become notified of that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I know that as a province we will . . . We do understand what's happening, and this issue is very important to me. Beginning of the winter I talked to the Salvation Army, and they also talked to mobile crisis. There was meetings with the police to make sure that, especially in the extreme weather, we were very conscious of the fact that we needed everybody to be watched. We've had very good discussions with the police. If there is individuals that can't come in to one of our shelters, that they'll pick them up and take them, even keep them in a cell if they need to, to make sure that they're safe.

So yes, the importance of keeping track of it is something that we do as government, but I shouldn't say that we're aware of . . . And what we will do as we go forward as part of a cold weather strategy, discussions that we're having with the larger centres and even some of the smaller ones, because the whole idea of working together like the Hub in Prince Albert and in other locations across the province now, we know that it's not just one ministry. How do we make sure that everybody that is on the street is working together to be able to share information?

That's probably the best vibe I've had is that there's now an understanding that there's not any one individual; it's working together as a community. I've heard those comments from the groups that are working towards developing a plan for their own cities and working with government. It's a shared responsibility, and it's something that we will look forward to.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. I have a question about waiting lists. You may have noticed I haven't got my written questions about the waiting lists because the last one we did, I got a reply that you had stopped. Now I wonder if I have an example of one in front of me, and I may not have. But do you still keep track of your waiting lists and the three forms? Because I know all of a sudden in July of one year my answer came back that you'd stopped doing that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to ask Don. We do have some information to share with you.

Mr. Allen: — So while the social housing program changes are being rolled out across the province — so the first phase in the four big cities and now we're into the next phase of the 22 next largest communities — information on waiting lists became very problematic because we had to go back to everyone on the waiting lists and ask them to, you know, complete the income and asset information.

What I can tell you is what I know about the four large cities in January of 2013 as compared to June of 2012. And in those four communities, and I have the breakdown — family, senior, non-senior — but in the case of families in June of 2012, there was 654 families on the wait-list in those four communities. In January that had dropped 32 per cent down to 441 families on the waiting list in those four cities.

For seniors, there were 402 seniors on the waiting list in June of 2012. By January of this year, it had dropped by 44 per cent down to 226 seniors on the waiting list. There's also a category called non-senior, which I think is me.

Mr. Forbes: — Is that a permanent category? So are you saying then that in a couple of years you'll get back to having these waiting lists across the province so you'll be able to tabulate in the 14 or 15 larger . . . in the cities, but right now it's not meaningful because of the changes?

Mr. Allen: — I'd say within four or five months of us actually making those changes, bringing those changes into effect. So in the 22 communities in June or July of this year, we'll be able to start measuring waiting lists in now 26. We can now do it in four communities: Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Moose Jaw. That will increase to about 26 communities by summer of this year.

Mr. Forbes: — How are you measuring it? By family, you said? You're not using the social, affordable, or seniors? You're using the seniors list. That's still a group.

Mr. Allen: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — But then the other category . . . Are you using social housing as a category?

Mr. Allen: — Yes, we do actually. We differentiate between social as family social and family affordable, senior social, and senior affordable. Some communities combine the two wait-lists because the income of tenants is very close.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So you're doing them in the four cities right now and then you hope to expand over the summer to the other . . . Is it 22, 24?

Mr. Allen: — There's four in the large cities. The next phase, phase 2, involved 22 additional communities. So the total of the two will be 26.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then phase 3 will be in . . . When does phase 3 come into effect again?

Mr. Allen: — The notices will be in around July. We believe it'll be July of 2013. So four or five months after that, perhaps six, given that we have some summer in there.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, good. So I'll be waiting to see more of that, but there's no point because you need a benchmark to see how it all settles down. So that's what we're trying to do. Now, Minister, and I haven't found my piece of paper, but you had alluded to the different categories of different things that weren't counted in as income, like seniors' income plan. RSPs [retirement savings plan] were not included. Understand?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — RSPs are included.

Mr. Allen: — Are you referring to assets or income?

Mr. Forbes: — No, I'm including, I think it was income. But it was schedule C, if somebody has a schedule there from the application.

Mr. Allen: — We don't have schedule C with us, but RSP income is considered as income. The first year that you would draw one, we wouldn't be aware of it in the housing authority system. So it wouldn't be part of the income in that particular year, but as soon as we did the income review, it would be captured.

Mr. Forbes: — Well the question the person had for me was the fact around that RRIFs [registered retirement income fund] were included as income, but RSPs weren't included.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I've got someone going up to my office right now to get that list.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So maybe we'll get that back.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — So we can go through them. And if you want to ask other questions, I can get you that information.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. Oh you know what? I just found it right here under a paper clip. That's where you go. So here we go under . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, those dang . . . I try to sort myself out and it does more damage than . . .

Okay, under income you have the different things that you exclude. And then it says here, number 2 excludes the following from income for each household member, where applicable,

RSP withdrawals. So now this is from March 1, 2003 but whether that's been changed . . . But this person was in a bit of dispute. And then he was . . . But RRIFs, RRIFs are included.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — So then really it's a lump sum withdrawal, not taking it out as income.

[16:15]

Mr. Forbes: — I'm not sure.

Mr. Allen: — There's a footnote, should be a footnote on the bottom of the form that indicates that lump sum withdrawals are not included as income. But if you were to take that RRSP [registered retirement savings plan] and turn it into effectively an annuity, that is counted as income.

Mr. Forbes: — So say that again. If you take an RSP and then transfer it into a RRIF, then that's income?

Mr. Allen: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — But if you just take it out and spend it, then what happens?

Mr. Allen: — You can actually withdraw. There are provisions to withdraw from your RSP in order to buy a house. So we wouldn't count that as income. Or you could simply, you know, take it out, collapse your entire RRSP and take it out. It would be taxable, but we don't count it as income because it's actually not an income stream.

Mr. Forbes: — Because it's a one time only?

Mr. Allen: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Whereas an RRIF is a continual income . . .

Mr. Allen: — Correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Type of thing. Okay. Well all right, I'll take that back as . . . Yes.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — If there's further explanation required or if we can help, just call the office and we'll do what we can to help your constituent.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. It can be complicated when you're trying to deal with all these different sources of income. But okay, that's good. I just wanted to raise that up. And we have now raised the issue of rental supplements that I wanted to ask about. You've answered that question.

My other one is around co-op housing initiatives. Is the government doing anything to promote co-op housing?

Mr. Allen: — Certainly. We've had several conversations, and we've actually had the co-op association at virtually every one of our housing summits, including the one two weeks ago. We're certainly willing to work with housing co-ops on new projects. And I believe the co-operative association is actually trying to organize a couple of groups to develop new housing. We haven't had anyone come forward in recent years though

with a new proposal.

Mr. Forbes: — They have unique challenges because usually they're people without very significant . . . or they don't have their land together or they don't have the cash. So what unique things is the ministry doing to help co-op housing other than what any typical developer would have?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I had an opportunity to meet with representatives from Co-op Housing, and we asked them . . . We joined them in a meeting with Headstart to see if there is some work that they could do together. We've kept them advised of all of our programs and asked them if there is, you know, is there anything that government is doing that would be a barrier to what they're doing, what they're proposing or what they need.

So the opportunity to work with them is something that we believe is important. So there's . . . You know, as we move forward with our initiatives, they are definitely a group of people that we see as an important, can fill an important part of the roles in developing housing.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. So they're engaged in conversations, but you have no specific or anything unique yet. And they don't feel that, they don't feel that there are any barriers. Is that where you're . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — They haven't come back to, they haven't come back to me and asked about something specific. I'm not sure if they have with Sask Housing. But I've had at least two — or I think it's three — meetings with them to talk about how they can have an impact, and their type of housing is important. And they are well aware that if there's any discussion as we go forward, we're more than willing to talk with them.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Then I just have a couple of quick questions that I want to ask you about how much money are . . . You're talking about different summits. How much money did the summit last week or a couple of weeks ago cost, and what was the cost of the individual attendee? Was it a free conference or did you have registration fees?

Mr. Allen: — So there was no registration fee. The invitations were sent out and it was free registration. We paid for the speakers. We paid for the room. We paid for the food. We also provided each of the travelling non-profits, I believe, it was \$150 a day — it might've been \$150 per person — for travel expenses. Altogether we estimate that the cost of, and we don't have the final bills in yet — but we estimate the cost of that particular summit at \$75,000.

Mr. Forbes: — And how many . . . And now the Regina one, are you just a sponsor or are you actively sharing a big chunk of that cost? Or what will you be looking at for that?

Mr. Allen: — We haven't been approached yet by the city. We've had conversations. If there is any financial contribution by Sask Housing Corporation, it will be as a sponsor, just as any other organization that sponsors that particular summit.

Mr. Forbes: — I have a question about the, I sent in a written question about the corporate income tax rebate that was

announced in last year's budget. And the answer was, the application deadline for the CIT [corporate income tax] rebate is January 1st, 2014. So it sounds like, I thought this was an ongoing application process, that when the developer met the criteria, that things were going to go ahead if they met the criteria. But that's not the case. You're making a decision. They apply up to January 1st, and then there'll be decisions made. What is the process for that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — When we introduced the program last year, we talked about having a time frame on it which was January of 2014. But we also didn't tell anybody . . . We didn't say that you have to apply before you start your project. So we know that developers tend to kind of apply at the end. In the discussions we've had with them, we know they're aware of the program, and more of them are aware of the opportunities that they may have with this program. But right now we know that about 85 per cent of our applications on RFPs and RFOs have been received in the last week before closing, so I'm quite confident that we will have those applications.

Mr. Forbes: — So you think that would be in December of 2013 that you get most of these?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I believe that it'll be happening later on.

Mr. Forbes: — And that they actually can be being built right now, and then they'll find out whether they qualify because they're going to go ahead with this regardless?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct. I mean the requirement is that building permits have to be dated after March 21st of 2012 and before December 31st of 2014. So I mean we could have buildings under construction right now that will apply for the corporate income tax rebate later on.

Mr. Forbes: — Now are there any unsigned contracts that Sask Housing has with any supplier or people providing goods for Sask Housing?

Mr. Allen: — We follow government's purchasing policies. And so whether it's by virtue of a purchase order or a contract, that's the basis upon which we do business. There are some contracts — at least one that I'm aware of right now — that we're in the process of negotiating and haven't finalized yet. But you know, we know the price. We know the services to be offered. It's just a question of working out the legalese that goes into the contract.

Mr. Forbes: — They'll sign it before they start.

Mr. Allen: — Correct.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. And then just the one last question before my colleague takes over, but it is a question that we're asking everyone in terms of, you know, there is a lot of discussions around privatization, that type of thing. Is Sask Housing, will Sask Housing, is it being considered to be privatized at all?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — No. We know that, we believe that government does have a responsibility when it comes to dealing with people that are vulnerable. And there is no discussion at

this time for privatization of Sask Housing . . . [inaudible] . . . Social housing costs money.

Mr. Forbes: — Well they're social entrepreneurs. You know, there's . . . But I appreciate that, and I appreciate the direct answer. And we think there is a role for Sask Housing, absolutely. And so . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — If you find someone who's interested in providing social housing that costs money, then maybe you should.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay then. I think if my colleague here has a few questions, are you ready for us? Okay.

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes Mr. Belanger.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the minister and her staff for being here today. The area I'd like to speak a bit on is, well, in particular northern Saskatchewan.

One of the things that I wanted to ask first of all is that . . . Basically Sask Housing Corporation had a very large prevalence of staff and programs coming out of the Prince Albert office. What kind of job losses and what kind of cuts has Prince Albert sustained over the last couple of years in terms of raw numbers of people that have been either retired or have been fired or have not been rehired?

Mr. Allen: — Well there are two main initiatives that the housing division has undertaken with respect to its operations and that have had an impact in Prince Albert. There have been one or two very minor ones that I'll mention at the end. The Ministry of Social Services had been contracted by a housing authority, specifically the Living Skies Housing Authority, to provide accounting services to the housing authority. The housing authority, after several years, determined that it could now undertake to provide those accounting services on its own and didn't renew the contract about a year ago. And that was about six full-time equivalents. They weren't all staffed at the time of the announcement, but about six full-time equivalents.

The housing division also looked at its operations in another way and we looked at the technical services. The Living Skies Housing Authority was providing certain very specific technical services — mechanical systems like boilers, air handlers and elevator, as well as a couple of others. And at the same time, the housing division of the Ministry of Social Services was providing other technical services of the housing authority.

It was determined that the best thing for us to do was to put them all together, and the place we landed was to put them all in into Living Skies Housing Authority. The unionized employees transferred about October 1st of last year from the Housing ministry to the Living Skies Housing Authority, took their collective agreement with them, and to my knowledge they're still employed in the community that they were living in back last October.

Mr. Belanger: — So have you got a number of people that may have not been rehired or may have lost their job in the transition from, whether it's Sask Housing Corporation to Living Skies

housing division? Is there a number?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There is a collective agreement and we followed the agreement. I think we were talking about six, six FTEs.

Mr. Allen: — Sorry, my staff have just indicated that there were four, four accounting positions that were staffed at the time of the announcement a year ago. All have been rehired elsewhere within government.

Mr. Belanger: — So just to confirm, all the cuts at the Prince Albert housing office — whether it's secretarial support, IT [information technology] support, program support, management support, whatever the case may be — you're saying that there's no job losses at all as a result of the decision by Sask Housing to stop basing their operations out of Prince Albert. Is that correct?

Mr. Allen: — Well there's been no decision to stop, to no longer base our operations out of Prince Albert. We still have an office, a very vibrant office in Prince Albert. There were two program staff that I referred to in my earlier answer whose positions have been abolished, but that's because of the program that they offered, which was collecting mortgages from 30 or 40 years ago that were no longer actually in existence because the mortgages have been either paid off or they're non-performing. Those staff have had their positions abolished over the course of the last two years, but each of those employees went on to retirement.

Mr. Belanger: — So what is the employee number now in Prince Albert for Sask Housing, total employees? How many have you got there?

[16:30]

Mr. Allen: — It would be an estimate, and the estimate that we have is nine or ten that work directly for the housing division. There's also the technical services office or the Living Skies branch office that's not included in that.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. The other question I have in relation to Sask Housing programs itself in northern Saskatchewan. Based on the fact that we haven't got a large tax base and we're aware of the socio-economic challenges that many of these communities face, one of the things that we thought would be a fantastic idea is the notion of the rental purchase option where people rent, I believe it was seven or eight years — correct me if I'm wrong — that following that time frame that they would enter into negotiations with Sask Housing to outright buy these homes.

Many of those clients undertook that particular option, and I want to find out today whether that RPO [rental purchase option] program, the remote housing program itself, and the current housing stock in general . . . The minister had spoken about doing an assessment, a review of those programs, and there are many working men and women in northern Saskatchewan that are really curious as to what the next step is under the RPO program, the remote housing program, and of course new construction. Could you give me an update on all those programs?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. The program that you've identified is one that is in abeyance, but we are having a northern summit to talk about housing and there's discussions that will be happening, I believe in May and June, about what their input is.

The rental purchase option was actually introduced in 2001, and it offered the social housing tenants with a minimum of six years the option to buy their housing unit. The RPO was really intended to be offered only for three years. So by 2011 we did an evaluation of the program, and it was determined the program had largely fulfilled the original objectives of it.

So there was letters sent out in December of 2011 to people who had applied for the program in the previous year and to those who had requested information. And the letter advised them that the program would end on March 31st of 2012 and if they wanted to exercise their option to purchase it, it had to be done before the program was terminated. The program I don't think worked the way originally intended because there was . . . Because of the length of tenancy, there was 54 households that acquired the asset at a purchase price of \$1. So the average net price for the remaining 85 clients was \$12,800.

So really this . . . We had concerns about, that the significant number of those who had accessed the program were having difficulty maintaining property and paying things like their taxes. In addition, the program, it wasn't working the way originally intended to be.

I think that this was . . . We have the opportunity now, as we go forward to the northern housing and the summit that we'll be having in the North, to ask them what we can be doing. I think it's important to know that we've, since 2007, we've actually built or completed 256 units in the North, and we've spent about \$2.9 million to upgrade another 267 homeowner and rental units. So there is considerable . . . There's work to be done, but we're actually very pleased with the feedback we're having from communities as we go forward and talk about the strategies, the consultations that we had last year.

We had, 25 per cent of our consultations were in the North to discuss the unique housing needs. And I think it's important to also note that two of our Summit Action Fund projects were in the North; one was in La Ronge and one was in Pinehouse. And it was . . . The interest that we have from the municipalities and from the developers and the potential developers in the North is great.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. I think, I just want to point out that there are a lot of low-income families in northern Saskatchewan, as a result of the deadlines and timelines set by Sask Housing, may have misinterpreted a lot of the information flying their way.

Madam Minister, I would appeal to you on one particular point when it comes to home ownership in northern Saskatchewan. There are many, many people that would take the option to buy their home based on negotiations and discussion with Sask Housing right now. I can find you 10 cases in my own hometown of Ile-a-la-Crosse that would sit down with your officials and say, let's work on a price based on how long we were renting off you, the market price, and many of the other

issues, the condition of the home. The list kind of goes on.

And it's news to me that the program to buy out these houses ended in 2012. I wasn't aware of that myself. Now generally I'm all over the place, and many times you miss a lot of things. But there are many families out there that wanted to exercise the right to buy their home. Now how come they never understood that? That that program was coming to the end is beyond me, because this doesn't seem forthright in terms of all the information that I'm getting.

I know you had other people. A good example is a local fellow in Ile-a-la-Crosse that was basically a regional Sask Housing worker. His name was Martin Corrigan. Martin recently lost his job. And Mr. Corrigan's job was to explain to all the low-income families and the working poor, basically the people that are holding down jobs and raising their family . . . And he used to be able to do that very effectively in Cree in his home visits, and the awareness was on. But he's recently been terminated. Now that's going to be a huge loss to Sask Housing because Mr. Corrigan provided a very valuable one-on-one service.

And as the process unfolded, he was doing more of the work on a regional basis by himself and he had more added responsibility and he had more area to cover. And then finally after a few years of that, he got terminated unceremoniously by Sask Housing. So there's a huge communication gap here. There's a huge communication gap between the tenants of Sask Housing in some of these northern communities and Sask Housing themselves.

Now I would suggest if you're going to have the meeting and the housing summit, we will organize the families to go to this summit and explain to you what their aspirations for home ownership is. These people are not making a lot of money, but they're making enough to be able to buy their homes. And if we could provide you, Madam Minister, with a list of names of people that could go to the bank and negotiate a mortgage with the bank to buy that unit off you at a negotiated fair value, taking in consideration market and condition of homes and so on and so forth, would you be prepared to entertain that notion that perhaps these people, these working families, whether it is a single mom or a single dad or mixed marriage, that they'd like to own their home?

They'd like to have the opportunity to own their own home and get the government and Sask Housing out of their hair. Would you be in a position to say, absolutely, yes, we can sit down and negotiate a price, and we'd be able to offer these folks home ownership. Is that possible?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I appreciate your ideas. When we're meeting with the New North, and when we go to the North with the summit and the discussions, I'll be interested to hear what they have to say and maybe there could be options. I understand the importance of home ownership and I also know that government . . . There is some responsibility to make sure that we have homes for people who aren't able to buy them as well. So you're talking about a group of people who do have the wherewithal, and that's great. But at the same time, what can we do to make sure that other people would have homes as well? So the discussions can always go on and I appreciate the

fact that you would be willing to work with us.

I wanted to just talk about the rental purchase option. We sent letters out in 2011 and I believe we had a similar discussion . . . maybe it wasn't with the member I'm talking to right now or maybe it was the member from Cumberland that talked about it, but we've had a discussion about the rental purchase option. So it can't be new to all the members on your side of the House because we have had the discussion before. And when the letters went out in 2011, they were aware that they had until March 31, 2012. And I'm not saying that there isn't . . . Maybe the communication is something that we have to work on more. We talked about ensuring that some of the residents in the North that don't understand or English isn't their first language, maybe that is a discussion that we have to have.

When we talk about housing, it's right across the province. I know there's unique needs in the North as well. And I was trying to explain that we have spent funding in the North. We know we have more social units in the North per capita than in the rest of the province. And we also know there's opportunities now with jobs, not just in the mines, but in the North. So I believe that the discussions we'll have on housing in the North is an important discussion as we move forward. So I will take your concerns and any ideas you might have as we move forward.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. Well the closing comment that I'll make is that a lot of people were quite angry when they found out they couldn't have the opportunity to buy their house off the government. They were led to believe that the opportunity would exist. And I'll give you an example. I know one particular lady that said, look, I've been renting off the government for 10 years. They say I have an option to buy this house off them after eight years. I don't know where she got her information, but let's just use that as an example.

She said, I've been working towards that, paying my rent every month. And I'm working in a, you know, in a job that . . . I have two jobs, got two kids. And now I get a letter saying that I don't have the option to buy it; it's past its option date. She said, I was just building up to the point where I can go to the bank, reducing my debt, go to the bank for a mortgage. Now I find out that I have to rent forever. And I told this lady, it doesn't necessarily mean that's the end of the RPO program. She was quite angry, and there's a lot of other people who are angry as well.

Somewhere along the line we missed the mark. And my only point to you, Madam Minister, is that there are working men and women in northern Saskatchewan that want the option to buy out their house from Sask Housing so that they're under the RPO program, to be able to outright own their own home.

And we're not talking about kicking people out so we can put somebody that has a disability in there or a low-income person in there because what's beyond me sometimes is how a working family or a working mother or a single father can't afford to buy that house, and we have to move them out to put somebody in there that may be on assistance or low income. And how does that make sense from the family perspective? You want to strengthen families.

So a lot of these families are sitting back and saying, well where do we go from here? We got this letter saying we passed the deadline date, and they have letters indicating that there's an opportunity for them to buy. So all I'm asking you to do today is, if we present you 10, 20 letters of people that have been long-term renters from Sask Housing saying they're prepared to enter negotiations with you to buy out their house, to extend them the time necessary to go to their banks and outright buy these homes.

It's less responsibility for Sask Housing when they become a private homeowner. And you can follow the same premise that you have with your remote housing program because that particular program fosters things like paying your insurance, paying your taxes, maintaining your home for a defined period of time, and paying off your mortgage. They'll follow those particular examples in the perimeters of that. But they have to be able to start from the start saying, we'd like to buy this house off Sask Housing. What is it you want for this house?

[16:45]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. And I'm just going to clarify again that when the RPO was announced in 2001, it was announced for three years. And we weren't government at that time. And it ended after 10 years. And there was individuals who were able to buy their house for \$1. So it isn't fair. How do you choose which one of your neighbours will get a house for \$1 and which one of your neighbours will get a house \$12,841?

We have to do something better than just looking at a program that was offered a number of years ago. And that's why the opportunity to talk to New North and see what we should be doing as we go into the future is important to me and as it is to our government. There also has to be an acknowledgement that having a house is more than just buying it because the ongoing cost and maintenance and upkeep of a house is expensive as well.

So I appreciate what you have to say, and we will be talking to New North. But this particular program is finished.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. My final comment is that there are many people that are renting in northern Saskatchewan now that may have the resources now that wish to make an offer for their housing unit. What I tell them is that this is a contractual obligation that I don't think was advertised enough, nor was there a good effort to contact the current renter to advise them of their options to buy out. There may have been no consideration for the time it takes to arrange a mortgage. There may be a number of factors. So I really think it's a contractual obligation, in many ways of the word, to at least, at the very least tell these current renters, look, if there is a breakdown in communication, we weren't certain what was going on.

There are different issues for different folks, and I'll give you an example. CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] co-owned some of the houses that Sask Housing has. And Ottawa every now and then puts out to Sask Housing that we no longer have any interest in unit A, so it's now your unit. Well how many of those houses have just recently been released by CMHC in terms of CMHC holding an interest in

that house?

Well that's a good example of how some of these homeowners simply didn't have the option to buy because you had a contractual obligation with CMHC in Ottawa for a specified time frame on unit A. So now that process may finally be . . . You've finally gone through it in terms of getting CMHC off the title. But now that you're holding the title, and the tenant wants to own it now, well that program ended two years ago, he said. Well it's not the tenant's fault that CMHC still had their claim on that property. That's another example of how some of these units were in a complicated situation. They weren't as easy to deal with as you and I would assume they were.

So that's the reason why I'm saying today that there are many complicating and varying factors in each of these units. And I don't think we made the concerted effort to make the best option available to as many of the homeowners of buying out their property based on negotiations with them. And all I'm asking you today is to be able to extend to those folks the opportunity, to afford those families the right to be able to present their case.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I'm going to ask Don to comment on the CMHC. I just want to make one closing statement on your argument. These housing units, there was supposed to be three years. They had up to 10 years. So there was time. If the individuals have the money, then they are in better shape than individuals who couldn't afford to buy a house. And my concern is for everyone, but of course responsibility is for those who can't afford to buy something. Regardless, they need support.

So Don will you make a comment on the CMHC please?

Mr. Allen: — Certainly. When Saskatchewan signed the social housing agreement in 1997, CMHC was on all of the titles. Over the course of the last 15 years, CMHC has been able to remove themselves from all but several hundred, perhaps even several thousand titles. However if someone wanted to purchase their home under the rental purchase option, we would immediately and did immediately go to CMHC and have them go through the process of having their name removed from the title, so title was not the issue. Actually Sask Housing Corporation and the province of Saskatchewan own those homes. It's just CMHC hadn't removed their names from the title yet because they hadn't gotten around to it.

The Chair: — Thank you. I understand that Mr. Vermette would like to ask questions. So, Mr. Vermette, you have the floor.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the minister and your officials, welcome. And I guess I just want to make some clarification to be clear. I know you're going to talk about the New North and calling a, you know, a northern housing summit. You mentioned that in your comments that I observed. And if that's going to happen, it would be nice to know . . . I'll find out the date I guess from New North when it's going to happen to take part in it to hear the issues.

But you also . . . And I know you've been to one of the communities where I requested you to come and your officials, and I thank you for that. Sandy Bay was the community. But

having said that, I know that there's . . . You talked about the new I guess implementation of the process that would actually bring a start-up date of your new housing policy for northern Saskatchewan. You said there was a new policy, but it wasn't going to be implemented till I think 2014. You were going to go back and consult with communities, northern people. There was opportunity for them to have input before decisions would be made, and nothing was finalized.

Can you tell me then if that's the case? Have your ministry for Housing sent out any letters, indicated any policy changes that are coming or will be in effect prior to having the housing summit having consulted with communities? Have you sent out any letters, notices? You reminded . . . And I'm just going to say that the understanding was there would be time to consult and talk to communities before any letters, any information would be handed out to anyone. Can you tell me if that's still the case, or it has changed now that you're going ahead with some of your . . . bringing forward some of the changes immediately by notice of letters by Sask Housing, anything like that? Just so I have an understanding. I'm just trying to understand.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We've had officials that have had discussions and have been around the table with New North and other individuals. There isn't anything that . . . They haven't sent any letters out to anyone. But the discussions that we're having and some people who work with the northern communities a lot are making sure that we understand some of the unique needs that are there. I know that when we had the opportunity to visit Sandy Bay, some of the officials that came with me at that time talked about the needs, as well as the individuals, the mayor, and some of the town people that talked about needs. So we are aware that there is . . . as we make changes, the effect they will have on individuals. I don't know, Don, if there's anything else we can add.

Mr. Allen: — Yes. In one of our previous answers we talked about, you know, the basically hundreds of housing authorities that have been talked to in recent months about the possible changes to the social housing program in small communities in the North. Virtually every one of those housing authorities came to an agreement that what we're talking about implementing and sending out letters to tenants in around June or July of this upcoming year, that what we were proposing was the right thing to do. And that's to take the program as designed in the South and add another dimension onto it where seniors can access the program even if they don't qualify. They don't fit that same rent scale; that's not 30 per cent of income for rent. That's a different rate scale, and they are prioritized last as opposed to, you know, being in the queue with everyone else.

But that was talked to, and there is an intention to accept an invitation that we've received from the northern municipal round table to come and speak to them about those policy changes I believe as early as next week.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And I'd like to add that when we speak to them, it's also with them. Like if there's ideas that they bring forward, we're willing to listen to them to see what may be different and unique in the North.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you. Then I guess the other . . . I'm

going to be meeting with seniors in Creighton because they have . . . I know there's a petition, a letter. You may have received it or not — an invitation as the Minister for Housing to come to Creighton to deal with the seniors. And I'll be meeting with them, and I know I've received a petition and a letter from them. And they're very concerned about some of the changes that are being . . . letters they received and changes that they got.

And I just want it to be clear that they're not very happy. They have some issues with the way the, I guess if it's clear, the way they're being put into A, B, C zones. There's different . . . And when I meet with them, I'll get the full understanding of it. But there's obviously been some changes. And letters went out to them, unless I'm missing that. But obviously something was shared with them from the housing authority that there's going to be some changes coming to them, whether it's rents or something. And I mean we'll follow up on that.

But I know they're very concerned. There's a group of them, and I'm going to be meeting with them. So within the next probably week, I'll be heading up to meet with them, hear their concerns. And then I guess yourself as the minister — I guess if they'll forward that on to you and your officials — will be probably being invited to hear some of their concerns.

So at that point, I know that there's quite a few of them that have signed the letter and are very concerned about the proposed changes that are coming in without them being I guess talked to. So I'll just put that on the table for now so you're aware of that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. And I just received the information. I didn't know that — maybe I should've — that the people in La Ronge and Creighton and Denare and Air Ronge actually did receive the letter because they're part of the 22 market communities that followed the four. First of all, Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, and Yorkton received — Moose Jaw, pardon me — received the original letters and then the 22 communities that received the letter in January of this year. So they would've received a letter in January about it.

So for sure give me the information that you receive. I look forward to hearing from you about it.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. Minister, I just have one more question. You had mentioned earlier that you're going to be meeting with the minister, the federal minister, to talk about housing. And it did remind me, as my colleagues were speaking, that I would think it would be appropriate not only to talk about housing needs right across this province, and particularly in, you know, the cities, communities, the villages, but also on-reserve housing because that clearly is a responsibility for the federal government.

We see challenges that happen particularly around education but also in terms of housing on-reserve. And I don't know if you have any thoughts on that, but I know for sure that it's always being raised. And I know FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] raises that as an issue, and so if you could raise that as well. I don't know if you have any comments on that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm sure it's something that I could discuss as well because it is an issue.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. With that, I want to thank the officials for their answers, and I may have a few more written questions as we come through. But I do appreciate the frankness and the directness of the answers. And I know we'll be back this evening with more questions about the other parts of Social Services. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. And I'd like to take the opportunity to thank my officials as well. Some of the Housing officials won't be back this evening. So they have done a terrific job in the last year. There's been a lot of changes, a lot of work between changes to policies and sales of lands and that type of work. It's been different than it has been in the last number of years.

So I want to thank them and tell them that they really have done a fantastic job. The housing issue is a big challenge in the province. And I trust the work that they're doing and I know that they are making a big difference. So thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And thank you to the rest of the committee. This House now stands in recess. The time is now 4:59, and we stand in recess until 7 this evening.

[The committee recessed from 16:59 until 19:00.]

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. The time is now 6:56, and everyone is ready, so this committee is back in session. And starting questioning will be Mr. Forbes or Ms. Chartier will have questions, I'm not sure. Ms. Chartier has the floor.

Oh all right, we'll let June . . . Sorry, she has another bunch of staff with her, so we'll have the minister introduce her other staff and if you have any opening comments on this section.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I would like to introduce my staff. And there's two different parts of the ministry that we're going to be talking about tonight. One is child and family services, and the other is income assistance and disabilities. So I'm going to, if it's all right with the members, I'm going to make a comment on the income assistance first, and then later on I'll make other comments just so you can get the information.

But I'd like to introduce the officials from the ministry who are with me tonight. I have Deputy Minister Ken Acton. And from child and family services, we have Andrea Brittin who is the assistant deputy minister of child and family services, Natalie Huber who is the executive director of program and service design, Wayne Phaneuf who is the executive director of community services, and Garry Prediger who is the acting executive director of service delivery.

From corporate services, we have Alan Syhlonyk who is the assistant deputy minister of corporate services, Lorne Brown, executive director of enterprise projects and risk management, Miriam Myers who is the executive director of finance and administration, and Leanne Forgie who is the director of financial planning.

And with income assistance and disabilities, we have Bob Wihlidal who is the assistant deputy minister of income assistance and disability services, Jeff Redekop, executive director of service delivery, Beverly Smith, executive director of community living service delivery, Gord Tweed who is executive director of program and service design, Joel Kilbride who is the director of program design and operational policy, and Doug Scott who is the director of the analytics unit.

So I'm going to just make a comment about the income assistance and disability services. In 2013-14 our government is increasing funding for income assistance and disability services by \$32.1 million, an enhancement of 5.6 per cent from last year. This increase will improve the lives of people with disabilities, seniors, and families with low income.

An increase of \$21.2 million is being committed to income assistance programs. This includes benefit increases for Saskatchewan assured income for disability or the SAID program, the seniors' income plan, the personal care home benefits and shelter indexation, as well as caseload and cost-per-case increases.

The average combined caseload of the Saskatchewan assistance program, SAID, and the transitional employment allowance is expected to be 26,558, an increase of 595 cases over the '12-13 budget. Although our population is growing, we anticipate that the income assistance caseload will remain relatively stable over the coming year. While the overall caseload appears to be stabilizing, the makeup of the caseload is shifting. The number of employable clients has decreased by more than 30 per cent in the past two years as the result of the strong Saskatchewan economy and our efforts to assist clients to attach to the labour force. Meanwhile the number of individuals with disabilities receiving benefits through the SAID program is increasing. These changes are positive as those who are able to work are leaving the caseload and becoming more self-sufficient, and those with disabilities are receiving the benefits they need for a better life.

[19:00]

As part of our commitment to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live for people with disabilities, significant investments have been made in the Saskatchewan assured income for disabilities program. In 2012-13, \$3 million is being committed to provide benefit increases of \$50 a month for singles, \$60 a month for couples, and \$20 a month for people living in residential care settings. When the Premier announced the SAID program in 2008, it was anticipated it would reach between 8,000 and 10,000 individuals. As of March 2013, Saskatchewan achieved a major milestone with 10,382 enrolled cases. This achievement was reached through the collaboration of government and the disability community.

An increase of \$3 million will go to the Saskatchewan seniors

with low incomes to provide a \$10 per month benefit increase and address caseload and cost-per-case increases. This increase is in addition to the monthly increase of \$50 provided in 2012. The maximum SIP [seniors' income plan] benefits for single seniors will have tripled from \$90 in 2008 to \$250 a month in July of 2013. The 700 seniors who reside in special care homes will also receive an increase of up to \$25 a month in July of 2013. Also in July of 2013, the maximum monthly income that seniors can earn on the personal care home benefit will be increased to \$1,875 at a cost of \$400,000. This program was introduced in 2012. In 2013-14, about 1,000 seniors will receive the personal care home benefit.

In October of 2013, shelter allowances for Saskatchewan assistance program, for transitional employment program, the SAID program, and the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement will be adjusted for the ninth time since August of 2008, with an increase of \$4.7 million. This increase continues to index shelter benefits for the changes in average market rents in Saskatchewan communities.

There'll be an increase of \$3.3 million applied to the level of care payments to support and recruit retention in approved private service homes, including both community living and mental health homes.

Within the '13-14 budget, a total increase of \$10.2 million is being committed to the ministry's disability services and programs. Following the government's decision . . . government's announcement in 2012, December 2012, for the funding lift to CBOs, \$8.9 million is being invested in CBOs that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities to help with recruitment and retention efforts. Another \$300,000 increase is being committed to CBOs not included in the original lift.

During '13-14, the ministry will continue to work with Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres and CBOs to understand their business plans and specific challenges CBOs face to move towards a funding approach that will assist them to reduce staff turnover.

This morning I was honoured to join the Premier and our CBO partners, ministry staff and, most importantly, our clients, in the celebration of a landmark accomplishment for people with disabilities. As of March 31st of this year, we have fulfilled our commitment to provide services to 440 individuals with intellectual disabilities who have been waiting for services. Those services are now either in place or in development. Not only have we eliminated the original wait-list, but we've been able to respond with programs and services for an additional 215 individuals with intellectual disabilities who have come forward since the wait-list initiative was announced. \$4.2 million is being committed to annualize funding commitments for residential and day programs made to complete the 440 wait-list. Through the wait-list initiative and by addressing emerging needs, CBOs have been supported to develop services in 40 communities across the province and to create 489 new staff positions.

In this budget we've also committed \$1.2 million in operating funding, an additional \$1 million in capital funding to develop services for a minimum of 20 clients with emerging needs, and

\$2.7 million for child and family services clients aging in to community living services delivery caseload to better align Saskatchewan with best practices across Canada in the provision of services for people with intellectual disabilities. On February the 24th, 2012, our government announced its intention to replace Valley View Centre by 2015-16. All residents will be transitioned to new services through person-centred planning processes. In '13-14, an initial \$5 million investment will be allocated to support the plan for new services as the Valley View Centre transition proceeds. Supporting the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in our communities and providing the right continuum of services for those individuals has been a key priority for our government.

A joint steering committee has been established, comprised of representatives from the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living, the Valley View family advisory group and the Ministry of Social Services to ensure that transition planning and replacement services meet the immediate needs and long-term needs of each of the 198 people living at Valley View. The person-centred planning approach is foundational to the transition planning.

The team will work closely with individuals who live at Valley View Centre and their families during the assessment, the planning, and the transition. Support needs assessment have been conducted with every resident. A report from the steering committee will be submitted to me shortly and will include recommendations to guide the next steps of the plan.

In summary, our '13-14 budget supports our continued work on behalf of our province's most vulnerable citizens. It will help us achieve the better quality of life for all envisioned in our plan for growth. So thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and to the members, and I'll be happy to take questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Ms. Chartier, you now have the floor.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and to all of your officials for your time here tonight.

I'll start with disability issues and will likely ask some really specific questions and all the way to some really general help-me-understand-this-a-little-bit-better questions, but I'll start with a very specific question. I understand that Cheshire Homes in Saskatoon, this past winter there was a heating issue. Particularly I know that it was in house 1 for sure, but there was no heat in house 1 and they were relying on space heaters in the rooms. And I understand that the ministry is aware of it and has committed to looking into it, but I'm wondering where that's at.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Okay. Thank you very much to the member and I appreciate the very specific questions. Rather than just take up time, I'm going to ask some of the officials to give you the direct answers.

Are there more questions on this home? I'm just wondering, if we're getting information, and I'm sure that you don't want to waste a lot of time. You probably have a lot of questions. So we'll get you the information and if you want to go ahead with another question, that will be fine.

Ms. Chartier: — Well that's refreshing. Thank you. I was going to ask too, along the same lines, or a more specific question. Do you have any sense of how many children with disabilities are living in long-term care, like Parkridge for example, across Saskatchewan?

Mr. Wihlidal: — What we would know is, for those in child protection services there might be five to eight. We haven't got an exact number, but in that order — five to eight children at Parkridge that are in child protective services. Other than that, children with disabilities in care would be in the care of the Ministry of Health rather than Social Services. And I'm Bob Wihlidal, income assistance and disability services ADM.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Bob. The question around Cheshire? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The response is coming. Okay. A more broad question here then, just in terms of self-directed funding. I'm wondering where the ministry is at. Specifically, obviously there's some health self-directed funding initiatives that have taken place over the years, but where are you in the ministry?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Over the years, we have constructed some specific customized responses for some families, I would say in the order of 10 or fewer individualized types of contracts like that, that you might regard as a self-directed funding option in community living services.

What we've determined through conversations with some families, and SACL [Saskatchewan Association for Community Living] as well, is that there's a need to look at a more standardized approach to self-directed funding options. So over the past 18 months or so, we have been having some conversations with SACL about that, in fact went on joint tours of a couple of provinces with them to see what other jurisdictions are doing around self-directed funding. And we are developing a policy position on that currently so that we can provide a standard response to families who are seeking a more customized solution to meeting their family members' needs.

Ms. Chartier: — Do you find that families are requesting that? Or do you have any sense of how common . . . or how interested people are?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Actually it's been brought to my attention a number of times. It's definitely a divided interest in it. The ones that really believe that they can fully support their family members with self-directed funding, it isn't a large percentage of the people that come to talk to me. But I'm interested in seeing what we could put forward as a province. So the information that's being gathered at this time will give us a better idea of what we should be talking about and the opportunities for families.

Ms. Chartier: — When do you expect to have a policy position in place?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I would think that we should have it, we'll be looking at something over the fall. So in less than a year.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you for that. In terms of obviously today the government celebrated the elimination of

the 440 wait-list. I'm curious, the start of that actually came before my time here in the legislature. So when we look at the 440 list, from what date to today, April 22nd, 2013, were you looking at? When you came into power? Or on what date did that list . . . did you take that number 440?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — October of 2008 is when we announced it. But we understood, when we became government in November of 2007, that was an issue that was of great importance plus concern to us at that time. So there was a discussion from the time we became government on how we should proceed with providing services for people with disabilities. So it was an immediate concern, but the first step happened in October of 2008.

Ms. Chartier: — And I know you talked today, so that the 440 original people on that list, you said, have either received service or the services are in the works?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's correct.

Ms. Chartier: — And an additional 250 individuals who have come forward since that . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's correct. And we called it sort of emerging individuals, people that needed support along that time as well. We didn't want to put them on a list as well, so we provided services for them at the same time.

Ms. Chartier: — So are there, forgive my ignorance here, but so are there . . . Obviously, as you said, that there's some of these programs or services are in the works. But so is everybody then taken care of? Or do you have an additional number of people who are still waiting for services? Or a new list?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — No, there isn't a new list. What we've done is look into the future to look at the children that we have in care, the ones that are on . . . that will need services. So we know that every year there's going to be somewhere between 20 and 50 individuals that will need our support. So we budget for that number, knowing that things could change along the way, but we want to make sure that every year we have money available so we don't build another list.

Ms. Chartier: — When do you anticipate having . . . What services are still left to be built to address ensuring that all these people have the services that they need?

Mr. Wihlidal: — As we announced today, the services are in place or under development for the full 440. There are a couple of group homes that will be built in 2013-14 that will serve the remaining number of residents.

[19:15]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think I had the opportunity, well I know I had the opportunity today to stand with one of the ladies from Hope's Home who, I believe, will be able to say that this is the last home that she'll be able to care for medically fragile individuals. So we know that that is . . . The individuals are being addressed and we know where they're going to be going.

Ms. Chartier: — When we talk about services, were there any people on this list who needed respite services? Or what was all included in those who needed services?

Mr. Wihlidal: — When the wait-list initiative was originally announced in 2008, it had five major components. An investment in approved private service home sector because we were recognizing a decrease in service providers there and we wanted to bolster that system and make sure we tried to stem the loss of that service provider group. There was a second initiative to create a new day program funding standard that would fund day program services on the basis of individualized needs of clients. So it meant a new assessment mechanism followed by a funding standard attached to that assessment mechanism.

A third piece was around complex needs. So for clients with much more complex needs, we created a new designation process to designate those clients and assess those clients with more complex needs and create a new funding standard for those individuals. And those were in the order, I believe, of about 100 clients provincially that we've identified.

The fourth piece had to do with recruitment and retention. So there was a one-time investment of 750,000 identified for things such as, one of the things that was done was a video on recruitment and retention that would support recruitment and retention in CBOs.

And the fifth piece was the large investment in day program and residential spaces for individuals. At the outset the investment was for \$76.9 million. At the end of the day it was an investment of 57.1, which in addition to that, we invested 5.4 million and were able to serve altogether the 440 plus 215 individuals over that period of time.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Just help me understand this here a little. I know that we've had a lot of opportunity last year. Our SACL is usually here every couple years and I know, I think it was last spring that the SACL mothers were here. And I think it was this fall possibly that there were some stories on — I can't remember what news program — but on people with challenges finding services for their family members with disabilities.

So I know one of the things that the SACL mothers really flagged was respite services. So is there, in all of this, I know when we talk about the 440 list, it is definitely something to celebrate, but one would walk away from the news conference thinking, oh there's nobody waiting for services, with disabilities here in Saskatchewan. And I know we know that's not the case. We have had people here within the last year who talk about some of their struggles. Is there any plan or what do we offer here in Saskatchewan for respite for people who have children with intellectual or physical disabilities?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I will again get the information, but I think you probably noted today at the announcement I said, and the Premier had said as well, that we know that there's always more work to be done. We are celebrating the fact that the 440 individuals that were on the wait-list when we became government in 2008 have either the programs or the homes for themselves right now.

And we know that there's always more individuals that need support. A number of the mothers that came forward through SACL have their children at home right now. Many of them aren't even looking to place their child outside of the home, but they're looking for a day or two respite. And that's the type of programming that we're always reviewing and looking at. We know that in order to keep the children at home and to support the families, there needs to be the investment.

So I'll get you the details, but I assure you that the comments that are being made right now saying that, good job, you've got this, the work that's being done, continue to work with us. And the approved private care homes, mental health homes, and the group homes that we have continue to be able to build programming, day programming opportunities for parents even if their child doesn't go for overnight. Even just going to a day program will give the parents an opportunity to do some of their work that it takes to keep them at home.

Mr. Wihlidal: — I'm going to ask Beverly Smith to come forward — she's the executive director of our community living service delivery — and give you a bit of an explanation of our current family respite program. And when we're done with that, we also have an answer on Cheshire Homes.

Ms. Smith: — In community living, we have a family respite program . . .

The Chair: — Excuse me. For the aid of Hansard, would you give your name please, first?

Ms. Smith: — Beverly Smith. Thank you. The community living respite program exists to provide community-based respite options to allow parents and guardians of children with intellectual disabilities to have a break from the daily responsibility of caregiving. So that is one of the sources of respite.

In the approved private service home sector, through the wait-list initiative we put in place a respite benefit that allows up to 21 days of respite at \$30 per day for approved private service home operators. They receive the benefit and then they would purchase the services.

We have respite registries in a number of communities. We fund an organization to develop a respite registry that would be available to people to access names of individuals or services that they could access. As well we have through the wait-list initiative invested in community-based organizations for crisis support programs. We have an outreach program for crisis support through the Saskatchewan Abilities Council in the Yorkton branch, as well as residential outreach through Menno Homes in Hepburn, Waldheim-Hepburn area.

Ms. Chartier: — Are you hearing from families still in some, particularly in some of the rural communities, that respite in the vicinity, the general proximity of their home is still really hard to come by?

Ms. Smith: — We do recognize that a gap in our service delivery system is respite in some areas. And we are gathering information from our regional scans to determine the need for respite. We also recognize that in some of our . . . for the respite

beds that we have in some of the group homes scattered throughout the province that that model works in some cases. In other cases, it's disruptive to the other clients to have somebody, you know, new in their home on a regular basis. And so we're looking at other options for that. It works in some cases and doesn't work as well in others. We recognize there's a gap in some parts of the province in terms of respite.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think I'd like to just add that I've had an opportunity to talk to Amy McNeil with SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] today. And some of the ongoing work that we'll be doing with them is identifying some of the needs and making sure that we can provide services, you know, as quickly as possible. Things change in everybody's lives. And so that is our goal, is to make sure that we can work continuously, work towards our stated goal of being the best place to live if you have a disability. And we know that takes continuous work.

Ms. Chartier: — Can you tell me a little bit about what some of the regional scans are telling you in terms of gaps in services?

Ms. Smith: — Respite does come up. Approved private service homes, as we've talked about earlier in the wait-list initiative, addressing recruitment and retention in terms of approved private service homes, and a number of the measures put in place through the wait-list have certainly started to address that. There's always more work to be done in that area, and we recognize that. Those are probably a couple of the areas.

Ms. Chartier: — Is there any one or a couple of regions in the province that struggle more than others with respect to respite, or it's across the board?

Ms. Smith: — No, it's across the board.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. You had mentioned the approved private service home respite benefit. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? My notes, I'm not quite as quick as I should be.

Ms. Smith: — It is a benefit program so there is up to 21 days of respite benefit that is available at \$30 a day. So the operator would provide, I guess, an invoice to us for up to 30, up to 21 days of respite at \$30 a day in a year, and they would receive that benefit.

Ms. Chartier: — And do families contact the private service home themselves or how are they linked in?

Ms. Smith: — This is the approved private service home proprietors that would make arrangements for respite and then submit a request for that benefit payment from the ministry.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you. Thank you for that. In terms of the bump, the 8.9 million that CBOs got this past December — was it? — did that come from the grassroots? It's in my giant stack of things here but there was a bit of push on last summer, and many meetings and discussions around recruitment and retention. Is that specifically where that came out of?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — It was part of it. We understand that because of the economy and the opportunities for people to be working in various areas and locations, to the amount of money that they were allowed, that they had, wasn't competing in some areas. And we wanted to ensure that we could not only recruit but retain the employees. So it was part of the initiative. Yes. Also it's . . . You can't be the best place to live in Canada for disability if you don't have the . . . we don't have people around, we don't have the right number of staff. So that was part of the issue as well.

It was an in-house, in-year funding increase which was fairly unique, and it sent the signal that the whole disability community understands. It's not just the ones that have the disability, but the ones that are working with the individuals, the disability, they're also very important to us. So yes it was a collaboration. It was an effort that we heard from SARC and from individuals and from government, recognizing that overall we . . . There's more work to be done in this area and whenever we have an opportunity to work with the disability community, we do.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. I guess this covers both disability and child and family services, but CBOs who work with various individuals. When government contracts CBOs or pays CBOs to offer certain services, is there a training and education requirement expected of the CBO workers?

[19:30]

Mr. Wihlidal: — Okay, I'll try to cover off both your questions, well from a family service as well as a community living perspective. We haven't got a standardized approach between the two parts of the ministry as it relates to child and family services, and you'll have a chance to follow up on this later if you so wish.

But they do have some mandatory training expectations of community-based organizations around CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] and first aid, crisis intervention. They provide general funding to the agencies, and the expectation is that the agencies do the staff development. That's the part that I think would be standard as it relates to Community Living as well.

We regard the organizations as autonomous organizations. We do collaborate through SARC as an association and with individual member agencies around training requirements for their particular care needs. There are some particular training pieces that we do expect to be in place around . . . particularly around Mandt training or PART [predict, assess and respond to aggressive/challenging behaviour] training, particular behavioural support and positive behaviour support services that staff are expected to have in place.

But generally speaking, we set the standards. We contract for the services. The agencies are autonomous to establish their staff qualifications. We have however, at the SARC partnership table, been talking about the need for a greater level of standardization. And certainly when you look at the staff recruitment and retention question in the community-based sector, part of the answer isn't just about the wages paid but how comfortable staff feel in their roles and do they feel that they're competent in their roles. And making sure that we have

an effective training package will be something that we'll be looking at at the partnership table.

Ms. Chartier: — And when you say you'll be looking at that, what is your expectation or anticipation at that? You're looking at it now . . .

Mr. Wihlidal: — From a partnership perspective, we've just initiated the conversation so I really couldn't say much more about it than that in terms of what kinds of things might we think are core curriculum pieces that we might want to support for all agencies.

Ms. Chartier: — But right now as you've laid out some of the mandatory training — CPR and first aid — when you said crisis intervention, what do you mean?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Crisis intervention as it relates to child and family services agencies.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. So when you contract for services, does the contract stipulate that you need X number of employees with these credentials? That's not the case at the moment then.

Mr. Wihlidal: — No, not necessarily. No.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Well while the ministry is bringing forth some more answers, I just wanted to talk about the fact that, as government, we're looking at all of our CBOs and looking at some of the outcomes of what we're doing to make sure that we don't duplicate services. How can we best support our CBOs to ensure that they are providing services and not just providing services but providing the very best services and how they . . . what their ideas are when it comes to dealing with individuals. So we are very positively looking at CBOs as what they can provide to our clients. And as a government, we're recognizing that their needs are unique. What may be needed in one area is different than in another area. So as we go forward and we have many multi-year contracts and discussing how we can best work with them and provide the services, we are developing a more government approach to how we're dealing with CBOs.

Mr. Acton: — If I could, just because there's child and family and the income and disability side, we've got Wayne Phaneuf here to just talk about the child and family services piece of your question.

Mr. Phaneuf: — Thank you. I'll introduce myself again. Wayne Phaneuf, executive director of community services, child and family services. Just to answer the question in regards to training required and whether it's in the contract, it's actually in the standards that are required in the contract. So we have a number of standards and the contracts speaks to satisfaction of the standards. And so this is one of the standards. So these are actually three of the standards. So again, as Mr. Wihlidal pointed out, there's CPR first aid training, there's therapeutic crisis intervention training that's required, and accredited suicide intervention training. And those are required in the child and family service homes.

Ms. Chartier: — And are those individuals trained on the job with that or do they often . . . Do you have any sense . . . Do

they apply and then get the training?

Mr. Phaneuf: — Typically they apply and then get the training. It is offered. The First Nations Family and Community Institute for example put it on this past year and invited any of the group homes in the province for child and family services to attend the training along with the First Nation group homes. So funding is provided to the agencies for training in general, and the agencies then schedule that training. But typically people get it once they have the job.

Ms. Chartier: — Can you tell me a little bit about what kind of training you'd go through to do therapeutic crisis intervention?

Mr. Phaneuf: — I'm afraid I can't do that. I don't have that detail.

Ms. Chartier: — Would that be the same with the accredited suicide prevention program?

Mr. Phaneuf: — That's correct. Those are specific training packages that are put together. And I do believe that they're copyrighted and so they are. It's not something that you can just pick off a shelf and deliver.

Ms. Chartier: — But there when you said that the contract speaks to standards, there's no recommendation that you have to have X number of staff who are social workers or youth workers. Is any of that laid out in the contracts?

Mr. Phaneuf: — I do believe it . . . No, not . . . I don't believe so.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. I appreciate that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Do you want the answer for the first question you asked?

Ms. Chartier: — Sure.

Mr. Wihlidal: — I have the answer around Cheshire Homes, Saskatoon. I understood it was about Saskatoon Cheshire Homes. The agency requested funding for windows and doors repairs in 2011-12. We approved this. After they implemented that, they realized that the issue was a little more significant. They're currently seeking a certified engineering report to determine exactly what can be done to address their heating issues. Once we see that report, we'll be responding to it.

Ms. Chartier: — Do you have any sense of how much, what they think the problem is? So that in 2011-12 they thought it was the windows and doors but it was clearly bigger than that. I heard something about venting or pipes in cement. And I'm not a structural engineer but I think that they have some sense of what the problem might be.

Mr. Wihlidal: — I think they found out it's not windows and doors, and I'm not an engineer either, but they're going to find out from the report what's actually required. And we'll respond to that. I wouldn't want to speculate what the real problems are.

Ms. Chartier: — And any sense of when they'll, when this engineer will come and have a look at the problem?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Sorry. No I don't have the time frame on that. I understand that currently they're looking for an engineer to do the work.

Ms. Chartier: — Obviously I'd heard stories of residents having to put mittens on. And at one point, in the dead cold of the winter at one point, the door in one of the rooms was shut and it was 18 degrees in the room when they came back in a little bit later. So, very cold. Big, big problem: people using space heaters, people with disabilities, mobility issues. So if you're using a space heater, I think the two things that were pointed out to me if you have a fire, obviously evacuation becomes very difficult. But the other piece is if you've got, if you're a paraplegic and you've got your leg next to a space heater and can't feel it, it could cause serious damage as well.

So is there some commitment then? From my understanding, and this is all hearsay and second hand, and again I'm not the structural engineer, but it sounds like it could be an expensive fix. Would there be the commitment to ensure that the residents here either by next winter they need to have heat of some sort or be moved somewhere else?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, we're waiting for the information. And I think it would probably go without saying that we're not going to leave residents in the cold. As soon as we get some information, then we'll be looking at what's happening and deal with it.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, then I guess we'll have a chance to follow up down the road for sure. Thank you for that. Back to thinking about the CBO sector here a little bit. We talked a little bit about training and education, but in terms of wages, do you know even with a funding lift what the disparity would be between a starting wage for someone working for the Ministry of Social Services versus someone in a starting position at one of these CBOs in a comparable position?

Mr. Wihlidal: — The announcement in December of 2012 which provided another \$8.94 million for community living CBOs established a new funding standard for community living CBOs. And in that standard we were targeting the health regions' funding standards. And we aren't quite there but very near the same funding allocation that the health region uses for similar positions, front line, which is actually a little bit higher than what Social Services pays for some of those positions.

Of course the issue is the difference between the funding standard that is paid and what CBOs actually pay. They are, as I said earlier, autonomous organizations. They have other streams of revenue. They have other business interests and so forth. But at any rate, they make their choices about how many staff they hire and what they pay them, partly as a result of collective agreements that they have which have no . . . which the ministry of course isn't a party to. The range is quite wide. There's some agencies that are able to pay at the standard that we're paying or very near to it.

Ms. Chartier: — You said they're not quite there yet, but almost. So can you give me an example?

Mr. Wihlidal: — The funding standard that we struck in December was \$19.39 an hour, which compares to about \$21, I

believe, in the health region for similar positions.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. And again just going back to the education piece then, so there is a will in the ministry, and obviously with organizations like SARC, to start looking at standardized training or ensuring that the recruitment and retention piece often goes to your ability to do a job?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that it would be fair to say that we're not just starting to look at it. It's been an issue. That's something that we deal with as government. We're putting our most vulnerable individuals and our children in the care of individuals who care very much about them. I think that the member opposite is aware that under your government, when you were in government, there was starting to be a lot more work put in the CBO sector. In fact I believe that there was very few group homes built in the last five years by government, by the NDP [New Democratic Party]. It was through the CBO sector.

So yes, our individuals are . . . Making sure that they are safe is a prime concern. And the individuals that were there today, as an example, with the wait-list are doing a job that I commend them for. I believe that there isn't anybody that can do it better. They are there not just because it's a job but because they love the individuals they're dealing with. There's never been an opportunity that I've had when I went out to a group home . . . to see the family that's around them and know that they're proud of their extended family. And the work that they do impresses me, and I can't give them enough praise knowing that they've made a big difference in our province.

So yes, we will continue the work that's been started. The partnerships that we have with organizations like SARC underline to me the fact that as we move forward, it's not just government. It's the people of the province that care about each other, and it underlines who we are as a province.

[19:45]

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. Just going back to the 440 list again — and please forgive my ignorance here, just trying to make sure that I understand it thoroughly — so if I had a child with a disability who was 20 years old right now and aging out or turning 21 next year and I was looking for a residential space, does that mean that in a year from now my son or daughter would have a space? Or would there be some kind of wait?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Again, I will ask him to go through the process. But I know right now we already have identified people as we go forward. That was never done before.

We're looking into the future and seeing what children will be aging out and what will be needed for them. They also are assessed. To say, to use the term disability is very broad because the needs of every individual is different and the family's requests for where they might be. So it's a very complex issue. And that's why I'm very proud of the individuals that have been working with this wait-list and our officials saying, how can we best meet the needs of the individuals?

I had the opportunity to go to Melfort when there was a . . . with a wait-list enhancement for four individuals there to see how the community was involved with it, the individuals that are working in the home, and the four young people who now have a place that they call home and feel secure.

So I'm going to ask Bob to discuss how we're working through the process into the future.

Mr. Wihlidal: — All right. Just to add a little bit more information to that, yes we do project need into the future. So we are aware of approximately how many people are aging in to the system over the next number of years, or that we would expect to come to community living service needs in the next three to five years. And we use that number to estimate our annual requirements, which is how we came to be investing in 215 additional people beyond the 440 wait-list.

Those needs are identified, as you described, as the example that you had, directly to the ministry staff at times, perhaps through SACL contacting us. And we become aware perhaps through the education system or through the health region of an individual or a family that is in need of services.

The general approach of course is a person-centred approach with the individual client, so identifying the particular and assessing the particular needs around that individual using, for example, a daily living support assessment tool that can create a standardized perspective on that individual's support needs on a daily basis. Tools such as that determine for us the kinds of needs, but also the urgency of these needs once we identify how that person is currently being served in their home or wherever they are.

So in some cases, an individual's needs do change even though they are already in our services, which means we may need to be planning for new or enhanced services for individuals already in the support of the ministry. So those are also part of our projections going forward — people coming new into our system but also changing needs and enhanced requirements.

So the person-centred assessment and planning is what we use to determine what those needs will be. And then we go about identifying the resource provider that might be willing to meet that individual's needs based on space availability in the geographic location, perhaps that the family would prefer, and making sure that we've matched that individual in a home or in a day program service that fits his needs but also is going to fit well with the other participants in that program and with the particular skills and capabilities of that agency.

Ms. Chartier: — I'm think what I'm getting at then with this person-centred approach, my 21-year-old who may have . . . Thinking about however my 21-year-old son or daughter would assess, that there would be a place for this individual, my son, would be on a wait-list.

Mr. Wihlidal: — What I've described is a forecast approach to identifying demand and calculating and estimating for that demand and then planning for it on an annualized basis. Then from a pool of funding that's provided in a given year, identifying those needs that are most pressing around those families and making sure they're met.

Ms. Chartier: — So something could be in the works two years from that time. We know that there'll be X number of people, and my son might be 23 at the time, but you know that this, this appropriate service or facility is in the works.

Mr. Wihlidal: — We might well, and often do, start planning with the family at the time the child's 15 years old so that this program is in place by the time they age out of the education system or out of, in some cases, out of the child and family services system into our system.

Ms. Chartier: — I think what I'm getting at is, are there people on wait-lists for services with disabilities?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We know that there are people that have emerging needs, and we are working with them. Can I say that there's a wait-list? I don't believe there is, but I do know that there are individuals that we will be serving into the future. I can't say that there will never be somebody, the minute that they need services or they would believe that they would need services because that's just not humanly possible.

I do know that we're doing things differently. We're not putting a whole bunch of names on a list and seeing what's going to happen. We are working with families and we are identifying families now. We are knowing . . . assessing them to understand the needs.

We are doing our utmost to make sure that their needs will be met when they need it because sometimes you have families who determine just because their child is aging or going into community living, they may not want their child to leave home. So how do we work with them as well? It's all about what we can do for the individuals. It's not . . . Nothing is perfect, but at the same time I believe that we are working very well with the families. Always more work to be done but our goal is to ensure that we can be providing services for the people that need it as quickly as we can.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for helping me better understand the 440 list. I've always, in my time here . . . well, what exactly is going on. So thank you for that.

Moving on to Valley View. The report, you're anticipating the report will be finalized very quickly here? When are you expecting the final report?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Very quickly.

Ms. Chartier: — A week. Two weeks?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I don't know. It isn't in my hands. It's in the hands of the committee that will be . . . Once they've reviewed it and come up with the information, then they present it to me. So I don't know the time on it.

I would like to tell you that I also have written to the Valley View residents and families and the family group, and told them that, make sure that they feel that they have included employees as much as possible at this time. It's not . . . We can't do all of that at this time because we haven't got the big picture idea. But I know that the importance of the employees as extended family is something that I want to hear about. In fact I've had the

opportunity to speak to some of the individuals as late as budget day when we talked about how they can be involved.

So we've . . . The report that's coming through from the individuals who will be presenting to me is done on their timeline, not on mine. So I'm looking forward to it, but at the same time I want it to be as thorough as possible. We're making major changes. We're doing something different in the province and it's an area of . . . It's something that, I believe, the model that we can be building on to make sure we consult as much as possible, we get the viewpoints of people that are caring about the individuals. So I'm looking forward to the date whatever it is.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for that. And I know now you just mentioned the employees. And in the fall session, I believe that I asked the question if there'd been any contact with any of the staff. And in those fall questions, the answer was no. And I know having . . . Obviously the primary focus is the residents. But having spoken to someone who is very involved with deinstitutionalization in Newfoundland, he had made the case that the employees are a huge part of the picture, especially with respect to inclusion and how people who move into community . . . Obviously if you've got people who were former employees and residents who have moved into the community, there can be tensions if you don't address the employee piece, and that's . . . The primary issue is residents and making sure the residents have an opportunity to live in community and be well supported, but . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Can I just say that even before this letter, there was the ambassador group and other opportunities to have some input from the employees. And I know that in the fall when we talked about this in the House, I did acknowledge that the employees at Valley View are an important part of the lives of the residents, an important part of what will happen as we go forward. I was pleased with the first report, to see that about 65 per cent of the residents want to stay in Moose Jaw. So that makes a big difference and impact on the decisions as we go forward. So I'm just going to ask Bob if he can tell me what other involvement employees had before this letter that went to them in the last month or so.

Mr. Wihlidal: — Sure. So we have been certainly communicating with staff for the past year through newsletters, an enhanced newsletter that we've been using throughout Valley View for staff. We established an ambassador group of a handful or 10 staff who have met weekly or biweekly with the Chair of the steering committee and had that opportunity to meet with him and provide their views on what they wanted to know or what their views were on the change and their fears and apprehensions and an option for him to keep them up to date to the extent that he could on the deliberations of the steering committee. There's also been sort of town hall meetings at Valley View Centre where the management team has met with staff in large-group settings and provided updated information to staff.

We also recently in about mid-March or the latter part of March, the steering committee actually met with the ambassador group of staff and reviewed with them their draft recommendations and spent a couple of hours getting that ambassador group's feedback on where the recommendations

are going and getting some perspective there.

The other thing that we are expecting that will come from the recommendations of the steering committee is a recommendation that staff be involved in the implementation, which is where the more significant engagement will come, not so much in the design of best practices, but in the implementation of those best practices.

Over the past year, staff have certainly been involved where it was relevant in the individual assessments of the 197 residents at Valley View. So one by one where staff have particular information, they were involved in those assessment meetings. But going forward when we actually get into the individual planning for residents and when we get into planning around structured or staged downsizing of the operations of Valley View as residents move out, as we work through new ideas in terms of service development, particularly if any parts of those are going to be government operated, having discussion with staff and involving them in the design efforts and implementation will be critical.

[20:00]

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for that. Have you thought about the difficulty? Obviously I understand the Newfoundland — and this was quite some time ago — there was actually no employment loss. Granted, people did have to move throughout Newfoundland, but I'm wondering if you've thought about the complications or difficulties. Obviously Valley View staff are CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] staff and government staff, most employees are SGEU. Is that a difficulty at all that you've thought about or how you'd handle that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The staff that's at Valley View are under a collective bargaining agreement and we will honour the collective bargaining agreement.

Ms. Chartier: — When it comes to possibly moving into other positions or transitioning Valley View staff into other positions, how would that transition go?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — A lot of the questions that you're asking are ones that I've been wondering about as well. There's been a process that we put in place over a year ago now that was modelled around and surrounded around the residents. The residents are now telling us that about 65 per cent of them want to stay in Moose Jaw. I'm waiting for the report that comes from the committee and then we'll be taking the next step to design what we can to accommodate these individuals. There's probably very few of the questions that you're wondering about that we haven't wondered about, and they're important and at the same time designing something that's going to be working for our province. I talked to June Avivi and some of the other staff to talk about a Saskatchewan model. I'm looking forward to their ideas on it and how we can work with them. So the staff is important to me. We will honour collective bargaining agreements. I don't know what it's going to look like from there.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Thank you. Do you have a sense of, in terms of . . . I note that there's many long-term staff there. Do you have an average or a number of how many are over 20

years? Can you give me a sense of staff service at Valley View?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Sorry, we haven't got the exact information you're looking for. What I can tell you is — and this information is a little bit dated, from 2010 — that 39 per cent of the staff at that time were age 50 years or older.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. Going to the 5 million that's been set aside, in the technical briefing it was referred to as a placeholder, I think was the word that was used. Is that how you would describe it? Or what do you see that 5 million being used for?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — When recommendations come forward from the committee and we take it to cabinet, I believe there will be some investment that'll have to be made this year or should be started this year. I don't know what's going to be proposed to government. I don't know where it's going to be proposed. I just wanted to make sure that the residents at Valley View and the staff at Valley View are aware that there will be a funding requirement. I don't know if it's . . . This is a . . . I would believe it's probably enough money for this year. If it's not, then I will go back to cabinet and say we need more. But at this time, we want to send the message that this issue is not, we're not just waiting for reports. We are ready to take action. And as to what that action is, I'll be waiting to see from the information I'm given.

Ms. Chartier: — Since the announcement last February, how many residents have moved from Valley View elsewhere?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The answer is zero.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. Nobody's left since last February?

Mr. Wihlidal: — The population today is 197; it was 270 a year ago. We do have deaths at Valley View.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. Thank you for that. I think that that's . . . Oh. What are you hearing from families? I know thinking about obviously Michener in Alberta, a much tighter kind of crazy timeline. One of the things that when institutions like this or facilities like this close in communities, there's huge fear, fear of the unknown, and I'm wondering . . . Obviously I think that there was some of that with families. What are you hearing from families and other supports that residents in Valley View have? What are you hearing from folks now about their feeling?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — First of all the Michener example in Alberta I think is an example of what we didn't want to do. I think that the families and the residents and the staff are happy that we are taking our time to make sure we are dealing with individuals and see them as individuals. So I again, the team that works with the ministry and the staff, or the Valley View centre residents and families and the family group will have more up-to-date information. But I have personally talked to a number of families who of course were uncertain when we first started speaking about it. Although there hadn't been anybody admitted to Valley View for over 10 years, there still was not . . . So it wasn't that it was a big surprise, but the question is, what's the next step? The work that's been undertaken in the

last year has given a level of comfort to a lot of individuals, families, knowing that they have a voice in saying what's going to happen as we go forward.

There's a feeling that . . . of pride, that we know, that they know that we care about the individuals. And so what . . . I don't want to say there's no level of anxiety, but I know that overall people are looking forward to the next step.

Mr. Wihlidal: — I think that's a fair representation. The report I get from the leadership of the family group is that the anxiety level amongst families is much less than it was a year ago. They are comforted that we've taken the approach of planning with them, putting them in a leadership role in fact at the steering committee level. Involving SACL as a partner as well, taking the time and deliberating consciously on the kinds of options and making sure we don't rush to judgment in terms of what kinds of services, where they should be, that we are putting the person, the resident, at the centre of the planning. It's not about buildings. It's about the residents.

And I think that is helping folks understand that we really do mean that we're trying to work in the best interests of the residents who are currently living in a facility that is certainly beyond its best-before date.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. I'm just wondering how the residents in Valley View factor into the services that you've created or projected, the 250 individuals. So you've got the 440 list plus the plans for the 250 additional people. How do the Valley View residents factor into that list?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The 440 list was one list. The 250 individuals were another list, and we have 197 individuals at Valley View who are also being looked at. Nobody is . . . We are looking at their needs on the same plane and same level, and not putting anybody before anybody else. We do have a time frame on Valley View, but again it's based on the needs of the individuals.

Mr. Wihlidal: — There's actually advantages to being able to plan with both the residents of Valley View at the same time as emerging needs families, as we have been keeping up in the past three or four years with the 215 that have been served in the past three or four years in addition to the 440. Those circumstances may well play in our advantage as we plan for individuals from Valley View.

If there's individuals from Valley View that would like to be in a community where it may not be in and of itself practical to proceed with an initiative, perhaps there's another family in our projected list that we can match up and we can actually create an initiative that will work, and see some economies of scale or advantage around an investment for a particular family on the emerging needs list but also with Valley View. So we will be planning on both on a parallel track. How does it play together? We will be working on both at the same time, as we have been.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, I'm going to go back. I need another clarification then. So the 250 who you've mentioned who have come forward since the start of the 440 list or desire to whittle down the 440 list, those are people who have already received services?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Correct.

Ms. Chartier: — So you projected . . . And I'm sorry. How many did you say a year you generally will add to . . .

Mr. Wihlidal: — Sorry, let me clarify. It's actually 215.

Ms. Chartier: — 15. Oh, sorry.

Mr. Wihlidal: — Yes, one five, two one five.

Ms. Chartier: — Too much loud music.

Mr. Wihlidal: — Yes. So in addition to the 440, we have served over these four years an additional 215 individuals through day program or residential services, which would average out to maybe 50-plus individuals per year. That may be a bit high going forward. It may be closer to 20 or 30 on an annual basis that we see as needing to be served in that given year, and that's what we will be planning for in addition to planning for a certain number of Valley View residents being served in each of the next number of years as we transition those 197 people out of Valley View to new community-based services.

Ms. Chartier: — Do you have any sense then of the transition with the \$5 million in the budget and the report coming soon that the transition will start right away here with respect to Valley View residents?

Mr. Wihlidal: — There certainly are families that are sort of raring to go, I'd say. And when we have the recommendations from the steering committee and we've had the time to put together an implementation strategy around initial investments, we'll be going immediately to especially serve those individuals and families that are wanting to move.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, sounds good. Thank you. Still sticking with disabilities here, I'd like to talk a little bit about FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder]. So I know last year the ministry was one of the sponsors of the national FASD conference. And sort of the general question, what . . . I know the deputy minister was at the conference. I'm sure the minister was as well. But in terms of what supports are provided for adults living with FASD, I know that there's been a big focus on prevention, but I'm wondering what's in place right now for those with FASD.

Mr. Wihlidal: — The key resource that we have currently for those individuals would be the cognitive disability strategy funding that provides a certain level of customized funding around individuals, around daily supports.

Ms. Chartier: — And that's a great program, but I'm wondering: adults with FASD, how are they expected to apply for the cognitive disability strategy and funding, and manage their own supports?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think one of the things that we learned with the SAID program is that when an individual has FASD, to be able to even apply for a program like SAID is in many ways not possible. So we have people that are working with these individuals to support them. I think FASD is recognized by our

child and family services committee now as one of the issues that's spanning so many of the ministries. It's not just in this ministry but we know in Education and Health and sadly in Corrections as well, that FASD is a huge issue.

[20:15]

We had not one FASD conference last year; we had three within the same week. We know that the issue is something that has to be dealt with on two levels: first of all, prevention, and then dealing with . . . and the support that's required for people with FASD. Within our committee we, the Ministry of Health, and Education are saying diagnosis, and that's where we put our money two years ago, was hiring the professionals that we needed to help do the diagnosis. Support at an early stage, at an early age, is one of the very best steps that we can take to ensure that someone with FASD can grow to their highest potential when they are supported even at an early age.

So right along the age spectrum from very youngest to someone that's an adult, there needs to be different supports. So it's recognition through not just the cognitive disability strategy but through the FASD parent support network. They bring forward the issues and the ideas to us as well. We have, between Health and our committee, we are dealing with saying how we can support individuals and support the parents and the caregivers. Sometimes it's just the idea of being able to know someone else is in your . . . is playing in the same field as you're playing when it comes to dealing with their child or with a loved one that has the disability or the condition. I've had the opportunity to attend a number of conventions and talks about FAS [fetal alcohol syndrome]. There's no silver bullet to solve the problem. There is nobody that's saying that we've got all the answers. But we do know that dealing again with individuals and the CBOs or the family groups around them and offering supports in many levels is probably the best step that we can take.

As a province, even one of the most difficult questions we have is people saying, so how many . . . What percentage of your population has FAS? Well unless someone is diagnosed, we don't know. So the school system is recognizing that they need to be cognitive of any signs or any opportunities to ask if FASD is an issue. We've asked the health system to help when it comes to the questionnaires that are filled out at the time a child is born. The work that's being done is starting to move forward now quickly.

I think 10 years ago if you'd asked somebody what FASD is, most of them wouldn't know. I think today there is that recognition. There's a knowledge that we have a preventable condition, and so we must focus in that area, but at the same time understand that there are still opportunities or skills that individuals that have FASD can offer to society and how can we best help you.

Ms. Chartier: — Just to again . . . Though one of the things that stood out for me about that conference was the young man who put on, I think . . . Did he help co-chair? He co-chaired, but he also did one of the breakout sessions. And I think the thing that really stood out for me is his point that, I need support every day or I need someone reminding me to pay my bills at the end of the month or I need someone on a regular basis. And

I think that that's the one thing that I've heard reflected back to me from people here is that the prevention piece is really important. But for adults who are currently living with FASD there is a lack of daily . . . or consistent hands-on support.

So again you'd identified with the SAID program the difficulties people with FASD had filling out the application or the cognitive disability strategy, that that's the one piece people can rely on. So I'm just wondering what is in place. Or is there any plan with respect to better supporting adults with FASD?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The goal is yes we would like to do more of the work. In fact I think if you see the work that we've done in autism in the last . . . And we're getting into the health field now, but supporting families and understanding that if we coach and help . . . I don't want to use the word train because many individuals with FASD are going to need an external brain for the rest of their life. So they're going to need that type of support. So if we can as a society ensure that we have supports in place, that is part of our goal.

The work that we're doing within the committee recognizes that the support system should be in place and can be in place. The autism resource centre has a beautiful little mock apartment, so to teach someone what it means to actually run a household and understand what it might mean to live alone. So these are all types of new initiatives that we've been bringing forward, knowing that again it's part of the disability. It's a part of the strategy that we'll be using as we're going forward to make sure that we can surround individuals and help them in every way that we can.

The Premier has appointed a Legislative Secretary that is sitting in the room with us right now and he's going to be dealing with disabilities in many different ways and bringing forward ideas of how we can, as government, within a balanced budget, bring forward ideas to support individuals and make sure that they are part of a growing province.

Ms. Chartier: — But at this moment, right now, that there's nothing in the works for adults with FASD specifically?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that some of those questions should be asked to Health as well. And I'm going to ask Ken to comment.

Mr. Acton: — If I just could add that, you're right. I was at the conference as well and I was impressed and I came away with a much better understanding of some of the challenges and I . . . My thought was that we really need, we need a whole range of programs. I mean we're starting right from the prevention piece all the way through in terms of the level that an individual may struggle and then what kind of supports do we have there.

The minister mentioned the child and family agenda and part of that being a focus on mental health and addictions. And I'm working with my colleagues with Health, Education, Justice, Corrections because we all recognize that we need to work at this together to make sure we've got the right kind of supports in place for individuals. So I think all of us are keen to look at this and develop a clear strategy that'll help us address the issues going forward.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'd also like to add that I talked about the FASD support network and that parent group. In Saskatoon, CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.] is dealing with FASD in a hands-on way as well as supporting families. And then there's a new family support network program in Saskatoon that has improved the school attendance for children with FASD. We also have three sort of storefront programs that are available in Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert to deal with . . . to help family support for FASD. So we are doing more.

The inference that we weren't doing anything for adults with FASD isn't right. It is correct that we do need to do more. But in the last three years, to raise the profile so that there is an understanding that government and society could be doing more and should be doing more is an important part of the child and family agenda as we move forward.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. I know when you pointed out the Saskatoon programs, I'm wondering in terms of support for adults living with FASD outside of the urban centres. What is there in other parts of the province?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There's within every health district or health region there's recognition and that there are trained professionals and there are also . . . I should back up. There are individuals that work with the issue. We also know that the federal government has put money into FASD, into the health regions. And there's, outside of the centres we also count on — the bigger centres — we count on the school system as well to recognize, to help us identify individuals that may have FAS.

So more work to do, for sure. There is no one single thing that's going to solve all the problems that we have, but working together inter-ministry is going to be, I believe is the key to making sure that we can give the supports in helping individuals live as round a life as possible.

Ms. Chartier: — So just to clarify then, there's no programs outside of the larger urban centres supported by the ministry for FASD, for adults living with FASD?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The three storefront programs that were identified last year and are under way are what I would, I don't want to call them pilot programs, but they're the first steps. How do we make sure that what we're putting in place is working? We put extra money in last year. I believe we're up to about \$1.2 million for FASD for these programmers. We will monitor the work what they're doing and keep a close eye on seeing if this is the kind of programs that we need in other places, realizing and knowing that there has to be special, I'll say, training. The individuals who have a foster home will take special training to understand how to deal with individuals with FASD, and that might be the type of work that we'll continue across the province.

Ms. Chartier: — The storefront locations then, are located . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, that's what I . . . It was P.A. that I wasn't sure about. Okay. You know, I'll touch on FASD a little bit when we talk a little bit more about child and family

services, so I'll put these . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Can I just add . . . I was wrong. It's actually \$1.8 million that we're spending on FASD this year.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. And that includes the three storefronts? Can you tell me what that all includes?

Mr. Acton: — Most of this money is actually in Health, so I guess my preference would be that that would be a question for Health.

Ms. Chartier: — Fair enough. That's okay. Just moving on here, I have to make sure I go back to this. In terms of the SAID program, I don't know if . . . We don't have to switch officials? We're good? Everybody's good? I'm wondering where you're at with respect to an appeal process. So obviously you've had many people go through the application process. A number have gotten on the program. But what are you finding with respect to the appeal process?

Mr. Redekop: — Okay. Jeff Redekop, executive director with income assistance service delivery. So you had asked about the appeal mechanisms for the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program. So there are two different types of appeal. There is the appeal for benefit-related decisions, and there is an appeal process or an adjudication process for decisions related to the determination of disability impact.

[20:30]

So within the appeal mechanism for benefits, there are essentially two levels of appeal. And in addition there's an initial internal review, so that would be decisions related to communication with beneficiaries about the amount of benefits they would be receiving. So the first level would be through a regional appeal committee of which there are five in the province. And then there's a second level, higher level, and a final level of appeal through the Saskatchewan or social services appeal board, the provincial board represented by Chairs in both Regina and Saskatoon covering north and south.

In terms of the disability impact assessment, there are also two levels of appeal there. And that would involve an internal reconsideration of the assessment. And just to back up a touch, the assessment is used to determine the impact of disability. As you may know about the program, SAID is designed for providing income support for people with significant and enduring disabilities. So it's the significance that's covered by the disability assessment. And the determination of eligibility in terms of the significance of disability is what I'm talking about in terms of the impact assessment. So two levels. One is an internal reconsideration. And then there is an adjudicator, level two is the adjudicator, which would typically be a person skilled in psychometrics such as a Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] or master's level psychologist.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for that. I've got some competing noise here. Are you finding that there . . . Well how many people have been turned down since the intake that started last spring?

Mr. Redekop: — Turned down in terms of eligibility for the

SAID program?

Ms. Chartier: — Yes. Yes.

Mr. Redekop: — I'm going to need to confirm numbers on that but, just before I do that, one could be turned down for not being financially eligible, and one could be determined not eligible because of not having a high enough significance of disability for the program. So are you asking about the latter?

Ms. Chartier: — Yes.

Mr. Redekop: — Okay. Let me just confer and make sure we're clear on the numbers.

Okay, we have an answer for that question. Since the expansion of the program to serve people living independently in June of 2012, I'll give you those numbers. Now just to back up, prior to that we were only serving through the SAID program, as it was in development, people who were living in residential care programs prior to June of 2012. So the statistics I'm going to talk about are only to do with people living independently. So the numbers are, we've had 6,553 determined to be eligible in terms of the disability impact assessment, not eligible is 1,602, and still in review is 233. And I can give you those in percentage factors as well. So 78 per cent eligible, 19 per cent not, and just over 2 per cent still in review.

And a comment on in review. As you may know, the take-up on the SAID program has been phenomenal. Government set a target of 8 to 10,000 people back in October of 2008, and the take-up has been very strong. So there's a high volume of people coming into the program. And we're still working through and we've actually worked pretty much almost all the way through that process where we're dealing with the people who are initially waiting to come in until we level down into more of a steady state of people applying within the regular process of people who you would normally expect to come in to apply for SAID, whether that's through aging in to eligibility when they become 18 or perhaps through a disability impact becomes more significant as a result of an occurrence in life or simply aging. As many of us would know, disability impact tends to increase as a person ages.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for that. In terms of the applications that have come in, I know that you were inundated and a few months behind in terms of assessment. Where are you at today with respect to trying to get through all the applications?

Mr. Redekop: — Okay, I'll just confer on that. Okay, we have that answer. Right now the time it takes to complete an assessment is approximately a month. And just to give you a bit of background on that, the assessments are being done by the Saskatchewan Abilities Council, who were the successful bidders in the request for proposal process to do the SAID disability impact assessments for the ministry.

So the process will be receiving the application, determining financial eligibility, and then having the Abilities Council perform the assessment and communicate the answer back to the ministry. So now I think the speed of which we're receiving completed assessments is increasing dramatically as that initial

uptake is now settling.

Ms. Chartier: — So it takes about a month for the process. So how many people are waiting to be processed? Maybe that's not the best word, but to go through the process.

Mr. Redekop: — I'll just confirm the answer on that. We have that information. As I mentioned before, there were approximately 233 in review. There's a few others that are still in process as well, so that would take the number to approximately 250. And again, some of the issues in terms of the month will involve the Saskatchewan Abilities Council contacting the individual, being able to arrange an assessment, and going to travel to that person's location and perform the assessment, typically within their home so that it's a very citizen-centred approach by doing that assessment in the location that works the best for the individual. But of course the Abilities Council does have to, as I mentioned, travel out and arrange a time that's mutually acceptable to the individual.

Ms. Chartier: — So these 250 people who are still waiting, is it expected that within a month that number will be processed?

Mr. Redekop: — I think probably, yes.

Ms. Chartier: — I just want a sense of the picture nine months ago or last July. It took more time; obviously you were inundated. And how long, back in July . . . Would it have been a three-month wait?

Mr. Redekop: — Well I'm not sure that answer can be provided. It would have depended on who, you know, whose application we looked at first: location, the resources. There were many things being put together at the time. So there are those who may have been assessed immediately within a number of days, and there are those who might have had to wait a little bit longer. So I'm not sure we can provide a more detailed answer on that. I think what's really important here is we've now got a handle on the process and it's becoming far more routine in terms of delivering a service.

Ms. Chartier: — I just want some clarification. And I've understood that if a person applied on February 1st and found out in fact that they were eligible, that they would be — and they didn't receive it until April 1st — that they would have been eligible to receive February's benefits, like from the time that they applied.

Mr. Redekop: — Benefits received are based on the application date and when they were determined to be eligible.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you for that. Just looking at budget numbers here, your SAID numbers. I know that you described the uptake as very strong. And your difference — page 121 here — in the SAID amount is allotted a little bit lower this year. But the SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] numbers are quite dramatic actually, the budgeting for SAP. So I'm just wondering what that's all about.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We're going to get you the information, but I just wanted to make sure that you were aware that when we thought that the original uptake in SAID was going to be greater faster, that's when we learned that many of the

individuals that could possibly qualify for SAID were intimidated by having an envelope of questions in front of them. So though the number that we were expecting is there, the immediate uptake wasn't as, wasn't the way we had anticipated. So, Bob, maybe you could clarify some of these.

Mr. Wihlidal: — So your references to the SAID budget line for '13-14 being marginally lower this year than last and the Saskatchewan assistance program budget line for '13-14 being somewhat higher than last year, what's important I think is first of all to look at these three programs, our three core income support programs as a group.

The SAP, SAID, and TEA programs — the transitional employment allowance, the Saskatchewan assured income for disabilities, and Saskatchewan assistance program — together combined are our income support, base income support programs. In '12-13 those combined programs are expected to — the books aren't quite closed — but about \$303 million will have been spent on those three programs for an average of 26,687 cases. So that's what last year looked like. And this was actually about \$9.4 million and about 700 cases more than we had anticipated in last year's budgets. So we did overspend in that suite of programs, partly because we had overestimated how fast the decline would be in that set of programs.

The 2013-14 budget for that group of programs combined is \$310.8 million when you add SAP, SAID and TEA together. And so compare that 310 million to the 303 we just spent last year. So it goes up slightly and the estimated caseload for that \$310 million is again 26,558 cases. So just slightly lower than where we ended last year is what we expect to average in the coming, in this fiscal year.

The \$310 million funding base for this current year includes \$12.8 million for benefit increases. So that includes shelter indexation across the group of programs, utilities and inflation costs across that group of programs, the June benefit increase for SAID, as well as a funding increase to approved private service home level care rates, as well as a catch-up amount for the caseload increase that we had underfunded or, you know, had been overspent in last year's budget.

Now the variance between SAP and SAID is something that we should explain as well. These numbers were based on our third quarter estimations and take-up of the SAID program. At that time, we were expecting to end the year at about 8,000. And when we got into the fourth quarter, as Jeff just finished explaining, we got a lot better at the assessment process and, as it turned out, clients became more comfortable with making application to the SAID program from SAP. And as it turns out, we've ended the year around 10,000 rather than 8, and so the quarter three numbers were used as the budget base, whereas what we know now is that the average set for the coming year is going to be somewhat higher than 10,000. What we also know is that the SAP number is going to be significantly lower than what we thought it was going to be in the third quarter of last year.

So the bottom line is, going back to my first point, the base of 26,558 that we predict for this year is still more or less what we were predicting but in different places. So there's a shift between SAP and SAID that we learned about in the last quarter

of the year.

[20:45]

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for explaining that. Just one more question here around SAID and actually FASD. And I'm just wondering if there's been any special measures to ensure that folks with a cognitive disability like FASD are successful in their application with SAID.

Mr. Wihlidal: — You may recall some of our conversation from a year ago was what kind of community-based organization support is there for applicants to the SAID program. And there's quite a range at play right now. I have a bit of a list here of individual organizations that provide some support to individuals who are making application for SAID. In particular, the FASD support network of Saskatchewan does provide some support to that application process. So I think we've gotten a little better at identifying and streaming folks to supports like that to support them in their application.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. And I think last year we also talked about if there was any extra resources given to some of, any of the CBOs who were helping with SAID applications, and I recall there wasn't. And I'm assuming that that's still the case, that that still falls under there.

Mr. Wihlidal: — The only exception would be Sask Abilities Council, which is actually contracted to provide the assessment process itself.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you. One thing that I'd like to chat about that we talked about last year was the employment supplement. I had brought a case, a specific case, forward: a family who, she ran a day home and he was, he worked for the school board and had gotten a small raise. And it had bumped them off the employment supplement, which the supplement itself wasn't the big deal for them, it was the family health benefits. He was diabetic. They had all kinds of trouble.

And I know, Madam Minister, that you pointed out that there was an increase in 2008.

But I'm wondering, I had another case here that I'd like to talk about. But I'm wondering, I know you review programs annually but is there any, any possibility . . . The parameters for the employment supplement haven't changed since 2008, I believe. And so I'm wondering, I see here as a budget line that it's decreased and if there's room going forward to review that? What I'm hearing from people is that because incomes have gone up, but so have costs, that people are not eligible for the program.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — As to the member, we always are reviewing programs. At the same time, we're very aware that the average weekly earnings has increased significantly in Saskatchewan and even the minimum wage. But programs are always being looked at to see what we can be doing. If you have a case that you would like to discuss, we can do it now, or if you would rather because of confidentiality do it, you know, bring it to my office. We can do that as well.

Ms. Chartier: — I think it's quite fine. I think it's more illustrative of some of the difficulties. It was a woman who is

just finishing up her master's degree and was getting paid, doing some of the research work. And her husband actually was on employment insurance, and she learned that she didn't make enough money to qualify for the employment supplement.

So they were living off his EI [employment insurance], her money that she was earning studying and working, doing things that students do for professors, and student loans. And they've got a few children and they realized they . . . She was actually told that she made too little money to be eligible for the employment supplement, because obviously they look at the threshold income as the families, as a couple, and then they look at where that income comes from. And I understand that employment insurance isn't . . . Could you explain how employment insurance is factored into the employment supplement?

Mr. Scott: — Hi, it's Doug Scott, strategic management branch. I could talk a little bit about the structure of SES [Saskatchewan employment supplement]. The minimum qualifying earnings is \$125 a month, so it's pretty modest. So this person would have to be earning less than \$125 a month to fail to qualify.

Ms. Chartier: — Can you say that one more time?

Mr. Scott: — This person would have to be earning less than \$125 a month in order to fail to qualify for SES. The minimum qualifying earnings for the supplement is \$125 a month.

Ms. Chartier: — She was earning more than that. It varied month by month obviously. But his, I think was the EI piece. I'm just trying to look at my email here.

Okay, I will actually look at the letter from the manager. So she had employment wages and her spouse had EI. The two eligibility tests related to income received from EI. The first test looks at the total family income to see if it falls below the maximum level for the program, which I think in their case it did. EI benefits are included in the test. If the family's total income falls within the program parameters, a second test looks at how much that income is from employment, self-employment, or child spousal support to determine the amount of the SES benefit. Although EI income does not create eligibility for SES, it is a factor in determining benefit levels.

Mr. Scott: — Yes, it is. There are two income calculations as part of SES. One is income that can be supplemented and it's principally earnings, although it could be spousal support as well because the program is intended to encourage people to take available work, plus intended to encourage people to pursue spousal support. The EI could figure in. It wouldn't be supplementable, that is to say that it would have no bearing on the amount of the SES benefit. But if the amount was fairly high, it could disqualify the family because they could be beyond the family income threshold. They could be deemed to be not a low-income family, essentially, if the EI was enough. And that's what must have happened in this case, I think.

Ms. Chartier: — Well I'm wondering . . . So you're saying that the rate now, 120, you have to . . . If you earn less than \$125 a month, that's what makes you ineligible.

Mr. Scott: — I'm saying there's two income definitions. One source of income calculates the rate of supplementation, okay, the rate at which . . . the additional money that you get. But the second income calculation is a total family income calculation from sort of all sources. And if that total family income is too high, then the family would be deemed ineligible.

Ms. Chartier: — I don't think that was the case here. But the problem then would have been her monthly earnings would have been, if it was . . .

Mr. Scott: — Yes, it could have been one of the two. Either the EI pushed them over the family income limit, which meant that their total family income was too high to qualify, or her earnings were too low. But they'd have to be very low not to qualify for SES because it's \$125 a month. So if you think at minimum wage, that's like 12 hours a month of work would get you in.

Ms. Chartier: — Yes. Do you still month by month submit your employment numbers or your . . .

Mr. Scott: — Yes, you do, yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Perhaps I will take this up with the minister. Thankfully their circumstances have changed, and they have a small inheritance that'll get them through here the next little bit. But they had no other source of income. They had his EI. And he'd learned that, through Can-Sask, that he wasn't eligible to take any training programs because his IQ [intelligence quotient] was too high. She was in university and had student loans. They have kids. They couldn't afford for him to go back to university to retrain because they already had student loans from her. So they were really — well they still are — between a rock and a hard place. She'll be done here, her school, in the next two months and hopefully will have employment, but everything ended on April 1st for them. His EI ended on April 1st, and so I will perhaps take this up a little bit more thoroughly here.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think we should be looking at it. I know that every case is individual and that this is something that I'd offered earlier. If there is a specific issue, the programs are in place to ensure that we can be supporting those who are working, and helping them achieve their goals. So please bring the information to my office.

Ms. Chartier: — And actually one of my colleagues, Cathy Sproule from Nutana, had brought this forward, and I have a letter from the ministry on this. But I think I want to illustrate that this is another case of how perhaps SES should be reviewed; \$125 is really low for 2013.

Mr. Scott: — It's intended to be easy. That threshold's intended to make it easy to get on with the program. So, yes.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's the point. It says that the more money you make . . . It's encouraging people to work. So we — at \$125, which is like 12 hours a month — will help you to be able to get some of this funding. So we can always look at it, but this program is in place to help individuals to be able to work.

Ms. Chartier: — And it's not the \$125 that's the problem? I'm wondering what the cut-off too is, and that was the family last year that . . .

Mr. Scott: — The cut-off for family income is \$4,500 a month.

Ms. Chartier: — When we say a family income, how many people is that supporting?

Mr. Scott: — I'm sorry. I . . . [inaudible] . . . else.

Ms. Chartier: — It's okay. That \$4,500 cut-off, how many people is that?

Mr. Scott: — It's a blanket \$4,500 regardless of family size. So that's the upper limit. The whispering in my ear was about, if this person's circumstances have changed, they should re-contact us so that we can reassess. There's a possibility.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Thank you. I will take that up a little bit more thoroughly. Thinking about the child care benefits — I just have to grab my copy of the budget here — the parent subsidies, obviously we see that they are going down considerably here this year, and I just was wondering what that's all about.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — First of all, I think you know that the child care subsidy is income-tested. So when there's less people that are getting the subsidy, that's a good thing. It means that incomes are rising. So there's approximately 3,400 spaces right now where there's a child care subsidy, and we know that even with the minimum wage increases, it far outpaces any kind of a clawback you would get.

I'll give you an example. Under the minimum wage, the clawback for someone working full time is about \$23.25 a month. But on minimum wage with the increases, you're going to earn \$355 a month more. So the subsidy is in place for people that are requiring help but at the same when you . . . Because it's income-tested, it's actually a good thing. When we're paying less money, people are taking more money home. Wages have increased. Minimum wage has even increased 26 per cent. Average weekly earnings have grown 26 per cent in the last five years.

Ms. Chartier: — It's important to note, though, is it still the case that the turning point has not changed since 1983, I believe?

[21:00]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Somewhere around there and yes, it is. The turning point has not changed. And this is another issue that we are looking at as government. In fact when the Premier appointed legislative secretaries, I have one legislative secretary that's working on the disability strategy and another one that'll be working on the issues dealing with foster families and the child welfare review and that type of thing. So the turning point is something that we will be looking at as well.

Everything that we do is done within a balanced budget. So making sure that we are providing support to those who are the very lowest income is my goal, at the same time making sure

that within a balanced budget we can be supporting families. So I've specifically talked to the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] from Moose Jaw Wakamow to look at this issue. It's important to all of us, so we will be reviewing it.

Ms. Chartier: — So do you anticipate having something . . . ?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I anticipate hearing something back from him.

Ms. Chartier: — I think for me, having spoken to both directors and families, one big issue that they've identified is the problem with subsidies. And 1983 is a long time ago. The \$1,640 that you can make before you start losing — over \$1,640 — is barely over minimum wage before you start to lose the full subsidy. And if we want people to be employed and to be able to afford child care, I think that that's a huge, huge issue.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, I'm not disagreeing with you on this issue. I've asked that it be reviewed and looked at. I do like the idea that the child care subsidy is income-tested. But the turning point is something that we've discussed before. And everything we do will be done within a balanced budget, but it's something that I'm looking at.

Ms. Chartier: — I don't have them in front of me right now. Of course it's the only piece of paper I don't have in front of me right now. But my written questions on child care subsidies, I'd asked the range both last year and this year more recently, the range of what has been paid out in subsidies. And it surprised me a year ago, and it continues to surprise me that there's a 25 cent subsidy paid out.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think the member knows that nobody gets a cheque for 25 cents. It goes to the daycares, and it's part of their overall payment for the children that they would have in subsidized daycare spaces. But to get this 25 cents would mean that a parent is making \$22.61 an hour.

Ms. Chartier: — And maybe you don't have this at your fingertips right now but . . . So for one particular family then, there's a 25 cent subsidy paid to the child care provider?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I believe there's only one. There's one payment in that amount, and we know that that parent would have to be making \$22.61 an hour.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Do you have a sense, in terms of the records that you keep on subsidies, do you have a range? So 25 cents is pretty low, but how about 25 cents to 50 bucks? Do you have that number, or how do you keep track of those numbers? What form can you give those to me?

Mr. Wihlidal: — I don't have a percentage. I have a picture but . . . Oh there we go. Sorry about that, I've got more than a picture. Approximately 10 per month or point three per cent receive less than \$10. Approximately 170 per month or 5 per cent received payments of less than \$100. And we know that about 70 per cent receive the maximum.

Ms. Chartier: — Just pointing out that that 25 cent subsidy that was paid to, the one 25 cent subsidy paid to that child care at

\$22 an hour sounds pretty good but it's still, if you've got . . . How many children did that involve?

Mr. Wihlidal: — [Inaudible] . . . as it relates to one family, one space.

Ms. Chartier: — So \$22 an hour is far better than minimum wage, but it's still, with cost of living, doesn't, it translates into I think somewhere between 40 and \$50,000 a year which is still . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I understand that. But I also know that the member knows that from 1982 to 2007 when we became government, there was opportunities for your government to look at it, for the NDP to look at it, and it didn't happen. So it's something that I'm looking at, but obviously it wasn't a priority on the list of the NDP.

Ms. Chartier: — I completely agree that it has been ignored, and I would advocate that it's something that needs to be addressed.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Agreed.

Ms. Chartier: — If we want people to be employed and . . . Child care is an economic strategy, aside from making sure people have good care. So you've got labour force shortages. You need to make sure people have access to child care.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that the member and I are sometimes on the same page, and we're on the same page on this issue.

Ms. Chartier: — All right. Thank you for that. The bus pass program — and forgive my ignorance — this again was implemented initially . . . that the support that the Ministry of Social Services provides, I believe it's to municipalities. Can you tell me a little bit about how that works.

I had spoken to a constituent about a month ago who has a disability but is not on . . . he can't access an inexpensive bus pass. It doesn't fit any parameters. And he was saying for he and his wife to get groceries, it's cheaper for them to walk to the grocery store and catch a cab home rather than both of them catch a bus both ways. So can you tell me a little bit about the bus pass program?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to ask Gord to do that. But first of all I want to comment that this is with the disability strategy. The whole idea of transportation, education, employment, we need to look at that in a broader picture. I'm really excited about the opportunity to review the whole disability strategy and get some feedback to see how we could be improving various areas. So I know that this issue will be looked at again in the next few months. My colleagues will be reviewing this file as well.

Mr. Tweed: — Gord Tweed from the income assistance and disability services division. So as the minister suggested, the program that's under operation is called the discounted bus pass program, operates in seven municipalities across the province: Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Yorkton, and North Battleford.

So the program is quite simple in its construct in that the province, our ministry, provides a monthly subsidy per adult bus pass sold to a recipient of our Saskatchewan assistance program, the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program, the transitional employment allowance program, the employment supplement program. The ministry provides a per-month or a per-pass subsidy of \$24.75 to the municipalities. So in total, just to kind of summarize, there's about 65, 66,000 passes sold each year in those municipalities under this program. The contribution from the province would be as much as \$1.8 million to those municipalities.

Ms. Chartier: — I think his challenge is that he was on CPP [Canada Pension Plan] disability benefits.

Mr. Tweed: — If he was on CPP disability, in order to qualify for this program, provincial program, provincial subsidy, you need to be on one of the programs that I referenced.

If your CPP income was not sufficient to meet your basic needs and you were on either the assured income for disability program or the Saskatchewan assistance program, you would qualify for this. To do so, you only need to provide confirmation to the municipal transit office that you're in receipt of one of the provincial programs that I suggested.

So just to give you another sense on this, so the price of an adult bus pass in Regina, for example, is on the order of \$65 a month or thereabouts. The discounted pass would be sold to the individual at about \$20 per month or thereabouts. So it's made quality and affordable transportation available to many people who didn't have that access before.

Ms. Chartier: — And Madam Minister, you said you are in the midst of reviewing this?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We are, with the disability strategy that the member from Coronation Park is looking at. Transportation is one of the issues, so I'm sure that as he reviews the programs that are available, if there's some . . . I don't know what else . . . I don't know what will be found. There'll be discussions with the disability community on a number of issues, and if this is something that he's hearing more often, I'm sure I'll hear about it.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. Just switching gears here, there was an OC [order in council] that came across my desk around fraud investigation with Regina and Saskatoon Police Services and I think I saw it last year as well. Has this been a long-standing practice and have the numbers fluctuated at all with respect to this?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We'll get information on the amount of monies that are involved, but we actually have, both with the Saskatoon and Regina police department, we have, I believe there's one individual that works with the ministry to investigate fraud occurrences. It's been a program that's been in place for a number of years. We believe that it's beneficial, and I'll ask Jeff to give us some more information.

Mr. Redekop: — Jeff Redekop, income assistance service delivery. The minister has stated it correctly. The contract has been quite long standing and the amount of the contract is based

on the salary of the police officers that are doing the work. So if they were changing those salaries, the amount of the contract would be amended to that amount. And it's proved a very appropriate approach, a very successful approach in terms of following up on the rare instance of fraud. The vast majority of citizens in receipt of benefits are honest, but for that small number that may seek to circumvent the system, we do have a solid approach in working with the Regina and the Saskatoon police forces to make sure that incidences where we suspect fraud are followed up upon.

Ms. Chartier: — How many cases on average in a year does this police officer pursue?

Mr. Redekop: — So I'll just do a quick mental calculation of the average. It looks like in and around 50 to 60 in any given year that we follow up upon. And what I can say is when they're followed up upon and taken to the court process, the likelihood of conviction ranges between 90 and 97 per cent.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you. And sorry, I'm backtracking here. I realize I had a follow-up question around the child care subsidy here. What is the processing time? I think that that's one of the big complaints or difficulties that I've heard from both families and from directors of child care facilities who end up carrying bad debt, because someone will come and have a child care space and apply for the child care subsidy and it takes, I've heard, anywhere from six to eight weeks to have that processed. And in that time they may not be eligible or they may be eligible for less than was thought. The person ends up leaving the space and the debt never gets paid. So the question: processing time for the child care subsidy?

Mr. Redekop: — The processing time from point of application is approximately two to three weeks.

Ms. Chartier: — Any explanation as to how I'm hearing from many directors that it's much longer than that?

Mr. Redekop: — One of the possibilities would be when the ministry is awaiting confirmation of information. For example, parents would need to report their income, their utilization. So there could be processing delays based on waiting for information to come in.

[21:15]

Ms. Chartier: — So the average wait time, just to confirm again, from the time of application is two to three weeks? Okay.

Mr. Redekop: — Maybe I can expand on that a little bit.

Mr. Acton: — I'll just have Jeff get you an update on some of the work we did over the last year in terms of the lean process. We had one of the providers in Ministry of Education staff as well as our own staff to see if we could streamline the process and identify ways that we could speed it all up and hopefully reduce some of the paperwork. So there's a number of things that we've already implemented or are currently in play that I think will improve the situation.

Mr. Redekop: — So as mentioned, we've used lean technology to have a look at the process that's being used within the child

care subsidy to identify opportunities for improvement in terms of how the program is operated. So that lean event included, as mentioned, folks from the education world, providers, and our ministry staff. So it included the people who know most about the program and also have the best idea for how to improve things.

So through that event, I believe there were about 20 different areas looked at for possible improvement and that was narrowed down to five critical areas as immediate approaches as part of the continuous improvement plan. And those include redeveloping a program application form and creating change forms to streamline the program intake and accommodate changes to family circumstances, changes like income or address. And another was implementing a web estimator to provide a real-time estimate for potential users of the program, so they can go online and have a look at their child's circumstances or the utilization, entering their income and other circumstances and have a look at what the benefit might be.

Another, a third one would be enhancing eligibility notice to families and child care facilities to provide subsidy eligibility information as quickly as possible. Another is refining the income reporting mechanisms by exploring phone-in income reporting rather than just through pay stub submission, and finally streamlining attendance reporting and data entry by supporting inter-ministerial efforts to implement an online attendance reporting. And some work is going on right now in collaboration with one of the centres around that use of email to streamline that process. And we'll also be engaging that child care provider centre on the web estimator as well.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for that. So the attendance reporting, that was another big issue. And I think we talked about this last year where every child, every child care centre, there's a paper record which the director fills out and then submits to the child care subsidy unit, then it's all reviewed and inputted. So that attendance reporting, so you're working with one, a pilot with one child care centre on attendance reporting? Am I understanding that correctly?

Mr. Redekop: — I believe that's correct. Well it is correct, one, but it's correct also that it's even more. Every one can submit by email.

Mr. Acton: — If I may, there's a couple of things. One is in terms of in the short term, making arrangements so that they can submit documents electronically, to submit attendance sheets by email. So we provide them a template so it's easy to fill out. Once they get their children's names in there, it's easy to populate and send back.

The second larger issue is working with education and ourselves in terms of going the very next step, which is a fully electronic way of submitting. And we haven't got the second one going yet. We're still working with Education on that one. So short term is to make it as easy as possible for them to submit or fill out a template and send it into us by email. It's still not as streamlined as we'd like, but that's where we started and we're working on the second one.

Ms. Chartier: — Just with respect to your work with Education then, is one of the pieces . . . I know we've talked about this in

Education estimates. Other jurisdictions have moved to online registries, Manitoba, PEI [Prince Edward Island]. No, actually Manitoba and the Ottawa capital region has an online child care registry. So is that . . . I guess you can't speak for Education, but I'm wondering how your work on the electronic submission of information ties into the Education piece?

Mr. Acton: — I think you're right. I don't think I can speak for Education. We have a team that is working with Education and they're looking at options, and I'm sure if there's ways . . . Well we know we want to move to an online system, so the extent of it or exactly how it looks, I guess I'll leave that to Education folks and some of our staff to sort out and come back with a plan.

Ms. Chartier: — When we come back a year from now, is the goal to have electronic reporting in place?

Mr. Acton: — That will again depend on my colleagues over at Education as well. So I'm sure that everything being equal, I'll be here next year and I'd be happy to answer.

Ms. Chartier: — That sounds good to me. I'd like to think that . . . I hope that that's the goal here. Just a couple of quick things I think to clear up before we move on to child and family services, although I'm sure that there's something I'm missing here. Looking generally at the budget, accommodation services is up, I believe, by more than \$5 million. So I'm just wondering what that represents.

Mr. Acton: — The biggest component there . . . Well it has two. There's an increase of 170,000 in relation to government-owned accommodations, capital, and then there's 5 million as a placeholder for Valley View that's in that number.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, perfect. Thank you. Just sifting through making sure that there's no other . . . Oh, in terms of FTEs this year, there's a reduction of 45 I believe, and I'm just wondering where you see those coming from.

Mr. Acton: — Actually it's I believe the number of 43.6, but you're right. So the majority of these are things that are already, have already occurred. Ten of those FTEs are a part of a larger move of housing technical services staff that moved from the ministry to Living Skies Housing Authority. Some of those were covered in last year, they actually transferred October or November of the previous year, and that's . . . So 10 of those are being captured there.

Just in terms of background, some of . . . There was technical folks with the housing authority already doing some of the work, and then we also had some in the ministry, and we felt it was best that they work together in one unit and get them a little closer to the front lines. So they worked . . . The in-scope folks moved with their collective agreement intact and moved from the ministry to Living Skies Housing Authority. So that's where 10 went. Six of them were gained through efficiencies with the implementation of Linkin, and that's just the move from not having to input data a second time. So six were there.

There's 10 that we haven't identified yet. We have 7 to 8 per cent turnover in staff in any given year and we have a significant number that actually retire. So we work through that,

and each position, we look at it and say, is the position in the right location? Do we need to move it? Is it something that we can streamline?

The balance is really a reflection of the announcement last year for the closure of group homes, in terms of including Dales House and Red Willow. And some of those closures we were tasked with last year was part of the 100 FTEs from the previous year. We in fact did not meet that target. Government as a whole did, but as a ministry, the 100 that was identified last year, we in fact only achieved 74 of those.

It was a stretch target for us, and of course we had made the commitment right at the very start that we wouldn't do anything until we were sure we had capacity built into the system, and so Dales House and Red Willow continue to operate today, and we continue to work at making sure we have capacity in the community before we do anything more.

Ms. Chartier: — And I'll have some questions about that in a few minutes. But I'll just try to wrap up here with some income security questions.

So obviously Social Services regulations and policies stipulate or make provisions for all recipients to have an advocate, and recipients historically have had the right to have had an advocate. But we've seen both the Regina Welfare Rights Centre and Equal Justice for All in Saskatoon this last year lose some funding. So I'm wondering where the ministry is with respect to ensuring that the people who receive social services have the opportunity to have an advocate or someone in their court if need be.

Mr. Wihlidal: — The policy is unchanged, so we still provide a \$45 amount for individuals to select an advocate of their choosing to support them at appeal processes or an application process.

Ms. Chartier: — Do you think it's a problem not having a group or an organization who has the skill and has advocated for many people over time to do that?

Mr. Wihlidal: — Well I think the intent here is to ensure that the choice is in the hands of the individual, first of all. A centralized system in Regina wouldn't work for folks in Saskatoon. So you'd need to customize a solution in each community at any rate. And what we're finding is that people are able to find, generally, advocates that they need. We do provide I think a list at times of individuals they could access.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The appeal process is available to individuals. I have spoken to the Chairs of the appeal committees. I know that they use every opportunity to ensure that people have, you know, the information that's available to them. They are very in tune to the individuals' needs and are asked to make sure that they're following all the rules. So I've heard from some of the people that are not in the Equal Justice for All and those groups, but I haven't heard from individuals, from clients of ours who are saying that they can't find a way to be helped through their appeal process.

Ms. Chartier: — So can you just tell me how that might work. So if I'm someone in Regina who has to go through an appeal

process, and you do pay the \$45. And you said the appeal committee works with the individual to find an advocate?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — No, I didn't say that. No, I did not say that.

Ms. Chartier: — Making sure that they have . . . I think you said making sure.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I said making sure that their voice is heard, that they are not felt like they are turned away and that they are not listened to. So that's what I mean by their voice is heard.

The people that are on the appeal committee are listening carefully to the issues that a client may be bringing forward. And if they aren't happy with their regional appeal, they can go to the provincial appeal committee as well. And we also make allowances or opportunities for people who can't travel. There's telephone interviews that can take place as well. So we give people the opportunity to make sure that their voice is heard.

Mr. Tweed: — Maybe just to supplement that a bit, in Regina clients very frequently will access the services of the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry. That's an agency that's been in operation for many years and is very familiar with our programs and services, so they're well versed.

In Saskatoon, I won't get the title or the name of this group correct. You may actually be more familiar with them than I, but there is a group of university students who offer their services, CLASSIC [Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc.] who offer their services to individuals who are also questioning decisions made by the ministry.

And very recently, maybe just to add this, we, as you know, in the development of the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program, we work very much in partnership with the disability community. Within the past couple of weeks in Regina, there was an orientation around individuals who are accessing that program, an orientation provided by community members, actually hosted or convened by a member of the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry, in terms of how you make your way through the appeal process and what are the right types of things to ask and what are the right processes to follow. It's just trying to give people some foundational support in terms of how to approach a government ministry in terms of, I have a challenge with the decision that you've rendered.

[21:30]

Ms. Chartier: — I think it's important to note that the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry has handled over 2,000 cases in 9 of the 10 past years, and I think that they are feeling that some of this . . . they have another mandate as well. This is important work to them, but since 2011 they've seen an increase in cases from other parts of the province, and they're arguing that this takes away from other parts of their mandate and impacts the quality of their service to the clients. So it's great that the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry is there, but they as an organization are fielding a huge number of cases for advocacy.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I thank you for that information. I know that the number of people that are on social assistance that need the appeal system has decreased. One of my goals is to make sure that people that are, like, on the SAID program have every opportunity to receive that benefit. We are focused on ensuring that people can get the supports that they need in this province. I have had the chance to talk to some people within the Anti-Poverty Ministry and listen to their concerns. But at the same time, we need to make sure that individuals are . . . if their voice is heard, needs to be heard at the appeal process. We encourage the committees to make sure that they are listening well.

Ms. Chartier: — Can I ask what the rationale was for discontinuing funding to these two organizations?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That decision was made a couple of years ago I know, and I think the number of client that were actually using the system, I believe it was in Saskatoon . . . [inaudible] . . . were generally not our clients. They weren't the people that we are supporting or that we were looking after through the Saskatchewan employment.

Mr. Tweed: — Many of the individuals who approached for help through the Equal Justice for All facility were employment insurance recipients and not necessarily social assistance recipients. That said, they also did provide support to people on social assistance on occasion assuredly.

Ms. Chartier: — So I'm just wondering then what the rationale for cutting the programs were.

Mr. Acton: — Well this again goes back to choice and making sure that we're providing the funding to the individuals as opposed to dictating that, if you want help, you must go to a particular agency. So I mean, I think that fundamentally that was behind it in terms of saying individuals should be able to choose, and we should try to adjust our system so that we can make that work for them.

Ms. Chartier: — I'm curious about how, having never gone through the appeal process personally. So a person is faced with an appeal, and then it's great that there's the \$45 that's available to have someone, but how do you . . . The goal to have an advocate is to have someone who knows how to manage the system or knows some of the issues. So how is someone supposed to find someone who has those skills and abilities?

Mr. Tweed: — So information can be made available at our local offices around services that are available in each community. They can just reference the assured income for disability program. I know that you're well aware of the number of community groups that we work with monthly and who will represent the interest of not only their clients but other individuals who approach them for help as well.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you.

Mr. Forbes: — Just a quick question. How much have you paid out in total for the last year in the \$45 fee?

Mr. Tweed: — We don't have that information here. What I can tell you is that, of the thousands of decisions that are

rendered each year by the ministry staff, there are very few that actually culminate in an appeal. We would have around 400 appeals each year at the local level or the regional level and about another 120 or so of those, just approximately, that would go to the next level of appeal with the provincial Social Services appeal board.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm just hoping you can take a guess because we're talking a lot about the \$45. But I think if I can remember correctly, the grant to Equal Justice for All was in the 10,000 maybe. I was going to say 4,000 to 8,000 range. It was not that big of an amount. So I'm wondering if you're paying out the \$45 whether that's 2 or 300 that you've paid out or is it 10 or 20? Because again a question of how many people know that there is that ability to get a \$45 payment to have somebody help you out.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that the information that when someone can't receive their social assistance cheque, there is information that is given to them. There's letters given to them, and at most they would have a case worker they can talk to. I have every confidence in the case workers that would point them to the fact that they are allowed the \$45 that they can go to the appeal board. And at the same, we are talking about only 10,000. When we are balancing a budget, we are looking at spending our money wisely. We look at every penny that's being spent within the ministry. I don't say only \$10,000. I say it's \$10,000.

How can we make sure that we are supplying the service to our clients? How can we make sure that they have every opportunity to have their voice heard, and yet how can I make sure that your taxpayer dollar is being spent wisely? So it's decisions that are made and every case whether . . . Whatever it is, as government, we make choices. And one of our choices, one of the decisions that was made was that we will provide information to people, the 400 cases or so that come forward on a yearly basis to make sure that they can be heard. At the same time, there is an expectation that taxpayers' money is spent in a way that is good for people. So it was choices.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, I appreciate that, but I also appreciate the fact many people who are vulnerable aren't aware of these things. So you're telling me, if that there seems to be in-service to caseworkers so they're well aware of the \$45 and they should be making their clients aware that they have \$45.

But the other thing is, you know, when the Sask Party started as a government, there were three very active anti-poverty advocacy groups in this province, and now we have one. Welfare Rights in Regina actually had a much higher budget, but they did much more work in terms of trusteeship and that type of thing.

But these organizations, and Regina Anti-Poverty is very good at this, being advocates, not only for individuals but also for systematic change. And they have been really advocates for everyone. But we don't have that in Saskatoon anymore, and Regina lost a well-established one.

And so while the minister can, you know, make the comments about \$10,000 — and I agree that every penny counts — but I

also think that the government was getting really good value, really good value from these anti-poverty organizations both as making sure clients were being treated fairly and appropriately but also for systematic change.

I can remember for example when this ministry did a big thing about CBOs after first being elected and invited all those groups, including Equal Justice for All and Welfare Rights. And they participated only to find that a few years later they would be at the end of the road for them. So I'm curious to know how many people have been paid out for the \$45. And if you have the answer to that, it would be appreciated.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that there's been an indication that we don't know how many people have been paid out the \$45. We do have . . . One of the pieces of literature that are available to people on assistance right now talks about advocates. It says if you request it, you can receive \$45 to pay your advocate, unless your advocate is your spouse or your dependent child. That type of information is given.

I think the other thing that happened when we became government is the number of people on social assistance was considerably higher. Our goal is to make sure that we don't have people on social assistance. We have moved 10,000 people onto the SAID program that were on assistance before. Our goal is to make sure that as government we are supporting the most vulnerable and spending your taxpayers' dollars wisely.

So there's the booklets that are available to individuals. The information that we give to people that need our support are there. And the decision to go through the appeal process with allowing individuals to find their advocate is the choice that we made.

Mr. Tweed: — Each time a person makes application for benefits through the Saskatchewan assistance program, they receive a handbook. So the person conducting the intake interview would provide this to each person. I also believe they do it at annual review. So it's not that . . . There's not a shortage of information available to folks now. This handbook doesn't specifically suggest the rate that's available, but it does confirm that there is assistance available to assist people through the appeal process.

Mr. Forbes: — So if I did a written question, you would be able to answer how many \$45, how many times this has been paid out.

Mr. Tweed: — I believe we have a specific code that we enter on a file. I would need to confirm that though, Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Thanks.

Ms. Chartier: — Moving on to child and family services. Looking at the Children's Advocate report around children having the right to have their own voice or speak for themselves in child and family services hearings in court, the Children's Advocate talked about pro bono law. And I know that was one of the issues that he pointed out that he was hoping in this budget that there would have been some money set aside to ensure that children did have representation, and we weren't

relying on an organization like pro bono. I'm just wondering if that is on the radar or was that looked at this budget year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes, the child advocate did talk about it, and I think there was a question answered, and the Minister of Justice talked about it as well. He's looking at some opportunities to find out what would be the best thing to do in Saskatchewan. We understand that having the child's voice heard in court is important. How do we do that in the best way is something that we're looking at. So the Minister of Justice probably could answer as well, but I do know that as a voice on the child and family services committee that it's something that we'll look at. But overall, it's a Justice issue.

Ms. Chartier: — Is it the Ministry of Justice that represents Social Services? In child and family hearings, who does the legal work for the ministry on child and family services cases?

Ms. Brittin: — Good evening, everyone. I'm Andrea Brittin. I'm assistant deputy minister of child and family services. So there's a combination — there are Justice lawyers who provide representation on behalf of the child, and in some smaller communities, we do have private law firms who provide that legal service.

[21:45]

Ms. Chartier: — So the Justice lawyers primarily work in Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw. Can you give me a breakdown of how that . . .

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, sure. It's Saskatoon and Regina where we have Justice lawyers working, and in all other centres it would be private law firms.

Ms. Chartier: — So you contract. You contract with law firms. How does that work with the contracting? Are they generally contracts under \$50,000? Or how do you do the tendering or find a law firm?

Mr. Acton: — Justice manages that for us. So we turn to Justice for legal services, and then they make a decision about whether they can handle that in-house in Regina and Saskatoon or if in fact they seek private law firms to provide this service. So we turn to them, and they handle that for us. So that would be a question for Justice in terms of how they do that.

Ms. Chartier: — How much do you spend on . . . And obviously parents are on their own, so children will rely on pro bono. I guess family, parents for all intents and purposes could rely on pro bono or CLASSIC. Well not CLASSIC because they don't do court work.

Ms. Brittin: — Parents may be eligible for legal aid, and if not, then they would pay for their own legal costs.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. In terms of the financial costs of child and family services cases, do we have a sense of how much that costs annually?

Ms. Brittin: — I don't have that number available with me tonight.

Ms. Chartier: — Would it be best to ask that in a written question? And would that . . . It comes from the Social Services budget, not Justice. Is that correct?

Ms. Brittin: — That's correct. Well it's a combination because for private law firms, it would be through the Social Services budget, and for those where Justice is providing the lawyer, it would be through Justice.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. And where is this reflected in the — forgive my ignorance here — but where would this be reflected? What line item would it be reflected in?

Ms. Brittin: — It would be under the allocation of child and family program maintenance and support.

Ms. Chartier: — Child and family program on page 120. Okay. And what else does that line item all include?

Ms. Brittin: — That would be all costs associated with delivering the programs. So it would include all of the costs associated with paying foster parents, for providing support to families, all of those program-related costs.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you. So you rely very strongly on Justice in terms of making sure that in terms of legal representation, whether it's them doing it themselves in-house in Saskatoon and Regina and contracting out to other law firms in other parts of the . . . Yes. Are there contracts all throughout Saskatchewan then? Or where does much of the legal work in child and family services take place?

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, there would be law firms throughout the province who would be providing this service.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Just sticking with the Children's Advocate report, and I did ask several written questions around caseloads and about the structured decision-making system. And I know some of the language the Children's Advocate used, with habitual overloading, and it's reflected a few places in his report. In light of some of the responses that I got back, what do you think he's referring to when he talks about habitual overloading?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm just going to comment to start with, habitual overloading . . . The number of foster homes with more than four children has decreased by 60 per cent. I know that when we became government, there was foster homes with 21 children in it.

So now when we have homes with more than the four children in them, often it's a sibling group. There may be a home where the child has been in that home before, and we'd prefer, it would be better for them to go back to a place that is where they feel like it is home. I'm not sure if there's any other areas. I know the biggest reason why we'd have four children in an area in a home is a sibling group.

Ms. Chartier: — I think, noting though, he wasn't just talking about overcrowding. He talks about the move to peer and group homes that . . . His exact quote is:

However, we do caution that there has not been a

corresponding growth in human and financial resources within the Ministry of Social Services dedicated to providing supports to and monitoring of these expanded resources. It is our experience that this service is required to ensure the appropriate training of staff occurs, appropriate case planning and management is done, and that standards of care are met.

So I think, my sense in reading this document, that it wasn't just around overcrowded foster homes. It's around just general contact with both children who are wards in care and those in PSI [person of sufficient interest] arrangements as well. So I'm wondering what the minister thinks about his language around habitual overloading, where she thinks that might be coming from.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I know that when I read the comments, I was a bit surprised in some ways. I know that I am surprised when he talks about the support because although there's always more work to be done, we've increased the funding to child and family services by over . . . [inaudible] . . . million dollars since we became government. And we've invested on top of that another \$53.7 million in the child and youth agenda budgets in the last three years.

We have a new case management system and the Linkin system, so the work that we're doing to support our children and to ensure that they are safe, we've made enormous headway. I know that there's always more work to be done. Whenever a child cannot be within their own home, then we have to take every opportunity to provide the right supports for them.

So we have, with the money that we have spent and the reduction in children living in overcrowded foster homes, we have a reduction in the children who are in care. It's down 19 per cent for the first time in over a decade. So we're spending more money, and there's fewer children in care.

And I understand where the child advocate is coming from when he talks about the need to support children because that's our future. And I'm on the same page as him with that issue. But we will continue to work as a government, not just with the individual ministries but through the child and family agenda to ensure that all the ministries work together to see the child as an individual and not just as a case number.

Ms. Chartier: — In terms of that, so that 19 per cent that you've cited, that is this year over last or last fiscal year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — No, that's since we became government.

Ms. Chartier: — Nineteen per cent increase in . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Decrease.

Ms. Chartier: — Sorry, decrease. But the increase in PSIs in that same time?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There's been an increase in PSIs, but that is part of what we have agreed to. The recommendations that came from the child welfare committee that talks about the transformation committee, they talked about working

differently with families and with the First Nations in particular — the First Nations and Métis — ensuring that we are looking at extended families. And providing them a home-like atmosphere is something that was recommended by the committee and was agreed to in our signing with the First Nations and Métis, saying that if . . . Allow the children to stay with someone that knows them rather than taking them out of their familiar surroundings and putting them with someone they don't know.

So I agree with that theory, and so does the chiefs that I've spoken to and the families that I've spoken to. They've asked us to support the family. First and most important thing we can do is to provide supports for the families so that we don't have to take them away or that they aren't taken away. And if that has to happen, then we would prefer to leave them with someone that they know.

Ms. Chartier: — And I completely agree with that, that the goal should be not to apprehend children, and then family obviously is the preference. But I think the Children's Advocate was pointing out that PSIs, the control and some of the supports that are necessary for PSIs aren't there, and the regular contact isn't there. And that was the case in the written questions too. Those were the answers that came in my written questions. So I'm wondering about . . . I understand you're undertaking a review of the PSIs right now. So what is your expected timeline on that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that the member is talking about the letter that I have written to the child advocate to ask him to do a joint review on the PSI program, including an evaluation of policy and legislative provisions supporting the program. That work is under way. And I'm hoping . . . I know the member has been asking for timelines, wanting to know exactly when. This evening I can't give you an exact timeline, but it's something that's really important to us to make sure that we do review all these policies. I'm going to ask Andrea if there's a date that you're aware of.

Ms. Brittin: — Sure, thank you. I might just add that part of the legislative review that we are currently undertaking on *The Child and Family Services Act* will also contemplate the legislative framework and provisions around the PSI program. So that is under way currently as well as the joint review that is under way on the policy side with the Children's Advocate. So we're anticipating that we would have that completed within a few months time, that review, and then we will need to contemplate that, the results of that, in the context of the broader legislative review that's under way as well.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you. Thinking about those supports for PSIs or peer and group homes, all those kinds of things, we've talked about . . . I know you've provided me numbers on the 90 child and family services staff that have been added since '08-09, I believe. Just looking at Prince Albert actually and some of my written questions on the full staffing levels of the Prince Albert Social Services child protection office, I see that in '12-13 there were — I think I'm reading this correctly — more than 10 positions vacant. So there were 70 budgeted for and 58.81 utilized. So I'm just wondering what the discrepancy is or why there would be that chunk or those positions unfilled.

Ms. Brittin: — We do periodically have challenges with recruitment and retention of staff, particularly in some of the northern communities. We also have a fairly young workforce that is female-dominated. And so we do also have leaves for mat leaves. We have other sorts of leaves that require us to be backfilling. And so it reflects some of the turnover of staff and it reflects some of the recruitment challenges that we at times have in the North.

Ms. Chartier: — Do you consider P.A. a northern community?

Ms. Brittin: — To a lesser degree, it would still have some of those challenges, yes.

Ms. Chartier: — It was interesting to me, going through just briefly this afternoon some of where the FTE challenges were, that that one was the one that jumped out at me. I think that that was the biggest discrepancy between budgeted positions and filled positions.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — It would probably depend on the year as well. It depends on the location and the year and what might be happening in that area. I also know that last year, with La Ronge Indian, First Nations band taking over some of the responsibility, they were doing an incredible amount of work as well.

I'm not sure if that had anything to do with the Prince Albert office, but I do know that that made an impact on some of our northern communities.

Ms. Chartier: — Yes. I think just looking to the last three years, that there seems to be increased or greater challenges in P.A., like it wasn't a one-off last year.

[22:00]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm not sure exactly about Prince Albert, but I do know that we are relying . . . I've been told that Prince Albert or north, there's more challenges to ensure that we can find staff. That's why I was absolutely delighted to be able to work with La Ronge band to supply the services.

I know that we also have other agencies like Peter Ballantyne and the band there doing a lot of work as well. So the relationship and the work that our child and family service agencies are doing with us is making a big difference to the individual lives of our children.

Ms. Chartier: — So in terms of the, I believe it was 90 positions that you've added over a period of time, obviously many, not many of them but a chunk of them, have gone unfilled. So you've the positions allocated, but . . . And that perhaps is some of the challenge that the Children's Advocate is talking about. That you've added these positions, but they sit vacant and so the contact levels aren't what they should be.

I'm just thinking about La Loche here, and just need something clarified here. I understand, talking to people in La Loche in particular, that there have been some serious challenges, and I think that right now — please clarify this if I'm wrong — but there's one emergency worker, and that's the only child and protective services staff person in La Loche?

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, that's correct. The child protection services are covered out of Buffalo Narrows. And we recognize that that is not an ideal situation, so we are working with that community and developing a joint plan to get better coverage.

Ms. Chartier: — I understand you've been working with the . . . or the community had raised this quite some time ago, and this emergency duty worker is relatively new to the community. Is that correct?

Ms. Brittin: — I'm sorry. I don't know how new the person is.

Ms. Chartier: — I understand very new, or that's what I've been told. But looking at some of the answers to my written questions, I had understood that there has been nobody in La Loche doing child and family services work up until just very recently, but allocated . . . There is a Social Services child protection office located in La Loche, according to my written questions. So even if there's an office, if the positions happen to be vacant, what does that look like? So the office is there, and they didn't have this emergency duty worker, so what happens in the case where there's a budgeted staff person but there's nobody there?

Ms. Brittin: — In emergent situations, the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] would get involved. And the RCMP would be in contact with the office covering for La Loche, and that worker would be called out to respond to any child protection issues that would arise in that community. Again, that's not ideal. It does speak to again some of the challenges in getting staff, full-time staff, in some of those offices. But we have been . . . Our director up in the North has been working with that community to ensure more adequate cover off until we can get a full-time person there.

Ms. Chartier: — So the goal is to have . . . So budgeted or allocated is just over one, I think, one FTE or one point something. So the goal is to . . . So you've got the emergency duty worker there now. So what is the goal with respect to the La Loche child protection office?

Ms. Brittin: — The goal would be to meet our budgeted FTEs in that area.

Ms. Chartier: — So only one is budgeted, but would it be just to have the emergency worker or . . .

Ms. Brittin: — It would be to have a full-time person there.

Ms. Chartier: — A full-time person. And so when there isn't a full-time position, you're still considered to have an office though. Like the office doesn't . . . I'm just wondering with respect to my written questions that La Loche was identified as having an office.

Ms. Brittin: — It has an office because our goal is to get somebody in that community providing child protection services.

Ms. Chartier: — Would that . . . And you know what? I'm realizing this. You might not be able to answer this question, but I understand in Meadow Lake community living division, my written questions say that there's still an office in Meadow

Lake, but I've been told that services are, people are being directed to North Battleford.

Ms. Brittin: — For community living division?

Ms. Chartier: — Yes, yes.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The individuals that could have answered that question are gone, so I can get that answer for you.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, and just to clarify that there are people in La Loche who believe that the Meadow Lake office in community living division is not open anymore and that they need services in North Battleford.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'll look into that for you.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you. Just in terms of the — I'm flipping through my notes here — the position of 90 that you've added in '12-13, 23 of those I believe by my calculation, so almost a third of it, were not filled.

Mr. Acton: — I think that's . . . if you're looking at the utilization number?

Ms. Chartier: — Yes.

Mr. Acton: — So there's always churn inside of that. And we move staff around when we need to, to cover one office versus another. But with that many staff, there's always people that leave or transfer to other jobs or whatever it might be. All of those add up. So when you've got 470 or 500 staff, the utilization number is in fact, I would argue is a better reflection of where we're at.

And you're right. In total when you add it up across all the offices, there's about 23 that weren't full. That doesn't mean that we were, you know, we had 23 positions that weren't staffed. But it's a cumulative piece across, involving 500 staff or 471 I think the number is.

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, and let me just supplement that by saying that the 471 does include all staff who are officers under *The Child and Family Services Act*, which includes our supervisors and our assistant supervisors and many other positions. And so the front-line child protection staff, the 90 were filled. But over, but if you're looking at the full total of 471, 448 were utilized. So some of those may have been the 90 that were, that have been hired over the past, you know, four years. Or some of them may be other staff that were there. As Ken says, it's a cumulative number and a cumulative process of turnover.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. I have to think about that.

Mr. Acton: — If somebody goes on maternity leave on the utilization side, they wouldn't show up. Is that correct, Andrea? Yes.

Ms. Chartier: — I have to think about that a little bit here. Is there any plan to add . . . Again going back to the Children's Advocate comments about habitual overloading, and you may or may not agree with what he says, but is there any plan to add

further front-line child and family services staff this year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I don't think that his comments on habitual overloading would have a lot to do with the front-line staff. So I think that my goal overall is to support the families so that we, so that the children can stay in their homes. That's my goal. And so that's why the money that's put into the child and family, child family services committee for intensive family supports and for the work that we're doing through the First Nations child and family services, through all of our work, is to make sure that we can support a family. That's my goal.

The front-line workers are really important for that like the front-line workers in the CBOs who take some of our children at times as well. But though I've said that I wasn't in or don't always agree with everything the child advocate says, we have the same goal and that is to make sure that we can be supporting our children and supporting families.

So the people that we need within this ministry — and I know you're going to be asking about Dales House and Red Willow — we are, our pledge is to make sure that we can do whatever we can to have workers there to support our children. So that's been the number one priority since we became government and started looking at this issue.

Ms. Chartier: — Just going back to something that you said here. You said you didn't think he was, the child advocate was talking about front-line staff when he was talking about overloading, habitual overloading. So I'm wondering who he would have been talking, who you think he would have been talking about.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think he was talking about, I thought he was talking about foster homes. What do you think he's talking about?

Ms. Chartier: — Front-line workers. The contact, the ability to be able to ensure that foster families have the supports that they need. That the kids in care, whether they're in a foster home, a PSI arrangement, or in a group home, have regular contact with the ministry — that's what I read into his report.

Ms. Brittin: — So yes, I think that your question is around our contact standards and our workers' capacity around children in care. So I can say that we examine a number of things as we are assigning cases to workers. There is no kind of magic number around caseload size, but there is a number of things that we consider. And some of them are things like how long the worker has been around. Are they a brand new worker? Do they have several years of experience? That sort of thing. What is the complexity of the case that is being assigned to the worker? Is it a high risk? Is it a low risk? Now that we have our SDM tools in place, the structured decision-making tools, we can better assign work according to risk levels.

So we will take a look at that. We'll take a look at whether it's a generalized caseload or a specialized caseload. So some child protection workers also carry children in care files. They may carry foster home files. And so we need to look at whether it's specialized or generalized and whether it's rural or urban, whether there's travel involved in providing that service. So there's a number of things that we would look at to ensure that a

caseworker is able to manage within their allotted number of cases.

And so those are things that we'll continue to look at. We have done some work over the past year or so and, doing a more thorough examination, we have found pockets where we needed to realign staff to ensure that caseloads were more manageable. So it's a continual process that's done by the service delivery directors along with Garry Prediger, the executive director, in examining that to ensure that we have, that our workers have the capacity to carry out their duties.

Ms. Chartier: — With respect to the structured decision-making system, so that was implemented last summer, correct?

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, it's fully implemented now.

Ms. Chartier: — Fully implemented now. And it has some pretty . . . It lays out contact standards. As you said, every case is different with respect to risk, or it evaluates all those things. Are you meeting your contact standards laid out in the structured decision-making model?

Ms. Brittin: — Well with the SDM tools, the caseload standards changed. And so we are just starting to do the evaluation of that, and you know, kind of how close we are to meeting those caseload standards. And so that is something that we still have yet to determine now that we're fully implemented province-wide.

Ms. Chartier: — When do you anticipate having the first set of data that you can say whether or not you're meeting your contact standards?

Ms. Brittin: — There would be an audit under way right now. So we have completed one service area and the audit of the service area. There's two yet to complete, and I don't have a timeline on when those would be completed.

Ms. Chartier: — And how did that one service area fare?

Ms. Brittin: — We don't have the results of that with us.

Ms. Chartier: — When will you have the results? If I asked written questions in two weeks?

[22:15]

Ms. Brittin: — Within a month we should have the results of that tallied up.

Ms. Chartier: — And you said you found pockets where you've needed to reallocate staff. Can I ask where those pockets have been?

Ms. Brittin: — Mostly in the larger urban centres and in the child care units where child care workers weren't able to adhere to some of the standards. And so we were moving staff around to ensure that their caseloads were reduced. And it's a matter of evening out the work and making sure that all staff are able to manage.

Ms. Chartier: — What were you seeing in some of those larger urban centres then for caseloads?

Ms. Brittin: — Around 38 or 40 would be kind of tops in terms of caseload numbers.

Ms. Chartier: — And with your reallocation of resources have you been able to bring that down?

Ms. Brittin: — It would be around mid-20s. So again, I do want to reiterate though that a case isn't equal to a case. And so within the allocation to a particular worker, we would need to ensure that they're not, you know, kind of overloaded with cases that are all high risk as an example, that we would be allocating based on their capacity and the complexity of the case, and then all those other factors that I've talked about.

Ms. Chartier: — With PSIs, you answered some, Madam Minister answered some written questions about those contact standards. And I'm hearing anecdotal evidence of someone, people becoming a PSI and not ever having the assessments. I'm wondering if you've got any information on PSI contacts that happen?

Ms. Brittin: — So I think it's first important to establish that to become a PSI you need to go through a court process. So most children, when they're first apprehended, may be placed with extended family, but there is not a PSI designation yet. So in those cases, the child care standards for children in care would apply. So while the child is placed with this extended family member, we would still have all the contact that is required for a child in care.

Once the PSI order is granted, if it is a short-term PSI, we would continue to have face-to-face visits with the child once a month. For short term, the goal is reunification back with the family. And so in those cases, we would be having that contact to facilitate the return of that child.

In cases where the court has granted long-term PSI standing, that child is then in the custody of those extended family members. And although we'll have done the home study, we'll have done the assessment to determine the safety of that home, once the PSI order is granted and the information is filed with the court and the judge puts the stamp on that, the child is in the PSI custody and we do not have contact with the child after that.

Ms. Chartier: — And that'll be part of the legislative review, that piece, because the legislation right now doesn't set . . . lay that out for you.

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, the whole area of PSI is absolutely part of the legislative review and part of the joint review that we have under way with the advocate's office.

Ms. Chartier: — The short term, is there a length of time that we define as a short-term PSI arrangement?

Ms. Brittin: — It can vary. It really depends on the case plan and what supports the family may need to enable themselves to care safely for their children again. So it could vary.

Ms. Chartier: — In terms of that extended family, that placement with a family member, — again the question around contact standards and doing home studies — is a home study always done prior to someone being, a child being placed? I'm hearing anecdotally that it isn't, but I'm wondering if you've got any numbers on that.

Ms. Brittin: — So what we call a place of safety assessment is done as an initial assessment of the safety of the home. And then if the plan is to have that child remain with that extended family member . . . Because there are situations where it may just be the child has been apprehended and placed there as an overnight. We work with the family, get the child back. But if the plan is for the child to stay with that extended family member, then we would be conducting a home study on that home right away.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Thank you for that. I think my colleague has a few questions here while I . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, just a few questions about the Linkin system. And so is it fully utilized now? Is it up and running, and how is it going?

Ms. Brittin: — The system is being used by all child and family services staff, yes. It is well under way. And we are now planning for the rollout to the income assistance side of the world, but that is a long ways in the making. And so there's lots of work to do before we're ready to do that.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So what kind of timeline? So you're moving it into the income assistance area, the social assistance part?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That would be our goal. I think one of the discussions we have as a ministry is we have . . . So many of our clients or the people that are working with us may fall under a number of different programs. And the way the system is set up right now, first of all with the children, we now have our children on a computer system but it doesn't speak to some of the other computer systems we have that are older.

So the next phase of what we'd like to do would be looking at the income assistance. But we have to make sure that it's done . . . First of all, it's a very expensive thing to do, and we have to make sure that we do it right and do it in a way that we are looking at all the programs in a way . . . not just adding one in piecemeal at a time. How do we do it in a way that we are making the best use of the dollars?

Every ministry in government knows that if they can have a computer system, they think, they believe that they could be more efficient in their work. And I believe we can be in this one as well. But the standards that we have, the work that we have to do has to be laid out in front of . . . some of my colleagues say that this is the best way we can be doing it.

I'd like to ask Alan to talk about the Linkin system.

Mr. Syhlonyk: — Sure, thank you. I'm Alan Syhlonyk, the ADM of corporate. So in terms of the Linkin system, we did roll out the child and family basic case management system in June of 2012. So that's fully up and running and has had some

direct results, and Andrea can talk about those in terms of what that means.

This year we're also in the process of taking the SDM tool, which Andrea spoke of earlier within the child and family piece, and taking it from a manual tool into the automated Linkin system. So that's one of the key components that we are building this year.

The other piece that we're building is the financial interface between child and family services, but also with a view towards having it set up so that it will deliver on the financial components of the income assistance so it's the base financial engine for our ministry to interface with the government system.

Mr. Forbes: — How much does it cost? You alluded to it being expensive. What is the annual cost? And what has been the cost to date?

Mr. Syhlonyk: — So this year our total is, allocated for '13-14 is 13.17 million. And the total cost to date is in the neighbourhood of \$38 million since it began back in 2008-09.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Now I'm thinking of . . . You've alluded to, and the previous minister as well, to how much money has gone into the child and family services. And I think it was about 90 million. Is that right?

A Member: — It's 56 million.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, it is 56 million? I know one time it was 56, but I thought I heard tonight 90 million, so . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 54 million. So would that include the 38 million?

Mr. Acton: — No.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. How much of the 50-some million would have been directed to the LinkedIn system?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — None.

Mr. Acton: — None.

Mr. Forbes: — None? Not even at the beginning? I see Andrea . . . I thought it was at the beginning that there was . . . I think it was originally, you know, there was some talk about being 16 million. So maybe this is some further time down the road. I should ask some more questions about this because it is fairly expensive. So the annual operating costs are about 13 million.

Mr. Syhlonyk: — If I may, the annual operating cost will be built into the ministry base budget. This is the budget for this fiscal year to actually proceed with building the SDM tool, for building the financials, and also examining what it would take to build the income assistance key components — the SAP, the SAID, the TEA — to decide what do we need as a system, and what's the staging to deliver the best client service and reduce our risk.

Mr. Forbes: — So I just heard you refer back to the structured decision-making process. Is that part of the Linkin computer

system?

Mr. Syhlonyk: — It will be, yes. It will be.

Mr. Forbes: — So you will punch in a series of data and out comes . . . It goes with so and so as part of their caseload and . . .

Mr. Acton: — If I may. So right now they're doing that work with paper. It's a paper-based system, and we can load it right into the Linkin system with a bit of work, and then it will be, one-client, one-file is really the approach so that if a worker has used that SDM tool and then three months from now the family has moved and they're in a different location or whatever, we've got all that data online. Another worker can go in, log onto the system, and the work's there. The file's there, and they've got it all there.

But we didn't actually build the SDM into it originally. We were quite a ways down the build when we started using that tool, and we've tested it for a year on a paper-based system, and now we're going to load it into Linkin.

Mr. Forbes: — So how many cases are on the system now?

Ms. Brittin: — The rollout of Linkin was gradual, and so we had certain offices with their cases loaded onto Linkin. Some have had their cases being managed through Linkin for a year and a half and others . . . And then by June, all the offices were on Linkin. And so I don't know the number, the total number of cases that have ever been entered into Linkin. All I know is that it was a gradual rollout. And as offices came on, their work — the active cases that they were currently working on — were loaded into Linkin, and they began using it on a go-forward basis for all of their cases.

Mr. Forbes: — I just want to make sure I'm saying this right. Is it linked in with a D? Or is it like Lincoln, like Abraham Lincoln?

Ms. Brittin: — As in Abraham Lincoln except for spelled differently.

Mr. Forbes: — So I guess I was more interested in the number of cases because I'm assuming that some people, some families . . . as we hope that they will leave social services. Have you vetted or do you work with the Privacy Commissioner in terms of how you deal with this privacy issue because clearly families do not want their records being . . . You know, if they've just come in for a very short time in terms of income assistance, maybe through TEA [transitional employment allowance], that they don't want to be on the system for the rest of their lives, whereas you have others that, you know, would just . . . The old term was static case load, I guess, where people are on for quite a while. Have you worked with the Privacy Commissioner?

Ms. Brittin: — Yes. We worked with the Privacy Commissioner throughout the development of the Linkin system and do have ongoing contact with the Privacy Commissioner around — and will have — around future development of Linkin.

Mr. Forbes: — So getting back to, though . . . you don't have a

total sense of how many cases are on the system right now?

Ms. Brittin: — I know how many active cases there are. But there will be . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Sure.

Ms. Brittin: — All of the cases that were open at one time and closed throughout the given year.

[22:30]

Mr. Forbes: — So how many active cases?

Ms. Brittin: — Just let me find it. So in the month of March, there were 7,848 cases being managed. So that would include all of our adoption and pregnancy counselling, our children in care, our persons of sufficient interest. All of our foster homes are registered as cases. All of our child protection cases, that would be ongoing cases as well as any investigations that we had done throughout that month, as well as all of our 16- and 17-year-olds and any assessments that were done on those 16- and 17-year-olds throughout the month of March. So that includes basically every single case that we've touched in the month of March.

Mr. Forbes: — Just before I wrap up here . . . So now you've talked about this long-term project, and there's costs of doing this. Do you anticipate that it will be millions of dollars every year for the next number of years because this year it's an expensive project, and you've spent several million dollars. So when does it become part of your operating costs?

Mr. Syhlonyk: — Okay, I'll answer that in two parts. So once we have the CFS [child and family services] case management system fully deployed including the SDM, it'll become part of our regularized business, and we'll have a regular IT budget built into our base budget to maintain and maintain that system, that core system. Once we complete the build for the financials and the income assistance side, then in turn that will convert over to an ongoing maintenance.

So your question around how long will it take to build. Firstly we need to decide which components of the income assistance side will go first, and that in turn, and how complex that is to build. Once we scope that out, then we can actually determine will it take us two, three years to do. We're estimating at this point that it'll be likely 2017 before we complete it.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have an estimated cost to that part?

Mr. Syhlonyk: — Not at this point, we don't. We're still taking a slow approach to try to scope out how complex it is to convert over our paper-based system over and our aging computer system over to this new Linkin system. And so once we actually have that determined, then we'll go forth and ask government in terms of the budgeting process for the total envelope.

Mr. Forbes: — And you'll anticipate it's about in the same ballpark as what its cost to do the work to date?

Mr. Syhlonyk: — It would be premature for me to estimate that at this time. We know it's not cheap when you come to

building an IT system and especially when you're looking at a significant system such as the social assistance envelope. And so we want to make sure that we've got this narrowed down as close as we can before we proceed. Ken?

Mr. Acton: — I was just going to say that there's a couple of things on the child and family side. It was truly a paper-based system, and so we built from the ground up. On the income assistance side, I mean, we have systems there. They're really old and there's a tremendous number of cases on them, but so some of the challenges are different and that's some of the work that we're doing now.

In terms of saying before, we know we need the financial package to handle, you know, how we handle the payments. And then the other is, what are our various options in terms of particularly SAP, TEA, and SAID which are our biggest cases, our bigger programs.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I would just like to comment that we would like it, I would like it as a minister, and the ministry would like to have all of our systems, all of our programs talking to each other and the next step lined up. But we know that it fits within other government priorities as well. Once we have the child and family services system set up, then the next step will compete with other ministries, and it comes to the list of priorities and what should be the next step. We also are learning from other jurisdictions. There's ongoing discussions with provinces like Ontario, for example, that are doing some of this work. Will we be able to save money in the future by learning from others? Hopefully so. So that's why it's part of an overall picture as we develop the future for this ministry.

Ms. Chartier: — Back to some of my earlier questions, and I've got a copy of public accounts now, looking at the 2011-2012 public accounts. One of the largest expenditures under goods and services was for a law firm in P.A. for 749,384. So I'm wondering what that expenditure is for.

Mr. Acton: — That would primarily be on the child and family services side for child protection matters of one type or another. I don't have the full list. I guess there's the potential that there could be some on the income assistance side. But by and large it's on the child and family services side.

Ms. Chartier: — Is it just for the P.A. area or does that cover . . . Are they doing work for other regions?

Mr. Acton: — That would involve the North. There would be La Ronge as well, I believe, and a number of other points as well, so not just P.A.

Ms. Chartier: — Not just P.A.? And there's a much smaller expenditure, another P.A. law firm, Sanderson Balicki Parchomchuk, if I'm saying that correctly. Probably not. Is that 93,982, is that child and family services? Or what other things do you use law firms for?

Mr. Acton: — It would be child and family. And it could have been a particular trial or a case that, for whatever reason, was assigned to a different law firm. Perhaps there was a conflict; I don't know. But sometimes it's assigned to a different firm.

Ms. Chartier: — And Justice does all of this for you?

Mr. Acton: — Yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. So it covers P.A. and north of P.A. basically, is that . . . [inaudible] . . . All right, that answers my questions. Okay, thank you for that.

We don't have that much time left here, but with respect to both Red Willow and Dales House that last June, you announced the impending closure. And I understand that there was going to be a plan in place in February of this year, or staff was told that, and then I had heard June of this year. So can you tell me what the plan is with respect to Dales House and Red Willow in Saskatoon?

Mr. Phaneuf: — Again Wayne Phaneuf. The plan I guess is still unfolding. We certainly are working through that plan right now. We have a number of pieces. We will be engaging our staff with the plan first. We believe that once we have the plan in place, we'll be sitting down with the staff and letting them know first. I mean, it affects them. And we'll be moving forward with that at that time.

Ms. Chartier: — This June date that I've heard, what would that be around or is that in fact a date that's . . .

Mr. Phaneuf: — I guess the expectation is we would be getting to our staff before June of this year. However I don't have a date picked yet. And we still have to work through some of the logistics. Again I think one of the most important pieces is that certainly Dales House and Red Willow will continue to play a function until we are able to build the capacity in the community to make sure the children are served well. We will not put children in jeopardy simply to do the plan.

Ms. Chartier: — Do you have a timeline on that? I know staff at both facilities are feeling very insecure about the whole process. They've heard almost a year ago that their employment — not only their employment but the thing that they love to do and do with great passion — is coming to an end.

Mr. Acton: — If I may, we're not going to close in June. So if that's kind of the question, no, we're not going to. This is not going to come to an end in June. More importantly, I think as Wayne has mentioned, we have a great deal of respect for the staff. And I want to make sure that we talk with them about this plan, and so we are working on that. We're getting close to that. And before we announce this, I want to have an opportunity to talk to the staff about it.

Ms. Chartier: — So you do have something very . . .

Mr. Acton: — We have been working on it for the last number of months in terms of how we might do this. Again we want to engage the staff in that discussion.

Ms. Chartier: — And I know you said you won't close in June, but any sense for staff when you will be connecting with them?

Mr. Acton: — Within the next month I would expect we would be meeting with them to talk about this. As Wayne said, before June he had hoped to meet with them. So I would expect that

that would take place.

Ms. Chartier: — Part of this is all about creating capacity. I know that the minister and both of you have said you won't close until there's capacity. Are you anticipating by the next budget year that you will have created capacity?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I wish I could live my life by just saying this is the dates I want to do something. But for me it's more about the services that are available. The staff is aware of the fact that this is our goal, that overall we have to have the right places for the children. The capacity has to be there.

So I can't give you a date. It's like Valley View. I can't give you a date because it's about the people. It's not about the time frames.

Ms. Chartier: — Just with respect to that though, and I've obviously read the news releases and seen the media, but just wondering a little bit more about the rationale on closing these two facilities that obviously community capacity doesn't currently exist. You've got two facilities here at this point in time that are meeting some serious needs in the community. So I'm wondering about rationale on closing these two facilities.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — If I was going to set a target, it will be 2014 at some time. But I think the member knows that these two facilities have 31 spaces in them, and we have 915 spaces for children across the province right now.

We have built 440. So when we came into government, there was already 475 that were built previously by the NDP. And these 31 spaces are still there. They will be there until we have the capacity outside of Dales House and Red Willow. We believe it will be happening in 2014, but again the date is to be determined.

Ms. Chartier: — Just wondering again about rationale though. So it is only 31 spaces and they're doing the work that we need them to do.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Other ones aren't?

Ms. Chartier: — I'm sorry, what was that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Other ones aren't?

Ms. Chartier: — No. And I can't believe that you would imply that I was saying that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm just saying that I'm thinking that as soon as we find the right spaces, the right places for these 31, then I believe that they will be going into . . . then we'll have the other 31 spaces outside of these two facilities. And I do apologize. I know that you didn't mean that, but I do know that we have the opportunities. We're just following along the same line that's been happening now for a number of years. We've built 440 spaces that are protecting our children. I believe that we can do another 31 or whatever the number may be. And the time frame will happen when we know that the children will be safe.

Ms. Chartier: — I suppose I'm asking why you need to build

them though if they already exist.

Mr. Phaneuf: — Just in regard to the rationale, I think that we need to be clear that this is part of child welfare transformation. This is about doing business differently. This is about engaging our community partners and our First Nation partners to do the work in child welfare differently. So those are the pieces that are guiding us down this path. It's not that we believe the staff don't do a good job. They absolutely are committed folks, all of those kinds of things. But we do have a commitment to do things differently, to engage our First Nation and Métis partners, and so that's where we want to go down that road.

So it's not about the relative worth of the program. I certainly don't ever want to go there. It's about doing it differently. Child welfare transformation, it's about being able to do quicker returns of children to community, about enduring relationships, and all of those kinds of things. So if kids don't have to come in from another community and can be served more locally — closer to home, can maintain contact with families — those are the kinds of things that we want to see expanded in the system. And so, I mean, that's the real reason behind it.

[22:45]

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. That's what I was looking for. But I think one of the things that I've heard, obviously in places like Red Willow and Dales House, you've got kids who have complex needs and many challenges. And the CBO sector does amazing work, but the one thing that's been flagged for me is CBOs can turn away children if need be. And I think that that's something that's been highlighted as a potential risk of closing these 31 spaces.

Mr. Phaneuf: — I understand that concern, and it's a concern that certainly we are working with some of our CBO partners already and having those conversations about unconditional acceptance. It's easy in some respects to know that the child is going to be looked after, and you can turn a child away when there's always another option. If there is no other option, it puts a different level of expectation and a different level of responsibility.

And so we want to make sure our CBO partners are up for that in the first place before we do anything. So we are having those conversations actually already about unconditional acceptance and making sure that children have a place to go and that they will have a safe place to be for a period of time while they need to be out of their home initially or if they need assessment and stabilization.

Ms. Chartier: — With respect to that unconditional acceptance into a facility — and I'm glad to hear you're speaking with your CBO partners about this — but how do you, will you mandate that? How do you ensure that that happens?

Mr. Phaneuf: — I think it's not necessarily a question of mandating that. It's making sure that the CBO or the group home understands that that's a role, accepts that as a role and we make sure that the resourcing is there so they can do that role effectively and make sure that the children are safe.

Ms. Chartier: — I think another thing that's been flagged for

me is that places like Red Willow and Dales House, they both have high percentages of registered social workers working in those positions. And the reality is CBOs have great people working but they don't always have some of the education and training, and this goes back to our conversation earlier about ensuring that CBOs are well-resourced. I would agree that they're the closest to the community, but you have to make sure that they have the resources to do their job both financially and in training and education. So how do you ensure that that is going to take place?

Mr. Phaneuf: — I want to expand on the information I gave you before. And while we don't put it in the contract that they have to hire social workers, our two biggest partners in the province, who have been Ranch Ehrlo and Eagle's Nest, do hire social workers. They have the requirement internally to do the planning with children and those kinds of things. So I mean there is a like resource there.

I think the other thing that we also have to look at is ensuring that we have a family-centred model. And we've made a significant investment in the last two years in intensive in-home supports so children can return home quicker and still remain safe. So parents can learn about parenting, a different way to parent, while the children are there, not in an artificial situation when the children are out of the home, and then move the children back into the home. So again it's how we support families. It's how communities support families. And so it's really a family-centred approach as opposed to an intervention approach. While we'll always need that for at least a period of time, we are moving in a different direction.

Ms. Chartier: — With respect to preventing apprehensions and supporting families, I know that there's been announcements over the last couple of years. Can you tell me about where these services are offered, to whom they're offered, just generally a picture of those in-home, intensive in-home family supports?

Mr. Phaneuf: — Sure. We have parent aid programs, and they're long-standing in this province. They're in many, many communities across the province, and I would have to go into the detail to get those. You may be familiar with those.

I think more recently, if you look at the intensive in-home support where we're starting to step that up in a bit in regards to what kinds of intervention they can provide, is we get into Central Urban Métis in Saskatoon — CUMFI. I'm sure you're well aware of CUMFI. They're providing fostering families an intensive in-home support program and have been doing that for years.

We have 601 Outreach in Saskatoon that's providing those in-home and those intensive in-home supports. SIGN [Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbours] out of Yorkton provides those services, I believe not only in Yorkton but have moved out to Kamsack and points north.

And we also have, most recently, FoxValley in Regina who's providing that, and has been for a couple of years, but now will be providing a fostering families program as well as of this year.

Ms. Chartier: — Obviously that's Saskatoon, Regina, and

Yorkton and area, and then obviously the parent aid programs that have, like you said, have been long-standing. But is there a plan in this budget year to introduce intensive parent supports elsewhere in the province?

Mr. Phaneuf: — We do have . . . We will be having conversation with some folks. I was remiss. I mean Ranch Ehrlo has been doing this for a number of years in Regina as well. They've been doing a fostering family program. There are a number of things, and yes, we're looking at expanding that even further.

The other thing we've done, we've engaged Saskatoon Tribal Council in regards to elder panels in Saskatoon, which has reduced the number of children coming into care. So when children have had to come out of the family home because of safety reasons, within 24 hours we try and have an elder panel where we and the family meet with an elder to try and resolve how we're going to keep the children safe and make a safety plan for the child or children, as the case may be, which has been very successful in Saskatoon. We thank our partners in Saskatoon Tribal Council Urban Services for that. They've been really helpful, or STC [Saskatoon Tribal Council].

So I think that there's a number of those programs that we're looking at. I mean again it's about the child welfare transformation. It's about doing things differently. We're engaged with our First Nation and Métis partners quite extensively recently, and we're having conversations about what are the other kinds of things we can do. I mean the ministry is looking for assistance in developing that. I mean we need to look at the legislation again to be able to do some different kinds of things.

Ms. Chartier: — Can we expect something in 2013-14 then, in this budget year, in terms of those? Obviously, as you said, you're engaging with all kinds of stakeholders, First Nations and Métis organizations and others. But can we expect more intensive family home supports or what people need to keep their children with them in this year?

Mr. Phaneuf: — Yes we're looking at making that investment. The other thing is we have a group working in Saskatoon to look at what we call flexible response or differential response, which is how we deal with families who may be of low to moderate risk, to make sure that if they're not in a position where child protection is required, that there are supports in the community to make sure that they don't get there, to provide those kinds of services that are identified when we do the SDM — because the SDM is a strengths-based model but it also identifies some of the deficits that families may face — and making sure that there's services in the community to be able to do that. And we hope to be able to do that sometime this year.

So we're working with and certainly have a formal involvement with FSIN, with Métis Nation-Saskatchewan. They're sitting on the team that's looking at this to make sure that the cultural views of the community are also represented.

Ms. Chartier: — I've heard some positive feedback about the pilot in Saskatoon that's just started, and I've talked to some people who were at the meeting about a month ago who were very enthusiastic about it. So I hope that pilot goes well and that

it will bode well for other locations as well.

Just a sort of quick switch of gears. Well we've only got a few minutes left, but with respect to children who are in care who have FASD, what kind of accommodations are provided for these children — like weighted blankets, special lighting, swings, quiet spaces without distraction? Obviously those are all hard things to do in foster homes but very, very important things to do.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Andrea will give you some specifics. But I know that one of the important things that we have with our foster homes is that they do have the FAS training to understand some of the challenges that the children are facing. Each child is different and what may work for one child with the swings or the lighting will not work for the other one. So we really are relying on the foster families and . . . [inaudible] . . . their parents to learn how to live with the child's needs in a way that's comforting to them. So even though there's some overall training we can give, it really is basically learning that child's needs.

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, that's right. I would just add to that that we actually worked with the FASD network on the development of the curriculum. So it is a mandatory curriculum that foster parents take as part of their PRIDE [parent resources for information, development, and education] training. And the minister is quite right. Every child is different in terms of their needs, so at times we also have private psychologists working with our foster families. They provide assessments of those children's needs so that we can best address them.

So each child has their own care plan and their own case plan, and those are familiar to, of course, the foster parent who is trained to address their needs.

Ms. Chartier: — So there's children who have been assessed with FASD then. A psychologist would work with them and with the family to come up with things that would need to be accommodated in a home?

Ms. Brittin: — That can happen in certain cases, yes.

Ms. Chartier: — When you say it can happen in certain cases, it doesn't happen . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that one of the things that we know about FASD is it doesn't matter how trained you are or what kind of program there is, it depends on the child. I've had the opportunity to deal with a lot of parents who have children with FAS and they know that what will work for one parent will not work for the other one. So even though we have some overarching guidelines, when a child is diagnosed, it's learning to know that child and the support system that they need.

So I think the most important thing we're doing in this area is recognizing that the families need support. It may be from professionals and it may be from other parents who are dealing with their own children that have FAS. The network itself is a really, it's the heart and soul of what we're doing in the province and that's why we rely on their expertise as we move forward. There is nothing more compelling than listening to a family talk about their broken angels and how they can be

dealing with helping another family.

I know that the member knows, as I do, that when we have a condition that could be preventable, and yet we must deal with families and support them through their child's life, it's a huge issue. We're seeing it right across government and it's something that I think as society we all have to say, what can I do to prevent and what can I do to support? There are individuals that . . . these children, that have a condition that is brought on through no fault of their own, still have an opportunity to give back and to be part of society. And that's my goal.

I know that's my ministry's goal is to see what we can do as we move forward with this initiative and our work. I'd like to be able to say that we . . . [inaudible] . . . and I know we are in lots of cases, discussions with other ministers knowing that we are trying different techniques. We are engaging the public and the parents and the schools and learning from them. So for as much as we would like to say that there was a book with an answer in it, there isn't because everybody's different. So this is one area that we will continue to work on.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you for that. I think that that is 11 o'clock.

[23:00]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I want to thank the member for her questions. You have some very in-depth questions and it's important. And I'm glad we had a chance to share some information tonight. And I know that there's a couple of issues we have committed to get back to you and I'll look forward to doing that, and one case where you'll be bringing it to the office and we will work with you on that.

I want to thank the committee members for all your work tonight and for listening and for being supportive. Most importantly tonight I want to thank the people that are working with me — the people that were in the room right now and the ones that have left already. This ministry is, I think, is the heart and soul of government in so many ways because it doesn't matter what area people are working in, they still look at ours, look at what we're doing, whether it's the child welfare review or the Linkin project or our individuals in Valley View, the SAID program, social housing programs, disability strategy — it's all about who we are as a government.

The individuals that work in this ministry are second to none. They have hearts as big as outdoors and they have a vision and a goal that's the same as ours as government and that's to make Saskatchewan the best place to live not only for people with disabilities but for our children and vulnerable people. I'm honoured to work with them and I know that because of the work that they're doing, Saskatchewan is going to continue to shine as well. So I thank them for all their work and I commend them for getting up in the morning and being excited about their job. So thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you to all the members of the committee for all their hard work. This is what makes our beautiful democracy work, so thank you. Being now 11:02, it is past the hour of adjournment. The committee

stands adjourned till Wednesday, April 24th at 7 p.m. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 23:02.]