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## **Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, November 27, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Neil Ellis**



## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everybody.

I'd like to call the meeting to order, please.

Today we'll start with our witness panel, Dr. Segart and Mr. Stanfield. We'll have 10 minutes of testimony from each witness, and then we'll do our rounds of questioning.

We'll start with Dr. Segart.

The floor is yours.

**Mr. Aaron Segart (As an Individual):** Thank you for having me here today.

My name is Aaron Segart. I led research for the homeless individuals and families information system from 2009 to 2017. HIFIS is the common term for this. It's a computer system that was built by the federal government and installed at homeless shelters across the country. It gives information about shelter stays. We do research with that data.

Although not everyone experiencing homelessness uses a shelter, HIFIS contains a very large slice of the homeless population and allows us to understand a lot about the different types of people who use shelters across Canada.

HIFIS started collecting information about homeless veterans in 2013, and it took about two to three years for the data to really accumulate.

The first research we did was in 2014. Actually, it took place in 2015, using 2014 data. That report was called the "The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness". I didn't name it that. It was named by comms instead of by me. They put the "The Extent and Nature of" on there. HIFIS can't tell us a whole lot about the "nature" of veteran homelessness. It can tell us a lot about the numbers, though.

This was the first report that had ever given us an estimate of how many homeless veterans there might be in Canada. No one really had any idea before that. What we found, using a sample of, I think, 60 shelters, was that there were about.... We estimated that there were about 2,250 veterans using shelters annually. That's about 2.7% of shelter users.

The important thing to keep in mind with shelter statistics is that we look at them over the course of a year. That doesn't mean that

there are 2,200 homeless veterans right now. It means that over the course of a year, that's how many use shelters. The other thing is that any veterans who didn't use shelters wouldn't be included in that number, so there could be more.

The other interesting finding in that initial report was that veterans were more likely to be episodically homeless than other shelter users were. What this means is that they're in and out of homelessness. They keep returning, over and over again. Technically the definition is.... A homeless episode is a time using a shelter separated by at least 30 days before returning to the shelter again. If you have at least three of those in one year, you're considered episodically homeless. We found that veterans were about twice as likely as other shelter users to be episodically homeless.

The other thing we found interesting was that there were quite a few female veterans using shelters. In the general population of homeless shelter users, it's about a 70:30 male to female split. We found the same thing among veterans, but when we looked at veterans under 25, it was actually about half and half. About half of the veterans under 25 using shelters were female.

I think a lot of the idea we have about homeless veterans is that they're older men, but at this point, most of the veterans of the big wars are very old and are not using shelters anymore. These are people who have been in the military in some capacity. It's also not necessary that they had been overseas or in combat. That's why we have some people who are saying they had served in the military, and who are quite young and finding themselves homeless.

Two years later we released another study called "The National Shelter Study", which isn't specifically about veterans, but it did mention veterans in there. We have an updated number.

For that report, we used a much larger sample and a more sophisticated methodology. We found that out of the approximately 137,000 to 156,000 Canadians who use homeless shelters each year, about 2.2% were veterans in 2014, which is the first year that we were able to produce that number. This comes out to about 2,950 veterans, in that estimate. It's a little bit higher than the other one, but these are estimates. There's some error around it. It's just a guideline. It's not an exact number.

Again we found the same type of pattern, where about 70% were male and 30% were female. We also again found that over half of the veterans under 30 were females. As far as the males go, they tended to be slightly older on average than other male shelter users.

In that study, we found no significant difference in the length of stay between shelter users with and without military service. That particular study is not really designed to look at chronic and episodic homelessness, so we didn't have any new figures for that.

I would say that the figure of 2,950 is more accurate than the initial study with the estimate of 2,250 veterans. It uses far more data, a better sampling method, and all that.

I think ESDC will be releasing 2015 and 2016 figures in the next few months. I know that at the time I left ESDC and the homelessness partnering strategy, they were working on updates to that study.

The third method that gives us a glimpse about homeless veterans is the point-in-time count. There was a Canada-wide point-in-time count in 2016. The counts in cities are where they go out on one day and just look for people who are in the shelters and on the street. They typically find a few more veterans than we do in the shelter studies. We've heard anecdotally that a lot of veterans don't like to use shelters. Typically, in the point-in-time counts, around 5% to 6% of the people counted have served in the military. This varies by community as well. I think the results showed that somewhere between 0% and 13%, depending on the community, were veterans.

Some of the reasons for the differences could be that veterans are just less likely to use shelters, so more of them are found when you consider sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. It could be due to missing data in our shelter studies. As I mentioned, within HIFIS, the software that the government provides to shelters to count homelessness, we only started rolling out the veteran question in 2013. It takes quite a long time for that to be populated, so there are still some cases where that is missing and we don't know whether someone is a veteran or not. It could also be under-reported, because it's based on self-report and some people might not disclose that they are veterans, or they might not be asked. For whatever reason, that data might be missing.

These are estimates over a one-year period that I have been talking about, the 2,250 and the 2,900 veterans. That shows that there definitely are homeless veterans, and we can probably safely say there are more than 2,000 veterans experiencing homelessness in Canada each year. It's about 2% to 3% of the shelter population. I believe veterans are around 2.4% of the Canadian population, so that means they're not overrepresented in homeless shelters.

Male veterans tend to be older. Female veterans tend to be younger. This is probably an area for further research, probably not using the HIFIS dataset but in terms of actually going out and trying to find young veterans and talking to them about their experiences of homelessness.

The other interesting thing when we compare the shelter studies that I worked on with the point-in-time counts is that we should try to find out more about the veterans who are experiencing homelessness, whether they are less likely to use shelters than others and find out what the reasons for that might be.

That's about the gist of what I can tell you. If you have more questions about statistics, I'm your man for that. If you want to know more about people who actually interact with veterans, I'm not really able to say much about that.

Thank you.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next, from South Mid-Vancouver Island Zone Veterans Housing Society, we have Mr. Stanfield. You have the floor. Thank you for coming.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield (Chairman, Cockrell House, South Mid-Vancouver Island Veterans Housing Society):** First, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to be here today, to share some of our experiences that we've learned over the last 10 years.

In the spring of 2009, we started Cockrell House and got our society status in August of that year. It is transitional housing and I believe that we're still the only such place in Canada.

Over the years, we have participated in two of the HPS studies that the doctor spoke of. That's where we learned an awful lot of what we know, from the professionals. We found it to be of good value.

The housing first model is the slot that they put us in. We are convinced that it works, but not in isolation. Food and a bus pass, which allows mobility, cannot be overrated. That's right from the start, when we first get one of them in. You give somebody a bus pass and it's more than giving them a car. They can finally get around. If they have an appointment, they can keep the appointments. It's really been an important part of our program.

Counselling and peer support must be part of the program. We would like to be a success with them all. We don't want it to be a revolving door. We don't want it to be considered just a cheap place to live. It's a place where you can decompress, sit back and take stock of your situation, to figure out where you are and how you got there.

We're often asked questions like, "Why are these people helping us? We've been alone drifting and whatnot?". I think the relative comfort that they feel.... Without that relative comfort, it's difficult to make good decisions. When you wind up in a place, like being homeless, you're not in a position to make good decisions. You're just not. I believe this could happen to any of us.

We immediately hook a new resident up with a Veterans Affairs caseworker, if they don't already have one. Typically, most don't at that point in time. They should, but for various reasons, they don't. The Veterans Affairs office is a great big scary place. An awful lot of them have said, "I went in there and I was treated like a dog". Of course, that is not true, since it's just their perception. They walked in and they didn't know the questions to ask.

We get them hooked up with a caseworker right away and we've been really fortunate. We've had some great front-line people with Veterans Affairs. They are people that care a lot more than just a nine-to-five job. There are some excellent people doing some great work.

Another thing that we've learned is the value of veterans helping veterans. This was something we envisioned at the start, but we were unsure how it would work. It does work and I think it's a big part of the success that we see. The realization that they are still part of a family, with others that have served, can be quite a revelation. People that have served are used to being part of a military family, where they have each other's backs. It's the culture, so to find out that now that they're out and they're veterans they are still part of a family, it's a big step.

One of the better things that we've done is that we have a resident manager now who is there 24-7. He's a veteran himself. He was kind of drifting in life. I talked to him for a little bit and got him to come on board. He's totally committed. He did 20 years in the service and came out as a sergeant. They relate to him.

Another real bonus is that some people that have gone through Cockrell House and are now back in society. They have connected with family members and whatnot. With just a phone call, they're willing to come and speak to the guys and women. As the doctor mentioned, there are female homeless veterans, too. In the time that we've been going, I think there have been seven females who have gone through our program.

● (1545)

A veteran, a man or woman who has served, is different from those who have not. They possess pride and an understanding and acceptance of rules, an understanding of rank and structure, of responsibility. They want to know what the rules are. They might want to figure out how to get around them, but they want to know what the rules are and who ultimately they have to answer to. They were trained that way, and understanding some of these things has made it a little easier to help them.

Rarely have we found a veteran in a shelter—rarely. They are more likely to avoid society, to shun the urban setting. You're not going to see them sitting on the corner in a city. You're just not. It's back to that pride. A lot of the ones who are still of age are possibly living in the bush. We found them living there, or maybe they have a camper that's sitting on the ground and stuck away. Also they're couch surfing. Often we've had quite a few who have been living with a buddy in their basement, and finally the buddy's wife says, "Look, he's been here long enough. Christmas is coming. We have guests. He has to go." They hear about Cockrell House and that's where they end up.

Most of them, a large percentage of them, aren't living in shelters. The fact that they won't have anything to do with a shelter, I think, skews some of the statistics too, because obviously that's where the statistics have to be collected. But the others, how do you ever account for them? I've come to the conclusion, and my belief is, that probably 8% to 10% of the homeless population has worn a uniform.

Mental health and PTSD and whatnot are not usually primary causes of homelessness. In a lot of cases, any addictions are self-medicating health issues. The average stay at Cockrell House is about one year, although a few have stayed with us for less than a year and successfully got back into society. Many have been in the two-year range.

Indeed, we have one veteran right now who has already been with us two and a half years, who served 19 years in the military. He was medically released, and within the next few years he fell apart. His family fell apart, and he was living in his vehicle when we first found him. He's taken courses, he's worked hard, he completed his grade 12 and he's now taking a course in addiction counselling. He has a son with special needs and he's very focused. I think his son is definitely his motivation. We're going to continue to support him until he's completed the courses. It doesn't matter how long, because we don't have a definite period of time. We can't say, "You've hit three years. You have to go."

When we started we set three years for various reasons, but we got rid of that. We put it to two years and we got rid of that. With everybody, it's whatever each person needs and what will help them. The idea is, once again, that it's not a revolving door.

The cost to operate the house works out to be about \$1,100 a month. While that seems low, there are quite a few reasons. One of them is that we're all volunteers, but we have a lot of in-kind help. The only furniture we buy is a brand new bed when we get somebody. Other than that, all the furniture and things we have are donated. There are people who pass away, and the estate will say, "We've heard about Cockrell House and the veterans. We'd like them to have first shot at everything they want before we put it out for sale." We've had a lot of that. We've had people, especially veterans themselves, downsize and go into a condo.

● (1550)

We have gotten much of the furniture that way, and some of it nice stuff. When veterans are finished, when they are successful and can move on to their own place, we send them away with everything they need. They come in with nothing; you can't send them back out with nothing. We send them with everything they need to set up a home. In some cases, if it's going to be an apartment, it's first month's rent and whatnot. In many cases we'll continue supporting them for a while, even if it's just with a bus pass or a food voucher to help out now and then, just to get them on their feet.

The other thing we do, after the first couple of months, is assess each individual's own situation. We encourage them to make a contribution—we're careful not to call it rent, ever—to the project. This can vary from \$200 to \$500 a month, depending, obviously, on their income. This has proven helpful not just to extending our program but to their feeling of worthiness. They are now helping themselves. They're helping the program. They're helping what's helping them. We found that to be quite inspirational.

Our daily struggle, of course, has been for funding. We've never received any financial support from the federal or provincial governments. Without the Royal Canadian Legion we couldn't survive.

But we have to grow. The need is too great. Right now, if we had three times the number of rooms we have, I'm confident that within three or four months the place would be full. It's not that we turn people away. Those who will go to a shelter go to a shelter or just stay where they are until we have room. I wish it weren't so.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'm going to open up the questioning now.

We're going to cut down to five-minute rounds so that everybody can get in today.

Mr. McColeman, you're up.

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for being here as witnesses.

I'm interested, Mr. Segaert, that you've moved on to what I read as being a private company doing software development and consulting. Are you doing any work, in this space, the analysis of homelessness of veterans?

**Mr. Aaron Segaert:** Not specifically of veterans, I'm still doing some work for some communities and the "Canadian Observatory on Homelessness". It's research on homelessness in general, not specifically of veterans.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Okay. You are, then, staying on the research side of it in a broader sense.

Mr. Stanfield, when you use the number \$1,100 a month, is that per resident?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** That's what I wanted to clarify.

You also said that the average stay, if you averaged all the stays, is one year.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Do you have counsellors or support staff who mentor? You were saying "peer support", but do you have any counsellors involved in advising individuals what the next steps should be or helping them make those next steps?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes, absolutely we have. I think it's really important to have the professionals involved. The Veteran Affairs caseworker can be a big help to their networking. Also, with OSISS we have a peer support worker who's been with us right from the very start. He'll drop in two to three times a week.

We make sure they are getting the help they need. We've been fortunate that Veterans Affairs now has assigned us two caseworkers. When we first started, that was something that had never been done and they didn't feel that they wanted to do it. Now we have caseworkers who just look after our guys.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** You said you're trying to get government support.

What have been the barriers, in your estimation, to your not receiving any government support to this point in your history?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Maybe we haven't tried hard enough. A couple of times in the past, when I felt that we were getting pretty close, there would be a kind of reset.

Of course, it comes down, at whatever level of government, to their funding. Every Veterans Affairs minister who has served since we started had been out to visit Cockrell House, as have the deputy ministers and the ombudsman. I think we've had the right people look at it, but then they go back—and you people understand the workings of government a lot better than I do—and there's one pot of money.

An easy thing to say at the end of the day, if you're the federal government, is that this is all good, but housing is a provincial issue, and all of a sudden it has cut out what I think should be the natural place for us to get funding—somehow through Veterans Affairs. Veterans Affairs and we have the exact same mandate, and that's to look after veterans.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I remember the launch of housing first in the last Parliament. A number of corporate partners were involved in that, including Home Depot and others. They were putting financial support into it from the private side, and I don't know whether it was matching funds but the government was providing input also.

You mentioned that model of housing first as meaning more than just a roof over your head. There are a lot of other support services that these people need to get their lives on a track that's going to end up with their being successful in changing their circumstances and becoming contributing members of society. Many of them want that, but they need all the help to get through those initial stages.

Has anyone come from the government to study your model? You mentioned somewhere along the line that you think you're the only place in Canada that has this kind of service going at this level. Has anyone approached you from Veterans Affairs, or other housing initiatives in this country, to study your model as a model that's duplicable across the country?

• (1600)

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Not as such. We've been part of different studies, workshops and forums, and we've had our input. It's taken this many years of evolution to get to where we are now. This would be an ideal time for somebody to do that study.

Like you mentioned, some of the money that has gone in before was always for the broader picture, for the research and whatnot. It never filtered down to a little, individual program like ours. This would be the time to do it.

What we have now I could call a template. It could be duplicated elsewhere, and I think it should be.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Eyolfson, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you both for coming.

Mr. Stanfield, you talked about mental illness. I agree that mental illness is not necessarily the only cause of homelessness, but we know there's a high correlation between mental illness and homelessness, not just among veterans but among the general homeless population.

Do you ever have challenges with veterans who are resistant to help and seem in the grip of a mental illness, where you have someone you know needs help but who may not be competent to refuse because he or she has an ongoing mental health issue?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Once again, this is where the Veterans Affairs caseworker comes in. On the island, Dr. Malcolm and Associates are the contractors. They have a large number of psychologists who specialize in this and indeed work with veterans. We do everything we can to ensure that they're hooked up together. It starts out with just a visit and having a meeting, an interview. Veterans Affairs, I must say, has been very good at providing that.

I can think of four who have been given the big program that Veterans Affairs has. Veterans Affairs sent them back here for a course that is specifically designed for them—a very expensive course. We've had it work to where they've taken it...one person actually went through it twice. These things don't always work the first time.

We constantly try to make sure they are hooked up with the best professionals. As we've gone along, our network has grown too, with contacts. We have people like that now, who will reach out to us and ask, "Is there any way we can help?"

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson:** Okay. Thank you.

With mental health, and even just ongoing health problems—and particularly with older veterans you're going to have more health problems—do you find that once veterans with underlying health problems are hooked into your organization there's better monitoring of clients for their health issues? It could be medication for mental health, medication for diabetes or things like that. Do you find that it facilitates getting their health issues under control?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** It does. Yes, it helps. There's a woman named Deborah Morrow who teaches nurses and whatnot over on the mainland. It's one of the perks for some of her students. She'll bring them over every six weeks or so and do exactly what you're talking about. They go right through everything, right down to foot care and a diabetes check. All of this is for free.

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson:** That's remarkable. It sounds quite valuable.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** They're great people.

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson:** There's something else I was very impressed with. It's something that I think to the general public sounds like a little thing, but it's a big thing. You mentioned things such as provision of a bus pass. I'm a physician. I know it's a big challenge to get people to and from appointments. You get people who miss appointments simply because they didn't have bus fare and couldn't afford a taxi—that sort of thing. Congratulations on that, because it's a very on-the-ground practical solution that I can see being very helpful.

You said that once they're on their feet and back out in the community, your organization can provide some of these ongoing supports. If people can't afford a bus pass, then even once they've

graduated, as it were, from your organization they can still get those supports in the community.

• (1605)

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes. Usually it isn't a bus pass, because they're back on their feet. Quite often it becomes a case that it's the end of the month and their grocery money hasn't quite gone far enough.

One of the big motivators for the people who are successful is the previous family ties that, through the course of whatever has happened to them and their homelessness, have been broken. You get a veteran who has a couple of kids or something. The idea that if they can get everything together and get themselves back on track, they can hook back up with their family is the strongest motivation there is.

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson:** Thank you.

You mentioned substance abuse. That's something I found in my previous life as well. Very often, people with substance issues were in fact attempting to self-medicate for underlying illness.

Are you able to connect the people who have these issues with the kind of rehabilitation they need, whether it's for alcohol or drugs? Is there a conduit whereby you can get these people into treatment and rehab programs for substance use?

**The Chair:** We're running out of time, so just make your answer short, please.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** The short answer is yes, there are professional people we can hook them up with. When we started, we were going to make the place a dry house—no drinking. We found that this wasn't the way to go, because we didn't know how far along each person was in their journey. With no parties and this, that and the other thing, and with a resident manager, it just hasn't been an issue.

We haven't had a lot of problems with drugs, but when we have, we immediately get professionals in to help them, because we can't have the thing go sideways.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Johns, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you.

Thank you, Dr. Segart.

Thank you, Mr. Stanfield, especially for your selfless service. It's greatly appreciated.

You talked about your facility being full. Would you say it's 100% full most of the time?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Is the pressure getting worse? I'm from Vancouver Island. We've seen real estate go up 50% in the last three years. Are you seeing numbers that you've never seen before, in the last three years?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** I know that is definitely a factor. Housing is an issue. I think, though, it's an issue everywhere. I don't think it's just in the cities. Housing in Canada is a pretty tough issue right now. I know Victoria is an extremely expensive place to live.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** We know what we heard today, that 3,000 veterans have waited over a year for their disability claims to be opened. Are you finding veterans showing up who are waiting because of the backlog, getting frustrated, falling through the cracks and ending up on the street? Are you seeing veterans who aren't getting the services they need and then ending up there?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** I don't know that I can say we've had any who have ended up on the street because of that. Typically, most of them haven't approached Veterans Affairs yet, and probably would not on their own.

When the person is homeless—this is something we've learned too—somebody will phone me up and say, “I have a buddy who really needs your service. We heard what you do. I'll get him to come in tomorrow.” The first thing I'll say is, “Don't get him to come in tomorrow, because he won't. You bring him in tomorrow.” It just works that way. It just does.

It's the same with taking that first step to hook up with Veterans Affairs with a caseworker. I don't mean this in a bad way, but if you can take them by the hand, help them with their initial paperwork, and then once they get started and can see some light.... Many of them have no idea that there are benefits that they're entitled to that they never bothered to ask for.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Veterans Emergency Transition Services Canada—VETS Canada—and the Royal Canadian Legion reported an increase in the number of cases, according to a story on CBC, in which VAC has referred people to organizations. Has this happened in your facility? Have you had referrals made by VAC?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Is that with no funding from VAC, nothing that way?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** No. There's a lot of help, but no funding. More than ever now, our referrals are coming through VAC—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** From VAC, with no funding...?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** —just because we have two people who look after our people. The one fellow will phone at least twice a week and ask, “Can you see any room coming up? I have a guy who really needs you.”

• (1610)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** You said earlier that you don't think you tried hard enough, working with the government, to get funding. I would say the opposite. I would say that the government hasn't tried hard enough to support you.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Thank you.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** That would be my comment.

You heard about the lapsed spending. We passed a motion unanimously in the House of Commons just over two weeks ago whereby we're committed to moving all lapsed spending from the previous year that isn't spent by Veterans Affairs. It would have been \$148 million last year.

How do you think this money could make an impact, if it were rolled out to help support dealing with veterans' homelessness and support facilities such as yours?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** It would absolutely help. It would be a big help.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Right.

Dr. Segart, you talked about the number of veterans you're finding through shelters and many who can't be identified. I think Mr. Stanfield articulated that as well. Many veterans have skills to live outside. We see this on Vancouver Island. You know, Mr. Stanfield, that many veterans can live in the bush and survive for a long period of time.

Do you have any ideas or thoughts on how we can track those veterans or get numbers? Clearly, you're only getting the numbers from the shelters, but many veterans are living in remote areas, and for other reasons too.

**Mr. Aaron Segart:** That is a really tough problem. Counting homeless people of any type is very difficult. The point-in-time counts take place in cities. That's one way to get people who are on the streets or in various abandoned buildings or other locations, or living in cars, but it's probably impossible for us to count people living in the bush, camping somewhere, that kind of thing—or people who don't really want to be found. It's going to be hard to count them. I wish I knew how to include those people in our studies.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Stanfield, you talked about veterans serving veterans. I really appreciate that. In the United States, 30% of their caseworkers are actually veterans. In Canada we don't have a number. We put a lot of pressure on the government, and they finally came up with the number of 10%, which they'd like to see by 2020.

Can you articulate how important it would be for veterans coming through your facility who want to serve, are committed to serving their country, to be given the opportunity after rehabilitation to come back and serve their comrades?



**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** I'm sure it would be a help, because they identify much more easily with them. The majority of the caseworkers, at least in Victoria and area, are young professional people, so they wouldn't have had the opportunity to have that previous experience, in many cases. I think they're accepted just as professionals who care, once we get them hooked up. To do what you're saying, however, when you say that 30% of caseworkers in the States have served, that could only be a good thing.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Ludwig, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.):** Thank you.

Thank you both for your testimony today.

I'm going to start with Dr. Segart.

I'm looking at your research. You're a Ph.D. grad from McMaster. Did you always have an interest in veterans or in homelessness, or both?

**Mr. Aaron Segart:** It was more with homelessness. The veterans issue came up.... What actually happened was that once we started collecting the information on veterans, I thought we had better start doing something with it. We came out with that report. It became public around Christmastime in 2016, I believe it was.

I did not have a specific interest in veterans. Homelessness, yes, I had been interested in poverty issues and homelessness in the past, just because I had known some people who were on the streets.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Thank you.

Would you consider your data collection methodology something you would recommend? We have 200 agencies falling within the interactive map. Would your method of data collection be something you would recommend for those who are dealing with homelessness, so that we could start tracking with the same methodology across the country?

**Mr. Aaron Segart:** It is the government's methodology, actually. I developed the methodology for the federal government. I was a public servant for almost nine years working on this. HIFIS, the software I mentioned, is produced by the federal government, and it is deployed in about half the shelters in Canada. I think that in the coming years there will probably be a little more uptake as well. The goal is, obviously, to get everybody on the same system.

I want to note, though, that it doesn't track individuals. It's anonymous information. It's more on demographics and usage patterns, but I think it's a good method, for sure.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Thank you.

Mr. Stanfield, thank you very much for all the work you're doing. It's amazing that it's being done by so many kind and caring volunteers in communities.

Have you applied directly to the veterans wellness fund?

•(1615)

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** No, we haven't.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** That funding will be available in the new year. We can get you information after this meeting on it.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Excellent. I just heard about it the other day, to be honest.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** In terms of getting information to you, were you aware of all of the new services that are now available—the pension for life, the re-opening of nine veterans' offices, the joint suicide prevention strategy, the veterans emergency fund, the career transition services program, the education and training benefit, as well as a medical tax credit for psychiatric service dogs, and the Centre of Excellence on PTSD? I can give you the list.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes, I have heard of them all. We've had some interaction on some of them.

You mentioned the emergency fund that came out a while ago. That has helped immensely. We will get a veteran who is in need of a place such as ours, and we're full. With the work we've done with the caseworkers back and forth, now we will just ask whether they can put him up in a hotel for a month: "Give us one month and we should be able to have a room." That has really helped in two or three cases.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Thank you for that.

My colleague asked you some questions about the mental health side. One message I heard clearly from you, Mr. Stanfield, concerned veterans wanting to reconnect with their families. Within the capacity of the house you're operating, are you able to offer this, or who are the partners you're working with who could help make that transition more successful?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** We can't offer it. It would be great, but we can't. Even the female veterans we come across we have to keep segregated.

I wish the house we have were entirely one-bedroom units, but it isn't. Most are two-bedroom units, so you share a washroom and the kitchen. We won't put a female in with a male. It has been interesting that every single one of the women will say it's not a problem: "We've served with guys; we know all about it." I can tell you, however, that we're not going to do it.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Dr. Segart said that 50% of vets under the age of 25 are females. Do you find the same ratio in your house?

As well, is it women or men who tend to stay longer?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** That's an interesting question. We haven't run across the young ones whom Dr. Segart talked about. We just haven't run across them yet. As far as those we have are concerned, although I never thought about it before, I would have to say that they probably stay a little longer.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Do they ever come in with children?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** No. We can't have that. No.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bratina, we're down to four-minute rounds now.

**Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.):** Thank you.

Dr. Segart, could you quickly explain how the information gets in during the data collection.

**Mr. Aaron Segart:** HIFIS is like a booking software that is installed at shelters. When someone comes to a shelter and is booked in, their name, date of birth and some information such as veteran status, indigenous status or citizenship is put into the computer.

Every quarter, each of the shelters using HIFIS uploads a small sample of this data to the federal government, where it sits with ESDC currently. We use that database to do research on such things as chronic homelessness, the number of people using shelters each year, stay lengths, patterns of shelter stays, demographic trends, things like that.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Is it something you think can be continually improved and enhanced, or is it pretty much working?

**Mr. Aaron Segart:** It's always being improved and enhanced. There are updates to the software regularly. New features are added: case management, things that make it useful for the shelters, that kind of stuff. It's an ongoing thing.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** I know there are shortcomings, but if you can't measure it, it's really hard to deal with...

**Mr. Aaron Segart:** When I started with HPS in 2009, there was a lot of skepticism about trying to measure homelessness. People thought we were wasting money trying to do this. You're right, though, that when it comes to dealing with the problem—how much money it's going to cost and all that—we need to have numbers, so I think it's important.

•(1620)

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Mr. Stanfield, thank you for... I've been looking up your activities over the many years, and your record is pretty amazing. What actually led you to this work? Was there something that triggered you to get going on it?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** I've thought about that question a lot, and there is. It's just a personal thing. My grandfather was in the First World War. He had quite an influence on me. He came back, obviously, but he was injured, very traumatized. I knew Grandpa lived with demons. That's the only way I could put it.

He was a piper and he taught me how to play the bagpipes. It was a bond. Other than that, I don't know that I would have ever connected. Indeed, most of his grandchildren didn't. I think that kind of stuck with me.

I saw what my father went through after the Second World War—and he joined again and went to Korea—to a far lesser degree. I think that must have been in the back of my mind, though, because as soon as I heard about this, just over a conversation in a coffee shop, to be honest, I felt that here was something I had to do, never thinking that 10 years down the road I'd ever still be doing it.

I think that's just the personal part. The other thing is that I belong to the Royal Canadian Legion, whose mandate is to look after veterans and their families. There are 1,400 Legion branches in Canada, and every one of them has a service officer. It's a little bit of a finger on the pulse of the community. They know who is coming in for a little bit of a handout now and then or a little bit of help.

I think this is something that, maybe even in the next point of time, all of the Legion branches in that area should be approached about too, because they know of cases that aren't visible. That's how we found many of the people.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** What things around Cockrell...? You mentioned playing the pipes and all that, but if there were a piano or a library.... Is there anything that starts to draw them back into...?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** I'd love that, but the house we have doesn't even have a common area, unfortunately. It makes many things difficult. We started with nothing and we have this place now. We're happy and proud of what we've done, but it's nowhere near to being enough. We have to move on, and the next step would be a place with a common area and being able to do some of the things you just suggested, to have a little get-together once a week.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Wagantall, you have four minutes.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Dr. Segart and Mr. Stanfield. I appreciate your testimony.

First, I'd like your comments on this matter. We have shelters, and they do good work; however, VETS Canada and you, yourselves, just mentioned, if someone needs a place, you ask for a hotel. At VETS Canada, Debbie has said to me that they don't want to put them in a shelter, if at all possible. Your transition home is that next step to their hopefully having their own home.

It deeply concerns me that you're the only one. Can you talk a little bit about the importance of that first time when you realize that they're homeless and, if you don't have room, wonder where they should go, and how important that is?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** There seems to be a reluctance on the part of most veterans to go to a shelter, perhaps just because there are so many people there who are unlike them. Quite often it's younger people, with more drugs-type problems.

I think that's just generalizing.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** There's something about admitting that you need to be there versus possibly being in a hotel for a night and moving on from there—that type of thing.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** We only do the hotel thing just to give us enough time to try to free up a room or find a place. We've actually had people in the community...

We had one fellow come along, an older person whose wife had passed away. He had a big house. He said, "I was a veteran myself. Is there anything I can do to help some of these people?" I said, "If you have a spare bedroom, would you be willing to offer that, with a little bit of help and some oversight?"

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you very much.

Dr. Segart, you mentioned that 50% of those in the younger age bracket are female veterans. The percentage of women in the armed forces is not 50%. Do you have any explanations or thoughts about why there's a larger percentage of the women who are serving than of the men?

• (1625)

**Mr. Aaron Segart:** That's a real puzzler. We were surprised to find this, although I caution that the numbers are very small. In the first study on the nature of veteran homelessness, we're talking about an estimated 33 women. It's not very many, so I don't want to draw strong conclusions. I just think it warrants further research.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Yes, definitely; it's interesting. Thank you.

Mr. Stanfield, could you explain to me how you go about getting food cards and bus passes?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** We approach one of the local retail food chains and just grind on them as much as we can.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** It's a community effort.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes. It's a big part of the program. We go through about \$1,200 a month just in food cards. Our bus passes are \$85 apiece, but we've been able to find a place where we can get two for one.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** VETS Canada does that as well. These are very immediate needs that you're meeting for them, in addition to the housing first. You're providing an all-encompassing program for them to get off the street, basically, at that point. It's very commendable.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** I think all-encompassing is what we try for, because if we can do this, there's a better chance of solving that one issue with that one veteran.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** I have an opportunity in Saskatchewan possibly to do this type of thing, and an additional portion is that they would be able to stay longer if they enrolled in a program in our community college or that type of thing.

You were mentioning too that if they're in school or taking a course, you're more willing to let them stay longer.

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** On an individual basis, it is an option. In some cases, it would be nice if we had a phase two of Cockrell House for those who don't need all of the things they're getting there, so that somebody else could come in and have the advantage. When they're not quite ready to be totally self-sufficient and out on their own, if we could have that second step....

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Chen, you have four minutes.

**Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Samson.

In my short time on this committee, I've heard witnesses and others talk about the importance of veterans being part of the solution.

Mr. Stanfield, you mentioned that when reaching out to homeless veterans, sometimes word of mouth or a helping hand from another veteran to bring in that homeless veteran is very powerful.

Can you talk to some more examples of how important it is to include veterans in providing solutions for veterans?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Once again, just by feeling that they're still part of a family and that they're not alone, they can speak about it far more openly. This helps with some of the stigma and shame that sometimes go with finding yourself down at rock bottom.

**Mr. Shaun Chen:** That is extremely powerful.

I was meeting today with the Canadian Construction Association. They had read my bio and knew that I was sitting on the veterans affairs committee. They were talking about how interested they were to reach out to veterans to provide opportunities to them to train and find employment in that vast and booming industry.

Can you talk about some of the challenges veterans might face with respect to finding employment and how these tie in to the other issues they might be facing, such as homelessness or health issues, and whether there's a gap there and how it relates to the broader concern we want to give attention to for our veterans?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** I think there are opportunities to work with organizations such as the construction association. I think they should be explored.

We try to hook our guys up with the WorkLink office, which is only a block or two away. Some of them are ready for it after a couple of months. There's that first step: getting a bit of confidence and deciding that they can do it. Some of the guys have had success with this and are back out in the workforce.

We have some, and more than just a couple, who are not a burden on society anymore and are doing the very best they can. In their own way, they're not going to do any better. Two of them live on two different gulf islands. One of them has a guitar and lives on an island on which in the winter there are only 400 people. In the summer, of course, there are tourists all over the place.

There's another old fellow there who has a guitar. He gets through the winter, and in the summer he sits on the rocks with his fishing rod. He's doing the best he can. He would take the ferry and visit his daughter once a month—then it became once a week—on the island. Now all of a sudden, she's over there and he's a single parent. He's the happiest guy in the world. It's a success, but he made the success. We just gave him the chance.

•(1630)

**The Chair:** Mr. Samson, you have time for one question, and that's it.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Thank you. You're so kind.

Thank you to both of you for your presentation. Mr. Stanfield, the work you and your team are doing is just exceptional, and I want to thank you sincerely because it's much needed, as you stated.

I guess if I must limit my important discussion to one question, it would be this. What relationship do you have with other organizations across Canada that do similar things to help veterans? Is there a line of communication? Is there some sharing of best practices?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes, there is. Some of the workshops that Veterans Affairs puts on are a very good place to meet others. I haven't gone to one yet where there wasn't that kind of benefit. There's a lot of opportunity for all of us to work together and share best practices.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** In closing, the national housing strategy places a priority on veterans. Are you aware of this new strategy coming out and how maybe you can get on board? Have you had discussions around that?

**Mr. Angus Stanfield:** Yes. We're working on it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That ends our time for this panel. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank both of you for all you do for veterans in your organizations. We'll recess for a couple of minutes while we get our next panel in front of us. Thank you.

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\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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•(1635)

**The Chair:** Good afternoon. I'd like to call the meeting back to order.

In this round we have, from the Multifaith Housing Initiative, Suzanne Le, executive director. From the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund, we also have Robert Cl  roux and Tom Riefesel.

We'll start with Robert, for 10 minutes.

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux (President, Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Thank you for inviting the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund to address you today.

My name is Chief Petty Officer, retired, Bob Cl  roux. I retired from the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Navy in 2013 after serving 37 years. My last post was as a Canadian Forces chief warrant officer.

I've been a member of the Royal Canadian Legion since 2006 and am presently employed by the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, a federation of 15 private not-for-profit security companies with a social mandate of providing meaningful employment to veterans.

All this is to say that I have a lot of empathy for veterans, but I'm here today as president of the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund. I've been with the fund since 2007 and have served as its president for the past five years.

With me today is our vice-president, Lieutenant-Commander Tom Riefesel. He also has over 35 years of service with the Royal Canadian Navy.

The Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund's mission is to relieve distress and support the well-being of both serving and veteran families of Canada, and we've been doing this since 1942. The RCNBF provides financial support through grants, loans and bursaries to serving and former members of the Canadian Forces, both regular and reserve, who wear the naval uniform, and those other than navy who have at least one year of service with units of the Royal Canadian Navy.

This support is also extended to eligible dependants, and we also provide support to Canadian Merchant Navy veterans who fall under the act formerly called the Merchant Navy Veteran and Civilian War-Related Benefits Act and their dependants.

For 76 years, the RCNBF has served the naval forces of Canada through distress loans, grants and educational support programs to qualified naval personnel and their dependants. During this period we have assisted more than 40,000 people and given out over \$17 million.

Over the past year alone, we have provided financial assistance to 237 qualified applicants, totalling \$588,388. That total is broken down as follows: 83 grants totalling \$250,757 were disbursed to 25 serving sailors, 54 veterans and four merchant navy vets; and 19 loans totalling \$218,706 were disbursed, of which 14 were approved to serving members. In recent years, the issuing of loans is becoming an increasing and useful part of our business. Thirty-two educational bursaries were awarded to 32 young Canadians in pursuit of post-secondary education, totalling \$34,000. Also, 108 minor disbursements, totalling \$84,926, were made.

The minor disbursement fund is used to provide emergency assistance to eligible applicants on application to a Veterans Affairs Canada office, to VETS Canada, or through the Royal Canadian Legion branches. The maximum MDF grant is \$1,000. Legion branches, with their widespread accessibility, continue to be a valuable conduit to those who need this type of assistance.

In addition to direct financial assistance, the RCNBF collaborates with other funding and supporting agencies in order to provide the right level of assistance in a timely and efficient manner. One should not underestimate the power of these well-established relationships. We feel that there are many reasons leading to homelessness, including substance abuse, mental illness, traumatic brain injury and undiagnosed developmental disabilities, to name a few, and the RCNBF have helped in some of those cases.

Normally, either the Legion or VETS Canada finds the recipients on the streets and engages us in participating in helping them into some sort of housing. We had a veteran in southern Ontario who was found living in a tent. When he was approached, all he wanted from us was a lamp for his tent and a bicycle to go to work with. We helped, but I'm glad to report he is now in an apartment. With thanks, and in co-operation with the Royal Canadian Legion, he has left the streets behind.

We, the RCNBF, are also seeing other types of homelessness or near homelessness caused by financial distress. This financial distress can be the result of poor decisions during transition. As an example, a recent client received a large amount of money upon release. He did not qualify for a pension. He spent more than half of his settlement on the purchase of a house that needed a lot of repairs. He does not have a salary or a pension, so the bank won't lend him any money to fix his roof or his heating.

Some sailors find the transition from the military to the civilian world very difficult. The military provides financially and medically. You're clothed, fed and taken care of in almost every way. The military becomes part of an extended family. Now imagine someone who releases or retires without family support. He or she may feel abandoned, alone, maybe even desperate.

In another recent case, a divorced father moved to Oshawa for employment to be closer to his child, only to find that the job he was expecting had disappeared. He's now couch surfing. We will try to assist him with the first and last month's rent.

In my opinion, the majority of veterans retire or release from the Canadian Armed Forces without issues. They are prepared financially, they have a support network and they have a job lined up once they transition.

● (1640)

There is a fraction—and I'm not sure how big that fraction is—who, when they release from the Canadian Armed Forces, are unprepared for that transition. They leave the Canadian Armed Forces at risk because they are not prepared financially, educationally, emotionally and medically, and they lack the knowledge for a successful transition.

In conclusion, I consider that the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund, over these past 76 years, has fulfilled and will continue to fulfill its mandate, coast to coast to coast. The RCNBF has made a very meaningful contribution to the relief of distress and the promotion of well-being for those who have served and continue to serve Canada at sea, their dependants and their families.

The board of directors, membership and administrative staff wish to express their sincere appreciation for the co-operation and assistance received from Veterans Affairs Canada, CFPAF, SISIP, the Canadian Armed Forces, the Soldiers' Aid Commission, the Royal Canadian Legion and a host of other organizations, whose members are dedicated to helping our veterans and eligible applicants.

Tom and I would be happy to take any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Le, you have 10 minutes.

**Ms. Suzanne Le (Executive Director, Multifaith Housing Initiative):** Good afternoon, honourable members of the House and the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The Multifaith Housing Initiative is a charitable non-profit housing organization working in Ottawa since 2002. Its mission is to provide safe, well-maintained and affordable housing and supports for individuals and families who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

MHI has a proven track record in the development and successful delivery of affordable housing. We have just completed a 98-unit community in west Ottawa that was recently awarded the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association award for "Best Community (Built)" in 2017. The community was built on time, on budget and to the right deliverable.

MHI plans to create an affordable housing project with supports for veterans at risk of homelessness. The project will use a supportive housing-first model that seeks to help the veterans deal with health, mental health and addictions-related issues.

MHI will create the project on the site of the former Rockcliffe air base in Ottawa's east end. This site has been declared surplus by DND, and the Canada Lands Company has undertaken the required site planning and servicing needed to dispose of the property. MHI was able to secure a piece of the land on the air base in March 2018 through the federal program known as the surplus federal real property for homelessness initiative, run under ESDC.

To give you a few facts and statistics we have on the problem, the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa conducted a survey in April 2015. Of the homeless people they interviewed over a five-day period, they found that 8.5% of the homeless persons surveyed reported Canadian military service. That compares to 6.4% in Hamilton and 5% in Waterloo.

In April of this year, Ottawa conducted a government-mandated point-in-time count of the homeless population. In a two-day period, they found that 5% of respondents identified as former Canadian military or RCMP members, 62 as Canadian Armed Forces and three as RCMP. Of these respondents, 35% also identified as indigenous. Over the past three years, Soldiers Helping Soldiers, an Ottawa-based boots-on-the-ground organization of serving military members who volunteer in the shelters to identify and aid military veterans, has encountered over 380 homeless persons with prior military service.

In 2016, the Mental Health Commission of Canada released its report entitled "At Home/Chez Soi". In this study, we learned that compared to other participants veterans had higher levels of education, were 1.6 times more likely to have been robbed prior to the study and were 1.4 times more likely to have PTSD.

The Chez Soi study, combined with similar studies coming out of the U.K. and the U.S., has given us the following insights. Alcoholism, drug addiction and mental health problems contribute to and perpetuate homelessness amongst veterans, especially in cases where there were pre-existing mental health conditions. Drinking—socially and as a means of compensation—began while in the military.

Also, the transition from military to civilian life is dislocating for many. The abrupt change to the relatively unstructured civilian world from a very highly structured one can also disrupt focus, trust and friendships.

As well, a variety of reasons conspire to separate vets from their Canadian Forces or Veterans Affairs Canada benefits, such as legal obligations to others, no fixed address, no ID, etc. Homeless veterans describe a complex relationship with VAC. Some felt abandoned by VAC once they were discharged. Others felt that they were well supported by VAC, indicating that they were getting the help they needed to move on with life.

The Multifaith Housing Initiative solution is Veterans' House. We are committed to the construction and ongoing management of this project. It will be a 40-unit home for veterans who are currently homeless or at high risk of homelessness, and it will include wraparound supports.

Veterans' House will target the needs specifically and solely of homeless veterans who are living rough or are at high risk of becoming homeless due to mental health needs. The supportive housing model will help these individuals gain stable housing, recover from health, mental health and addiction-related issues, and improve their overall quality of life as well as the lives of their families who are unable to provide them with the support they need.

MHI is currently advancing Veterans' House to a place where we can be prepared to start construction in 2019. Therefore, at this moment in time, MHI is working towards the goal of getting this project as shovel ready as possible to ensure that once all the funding is secured there are no delays in construction.

To this date, MHI has secured the land through the federal government, submitted our site plan application to the City of Ottawa and submitted an application to the co-investment fund, which was created as part of the national housing strategy and is administered by CMHC. This fund identifies veterans specifically as a special priority group to benefit from the fund. We have embarked on a very large \$5-million capital campaign to support the project.

●(1645)

MHI takes a collaborative approach to all of our projects. In this vein, MHI has built up a village of collaborations and partnerships to support our tenants in Veterans' House once it is constructed. Partners and stakeholders for Veterans' House include Ottawa Salus, Veterans Affairs Canada, Soldiers Helping Soldiers, the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command and District G, True Patriot Love, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, Support Our Troops, and Helmets to Hardhats.

However, all projects come with challenges and ours is not without them.

The challenges we have faced on this project include a lack of provincial and municipal participation in the funding, which makes long-term viability more difficult. We have solved this issue by embarking on the large capital campaign I spoke of and reaching out to the public to fill the gaps that the province or municipality would have filled in a more traditional affordable housing build.

Also, the underwriting process for the CMHC co-investment fund as it is currently being implemented by CMHC is arduous, exceptionally risky for the proponents, impractical and at risk of causing some unreasonable delays to the project. Further, once all the documents are prepared for CMHC's underwriting review to begin, proponents are expected to begin construction without funding or to try to fund the early few months of construction by themselves.

Another issue we have found is that CMHC is refusing to continue the underwriting process until we have confirmed the full receipt of the \$5-million capital campaign. A capital campaign of that size will take us at least two to three years to complete, and it was our plan to do the capital campaign while in construction.

MHI believes that Canada owes these men and women of the Canadian military service a duty of care. We are doing our part to respond to that. We also believe that there is strong federal support across all party lines for those former soldiers who are so desperate for our help. For that, we are very thankful to you.

Once funded initially, Veterans' House will sustainably continue to care for our veterans for years to come without any further funding from the government, and it will be something real and tangible that we can all feel very proud of for years to come.

Thank you very much for your attention today.

●(1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll begin five-minute rounds with Ms. Wagantall.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thanks for being here. We really appreciate what you've brought to the table today.

I would like to have both of you respond just quickly in regard to the discussion around the fact that it's a fraction of our veterans who don't do well, who come out and are really struggling. You referred to not being prepared with education, finances, emotional stability and health—all of those things.

We need to deal with homelessness, but the ideal thing to do would be to make it even less common. When we're talking about that side of the picture, do you hear concerns from them?

Would you say that it would be better if, as our committee has studied and recommended, DND did not release them until all of those things are absolutely in place for them? That would be for the high-risk individuals, so that everything is in place before they're released. Of course, the majority of them who are high risk are released due to medical reasons due to service, and the concern here at the committee was also that this has been established, so it shouldn't need to be re-established by VAC. Just make it happen prior to their leaving.

What role do you see in that issue of that fraction not being prepared to release?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** We would absolutely agree that they should not be released until they are prepared to re-enter the civilian world. Some of it is as simple as not understanding that when they get a VAC settlement or SISIP settlement of a couple of hundred thousand dollars and they buy themselves a house, they then don't qualify for welfare or disability support programs because they own a house or have money in the bank. They don't understand the rules that apply on civilian street once they retire from the armed forces.

Education is a big thing. I spent 37 years in the military. I finished as a Canadian Forces chief warrant officer, but once I became a civilian again, the only thing that was recognized was my Grade 12 education from 1977. There's no accreditation for my time in the armed forces, unless it's a company that understands where you're coming from.

I absolutely agree that especially the injured—the corporal, master corporal, master seaman or leading seaman who is not going to have a huge pension—should not be released until they understand what's going to happen next.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Right. We know from other information we've received that for the majority of veterans who end up homeless, it's about a decade after they are released, versus the average of the other individuals who are homeless. The truth of the matter is that a lot of the younger ones who are homeless probably wouldn't be if they'd been part of the armed forces because you have all of those things in place for you at that time.

Suzanne, could you talk to me about this funding for Veterans' House? How much capital are you receiving from Veterans Affairs Canada specifically for the building?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** We are not receiving any funding from Veterans Affairs Canada.

The project is going to be an \$11.5-million build. We are fundraising \$5 million of it. Our application to the co-investment fund is for \$5 million. We will mortgage the remaining balance of \$1.5 million. That is the most mortgage we can sustain on the very low rents that we are going to be charging the tenants.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** CMHC is saying that you have to have the full \$5 million promised or in the bank?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** They want us to be able to show them that we have all of the money committed.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay.

I know that with capital fundraising it takes time for that to build and to roll, and a lot of times seeing something physical in front of

you that is at stage one or whatever makes a difference to that continued growth in funding. Have you been able to communicate that?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** We have tried. We had a conference call with CMHC a couple of weeks ago.

When we first got the list of what they wanted us to do before they would start the underwriting process, we thought it was a mistake. It's not normal in affordable housing developments. We have received federal, provincial and municipal government funding for previous projects, and this has never been the way it's been done. Generally you get a letter of commitment, and then you start doing the studies.

They were unbending.

• (1655)

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay. Thank you.

This is with regard to the veterans you service with the Legion and with your housing. Without being personal or getting personal information, do you have any means of recording conversations or feedback as you talk with individuals who you have in your house and as you work with them? Do you have any means for that in terms of the transition in how they have moved from serving to being released, to being homeless, in order to come up with some concept of why, in that course of time, they ended up in that state?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** We don't. A lot of them actually feel ashamed—

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** I know. It's all anecdotal.

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** A lot of them feel ashamed to come to us in the first place, or they weren't sure that we were even there to be able to help them. Also, they don't necessarily want to share their stories either, so it's difficult to do that.

I don't know if you want to add anything, Tom?

**Mr. Tom Riefesel (Vice-President, Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund):** Vulnerabilities take on very many shapes and forms. The veterans we serve are often hampered by that vulnerability, like Bob said. After a proud period of service where you are strong and you have to be strong, and then when you're out of uniform you can't be strong, where do you turn for support?

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Do you think we would be better—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but you're out of time. Thank you.

Mr. Samson, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you very much, all three of you, for the work you do, which is extremely important.

Also, thanks to both of you for your service. It's a very tough profession. We sincerely thank you for that. It's very much appreciated by all Canadians, and you're continuing that service, which is what is even more amazing.

I have a quick question about your relationship with Veterans Affairs. Is there an ongoing relationship? What issues do you share together?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** For us, absolutely. We depend on VAC. They help us identify clients, because we're a very small group and we only have one employee. VAC contacts us and says, "We've found a sailor that's in need." They often will create the case for us, and then we'll adjudicate the case and see if we can assist. We have a good ongoing working relationship with VAC.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Do you receive funding from VAC?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** We do not. No. Prior to unification, we used to receive money from the canteen funds of ships, but since unification we haven't received any money. We were intelligent enough to invest our money. We live off the interest of the money we have invested.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Again, that's exceptional.

How about you, Suzanne?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** In our case, we've had conversations with VAC and they have committed to caseworker support once the building is operational. They have given us access to their research, and they have allowed us to also access their video files and such things, but no funding.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Housing, the national housing strategy has I think indicated a priority for veterans. What are the discussions on that piece with both organizations?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** In our case, the issue with a lot of the funds is that veterans are identified as a priority population, so there was a recognition by the government when they developed the national housing strategy that veterans needed to be highlighted, but there was a disconnect when they made all of the programs require provincial and municipal participation.

In the case of veterans, there are many provinces, Ontario being one of them, and many cities, Ottawa being one of them, that will not fund projects and programs for veterans of any sort. We are specifically excluded from it because they see it as a federal plan.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Then what did you do in yours? Did you get the provincial and municipal governments in both?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** No. We have no provincial government. The municipal government gave us development charge relief, which we were entitled to because we are a charity, not because it's a veterans' project, and that was enough to make us eligible to apply for the program, but it did create this big funding gap.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** From the Canadian navy, there has been support for a lot of programs in the last two to three years. The needs are there and that's been identified. I think the more we learn about transition, the more we learn about needs, and the more we learn about the benefits that should be linked to those needs. On pensions for life, you mentioned that before you faced individuals who would have taken the one-time payment.

Are people now aware that they have the option of a one-time payment or a pension for life?

• (1700)

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** People are aware. I'm not sure that they've taken advantage of it yet. I think a full rollout of pension for life is coming up in April. It's not going to address all the people who are releasing. It's for the most severely injured. It's not for people who were not injured in combat. Some of them will be covered by insurance and not by VAC. We still end up with people releasing with a cash settlement that is not going to provide for them forever.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** You talked about the education program. Our government, or the government of the day, put a very aggressive support in place for education: six years, \$40,000; 12 years, \$80,000. Is that the program you're talking about? Can you expand on that, please?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** I'll let Tom speak to that.

**Mr. Tom Riefesel:** There are two lines there. That is a very good program for somebody to go and develop higher education, to work on a foundation they've built up in their experience in the Canadian Armed Forces, but it doesn't apply to all veterans.

Those veterans who were actively involved in the Veterans Affairs Canada rehabilitation program don't qualify for access to that program. Just because you want to do the program doesn't mean you'll get the funding. For the veteran who's on the rehabilitation program, trying to get well, a lot of that is not available because the goal of the rehabilitation program is to get you to where you were when you were serving, before you were released medically. There's a bit of a disconnect there.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you, and thank you, all, for your work and selfless service.

Maybe I'll start with Mr. Cl  roux. You mentioned that you're not getting any funding from Veterans Affairs. Is Veterans Affairs referring clients to you?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** They are, with no funding...?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** That's correct.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay, I just wanted to hear that again.

What kind of funding would support the work you're doing?



**Mr. Robert Cl roux:** A lot of the referrals we get from VAC is emergency funding, and it's emergency funding that doesn't fall within their ability to support it. For example, VAC does not cover first and last months' rent. We would prefer that the person who is homeless or near-homeless be able to get into some sort of housing.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Right, so it's more funding for housing instead of the one-time emergency amount. I get it. You need first and last months' rent if you're walking into a place. You need it even longer really, if you've flat out lost everything and you're on the street.

That being said, you've heard about our motion on ending lapsed spending and carrying it forward to attack the 12 service standards of the 24 that the government is not meeting.

Would you see this amount of money—\$148 million last year—as money that could be used and applied immediately to supporting veterans?

**Mr. Robert Cl roux:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** We heard from you, Ms. Le, about the \$5-million shortfall. The municipal and provincial governments are saying that it's not their responsibility, that veterans are a federal responsibility.

They've served Canada. They expect Canada to honour its obligation.

Is this leaving this project in jeopardy right now, or were you able to source that \$5-million gap?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** I'm very confident that we're going to be able to fundraise that \$5 million. We started our campaign six months ago, and we're already at \$2 million, and we're still in the quiet phase. There's a lot of public support for veterans.

The issue is how long it will take us to do it. I expect that it will take us two to three years. If this project sits on ice for two to three years, I can tell you that the cost of developing the project will go up by \$2 million to \$3 million.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Absolutely. I'm sure.

I sat on local government, and it is challenging with the downloading that's already happened over decades.

When it comes to veterans, do you see that the national housing strategy should have looked at veterans and created 100% funding for veterans' facilities?

• (1705)

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** Yes, I do.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** That being said, you talked about the layer of bureaucracy. You just identified how difficult and challenging it is to navigate that.

Do you think it would be appropriate to have just one source funding, one source application, so you're not getting put through all of the different challenges of interjurisdictional and departmental challenges that might be faced?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** Yes, that would be really lovely.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** You talked about not relying on any ongoing funding.

We just had Angus Stanfield here, a great Canadian in Victoria running the Cockrell House. They have no funding. They are doing all of this on donations. It's costing them about \$1,100 a unit per veteran to do this, and they're not getting any funding from Veterans Affairs.

Do you feel confident that you're going to be able to run this facility without any funding? I imagine it would help to have some ongoing, long-term, stable funding to ensure that veterans' needs are being met.

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** We have, and we do. It's the beauty that once you invest in capital...

Right now, there seems to be a very big move towards investing in programs instead of investing in capital. However, if you invest in capital, then the project is self-sustaining. We will be collecting rents from these tenants, because it's not transitional, not a shelter, and it's not short term. They will be paying rent of \$479 a month, which is the shelter allowance rate for ODSP in Ontario. We will be collecting that rent, and with that rent and a mortgage of no more than \$1 million, we can sustain this.

The Royal Canadian Legion has committed ongoing funding of \$100,000 a year to pay for the mental health supports, and then we have a lot of relationships with different volunteer organizations that will be doing peer mentoring services, etc., in the building.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Super.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** You have 139 units, 300 to 400 people, at different sites. That's great work—exceptional work.

How do you identify the percentage who will be veterans at those facilities?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** In my other facilities...?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Yes, that's right.

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** In the other facilities, we take people out of the shelter system in Ottawa, and most of them are families. We have a lot of newcomers to Canada. There are not a lot of veterans in our other facilities currently.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay, great.

Thank you all for your important work.

**The Chair:** Mr. Chen, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Shaun Chen:** Thank you.

I want to start by thanking the three witnesses here today.

You clearly speak with such care and compassion for our veterans, and the work you do is tremendous. It is a great service to veterans and to our country, so I want to commend our witnesses for their hard work. This care and compassion is exemplified by the investments that I know over the past three years have been made to support veterans—a total of \$10 billion.

One of the challenges, as you mentioned, Mr. Cl  roux, is to be able to identify veterans and to offer and provide the types of support they need. I'm glad you gave the example of the veteran who was living in a tent and all he wanted was a lamp and a bicycle to get to work with. Of course, there are many other resources and services that can be provided to support veterans like him.

Mr. Cl  roux, I know that your organization offers direct financial assistance through a number of different funds. One of the new funds that was launched April 1 of this year is the veterans emergency fund.

Do you know if that fund is being accessed to its potential in providing the \$2,500 per veteran per year for extenuating circumstances, and to help pay for food, shelter and other situations that come up that veterans need support for?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** As far as I know, yes, it is. As I said, we have a great partnership with VAC. When they refer clients to us, it's because they cannot help them due to the way their fund is set up, but they will help first.

It's the same thing with the Legion. We often get into a partnership with the Legion, where they'll ask us to share emergency funding in those kinds of cases. We're happy to do that.

**Mr. Shaun Chen:** That's great. It sounds like it's being used.

The pension for life is rolling out in April. That fund, as you've mentioned, is for veterans and the pain and suffering they have endured as a result of service-related injury or illness. Hopefully, that fund will be utilized by the veterans that need it. It provides that monthly tax-free payment to them so that they can access the financial resources they are entitled to.

There's an application that must be filled out. What do you think needs to be done to ensure that veterans who are out there and suffering, who do have those service-related illnesses or injuries, are aware of the pension for life and are going to apply? How can we better reach out to those veterans to make sure that every veteran who deserves that payment gets it?

• (1710)

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** It's a very difficult question for me to answer. Using the associations—there are so many associations out there that care about veterans—I think is a good way to communicate.

Tom, do you have any ideas?

**Mr. Tom Riefesel:** It's ongoing communication. When you think you've communicated enough, you have to communicate some more.

You have to access all of those resources that are available to you: newspapers, media, social media and the veterans support organizations that are out there doing the heavy lifting on the streets and helping. We have to access all of those and continue to push that message out there.

As well, the partnership between the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs and that handshake and transition have to be strengthened.

**Mr. Shaun Chen:** That's great.

Ms. Le, you mentioned Helmets to Hardhats. As I told the previous round of witnesses, I met with the Canadian Construction Association earlier today. They really want to attract more people to work in Canada's booming construction industry, and one of the groups they mentioned was veterans.

This sounds like something in that realm. Could you perhaps share with us a bit more about that program?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** It's really important that when we build this project we use it to do as much good wherever we can, however we can and with every tool that we can use. Helmets to Hardhats is a really well-aligned organization that aligns with our values, in that they bring in veterans and retrain them from the military world into the civilian world through the trades. That's supported by the trade unions.

We have developed a relationship with them and we have committed to using as many Helmets to Hardhats participants as we can in the building. In our interviews with construction management, we made that a criteria for their being hired and getting the job of doing the construction on the project.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bratina, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Thanks very much.

Ms. Le, what's the origin of your organization? It's multi-faith, so it has many faiths.

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** Yes.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Is that component a prominent part of how your organization works?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** The organization started in 2000 out of the archdiocese centre in Ottawa with a working group for the poor. They were looking at how they could help situations for the poor. Everything fed back to housing: food bank usage, higher amounts of hospital usage.... All of these things come back to that one piece—housing—but it's also the most expensive piece to fix.

They decided to tackle it, but they decided to tackle it by engaging other faith groups to work on it. We have eight working committees. We have 80 to 100 core volunteers who work in our organization every month and who really do a lot of the heavy lifting, which helps us to keep all of our costs down.

They come to us through these faith groups. We have 70 faith groups in the City of Ottawa that have memberships with us: Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, Sikh—I'm sure I'm forgetting some—and Unitarian. We have the whole gamut and they come in and do the work. That's how we originated. It has nothing to do with our tenants. The tenants have no religious or affiliation requirement to be in our units. These groups are just where we get our volunteers from.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Wouldn't that be helpful in terms of awareness of veterans and their needs?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** Yes, it's helpful in awareness of the whole affordable housing issue carte blanche. We do a lot of speaking engagements in these 70 faith groups. They come to our events. They get to learn a lot about the issues around affordable housing, the poor and the shelter usage. Veterans' House has certainly been one of our very large highlights. We recently had a big gala on it and the room was filled with people who came to learn about Veterans' House and support the project.

• (1715)

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** The 98-unit building, you started off with regard to the....

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** Yes.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** When did you build that?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** We completed construction in 2017.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Over what period of time was that done?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** It was an Action Ottawa request for proposal through the City of Ottawa. How it works is the federal government downloads money to the province, the province kicks in money and they download it to the municipality. The municipality kicks in money, and then they release it in a whole competition and you put forward projects for it. We won and we built the 98 homes.

We won in December 2014. We started construction in November 2015 and we completed construction by July 2017.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Thank you.

Mr. Cl  roux, is there a lot of difference between a naval vet, an army vet or an air force vet? Is life aboard ship different from life in a camp?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** I'm sure life aboard ship is different from life in the bush for a soldier, but there's not a lot of difference between the veterans.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Your organization stands alone, so obviously you're connected to naval people.

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** That's right. We have helped army and air force members, but they have to have served with the navy at one time.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** I see. Could you say there's much difference between a vet of a short period of service—say, a three-year individual versus a 20-year individual?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** There is, because of the pension. While I was serving, you got a 40% pension after 20 years. Somebody who releases from the armed forces after two years would have no pension. The person may release because he didn't like the navy or for whatever reason, go into employment and not be successful and still require help. For us, a veteran is a veteran and we will help every veteran as long as they completed basic training. It doesn't matter if they have 37 years or 13 weeks.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** You're doing this pretty much on your own. We set out to try to make things better for veterans.

Generally speaking, are you seeing any improvements, or a better system? Despite the issues that we've been discussing because we're here to solve problems, is it a better day for veterans?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** It is. I know there are some really good programs under the new veterans charter. I think it's called the wellness program now.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** It's the well-being fund.

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** I think there are some excellent programs in there.

I'm going to give you a story. I hope I don't take too long.

I had a friend who retired many years ago. He was injured. I hadn't seen him in many years. He used to be a navy diver, so he was very fit. He was under the old pension program—the old veterans program. When I saw him, he was well over 300 pounds. I asked him what he was doing. He said that all he was doing was sitting at home watching TV. I told him that he had to get out and do something. He said that he didn't want to lose his pension.

The new veterans charter is trying to get veterans well and employed. I think that's good, but there are still people who are not getting the help that they need.

**Mr. Bob Bratina:** Thanks.

**The Chair:** Mr. McColeman, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Thank you for your testimony on all fronts. It's kind of interesting to hear you talk about the pension for life and the fact that it actually does not address the people with partial disability or partial assessment in terms of when they come out. You're right that it addresses the people who are most disabled and gives them something, but the other people fall between the cracks as far as pension for life. I'm glad you said that, Mr. Cl  roux.

Also, Helmets to Hardhats was an interesting program. I was president of Ontario Home Builders' Association for many years and that was a program that we conceived with the construction industry on both sides. It's great to hear that you're utilizing that, and that is has grown and it continues to grow.

When you said you won the award for that 98-unit housing, what form of housing is it? Is it low-rise or high-rise? If it's high-rise, what's the makeup of the units?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** It's a mix. It's a complete community. It's two low-rise buildings, six blocks of back-to-back towns and then two traditional blocks of towns with a *grande all  e* down the middle. We designed it literally to engage the community in the programming we have going on there. That award is generally given to for-profit developers. It's not made for not-for-profit developers. Also, an affordable housing community provider winning that award is a first—and it's quite exciting.

•(1720)

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** It's quite exciting for me to hear that. I have been to the Ottawa home builders' awards nights over the years and right across the province, and I don't think any project like that has ever won an award from that organization.

Nonetheless, you also mentioned that you're using the ODSP rent threshold as your threshold. Why have you chosen that?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** We made an assumption that they're not going to get any other kind of support. This was what we could get them. There will be some who may go as low as Ontario Works, in which case we will have to be doing some fundraising to make up the shortfall between them and the others. We just made an assumption that there is going to be no one who is.... We're taking them off the streets. They're not going to be working when they first come. We're going to have to help connect them to their benefits.

VAC may have some programs by then that have been developed and that will help them. We don't know that. We don't know what it will look like. We don't know who it will include and who it will exclude. Therefore, we have taken kind of a rock-bottom approach.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** For the benefit of the other committee members, ODSP is the Ontario disability support program. It supports individuals who qualify, and they are largely the disabled community. It supports them in their adult life, helping them to achieve some modest level of subsistence in the community. For most individuals, it rarely exceeds \$12,000 a year, with all the rent and the other supports you need. It gives you an idea of the lifestyle of adults with disabilities and the challenges they have to deal with when they don't have other supports around them. Therefore, it surprises me that you use that.

I was also surprised, when the question was asked, I think by Mr. Johns, about your operating expenses—you've laid them out, no doubt, in a business plan or in your proposals—that you are able to exist as a non-profit and break even every year at those rent levels.

When you present this to the people who evaluate you for qualifying or not qualifying for funding, is this something that you run into problems with?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** No, we haven't. It's quite sound. We're building this project to what's called "passive house" standards, which is a very high level of environmental efficiency so that our operating costs are quite low. We're putting the money in the capital up front rather than in long-term operating. We have a lot of volunteer bases. We are a registered charity, and today I was informed that we have received our tax exemption on this project, so we won't be paying property taxes on it.

These different things that we are able to layer together allow us to operate with a small amount of income. Also, the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command is picking up the tab for the official mental health supports.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Kudos to you, frankly. That's an amazing model. Thank you for doing it.

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Ludwig, I believe you're splitting with Mr. Eyolfson.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Are we splitting?

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson:** Take all the time you need.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** I'll be fast.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** I'd like to thank all of you for your testimony. It was absolutely fascinating and really inspiring.

Ms. Le, you mentioned your facility. We heard from a previous witness that there is a disproportionate number of young women under the age of 25 in comparison to the actual composition of the Canadian Forces. Do you see that with the veterans you're helping out?

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** The number we're getting back shows that about 5% of the homeless veterans are female. Now, that's not a really good official account. We have been doing some deeper research on it to try to get some better understanding.

That said, the 40 units of our project Veterans' House being built are 40 independent self-sustaining units with a lot of common space. We can take from both sexes, then. It's not an issue.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** I'm also pleased to hear you mention the common space, because Mr. Stanfield said that at his house one thing they don't have is a common space.

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** We did a plan-of-care charette, into which we put all of our designs for the common areas, the outside. We had a lot of different groups come in, a lot of different military groups, and they fed into that the things they would want to see, including the PTSD service dog unit. Then we went back and redesigned the whole space to really meet their needs.

It's one of the things that are really beautiful about this project. It's been designed very specifically for this population, to their needs, recognizing the uniqueness of the veteran population.

•(1725)

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** That's fantastic. I actually think it's a model for so many other housing projects.

Gentlemen, I have a couple of questions for you, particularly around the trades.

In the work I've done through post-secondary education, I've actually done a lot of work with the Canadian Forces over the years.

I'm wondering whether there are specific trades that are not being recognized by the civilian groups, for which maybe there's an opportunity to work with the Department of National Defence on the training side of it so that the designations are actually recognized.

**Mr. Tom Riefesel:** I'll speak to that from a naval perspective.

The work in the navy, even over the span of our career, has changed dramatically from very manual types of activities to very technical, highly skilled tasks, which in turn require highly trained, very skilled, technically capable sailors to make that warship or submarine function in the way it's supposed to.

You're talking about highly trained electronics technicians, highly trained marine engineering professionals, high-voltage electricians and thermodynamics. There are operators who run the computer systems on board those ships, and of course there are others, such as the administration clerks and the cooks. Food is very important. They're trained professionals as well.

It's something that we've heard consistently throughout our careers, that those qualifications and skills should be and need to be recognized, not only at sea in service to Canada but also on civvy street when your service to Canada is over, as true credentials to carry forward into a second career.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** I agree. I think it's an important return on federal investment as well. That prior learning recognition should be part of the credentialing, because at some point there's going to be that transition to the outside.

I have one last question for you. Right now you're not receiving any federal funding. Have you applied?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** No.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Okay.

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** Is there a fund that we can apply to?

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** I'm going to find something for you.

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** Thank you.

Can I answer the question that you asked Suzanne?

Most of our clients in terms of homelessness are young males, but we have a huge client base of older widows who can't buy teeth, eyeglasses or hearing aids because their pension is so small that they can't afford those kinds of things. We still have lots of widows in their nineties who require assistance. It's not homelessness, but they still require assistance.

**Ms. Karen Ludwig:** Thank you for sharing that.

Doug, is there time?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson:** Thank you.

I just want to ask a question. This never occurred to me to ask until you mentioned what to my memory is the first organization that is specific to one branch.

You may not know this because you concentrate on one branch, but do you know if anyone has any data on the rates of homelessness for veterans of different branches? Are people who have served in the navy, the army or the air force—any veterans from any of those—more or less likely to be homeless?

**Mr. Robert Cl  roux:** I have no idea. I have no data on that at all.

**Ms. Suzanne Le:** We've actually tried to dig into that question a lot further. We're doing further research right now. We have a partnership with the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, and a researcher at Carleton University to try to get us a little more colour and detail around homeless veterans.

The number that really surprised us from the point-in-time count was that 35% were aboriginal. That question was asked. That seemed to be a lot higher than what we were expecting. I had it in my head that it would be somewhere around the 5% to 10% mark, not the 35% mark.

**Mr. Doug Eyolfson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That ends the time for our meeting today.

On behalf of the group, I'd like to thank all three of you for everything you've done and continue to do for veterans. Thank you for taking time to testify today.

Could we have a motion to adjourn? Thank you, Mr. Bratina.

(Motion agreed to)

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