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Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Hello, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 72 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*English*]

The Board of Internal Economy and public health authorities no longer require everyone to wear a mask, but masks and respirators are still excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other airborne diseases.

I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone in the room that you cannot take screenshots or photos of this meeting. In fact, it will be online. You can see it then.

I also want those of you who are virtual to know that, if you look at the bottom of your screen, you will see a little globe icon. If you press on that, you can get translation in English or French. For everyone on the floor, there are earpieces to get the translation.

Please direct all your remarks through the chair, and do not speak unless I call your name.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 20, 2022, this committee is meeting to continue its study on safe sport in Canada.

Today, we have witnesses here to speak to us about this issue. We have, as an individual, Wendy Glover, a secondary school teacher and athlete development consultant. We also have Ryan Sheehan and Kim Shore, co-founders, Gymnasts for Change Canada. We have Robert Hedges, secretary to the board of directors, Athletes' Association of Canada, who is here by video conference. For Scholars Against Abuse in Canadian Sport, we have MacIntosh Ross, assistant professor, Western University.

Welcome.

We will begin by—

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Could I have a point of order first, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I think everyone has seen the motion I would like to present here, this morning, in both official languages. It would be option one, Madam Chair:

That Hockey Canada be ordered to provide the committee, within 24 hours of the adoption of this motion, the final report by Henein Hutchison, regarding the June 2018 alleged Sexual Assault Case in London, Ontario at the Hockey Canada Foundation Gala.

I heard that Henein Hutchison has given its report to Hockey Canada. I wish to receive it here, in the very near future, to look over.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Go ahead, Chris.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I discussed this with Mr. Waugh. I'm trying to be careful about what we discussed in camera. I have a broad concern about solicitor-client privilege, but I think I'm in the minority on that one.

The other issue is privacy. I think Mr. Waugh agreed, when we brought it up, and I see heads nodding on the other side. If there are names in the report, they should not be made public. I don't know how to word that. Perhaps it should be sent to the law clerk, first, for redaction, for privacy issues, before it comes back to the committee. I think we discussed this before. There are names that we all agree should not be made public.

The Chair: That's a prudent amendment, Chris. I think Kevin is nodding. Everybody else is nodding.

Kevin, if you don't mind, we will shelve this until we get that. Chris will talk to the law clerk and decide what the wording would look like. If you're in agreement, then yes.

Mike, the clerk here, is telling me that we have standard wording, which he will apply. We don't need to go to the law clerk.

Mike, if we have that and we can get it before the meeting ends, maybe we'll be able to go back to this motion then. What do you think?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): You can vote on it now.

The Chair: Do you want to vote now, with the amendment coming with regard to what Chris said?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: All right. Is anyone opposed to amending the motion with regard to what Chris said, given that we will get the standard language from the clerk?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: It sounds as if that motion passes unanimously. That's great. Thank you, everybody.

Gosh, can we not always work like that? That was very nicely done, Kevin.

Witnesses, you have five minutes each.

We begin with Wendy Glover, who is a secondary school teacher and athlete development consultant.

You have five minutes, Ms. Glover. Thank you.

Ms. Wendy Glover (Secondary School Teacher and Athlete Development Consultant, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dear members of the committee, I want to thank you for proving me wrong. Let me explain. I teach teenagers, and model a simple saying, "Stop complaining and address the concerns."

About 12 years ago, after much observation and frustration from being immersed in the youth sport system as a teacher, parent and coach, and feeling powerless to instill positive change, I started a sport leadership program in a high school to address my concerns.

Over the years, I have told the over 500 adolescent student athletes that have been through my program, "You will be an adult one day, and if you're an educated active citizen, you may be able to improve the sports system, as I will be out of the system before it can be done."

Where I was wrong was that I didn't think my voice would ever be listened to. I had almost lost all faith that the sport system could change for the better, and you all have given me and Canadians the opportunity for hope, and I thank you.

My educational background is a phys. ed. and health education teacher, certified in grades kindergarten through 12. I've had the opportunity to teach in an elementary school for five years, and secondary school for the last 20 years. My current teaching role for the last 12 years is unique as a health, wellness and sport management specialist. It allows me to teach sport science and sport leadership, and provide athletic development guidance and experiential learning opportunities to student athletes in the sport community.

As part of my job, I review sport development models, and teach appropriate applications of them to student athletes who are currently in the sport system. I also get to help plan the sport, academic and career paths of the student athletes from high school to post-secondary. I teach and assess youth and adolescent physical, cognitive, social and emotional development applied within sport. I have

written programs, courses and curriculum being taught in the Ontario school system.

Often, with teen athletes, I use evidence-based research to write programs, and create resources for addressing concerns they have, like a guide for moving away from home and into a billet family. We consult the research and athletes, and then create documents and programs to address what the young athletes have voiced themselves.

Two years ago, I was encouraged to contribute to the hockey community as part of the Ontario Hockey League as an academic and personal development adviser with the London Knights. My education experience was relevant. Additionally, my children grew up in the system, and are now in their 20s. One plays professionally. My husband is a former professional hockey player who has coached youth hockey for many years. I know the hockey system, and the players who are part of the OHL.

I'm not innocent in my part in the hockey system as my children went through it. I was simply at a loss for what to do as any efforts I made were often not well received. I believe my unique perspective, and understanding the various stakeholder views in hockey, has been helpful to understanding some of the problems within it, and the complexities in trying to address them.

For example, how do you expect hockey administrators to address adolescent behaviour when they usually have little, if any, education or training on how to do that? They're not teachers. They're not used to disciplining and addressing the behaviour of adolescents.

The word discipline means to teach. When we see behaviour that is not appropriate, we need to call it out, teach, give consequences, and provide opportunities to improve. We are lacking in the ability to effectively teach and monitor appropriate behaviour of some players within the system. It is easy to cast blame at the leaders without understanding why they may be leading in the way that they are. They need more help and guidance.

More education programs are needed to teach players, parents and stakeholders about child development and athlete development, as many problems stem from a lack of understanding. Simply having parents, players and stakeholders complete online courses does not mean they understand the concepts, have learned the appropriate values, follow them appropriately or apply them effectively.

The reason this matters is because it's the lack of understanding and application that has led to inappropriate behaviour and governance. Any system applied to the masses has flaws. You simply cannot adequately compare the experiences of the players at the highest level of minor hockey sport participation in Toronto to that of Nova Scotia, northern Ontario or the Prairies as the environments are different.

Provincial sport bodies need to have some flexibility to apply the model. This ambiguity has allowed local sport organizations to apply the rules under the guise of best practices, when in fact it is not in the best interests of children. Well-intentioned adults are missing the key understanding of how athlete development should be applied. Those in charge need to be educated often, evaluated and mentored. I don't believe the people in decision-making leadership positions can do so effectively if not governed properly.

• (1110)

How adults lead sports has to change. More paid positions need to be created. More interdisciplinary teams need to be established. More community partnerships need to be established. More communication channels need to be created. More education programs need to be written and taught, and—

The Chair: Ms. Glover, can you please wrap up?

Ms. Wendy Glover:—more reporting needs to be done.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you. You can elaborate as you get asked questions.

Now we go to Ryan Sheehan, co-founder of Gymnasts for Change Canada.

Mr. Sheehan, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Ryan Sheehan (Co-founder, Gymnasts for Change Canada, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I started gymnastics at the age of three, bouncing off the walls and making my first national team at 11. Since then, I have competed at four world age group championships and at world cups, won the Pan American Championships twice and competed at two world championships.

When I was 15 and 16, I was sexually abused by someone I thought was a national team therapist, doping control officer—the person who watches you urinate while drug testing—and international judge. A few of these experiences are—and I apologize for the language I'm going to use—his telling me that the next time he saw me, I'd better have “my legs, armpits and asshole shaved”; his refusing to give me ice unless he treated my groin, where he told me to “move my dick or he could move it for me” and then put his hand up my gym suit and underwear and groped my genitals twice, only to tell me to ice them; and his telling me and my teammates about his Prince Albert piercing and how long he couldn't have sex for after having it done.

In 2013, his contract with GymCan was “not renewed”, and he went on to work out of a clinic at a gymnastics club, marketing his false qualifications.

In 2019, my coach tried to report to GymCan but was told the matter was no longer in its jurisdiction. I spent a year trying to figure out what professional designation this man actually had. Originally, we were led to believe he was a physiotherapist; he was not. We were then told that he was an athletic therapist, and he hadn't held that designation since 2002.

Ultimately, I lodged a complaint with CCES, which demanded that GymCan do an investigation. I spoke with Gretchen Kerr, who had been the GymCan welfare officer for the past 30 years. I went without an update for 10 months. Finally, she shared with me that four other individuals had come forward detailing their experiences with this man. Kerr's report made no recommendations for sanction or discipline. Instead, I and the others were told to report this matter to the college of massage therapists. We were surprised to discover that this man, who was sent across the world as medical support staff, was merely a massage therapist. This man was never sanctioned by GymCan.

In July 2021, I put out a post on social media saying I had been sexually abused and that my reporting experience with GymCan left me feeling more broken than the abuse itself. Two days later, I was asked to have a call with Ms. Kerr in which she asked me, “Why are you so mad at Gymnastics Canada?” She claimed that I had never filed a formal complaint, so I had no reason to be upset, and that if I was careful about what I posted, she would ensure there would be an outcome that both she and I would be happy with.

After this call with Ms. Kerr, I started planning how to take my own life: the friend I would drop my dog off to while I claimed I needed to go out of town for the weekend, the air conditioning hose I would take to siphon the exhaust from my car into my vehicle, the empty Edmonton transit parking lot I would park in after hours, and the delayed email I would send to my family of where they could find my body.

My call with Gretchen was the ultimate loss of hope. The organization that my family and I entrusted with my physical and mental well-being for two decades could not even do the bare minimum to investigate my case unless forced, and then attempted to silence me.

Finally, 15 years after my abuse, this man signed an undertaking with the massage college for three counts of sexual abuse and agreed to give up his licence “in the best interest of the public”. I have now connected with 19 others who have had sexually abusive experiences with this man.

The recent McLaren report stated that 83% of respondents had a positive experience in gymnastics. I do not disagree with that statistic because the irony of my story is that 99% of my gymnastics experience has been exceptional.

We can hold two truths: that the sport is incredibly important to many of us and that there is a culture in Canadian sport rife with abuse, complicity and enabling that can only begin to be solved by a national inquiry. There were many nights where I felt broken beyond repair. I was not broken by sport; I was abused in sport and broken by the system. As MP Duncan said, it should not take years of therapy to recover from a career in sport; the cost is too high.

Today you will hear multiple examples about a researcher entrenched in the sports system who's influencing the direction of safe sport at every level. Now with an opportunity to support a national inquiry, Gretchen Kerr opposes it. A researcher who doesn't want anyone else to look more closely at corruption in sport, she has said that she already knows everything that anybody needs to know about fixing the sports system, but she doesn't declare a single one of her conflicts of interest. She gets paid millions of dollars to do research on abuse in sport. Her Ph.D. student is the president of AthletesCAN, which appointed Gretchen as its case manager. Gretchen has been the welfare officer at GymCan for over 30 years. She has been in a position to make gymnastics better for 30 years and yet here we are.

This is not the case of a few bad apples and a few people who have enabled them. This is a systemic human rights and abuse crisis across the entire sports system. While we are grateful for the opportunity to share lived experiences in a forum such as this, we are barely scratching the surface of this problem. This is just one of the inappropriate and abusive experiences I have encountered in gymnastics over my career.

It is the height of arrogance to say we already know everything. We call for a national inquiry that can compel testimony and unravel the complexities of funding, conflicts of interest and corruption.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Ms. Kim Shore for five minutes, please.

Ms. Kim Shore (Co-founder, Gymnasts for Change Canada, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thought it was just me whose hips were too fat by age 10, and whose coach went to strippers so that he could tell us how it looked when girls did the splits on glass tables.

I thought it was just me whose coach terrified her into attempting skills—one of which resulted in a broken leg—and who screamed things like, “You're a waste of my time, your mother's money and your own effort.”

Was it just me who was forcibly kissed by a married coach, who then had to miss practices to avoid him, who suffered two grand mal seizures after a training accident that got no medical attention, and who earned a full-ride scholarship to a division I NCAA school, only to give it up to escape a predatory coach who was later banned for life?

I spent my entire childhood in gymnastics. Despite it all, I loved the sport, but I spent many adult years recovering from it—and I am not alone.

In 2018, I joined the GymCan board of directors. It was becoming apparent that gymnastics had serious human rights and child abuse issues to tackle, and I was ready to help. There was interest at first, but then resistance, gaslighting and insults. Eventually, I was told to stand down when I challenged wrongdoing too many times.

Here are some of the highlights.

In 2016, a GymCan board chair was arrested for the possession and distribution of child pornography. He had previously gone to prison in 1992 for child prostitution, and nobody knew.

In 2015 to 2018, executives were informed by staff and others about inappropriate behaviour by multiple coaches. Information was suppressed, and there was a failure to act on their duty to care. The coaches kept coaching, and at least one reoffended.

In 2018, a secret internal investigation led to two executives resigning, one of whom is now a CEO at a different national sport organization.

In 2017, two out of three women's national team coaches were arrested. The third was relieved of his duties in 2019, with the CEO citing, “the gravity of the situation is at a level that I must remove him from his role” as a result of “both formal and informal complaints.” Conversely, the gymnastics community was told he left for personal reasons.

I pushed back many times, to no avail. The welfare officer of 30 years insisted that Gymnastics Canada had received only one formal complaint about his conduct and that it was very unusual to suspend or expel someone based on one complaint.

I still wonder how many complaints it takes to trigger a safe sport investigation. What is a child's safety worth?

In June 2021, I opposed the naming of a coach to team Canada because a formal complaint by an Olympian was still unresolved after eight months. Within days, the case was dropped, with no investigation. The coach went to the Olympics, and I resigned from the board.

This is how gymnastics in Canada has operated for decades. Putting a new CEO in place will not fix it. It's much bigger than gymnastics, and bigger than any one national sport organization. It's a complete failure to do the right thing by children and athletes, while protecting abusers and enablers. If balance of power was a hockey game, the score would be: athletes nothing; sport system everything.

Canadian sport is a tangled web of people. Many of them have failed athletes, but continue to influence developments like the universal code of conduct, the Canadian sport policy and the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, and sit at the minister's roundtable discussions. Is it any wonder that so many athletes don't trust those running our sport system? They are those who also say a national inquiry is not necessary.

Willful blindness, an imbalance of power and undeclared conflicts of interest need to be uncovered and resolved. Adults need to stop choosing to protect their legacy over protecting children. Resistance to a national inquiry needs to be deeply scrutinized. We recommend a national inquiry to interrogate and then repair Canadian sport.

Thank you very much.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Shore.

Now I go to the athletes' association of Canada and Robert Hedges for five minutes, please.

Mr. Hedges is on by video conference.

Mr. Robert Hedges (Secretary, Board of Directors, Athletes' Association of Canada): Thank you for having me here today and thank you to all the panellists here today for their efforts in this space.

I am an active athlete, a four-time Paralympian and I have been on the national team since 2007.

Today I'm here speaking to you on behalf of AthletesCAN, which is the association for Canada's national senior team athletes, founded in 1992 by athletes for athletes. We are an independent organization that is run by athletes for athletes. We pride ourselves on being the collective voice for Canadian national team athletes.

AthletesCAN focuses on ensuring an athlete-centred sport system by developing athlete leaders who influence sport policy and, as role models, inspire a strong sport culture. Our membership comprises active and recently retired athletes who represent Canada at senior world championships and are currently funded by Sport Canada.

I have been on the AthletesCAN board of directors since 2017. I served as vice-president, and I am currently serving as secretary.

Today I will talk to you about two areas: what we have been working on and have accomplished, and what needs to be done in the future to build a safe environment for all members of our sport system.

In 2019, AthletesCAN conducted a study on abuse in sport with over a thousand respondents. Of these, 75% said "yes" to being exposed to at least one potentially harmful behaviour of maltreatment.

Themes that emerged from this study were performance excellence at all costs; normalization of harm; lack of attention to equity, diversity and inclusion; a culture of fear and silence; and lack of trust in organizations to handle cases and investigations. As a result of this study and the themes, AthletesCAN hosted a national safe

sport summit in 2019, where seven consensus statements based on the study and the conversations at the summit were finalized.

Two of the major next steps determined at this summit were to develop a universal code of conduct and to establish an independent third party organization at the national level to conduct investigations. Not only have these two been achieved, but work has been done on the remaining five consensus statements. AthletesCAN has been using the findings of this study and these statements as guidance for our decision-making and work in the safe sport field.

The UCCMS was published in December 2019, with many revisions since then. It is an incredibly important accomplishment for the sport system. In developing a standard for behaviour within sport across Canada, we now have a framework that can be the foundation for all of our initiatives moving forward.

The Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner has also recently been launched. OSIC now being in place, combined with the fact that all NSOs are required to sign on, is a testament to the work that has been done in this space at the national level since our study was conducted in 2019. We still have a long road ahead, but progress has already been made.

AthletesCAN feels that what is most important moving forward is to provide education to all stakeholders in the sport system on the forms of maltreatment within sport. This needs to be provided to all athletes, coaches, high-performance directors, NSO staff, CEOs, MSO staff, technical staff, support staff, medical staff, board members and more. They all need to be involved.

We cannot move forward with preventing future maltreatment unless all stakeholders in the sport system are educated on what it actually means and on the duties that are required of everyone to prevent these forms of behaviour. To do this, we need a full-fledged, multi-level educational system approach that is based on research and the principles within the UCCMS.

We cannot solely rely on it being accomplished through e-learning and resources that people can quickly check off their list by clicking a button. We need a dedicated organization that will take charge of developing, building, distributing and maintaining this educational system across the sports landscape at no additional cost to those who take it.

Lastly, and potentially most importantly, compliance needs to be guaranteed in all of these initiatives moving forward with checks to ensure that NSOs are accountable. This also needs to be true for all policies, programs and agreements already in place within the sport system. We cannot rely on the honour system any more within sport to ensure that all these actions are taken by all involved.

In closing, I would like to add that what I have discussed needs to be implemented nationwide. Though it's technically out of the scope of AthletesCAN, we recognize the need for OSIC or an equivalent to be in place across all jurisdictions in Canada. This applies to the educational system that I outlined today as well.

Thank you all for your time and attention to this important topic.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hedges.

Now the final witness is MacIntosh Ross, assistant professor at Western University, and coordinator of Scholars Against Abuse in Canadian Sport.

Mr. Ross, you have five minutes, please.

Dr. MacIntosh Ross (Assistant Professor, Western University, Scholars Against Abuse in Canadian Sport): Thank you.

My name is MacIntosh Ross. I'm the coordinator of Scholars Against Abuse in Canadian Sport. Together, we're over a hundred professors and dozens of graduate and undergraduate students.

The whole purpose of our group has been to echo and amplify the voices of survivors, voices that, when I and some like-minded colleagues started this organization, we felt were already enough to prompt a national inquiry, but why I am specifically involved hasn't really been discussed publicly. It's really pretty simple.

In listening to the brave survivors who came forward seeking an inquiry, I remembered myself as a little boy, when I was just 10 years old. Much like Gordon Stuckless, the infamous Maple Leaf Gardens abuser, a man I trusted tried to lure me into sexual acts with sport. In my case, he exploited my fandom of the goaltender Patrick Roy. He offered me a hockey card that I could never have possibly afforded if I would simply massage his genitals. I was lucky. I said "no" and I was able to leave, but the damage was done, and the damage is still being done. Every time a survivor is ignored when they call for a national inquiry, that part of me, that little boy, fears that there won't be meaningful and sustainable change to this system.

It took me years to open up to my parents. For sport survivors to come forward, it can be an excruciating experience, but they do it because they want this to stop. They want the next generation of athletes to not have to deal with this anymore. They want there to be a safe space for sport in Canada.

At Scholars Against Abuse in Canadian Sport, there are over a hundred of us who stand in agreement, shoulder to shoulder with survivors, saying that there needs to be a national inquiry and that this is a human rights issue from the grassroots right up to the elite level. The abuse is broad. It's racism, ableism, homophobia and sexism. It's overt and systemic. It's experienced by athletes, coaches, officials and even spectators. It's physical and it's psychological. It's completely out of control.

Sport administrators are not equipped to foster the kind of meaningful sustainable change the system needs. The current abuse crisis in Canadian sport can't be solved by existing mechanisms. It won't be solved by Sport Canada, and it won't be solved by some extension of Sport Canada, because it's not a sports issue. It's a human

rights issue within sport. If I hurt my knee while lecturing, I'm not going to go to another historian for a diagnosis because it happened in a classroom; I'm going to go to a physician.

Sport can't turn to sport right now. It must turn to human rights experts, health professionals and independent legal experts. We know this. I think we all know this. The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children knows this. It's calling for a national inquiry, too, and for good reason.

There's a lot I would like to say, but I'm going to keep it limited. I want to focus on the fact that both the Prime Minister and I are boxers. A lot of people think that boxing is a lonely sport, but that's just not the case. You have your corner tasked with looking out for your best interests.

• (1135)

Politicians, like boxers, sometimes can get caught up in the heat of competition, but sometimes we need our corner to just throw in the towel and save us from ourselves. I hope that Mr. Trudeau would be in the corner of the Canadian people. Throw in the towel on this sport system and save it from itself. It's not an act of surrender. It's not an act of judgment against those involved. It's an act of love—love for athletes, coaches and officials who need you more now than ever. Throw in the towel.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ross.

That brings to an end the witness testimony. We'll move to the question-and-answer segment. The first segment is for six minutes. Each segment includes the questions and answers, so in the interest of time I will ask everyone to be as crisp and clear as they possibly can.

We will begin with the Conservatives and Marilyn Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

I'd especially like to thank you, Ryan, on behalf of the whole committee. We are happy you are here. Sharing your story will prompt real action and give hope to many. Thank you for your testimony today.

To begin, it's clear to me, from looking at all the different witness testimony we've heard, that when people bring forward an accusation of sexual abuse or any kind of situation within the sport, it goes nowhere. There's total protectionism within the sport. There's no action taken. Then they escalate it up to places like OSIC. Nothing happens. It goes to Sport Canada. Nothing happens. It goes to the minister's office. Nothing happens.

It seems clear to me that immediate actions need to be taken, even in advance of a national inquiry, which can take a really long time and cost a lot of money. I was a youth leader for years; I was involved in Sunday school. Whenever there was any kind of allegation of abuse, it went to the police for a report. There was a registry. People would have to go and get checked out by the police to ensure that no complaints had been brought against them in order for them to continue to be in place.

When I hear stories of coaches who have abused and then have moved across the country and gotten another job, and of CEOs who have done nothing when they've seen abuse and gotten another job, it's clear to me that it needs to go outside the sport sphere.

I'll start with you, Ryan. Do you agree with that? What would your view be?

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: Yes, I agree with that. I reported mine to the police. Mine happened in different jurisdictions, so I reported to two different police. One set of police said that my best course of action would be to file a civil suit, and the other one is still ongoing. A lot of these are jurisdictional issues with the police in terms of where it happens. I know for a fact that there were other police reports on my abuser and nobody did anything about it.

I'm not sure how to fix the sport system. I think a lot of the solutions that are offered that aren't a national inquiry are band-aid solutions. We need to look at the NSOs and what's above the NSOs, not just hiring people at an NSO level and hoping it trickles down.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Ms. Shore, I'd be interested to hear you weigh in on this.

Ms. Kim Shore: I have a similar perspective to both of you, with the exception that I think a national inquiry doesn't need to take as long as the way it's been described by many opposers, that it will take so long that it will take away from what they're doing right now.

I think many of the solutions that are being offered could work. Those are, though, very band-aid-like solutions. Until we truly know what's going on above the NSO level, the people who are making it difficult for the likes of board members like me and educators like Wendy to actually make material change, in the policies that are enacted that none of us can live...because they're not supported when we actually go and try to do the right thing.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Very good.

I want to switch gears for a minute and go to you, Ms. Glover. I'm very interested in best practices that we could put in place elsewhere to help prevent future situations of abuse. You're a secondary school teacher and have done work on this. I was interested in what you said about courses and curriculum in education and training.

What would your recommendation be in terms of how we could maybe leverage that for coaches, athletes and leadership?

• (1140)

Ms. Wendy Glover: The way we do it in our program is, for example, something like "respect in sport", which a lot of people have heard of. We don't just have people complete the certification. We actually monitor the kids as they go into the community. We have

feedback, evaluate them and mentor them along the way. It isn't just, "Take a cert and then it's over. You're good. Off you go."

It can be through teachers and the school system. Hire people who can oversee coaches and administrators as they learn how to apply the information. They're not generally trained on how to follow up and effectively see whether they're applying it properly in their community.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you.

Mr. Hedges, you talked about prevention. What would be your recommendations for the committee?

Mr. Robert Hedges: Moving forward—and it was just touched on by Ms. Glover—education and learning how we can teach the sports system to be better is the main thing. Education is good at all levels, as is using whatever resources are already out there to help facilitate and speed up this change.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: It appears to me that OSIC is not working and that Sports Canada is not working. Would witnesses agree that these organizations should be discontinued?

Ms. Shore, go ahead.

Ms. Kim Shore: I believe that we need a complaint mechanism run outside of sports. OSIC was developed by long-tenured sport academics and sport leaders, etc., and they are all in sports. It's being funded by Sport Canada, which is problematic right there, so take it outside of sport.

I spoke to someone who was on some of the original planning committees for the UCCMS and, I believe, OSIC as well. When they were meeting, they were calling for independence from sport, but it got misunderstood by somebody up there who thought independent from sport meant independent from the NSOs, the national sport organizations. What those individuals were calling for was complete independence from all sport, Sport Canada, sport ministry offices and everything. They wanted it outside of the sport umbrella.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I'm out of time.

If the rest of you can submit your answer to the clerk, that would be great.

Thanks.

The Chair: Next is Tim Louis for the Liberals.

Tim, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today, for your courage and for your stories.

I usually take a lot of notes, and I couldn't; it was that emotional.

Ms. Glover, perhaps I'll start with you.

Can you tell us more about how we can better educate those who coach athletes? You seem to be in the perfect situation, anti-harassment and discrimination.... What effective strategies can we improve on?

We hear stories about taking an online course and ticking a box, maybe in person or with certification, but that's not enough.

What could we do to move that needle?

Ms. Wendy Glover: I think we have to have a parent education system and an athlete education system. I have a lot of students who are 16 or 17 who are heading towards exiting the system, and they have no idea that there was a long-term athlete development guideline for their sport. They've been in the sport for 10 years, and they have no idea that you can click Hockey Canada or Canada Soccer and you can read exactly what's supposed to be happening in each age group. They're mind-boggled that they've never even seen it.

Why aren't these things taught to them, taught to the parents and explained clearly? Why isn't the reporting system, as you mentioned, on every organization's website, outlining step by step how you report? If we suspect abuse at school, I know exactly where I have to go and what I have to do, and it would be happening that day.

We're missing filling in the gaps of educating the parents. The reason they misbehave so often is that our athletes are so disillusioned with the process, and they don't understand it.

Mr. Tim Louis: We need to talk about educating the athletes themselves, the parents, then coaches and the administration. Thank you for that. It's very helpful.

How do we respond to those coaches who have been former athletes? They say, "It's always been this way. It was like that for me, and I came out all right." How do we address that issue?

• (1145)

Ms. Wendy Glover: To be honest, that's heard constantly. Because they played, they think they know how to lead. Unfortunately, that's not the case. They're really good at the technical and the tactical side of the sport, but even applying that to particular age groups effectively is where there may be a gap in understanding. Linking child development and the stages of adolescent development to the actual coaching experience and the administrative experience is where I think the gap in understanding is missing. How to teach a 12-year-old a sport is not the same as how you would teach a 15-year-old or an 18-year-old who is exiting the sport.

A lot of professionalization of the sport is happening to children. There are not many pros, and there are not many adults. The lens that they're looking through has to be much more age appropriate at every age group.

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you.

Ms. Shore, to say there's an imbalance is obviously an understatement. We all want to protect and nurture our children, but we also want to give them opportunities to grow and succeed.

At the same time, you talk about creating a culture of creating athletes and pushing them to be elite as opposed to nurturing our children. That starts at a very young age. What's a model so that it can be done in a balanced way? Is there a good example, a jurisdiction, or some way that this can be done in a balanced way?

Ms. Kim Shore: I keep going back to the national inquiry. The only way I can see this happening is for people to have a venue to go and speak to someone who they feel is neutral. I won't speak to anyone who is involved in the sports system right now. I was called out publicly in a national report, because I didn't speak. I was too scared to speak to them for fear that I might be called out.

I think we need to set up a safe structure that looks at sport outside sport, that starts to make some really clear mandates on how we're going to address this. I do think there's a role for the national safe sport policy to come out, to be informed not just by the anecdotal chitchat that's going on, but by evidence that is collected by an outside, call it what you want, "judicial individual". Then you build the sport policy from there. You start to change the culture. You go at the grassroots level, like Wendy is saying, and you educate all the stakeholders.

It is a big process. It is going to take a while. We can do things along the way, but it's going to have to be step by step.

Mr. Tim Louis: Okay. Thank you.

In the final minute that I have, Mr. Sheehan, I want to give you the microphone.

You described it as having a loss of hope, yet you're here. You're here, and hopefully an inspiration to people who are younger than you.

What message of hope can you give to that younger generation that let's them know that you're speaking on behalf of so many people who are not here speaking?

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: I would definitely encourage other survivors to come forward. I think that coming forward is safer than ever, but there still is an incredibly long way to go to come forward and to feel completely safe. There are coalitions. There are scholars. There are a bunch of sports that have these coalitions to work together to bring out stories. I think the time is now. It's every little piece.... I don't know if today I'll make a difference or my testimony will make a difference, but you can't give up on something you love. I love gymnastics. It's been a part of my entire life. I hope this moves it forward in even the slightest way.

Mr. Tim Louis: I assure you that all of your testimony is making a big difference. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I now go to the Bloc Québécois. We have Sébastien Lemire.

You have six minutes, please, Sébastien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their extremely poignant testimony. It helps us learn more about safe sport.

I see that the people in the room are also calling for an independent public inquiry, because in many cases, the existing system is only there to protect itself. For that reason, it hasn't been able to deliver justice.

I'd like to start with Mr. Hedges of AthletesCAN.

Mr. Hedges, I assume you watched the testimony given on Thursday for this committee's study, as well as the testimony presented to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

As a member of the AthletesCAN board of directors, how are you reacting to today's testimony?

What steps does your board plan to take in response to what was said today, particularly with regard to the abuse suffered by athletes?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Hedges: Can you be a little bit more specific?

Generally, in the safe sport field, is that what you're asking?

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Are these issues that your board of directors is considering?

Based on what I see, AthletesCAN receives a lot of governmental or financial resources, or consulting resources. Your organization gets a lot of credibility, but when the time comes to act, it's pretty passive. There seems to be a close relationship between your board and Ms. Kerr, of the University of Toronto, and ITP Sport. It seems like things often go in circles and just uphold the status quo.

I'm struggling to see how you're part of the solution.

When you hear the kind of testimony we heard today, does it make you reflect on what you could do to take action?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Hedges: Thank you for clarifying it.

Yes, at AthletesCAN we listen to all of these testimonies. We are working in the field. As I mentioned, we've conducted studies. We are—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, there's no interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll pause for a second, please, and find out what's going on.

Thank you.

Mr. Robert Hedges: Would you like me to start again from the top?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Yes, please. The interpretation is working now.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Hedges: At AthletesCAN our board works, yes, to hear and talk to as many athletes as possible, and then try to instill change. We work in the safe sport field. But we also work in many different areas in terms of what active athletes are looking for, such as funding, increased funding, athlete agreements and governance. All of those types of things we are looking to teach and build in those avenues, not just in the safe sport field. However, the safe sport field is critical at this time within sport.

Ms. Kerr has no influence over what our board is doing. She does research at different points in time, but in terms of the day-to-day activities of AthletesCAN, she does not influence what we are doing in that way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: How much money has AthletesCAN paid to Ms. Kerr in the last five years, for research or whatever else?

Can you provide that information?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Hedges: I cannot, off the top of my head. I would have to look into the resources. Oftentimes, she just partners with us if we do solicit a researcher, but I don't know what the monetary value is there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I'd also like to know about your relationship with the athletes. As we know, about 15 sports have parted ways with your organization.

How is your organization reacting to all these requests to cut ties and these displays of no confidence?

Has the board of directors had any discussions about finding solutions and course correcting?

That would help maintain athletes' trust in your organization.

[English]

Mr. Robert Hedges: As an organization, we try to talk to all of the groups that come forward. We've talked to bobsleigh and rowing. We've reached out to different gymnastics groups in the past, roughly a year ago. We try and support them online. As we move forward, we're always looking to improve what we do as an organization.

You mentioned that we get a fair amount of resources. Really, up until this last year and a half, we had one and a half staff members, so we do not have a lot of staff. Our board is made up of volunteers, and many of us work at it like a part-time job for free.

We are always trying to do as much as we can with the limited resources we have. We know we're not perfect, but we are working to try and make a better landscape in the sports field.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You commissioned a report on maltreatment and abuse that surveyed 1,000 athletes. That study was conducted by Erin Wilson and Ms. Kerr.

What were the findings of that study?

Obviously, the central issue is the need for athletes to have a safe space where they can talk about their experiences, in order to change things in society. That's very important for making sport safe and healthy. There needs to be a review of sport participation.

Are you in favour of an independent commission of inquiry?

Today, several witnesses have called for a commission of inquiry, and we've been hearing similar calls for months. More and more athletes' federations are calling for one.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Robert Hedges: To answer the first part of your question about what was found, I alluded to the findings at the beginning of my remarks. They included: performance excellence at all costs; normalization of harm; lack of attention to equity, diversity and inclusion; a culture of fear and silence; and the lack of trust in organizations to handle the cases. Those were the major themes that emerged from that study, and the last one is definitely one of the biggest roadblocks, as the other panellists have mentioned.

If the athletes do not feel there's an avenue for them to lodge their complaint, and feel comfortable in that, then there's no avenue for them. They feel hopeless. We need an organization that they can go through to do that. OSIC is what we have at this point. It hasn't been in place long enough, I don't think, to fully judge it, but it's similar to the CCES.

The Chair: Please wrap up, Mr. Hedges. Thank you.

Mr. Robert Hedges: For the final part of your question, we are not against a national inquiry. We are trying to work with what is there now, and that's why we're focusing on education and governance.

The Chair: I will now go to the New Democrats and Peter Julian, for six minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you to our witnesses, and particularly Mr. Sheehan and Ms. Shore. Words can't express how sorry we are for what you, and so many other athletes, have been through.

We have a system that has allowed predators and abusers to game the system with impunity, and there has been no reaction up until now from the federal government, or from federal agencies, to change that situation. We have to develop and put into place safe sports in this country. We're all wedded to that.

This committee has been working in a non-partisan way to find solutions. I am profoundly saddened by what you've told us today. In my mind, it just reiterates the importance for us to move forward.

We've seen a number of organizations that simply failed at their task. Gymnastics Canada seems to be one of those. It had the resignation of Ian Moss, the CEO. It had the egregious and appalling cases of Alex Bard and Scott McFarlane, and so many others.

Do you have any confidence that Gymnastics Canada is putting into place what is needed now to protect, and provide for safe sports? If not, what does Gymnastics Canada need to do to have your confidence?

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: Personally, I do not have confidence in Gymnastics Canada.

Ian allegedly resigned, but we weren't given a date for when he's actually resigning. He was also the high-performance director at GymCan, so he chose people for national teams and was in charge of a lot of national team issues. I don't know what his deal is, entirely. There was a safe sport person at GymCan for a couple of years, but she left. I believe that was in September 2001. After that, for a few years, all the safe sport complaints were to go directly to Ian.

I don't have confidence. If he leaves, he takes a ton of knowledge and information with him, which we will never get. The board currently in place has been there for a long time. Some of those members are new. When Ian resigned, they approved a statement saying, "Thank you so much for your service. You've done so much for safe sport."

Mr. Peter Julian: Go ahead, Ms. Shore.

Ms. Kim Shore: I echo what Ryan said.

In my hand, here, I'm holding the statement of a young survivor who was raped by her coach in the bathroom of the gym facility when she was seven years old. When she was a teenager, he returned to the gym after he'd been in prison, convicted of sexual offences against other children—not her, though. In 2015, she filed a complaint with the police. Not one of the coaches or leaders in her province came forward. No one would tell the truth. They all turned a blind eye and worked together to protect each other. Many of the coaches who knew he was in the gym with her are coaching at the national team level. They're still operational, and they work together to protect a guy who had already been to jail, so he was a known predator. Because she didn't get anywhere with the police, she put a civil case together and spent eight years.... This month, she was supposed to have her hearing. Six weeks before the hearing, all the defendants agreed to a settlement. They finally acknowledged wrongdoing happened.

However, it's the betrayal of the system. She told us—it's similar to what Ryan said today—that the betrayal of the system and of those whom she thought she could trust to come to her aid was more damaging than being raped as a seven-year-old.

I think the people developing all of our policies, from the very top of the sport chain down, need to recognize the dire harm they're causing. The negligence and conflicts of interest.... I don't want to name-call, because some people are well intentioned. Perhaps they've lost their way. I'd like to hope they are not evil people.

We are seeing the same people you had here last week, frankly, profiting off abuse in the sport. Perhaps they're doing some good work. I don't know who's doing the good work and who isn't, but some are profiting off the fact that the status quo is not changing and abuse continues. If there is no abuse, how are you going to research abuse? If all we need is education—if that's the only recommendation that comes out of the committees I've testified at—all the people doing the education are going to make a lot of money. However, they're just guessing at what, exactly, needs to be done. Even if those educators are well intentioned, we need them to be informed by evidence. We aren't going to tell our evidence to any of the researchers who have been in front of any of these committees.

• (1200)

Mr. Peter Julian: These horrific stories are why you're calling for a national inquiry, and why we need to reboot our sports in Canada: so they can be based on safe sports. We have fallen so far from what we need to put in place.

Ms. Kim Shore: These stories represent systemic failure.

We don't want to trot out survivors to tell the awful, embarrassing things that Ryan and I had to say today. We don't want any more people to have to do that. We want the stories to represent information that will inform how our system is failing us, then go above that and see how the funding models and the relationships among all the different agencies are failing us. The agencies might be good, themselves, but there are individuals in them who....

I worked with a CEO whom I know hid a couple of abuse situations, over the years. They've all been around for 20 years or more. If you hide one thing in your past, then the safe sport stuff starts to surface, you're not saying anything. You're doing everything you can, from that day on, to cover up what happened and that you

might have misjudged, instead of coming forward and saying, “You know what? I made a mistake five years ago. I let a guy off and I shouldn't have”, or, “I should have been harder with the sanction, and I wasn't.”

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shore.

I'll go to the second round. It's a five-minute round. We begin with, for the Conservatives, Martin Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I very much appreciate it, having been a volunteer coach in the community and having organized coaching in schools.

Ms. Glover, there's a piece here we're missing—it's the parents. I'm very familiar with a parent who went to the organization. The organization referred her to a third party.

She's now been to the police, who agree with her complaint. The third party organization is now dealing with it, but the original organization has washed their hands of it. She and her child have been revictimized.

What about the parents in this? How do we deal with this so that they're not revictimized? The amount of guilt they're now suffering for not having taken care of or protected their child is re-emphasized.

Ms. Wendy Glover: This goes beyond what I'm able to address, which is why everybody's meeting—

Mr. Martin Shields: You mentioned parents, though, a couple of times. That's why I'm asking you.

Ms. Wendy Glover: —and educating with regard to the process of going through the sport and what is actually appropriate per age group. The reporting systems that are in place are not clear, and I've said that.

As a parent who did raise children through sport, I wouldn't even know where to find that information myself. As an educator in school, as I've mentioned, it is very clear what I would do if I suspected or was told of a student who had experienced abuse.

There's a disconnect between how we help them in sport and.... I don't know how to answer that question, which is why we're here looking for help with that.

• (1205)

Mr. Martin Shields: I think that's a critical piece in a sense, and I don't know if any of the other witnesses today want to weigh in.

You've told the stories, but what about your family? What about your siblings? What about your parents? What has this done to them?

Ms. Kim Shore: Well, I am a parent of a gymnast. Because I loved the sport, I allowed my daughter to try it. She fell in love with it and was abused physically, emotionally and psychologically. She continues to live in chronic pain with a wrist injury.

I put in a complaint with Gymnastics Canada while I was a board member and said, "Please don't give me any special treatment," and there were four or five other families from the same club who put in a complaint with me.

I didn't hear anything for eight or nine months. Then I got a call from ITP saying, "I need you to rewrite your complaint on the formal sheet and cite numerically the aspects of the policy you think every one of those coaches violated." I burst into tears instantly, even though I'm supposed to be this educated.... You know, I helped make some of the policies at GymCan—

Mr. Martin Shields: You're the parent.

Ms. Kim Shore: —and it was totally overwhelming. I live with the guilt every day that I let my daughter try that sport.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: It took me about 12 years to tell my parents remotely what happened, and even then, I definitely downplayed it. When I put out my post on social media, that's when they learned the details of it. I feel most bad for my parents because they noticed a shift about 15 years ago when the abuse started. The light went out in their son's eyes one day, and it's never come back. They've watched me for the last four years trying to build my life back and trying to get some light back in my eyes. I told them not to watch today. They don't know all the details of this, but I'm sure they will see it at some point.

The ripple effect of abuse is not just on the person. It's on my coach. It's on my teammates. When I show up to a meet, I'm a pariah now, but that affects a lot of people. That affects my club. That affects my family. That affects my friends. It's a long-reaching issue for one case of abuse.

Mr. Martin Shields: The parent I spoke of has now been isolated from the other parents because none of them would go further, and she's left standing. She's isolated, which makes it very difficult with the processes we have. Even though an organization has a structure and a stand-alone place to go to, the parent is left out there very much in a place of isolation. How do we solve that?

Ms. Kim Shore: The sanctions are based on only the one complaint, even if there are other witnesses, so that's part of the problem. They then get a two-year suspension for having harmed a child in ways that could last for years and years. The coach gets two years, because they only looked at one complaint, even if there were five witnesses. That really should have been five complaints, and maybe they should have gotten 10 years.

Who's making the decision on how much sanctions time these people are getting?

I can tell you, I will be 52 years old in two days, and the harm I went through then...I thought I had recovered from it, because I was out of the sport, but when I got back in and involved in the sport and saw that it was systemic and that my daughter was now experiencing it.... I thought I could fix it for her, so I was in there, working at the club every day, trying to educate coaches. I did provincial seminars and all the things. I joined boards with Gymnastics Canada, and I still couldn't make change.

It was just better to pull all my family out.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We'll go to the Liberals with Lisa Hepfner for five minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I want to echo my colleagues in thanking you all for this really important, emotional and difficult testimony that you're sharing today.

Mr. Sheehan, I'm also echoing my colleagues and saying I'm really glad you made it through those terrible, difficult, dark times to be here today to share your stories and help us effect change.

I want to flag for the committee that even as early as last week, Minister St-Onge said it's not a question of whether there will be an inquiry, but what kind of inquiry it will be and how it will be structured. I think it's really important that we narrow down some of these cultural issues that we're seeing, because it's not just gymnastics, it's not just soccer and it's not just hockey.

One thing we talked about in this committee is the idea that sports organizations are really focused on winning and propping up the athletes who, at a young age, show extraordinary talent, and pushing athletes to go beyond what's healthy. They do this, instead of focusing on sport as something that everyone should do because it's fun, it's healthy and it promotes socialization, and there so many other intellectual and physical benefits.

I will start with you, Ms. Glover. What do you think about that idea that in sport in general, we're not focusing on the right things?

• (1210)

Ms. Wendy Glover: Thank you for saying that. That's exactly what's happened in the last 10 to 15 years, like we said earlier...trying to change youth sports into a breeding ground for the elite. It's supposed to be the long-term athlete development model, which enables everyone to play sport. There's social development, emotional, physical, team-building and a love of their sport. There are pathways to eventually become elite at that sport for the 5% who may move on past U18 or U21, and the fewer than 1% who may make money at that sport.

We seem to be able to move this professionalization of the sport younger and younger, and have moved away from, exactly as you mentioned, why you are playing the sport. It's celebrating the friendships and celebrating good coaches who want kids to come back year after year.

We have focused on the win-loss records and the shaming of teams if they are not at the top of their tiers. It has been to the detriment of the kids. The increased social media use of sharing results of teams, and highlights of players and athletes under the age of 18....

I don't know how it has been allowed, either, to constantly post children online. Other parents and associations...I'm not sure where they have permission to be doing that, because if you're highlighting one child's success on that sport that day, you're actually highlighting the failure of another. What is that doing to them?

There's a looking-glass, like a fishbowl, and they are constantly being evaluated. They're trying to move up or move down. They're assessed. There's a heightened sense of competitiveness, even in the lower levels.

In particular, I don't agree with what I call Halloween. Why are they dressing up like pro athletes when they are 12 and 13 years old? Other sports don't do this. You don't go to a swim meet, wear your suit and get pictures. You don't go to a volleyball tournament and post all kinds of things about looking like a pro athlete. We have moved that younger and younger. With the psychological development of children, and the identity versus role confusion that happens as a teen, you're messing with that.

Instead of developing athletes who are playing sports as something they do, you're tying it to their identity by calling them a soccer player, or a basketball player, which needs to be separated.

I'm sorry. I will finish there.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: That was a great answer. Thank you.

Not only does it affect the athletes who stay in sports, but I think it ostracizes a lot of kids. A lot of kids feel that sports aren't for them. They don't like any sports, they don't feel like they belong and they can't play.

I only have a minute left, but I do want to turn to Mr. Hedges.

You mentioned that OSIC should also be applied at a provincial and territorial level. I wonder if you would expand on that, please.

Mr. Robert Hedges: OSIC, or a form of it, needs to be nationwide. There needs to be a reporting mechanism for the grassroots. We can't have it just at the national level.

I don't really know the specifics of how that would look. It's out of our scope at AthletesCAN, but it has been talked about before. There needs to be some sort of reporting mechanism for all levels, so that we don't have, as was mentioned before, coaches or staff members who are working at a club somewhere and then leave—because nobody wants to prosecute them—and go join a club across the country.

Those types of reporting mechanisms need to happen so that there is a paper trail or a registry of some sort, so that we can now eliminate those people from the sports system.

• (1215)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you.

The Chair: We now go to Sébastien Lemire for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Shore, I think Sport Canada takes Ms. Kerr very seriously.

Could you tell us about her role at Gymnastics Canada and your experience with her?

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: My experience with her in particular was pretty harsh, I would say. Initially, I thought she was a person who was going to help me and be the person to do all of this.

She's been the GymCan athlete welfare officer for over 30 years. In my opinion, gymnastics has not gotten safer in 30 years, so I question what her role in that has been. I think her confidence last week to say that she knows everything and that they already have the solutions....

I didn't hear any solutions and I still don't.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: In politics, you can often gauge how seriously something is taken by the amount of funding it gets. Ms. Kerr receives a lot of money in grants from the federal government, but based on what she told this committee last week, she's not in favour of holding an independent public inquiry, because it would cost too much and we already have that data.

What's your opinion?

[*English*]

Ms. Kim Shore: As Ryan said in his speech, it's the height of arrogance to say that we know everything. I agree that she's done a tremendous amount of research on athlete abuse. She's defined it and she's identified it, but that doesn't help us with the system necessarily. We can all agree that there is abuse in the system.

Where I was troubled, as a board member, was that the harassment officer role at GymCan—I think it could be similar in other sport organizations—was a volunteer position, from what I understood. There was no oversight. There was no accountability for the person in that role. It's almost like the role was built around someone they thought they could trust decades ago. The role evolved; the sport got worse.

I don't know if she or anyone in that role would ever feel pressured by a CEO to not say certain things. I outlined at least three instances in my testimony where I thought someone who was going to have the moral courage to stand up for athletes would have done so, but in fact, she or they—I don't know exactly—decided to not even do a safe sport investigation. They decided to handle it like an HR complaint.

The problem with that is then that coach actually went out into the community and started telling people he was let go for safe sport reasons. The CEO of GymCan had already put a statement out telling the community it was personal reasons. Then he was allowed to coach at other clubs because we hadn't done a safe sport investigation that would have likely labelled him inappropriate.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shore.

I'm sorry to cut you off, but I have to keep watching that clock and I have to keep everyone on time. I feel really terrible having to cut you off when you are speaking about your own survivor issues and about the harms that were done to you.

Now I'm going to go to Mr. Julian.

You have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sheehan, it saddens me greatly that you use the term “pariah” to describe when you go to gymnastic events. I think this is another by-product of a toxic system where whistle-blowers and survivors are treated as troublemakers.

Could you comment on the importance of the public inquiry so that people right across this country understand the systemic horrors that we've seen with Hockey Canada, Canada Soccer, Gymnastics Canada and so many other national sports organizations? The public inquiry brings that to light so that we as a society can contend with what has happened to survivors and what has happened to the victims.

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: I think a national inquiry would bring to light a lot of these issues. There are still so many stories that are underground. Like I said, since my story went public, I've connected with 19 others who have had similar experiences with this man alone. They're not willing to come forward. Some of them have been threatened with their lives for coming forward. Some of them are—

● (1220)

Mr. Peter Julian: They are threatened by whom?

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: This abuser in particular has been known to abuse firearms. I connected with one survivor who said that his reluctance in coming forward was that he's seen this man use firearms inappropriately. That's the reason for his reluctance in coming forward.

That started a system of my connecting with my coach to see how late I can register for certain competitions so that people don't necessarily know where I am. Elite Canada was last weekend, and I didn't attend, because I was worried about my safety.

There's still a system in place at an NSO level that does not protect athletes. It's an old boys' club in a lot of ways. They sit there and protect each other.

Mr. Peter Julian: Have you been threatened directly, or is it an implicit threat that you're concerned about?

Mr. Ryan Sheehan: It's implicit.

Mr. Peter Julian: I want this to go to Ms. Glover, Mr. Ross and Mr. Sheehan. How important is it to have the public inquiry for that very reason, what Mr. Sheehan and Ms. Shore have spelled out in terms of victims and revictimization?

Dr. MacIntosh Ross: I would say that it's incredibly important, because the vast majority of athletes across the country are afraid to come forward because they're not sure how their testimony, their allegations, will be handled and whether they'll be taken seriously. We know that there is retribution when athletes come forward. They put their whole careers on the line when they do this, so there's a lot riding on it. You don't throw it away, but you're really putting a lot of trust in people who probably don't deserve it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now go to Kevin Waugh for the Conservatives for five minutes.

Go ahead, Kevin.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm going to pick up on that, if you don't mind, Mr. Ross.

I was in Saskatchewan on the Graham James incident. The two names, Sheldon Kennedy and Theoren Fleury, have never had.... They're going through hell even today, 20 years later.

It's not about Graham James; it's about Theoren Fleury and Sheldon Kennedy. Wherever they appear, everybody links them, but James gets nothing. He gets to walk away. He moved away from Canada and went coaching. It's all about Fleury and Sheldon. I feel sorry for them, because they will take that to their graves, both of them.

Do you want to comment on that, Mr. Ross?

Dr. MacIntosh Ross: Yes, that's a really difficult part of all this. When you go public about something as traumatizing as abuse, whether that's sexual abuse or whether it's something else, like Akim Aliu's coming forward about racism in the Greater Toronto Hockey League.... Now he's constantly asked about racism in that hockey league and about trying to break down barriers, when I'm sure he'd rather just focus on creating opportunities for young people to play hockey. The same goes for so many advocates.

To some degree, we have to keep bringing it up. We have to keep on building these coalitions and these advocacy groups, but I don't think we can underestimate how much pressure we put on people when they do come forward and what that means. They know that when they come forward. That's why it's so important, when they come to groups like this or other groups, that we're really ready to take action based on their testimony and not just hear it and file it away on a shelf.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I agreed last week with Teresa Fowler from the University of Alberta.

This where I have problems with the Sport Integrity Commission. OSIC is top down when we need to go the other way—grass-roots up. We're not doing it in this country.

I'll start with gymnastics, if you don't mind, Kim or Ryan, if you want to comment on that, because we're all looking for volunteers: "Oh, you have a live body. Bring him in. Get a police check quickly and get him in there." Right...? Every sport suffers from that that.

Could we have your comments on that? I love the comments that everybody has made today, but we have to go from the grassroots up. It is the only way that we're going to succeed in this country.

Ms. Kim Shore: I want to say one quick thing about the national inquiry. My hope would be that recommendations for legislative change would come out of that inquiry, which we have no research on.

You brought up background checks, Mr. Waugh. They are sorely lacking. There is a disconnect between the RCMP system and the municipal system. Predators can slip through the system as easily as that.

Also, it costs money to get those checks done. I sat on a provincial board where the coaches and judges were really reluctant to have to get re-evaluated every couple of years because it costs them personal money, and they aren't really making enough money anyway.

Changes to child protection in our legal system would be a recommendation that I hope might help.

• (1225)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay.

I will go to Ms. Glover.

I have a situation in my province right now with a young kid by the name of Connor Bedard. Wherever he goes, people are there. His mom and dad, Tom and Melanie, have been with him, but, as stated:

...However, with great fame comes great scrutiny, and Connor's rapid rise to stardom has raised concerns about his privacy.

Recently, Connor's mother, Melanie, spoke out about the invasive behaviour of some fans. She described how people would wait outside their home, take pictures of them, and even trespass on their property to scream for Connor. Melanie also shared she had to turn off her phone for days due to the overwhelming number of messages she has received.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. Wendy Glover: He is an outlier, one of the greatest stars who's going to be going into the National Hockey League, and very

shortly, it seems. Unfortunately, he's an example of fandom gone wild.

It filters down to younger age groups as well. They see that. They aim for that.

How do you protect his privacy? Again, I wouldn't have the first clue on how you can prevent people from acting inappropriately and doing this. They want to see him. They're going to be inappropriate.

Unfortunately, we are connected through social media. She'll have to continue to cut down her access on her social media platforms, because people think they have the right to connect with those people in sport.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The time is up on that one.

I will go to Michael Coteau for the Liberals for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I want to start by thanking all of our witnesses here today. I know that coming into a public forum and sharing such personal stories is a big challenge. I want to thank each and every one of you for your strength and your continued advocacy.

Personally, I support some type of inquiry. The stories we've heard are very compelling. I don't know how that inquiry would look. I wanted to take a moment—maybe we can start with Ms. Shore—and just ask, if it did proceed, what would an inquiry look like to you?

Ms. Kim Shore: Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate that.

I'm not an expert in national inquiries, other than I know that we have them.

I think I speak for most of the advocacy groups. If we could do an inquiry that is crafted outside of the sports jurisdiction, with human rights and child protection experts sitting at the table, and with the voices of survivors who have not yet been consulted, that would be a first good step towards producing something.

If we have to do it in parts, we'll take it any way we can get it right now. If we need to do it part by part, look at it department by department, or federal versus provincial versus local, etc., let's just put the plan together and then price it and see how we can actually do it.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Right. I'll ask Dr. Ross the same question.

Dr. MacIntosh Ross: In Canada, and with regard to sport, it's a bit unique in that we have had a ton of positive collaboration between the federal government and the provinces. The downside is that most of the collaboration has come for the purpose of elite sport in pursuing medals.

You could argue that our obsession with winning at all costs led us to embracing Own The Podium, which funnels money into just a small number of athletes, and creates a very much "win at all costs" attitude. However, the good part of that is we already have these existing relationships between the federal government and the provinces, when it comes to sport.

If we can do this, in terms of competing internationally and developing long-term athlete development, and things like that, surely we can dedicate the same kind of co-operation and collaboration, collaborative federalism, toward protecting athletes at all levels in this country.

• (1230)

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

Ms. Glover, you talk a lot about education. I know you have experience within the education system, but also within the sport sector. I've always argued there's been a massive disconnect in this country between our public education system and sport system. The divides not only work at that level, but there's also a huge divide between the provinces and the federal government.

From your unique perspective, is there value in looking for ways to bringing the system closer together, especially at the education of JK to 12, and the sport sector as a whole?

Ms. Wendy Glover: Absolutely. That is one of the reasons why I'm able to, within the job I have, teach the sport systems to the athletes who sit in front of me.

Your provincial governments can deliver this type of information through courses that are in their high schools already. We can put them in younger grades if we want to. We have the ability to revise the curriculum and adjust it. Again, it would have to be, like Mac mentioned, through the provincial governments, because they handle education.

There are so many sport schools that are run through the B.C. school system that are not available to us in Ontario. Quebec has CEGEP. Students get extra time in school, and get an extra year in school.

There are different ways, within each province, that you can do this, absolutely, because my students are in it, and we've educated almost 600 in these sport models. They are well aware of Sport for Life and Respect in Sport. They take 10-15 certifications. We mentor them. They go off into the communities. They're coaching. They're leading in sport, and they're circling back for constant evaluation and mentorship. It can be done through schools.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

The Chair: I will now go to a third round, and Martin Shields for the Conservatives. You have five minutes.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I'll ask a question, and then I'll split my time with Dr. Kitchen.

Ms. Glover, I have seen that there are protocols in place in the education system. As you mentioned, if abuse happens, there's reporting. If it happens that day, everybody knows about it, and the proper protective services are brought in.

Help me understand, how did those excellent protocols get into place? Did the province edict them into the education system, or did they come from the teachers' unions?

Ms. Wendy Glover: I have no idea. I just know that if I'm made aware of something, I know exactly what I'm supposed to do, and I wouldn't go home that day until it was addressed to the people that it needed to be addressed to, and then there's follow-up after.

I would assume that it was from the province down to the local school board. Maybe that's the case, but I wouldn't know—

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I'm going to verify that, because that's a critical part of this.

Dr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and sharing their stories with us. It's greatly appreciated.

I'm on the health committee as well, and one of the studies we've been dealing with is basically on children's health. A lot of what we've talked about is sports, about the value of sports and the great need of sports for our youth. We see it so many times. I have a four-year-old granddaughter who's in gymnastics right now. She just loves it, because she's so active. The reality is, where do we start? As parents and grandparents, we sit there and....

Granted, I got my kinesiology degree before I did my doctorate. I did a specialty in sports medicine. The reality is that I have that background, but the average Canadian doesn't have that information. They don't have a clue. The parents don't know. They're putting their children into these programs in all sports, whether it's gymnastics or swimming or whatever, and the assumption is that the people who are teaching them and mentoring them as they move forward have those levels and are continuing to do that.

I was the regulator for the chiropractor profession in Saskatchewan and then nationally. The reality is that we regulate our professions. How do we regulate our coaches, our trainers and our administrators? Do you have any suggestions along those lines?

• (1235)

Ms. Wendy Glover: I do. Thank you so much for asking that.

I constantly refer back to swimming lessons. You don't usually join a swim team until you get to a certain level of your swimming lessons. We go into sport and, as you said, it's the Wild West. We're not making sure that some of the kids have the technical skills to move up in the sport appropriately. There are reporting systems for each sport to assess kids, but they don't do it. We need to actually assess the kids and let everybody know what's happening.

As you're implying, we're asking a lot of volunteers. You don't go to swimming lessons and not pay the lifeguards or instructors, so you're asking the volunteers who don't have the background to be teaching the skills that they may or may not be able to effectively teach.

For example, in hockey, are they doing CanSkate before they are actually playing hockey games? Skills coaches in hockey are brought in to kind of supplement the program, but it's not mandated. I would think that you should probably have proper skating skills before you're involved in getting hit and checking in the sport.

There are things that I would change and put into place to keep them safer physically, but I don't want to take too much time here.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you for that.

I coached hockey all the way up to AA midget. I coached soccer and other sports because of my background. I did my Canadian athletic...but the reality is that, as a coach, at no time did anyone actually talk to me about any of that part.

As we move forward, we look at mental health. In particular, for Ryan and Kim, it's the mental health that's impacting them in terms of what they've experienced. The federal government put out in December \$2.8 million to increase the mental health literacy of coaches and sport leaders. The Public Health Agency of Canada put that forward. They ultimately had \$100 million. What about putting out that information and using that money for our athletes so that people like Ryan and Kim can have some steps and some training such that there's an avenue you could follow as you move forward?

Do you have any thoughts on that, Ryan or Kim?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Kim Shore: Quickly, I would just say that the money would be better spent towards a national inquiry so that we could develop a proper framework rather than just send piecemeal money.

I had the experience as a parent where the coaches emailed us and said, "You must send your child to practice whether they're sick or not. We will decide how to remedy or change their assignment for the day—unless they're vomiting or have a fever." So when my daughter was too exhausted or injured to go to gymnastics, I would literally check what I wrote the last time. Oh, I picked vomiting a couple of weeks ago? This time I'll say she has a fever and can't come to practice—because she's eight years old and doesn't trust that you're going to modify her practice.

Parents are groomed out of their own control. Even if we have education, we still have to change the culture.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shore. I think we have to move on now.

We'll go to Chris Bittle for the Liberals.

Chris, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you very much.

We started this inquiry on Hockey Canada. It's gone on from there, and rightfully so. When we were dealing with Hockey Canada, my own personal impression was that we didn't address enough what was going on in the CHL.

Ms. Glover, you're there. I know that you're not the general manager of the London Knights, and these decisions aren't yours, but with a situation like Logan Mailloux, how does your organization address someone who has come to it and who hasn't necessarily committed a crime, per se, and has been suspended by the NHL? As a teacher and as someone who's looking to make sport safer—I take you at your word—how do you address this situation?

Ms. Wendy Glover: I address this situation in the way that I would if I was teaching a student at my school who experienced difficulty and needed support, guidance and discipline.

As I work with kids as they age through high school, it's very common for students to make mistakes. They are adolescents. The prefrontal cortex is developing. They are plus or minus four years from their chronological age in regard to physical, intellectual or social maturity.

I look at the student in front of me as an individual. How do we evaluate and develop your value system? How do we fill the gaps in what you may be missing?

It is no different from the 500 students I have mentioned who have already gone through my program. I take them for what's in front of them and how to help them move forward.

• (1240)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Do other OHL clubs have an individual like yourself helping out?

Ms. Wendy Glover: Other OHL clubs have an academic adviser, for sure. I think my particular area of education and what I do as a day job is quite unique, since I am involved in the sports community. As well, I teach values and social and emotional learning through sport.

For the certifications that we talk about, we do all kinds of them. Besides respect in sport, we do understanding teen dating violence, communication, conflict resolution and leadership, etc. It's a bit of a unique program. The other teams probably wouldn't have somebody on staff who is able to look at the players through a more holistic lens, as I do.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Looking up an article, I see in The London Free Press that the individual—it's clearly the team's PR and the newspaper picking it up—is an “on-ice leader after adversity”. It doesn't mention the suspension or the goings-on at all. That's kind of washed away.

Is that redemption possible?

Ms. Wendy Glover: That's not for me to decide.

As I said, I work with the kids who are in front of me. If I was working with this student at school, it would be private. We don't share information about students under the age of 18 on indiscretions that they may have at school, or on suspensions or various disciplines that students always have in a high school.

As for what they are doing and what the league is doing, that's not what I am privy to. I stay in my lane.

Mr. Chris Bittle: What is the impact of billeting?

We've talked about parental responsibilities. If we're sending young, impressionable, developing kids away to an environment that is about winning at all costs, which we have also discussed, what is the impact of that? How do we mitigate the loss of that direct parental supervision?

Ms. Wendy Glover: I think it's extremely challenging to move kids away. The last two years of high school are difficult for an adolescent who is, as I mentioned earlier, trying to establish their identity, place, friendships and what they may or may not be doing after the age of 18.

The situation is very difficult because the sport itself is different from, say, swimming, archery, tae kwon do, gymnastics or whatever the case is. I can't think of a different sport—correct me if I'm wrong—where you are playing on a team with players who are one step from the NHL or actually signed in the NHL, or one year away from playing in adult recreation leagues perhaps, at the age of 21.

It's very difficult for the players to be in that situation where they are very close to pursuing dreams, but also very close to seeing that the doors are closing in that respect.

Living in the billet situation without the day-to-day with their families is challenging. However, they are willing to do it. My own children did it. It's a risk that many want to take.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we go to Sébastien Lemire for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Mr. Ross of Scholars Against Abuse in Canadian Sport.

In the open letter you published over the holidays, you wrote:

The establishment of the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner (OSIC) in June 2022 is not a solution. Without complete independence from Canada's sport authorities, the OSIC will always lack the powers necessary to resolve this crisis. The OSIC is an inadequate response to the toxic culture of abuse. It lacks the necessary independence, capacity, authorities, expertise, and mandate to conduct an inquiry of the breadth and depth required.

Could you please elaborate?

[*English*]

Dr. MacIntosh Ross: Yes. My primary problem with OSIC is that it's very reactionary, and I think I speak for many of the scholars involved in our group. Something bad has to happen—first—for OSIC to get involved. What we talked about, in the letter to the Prime Minister, was getting ahead of things and trying to be preventative and shift a culture that is already, as you said, very toxic.

We can't do that by simply reacting to individual cases all the time. We have to react to those cases—we need a reporting mechanism in place—but, at the same time, we need something more robust that can actually shift things in a meaningful way. We could all look at it and be happy about it, and athletes could put their faith in it. Every time you see one of those letters come out on “Fencers for Change” or “Figure Skaters for Change”, it's because a lot of athletes don't have faith in the sport system, right now. They have to take another route. They don't trust the people up the ladder to report these things. If that's the case, OSIC is not going to work.

Perhaps it will take time to get established, but the same argument being made there.... The opponents of an inquiry are saying, “Well, you have to give OSIC time to develop. It needs time.” However, the second we say “inquiry”, they say, “That's going to take too long.” Which one is it? Do we have time to do this? Do we want to get it right? Why are the goalposts different when it comes to an inquiry and OSIC? I would argue it's because there's been a lot of input into OSIC by very influential people who want to defend what they created. I think that's a natural response, but, at the same time, you need to remove yourself from that situation and think about what's best for the whole nation.

I think that's a national inquiry.

● (1245)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go to Peter Julian for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to go back to Ms. Glover and Mr. Sheehan, and the question about ensuring we don't revictimize victims when putting a public inquiry into place.

How important is that for a public inquiry, so we avoid the kind of situation Mr. Sheehan described?

Ms. Wendy Glover: Obviously, it's extremely important. I don't know how, moving forward, we can create a reporting system and maintain complete privacy for them. Look at how difficult it's been for him. I can't speak to that. It needs to go far above my understanding of this. I feel so terrible that they've had to explain it, in this way, but it needs to happen, somehow.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd like to come back, Mr. Chair, to Ms. Shore, Ms. Glover and Mr. Ross on the responsibility of Sport Canada.

The toxic sport syndrome crisis we're seeing in this country is something that overlays almost all sports. It's just unbelievable. It's so saddening that we haven't protected athletes, our children or the public.

What responsibility did Sport Canada's hands-off attitude have, over the last couple of decades? We've been through sexual abuse and anti-racism recommendations. None of them have ever been implemented, with Sport Canada insisting those be conditions for government funding. How responsible is Sport Canada for this incredibly toxic crisis and the mess we're seeing in this country, right now?

I'll start with you, Ms. Shore.

Ms. Kim Shore: How else do I say it? I mean, aren't they the "go-to"? The buck stops at the top. I would argue that, perhaps, the individuals consulting to get their on-the-ground information have vested interests in supporting their own businesses or the funding they receive.

I think there's a desperate need in Canada and Canadian culture, in general, for a persona of "We're all nice, and we're all about the best interests of everybody else." However, I'm not sure that's as true now as it was 50 years ago. Perhaps we need to look back to see how to get back some of the Canadian values we had decades ago, when we really did care about our neighbours and children.

My experience is this. I've been told to mind my own business by other parents whose children were doing fine in the gym. When I started speaking out on behalf of other children I saw in peril at the gymnastics club—not my daughter, because she was doing fine, at the time—they told me to mind my own business.

I think it still takes a village to protect children.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Shore.

Now I go to Martin Shields, for the Conservatives.

Martin, you have five minutes, please.

• (1250)

Mr. Martin Shields: It's been very enlightening today and very much appreciated. I think it's interesting that you mentioned, Ms. Glover, the skills that kids learn in swimming. They all take the swimming program and work up through the levels. That's how they're taught swimming. It's a life skill.

One thing I did get involved with at schools was we taught all the kids how to skate. That was just part of the phys ed curriculum. We started in grade 1.

It's very different in the sense of sports organizations. There's a very different reaction in an arena versus when you're starting soc-

cer with a four-year-old. It's the butterfly league. Whether they chase the ball or the butterflies, nobody worries about it.

But in a hockey arena, it's entirely different. How do we deal with this? You're talking about culture, and it's very different. How would a national inquiry deal with the differences that we have and how hockey is seen in this country?

Ms. Wendy Glover: Each sport, as we've clearly mentioned today, needs its own lens. As you mention, hockey is a little bit different from soccer or the other sports. Canada Soccer restructured the delivery of the programs. You see the mini-fields, and it's a little bit more age-appropriate. Hockey has also tried to follow suit. That doesn't mean the parents or the players understand why. It doesn't mean the coaches want to follow it to understand the psychosocial development of the child at that age, and can deliver it effectively. There's a gap in understanding, a gap in application of the concepts that already exist.

It already exists. I've seen it in hockey. Like I said, my children went through it. My husband was a coach. I understand the various stakeholder views. A lot of people don't understand how you actually move on in a sport, who actually moves on in the sport and then the lure of sport entrepreneurs, all these extra people who charge extra money along the way as you get older. It's just a convoluted mess of information. We need to redo the whole thing.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's my challenge. In the sense of a national inquiry, we had Bruce Kidd with us here. He said that 30 years ago we had the thing, and nothing changed. That's my fear.

I'll share my time with my colleague, who has a question.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Hedges, you haven't been forgotten. We appreciate your being here. We've heard a number of times about the need for investigation. It's one thing, as we've heard from our academics, to define what "abuse" is, but it's another thing to do something about it. Those steps need to be done. We can define as much as we want, but if we don't take the proper steps to do something about it, then we're lost.

Mr. Hedges, you talked about the safe sport summit that you did. One of the things that you talked about was a universal code of conduct, etc. You also talked about conducting investigations. Can you explain to the committee what your organization is doing along those lines, please?

Mr. Robert Hedges: Specifically, we separate ourselves from the actual investigation. We have an arm with Western Law called Sport Solutions. If an athlete comes to us specifically with any sort of complaint whether it's, say, with sport, athlete agreements, the selection process, we advise them to go to that. They get consultation from lawyers there on what they should do, whether it should go through OSIC, whether it should go through the SDRCC complaint mechanism, whether it should go to criminal investigation. That is the way we filter the athletes.

Outside that, in terms of advocating, we need a safe mechanism. As has been alluded to, when NSOs in the past were able to self-police themselves or complaints came back to the HPD, and then they would just bury things, those things cannot happen moving forward. We need a system in place where reporting can happen and athletes, again, can feel safe reporting, and where action is taken from their complaints.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Expanding upon that, then, if you're dealing with a complaint that's come your way along the lines of a coach or a trainer, or whatever, how do you as an organization specifically deal with those aspects?

Mr. Robert Hedges: How it works with us is an athlete will come to us and say that they have been having this issue, so we will talk to them, obviously, and then see where that's at. If they want to write a letter of complaint, we potentially could help them write that letter to their NSO, if that's the work that they want to do. If they are looking to take more formal action, then we steer them towards Sport Solution, which is a branch of Western Law, and they then get actual legal consultation, because we don't provide that.

• (1255)

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Do you have steps to sanction the coaches and the trainers that you could put in place? Are there avenues for you to address that?

Mr. Robert Hedges: No, we don't have any of those powers.

The Chair: Thank you, Robert. Your time is up.

Thanks very much.

I want to go to the final questioner, and that's Anthony Housefather for the Liberals.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'm going to do it, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Michael.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you so much.

Again, I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony today.

I want to go back to Mr. Ross.

You brought up racism as an issue when we're speaking about safe sport. Throughout our conversations with many individuals, this issue has not come up often. When you read through the papers and watch the headlines, you can see that this issue is something that not only impacts sports like hockey; it's right across the board.

I want to ask you from your perspective a little bit about why racism isn't being identified in mainstream conversations like this as an issue that needs to be included in the discussion around safety in sport or safe sport in general. Do you have any thoughts?

Dr. MacIntosh Ross: You're absolutely right. For some reason, we do kind of put racism in its own compartment away from safe sport. I'm not entirely certain why that happens, but in my gut I think it continues to come down to the power of white, predominantly male administrators within the sport system.

It's the exact thing that Akim Aliu was talking about, trying to find opportunities to make sure that there is room for diverse populations within ice hockey, for example, but also all sports in Canada. When he brought that forward to the GTHL, they said that it was impossible. They also said they weren't racist, and then they had to basically sanction one of their own for being racist in a meeting immediately after that decision was made.

I think it's something that people are still relatively uncomfortable talking about, but we see it all across the board. Despite the calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we're not seeing the kind of commitment to indigenous kids that we need to see. Down by me, there are still reserves that don't have clean drinking water. If you don't have clean drinking water, how can you have a robust sport system? That's not possible.

I'm sorry; I'm kind of at a loss for words, because we've been talking about this in academia for years, for decades. It doesn't seem that people want to take these really meaningful actions, the kinds of things Akim Aliu suggested that can make a change and can ensure that change happens. They want policies. They want to talk about it, and they want to move on, but that doesn't create change.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I noticed that recently Nova Scotia put forward an anti-racism strategy for sport within the province. There are these big jurisdictional challenges and, of course, different sports. We talked about the divide between public education and the provincial sport organizations.

How do we navigate these big challenges of all these different sections within sports that may not have the same language? They may not work well with each other because of those divides. How do we position that through some type of an inquiry, if it did go forward, to ensure that we can get the best possible recommendations federally while at the same time respecting those divides that may exist like the provincial divides? Do you have any thoughts on that as someone who's involved in academia?

• (1300)

Dr. MacIntosh Ross: I come back every time to the idea of collaborative federalism and how well it has worked for the sport system in terms of people working together from the provinces and the federal government, or Sport Canada and the provincial associations to pursue excellence in sport. Part of the reason that worked so well, as Wendy was saying, is that it uses different lenses to examine things. Once we look at things in the Nova Scotian context and we understand it that way, we can start to make changes there that are going to benefit not just the province, but all of the provinces and the nation together.

That being said, I think any kind of inquiry needs to be integrated that way. I don't think it's beyond the realm of possibility. Yes, it will cost a lot of money, but we spent a lot of money getting ourselves into this problem. We've pursued excellence and dumped millions and millions of dollars into it. If we have to have a large joint inquiry that incorporates both the federal government and the provinces, I don't think it should be something that we shy away from.

The Chair: Thank you.

That brings an end to our meeting for today.

I want to thank our witnesses.

Three of you are survivors. One of you is an advocate. I want to say how much courage it takes for you to come here and stand up with the stigma and the trauma that you've faced, as well as the backlash that you still face, being whistle-blowers—and being survivors.

I want you to know that you speak for so many people who are still hiding in the shadows and who are incapable, for various reasons, of coming out here themselves.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Your testimony is very moving. I feel comfortable speaking for everyone on this committee in saying that we are going to do everything that we can to address this systemic, bitter problem that we see and that we place our children in.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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