Standing Committee on Oversight of
Government Operations and Public
Accounts Hearings on the 2023 Report of
the Auditor General of Canada to the
Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on Child
and Family Services
Iqaluit, Nunavut
September 19, 2023

Members Present:

George Hickes, Chair
Janet Pitsiulaaq Brewster
Joelie Kaernerk
Mary Killiktee
Adam Lightstone
Solomon Malliki
Karen Nutarak
Daniel Qavvik
Joseph Inagayuk Quqqiaq
Alexander Sammurtok, Co-Chair
Joe Savikataaq
Craig Simailak

Staff Members:

Alex Baldwin Stephen Innuksuk

Interpreters:

Andrew Dialla Jacopoosie Peter Abraham Tagalik Blandina Tulugarjuk

Witnesses:

Liliane Cotnoir, Director
Kristie Cronin, Deputy Minister of Human
Resources
Jonathan Ellsworth, Deputy Minister of
Family Services
Andrew Hayes, Deputy Auditor General
Megan Hunt, Deputy Minister of Health
Sandy Kownak, Associate Deputy Minister
Victoria Madsen, Assistant Deputy Minister
of Health
James McKenzie, Principal

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Γσ[†]Cp[†] D'cdC Δb+[®]n[®]υ

Jimi Onalik, Deputy Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs

>>Committee commenced at 8:58

Chairman (Mr. Hickes): Good morning, everybody. I would like to call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts' televised hearing on the 2023 Report of the Auditor General to the Legislative Assembly on Family Services in Nunavut.

I would first like to ask Ms. Killiktee if she could lead us in prayer, please.

>>Prayer

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Killiktee. I would like to start off the proceedings with an opening comment from the Chair.

I am pleased to begin by welcoming everyone to this meeting of the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts.

We have convened today to begin the Standing Committee's televised hearing on the 2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut: Child and Family Services in Nunavut. This is the first of three appearances taking place this week by the Office of the Auditor General.

On behalf of the Standing Committee, I am pleased to formally welcome officials from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada to Iqaluit. I am also pleased to introduce my Standing Committee colleagues. I have:

• Alex Sammurtok, Co-Chair of the Standing Committee and Member for

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Rankin Inlet North-Chesterfield Inlet;

- Janet Brewster, Member for Iqaluit-Sinaa;
- Joelie Kaernerk, Member for Amittuq;
- Mary Killiktee, Member for Uqqummiut;
- Adam Arreak Lightstone, Member for Iqaluit-Manirajak;
- Solomon Malliki, Member for Aivilik;
- Karen Nutarak, Member for Tununiq;
- Daniel Qavvik, Member for Hudson Bay;
- Joseph Quqqiaq, Member for Netsilik
- Joe Savikataaq, Member for Arviat South; and
- Craig Simailak, Member for Baker Lake.

Committee Members, the Auditor General's 2023 Report on Child and Family Services was tabled in the House on May 30 earlier this year. This report follows two previous reports by the office on the same subject, one in 2011 and one in 2014.

I wish to note for the record that my colleagues representing Arviat South and Rankin Inlet North-Chesterfield Inlet also served with me on the Standing Committee that held a televised hearing back in September 2014 on the Auditor General's follow-up report to the Legislative Assembly on child and family services in Nunavut.

Protecting the welfare of Nunavut's children, youth and their families is an important responsibility of our government.

Recognizing that there are many challenges to addressing issues relating to child welfare and the safety and protection of children and youth across the territory, it is concerning that after nearly a decade since the last audit of child and family services in Nunavut, so many of the critical issues identified with respect to the programs and services required to implement the *Child and Family Services Act* are still not meeting the necessary standards.

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Officials from the departments of Family Services, Health and Human Resources have been invited to appear at this televised hearing, which will provide an opportunity for the Standing Committee to discuss the issues identified by the Auditor General.

Following the Standing Committee's hearings, we will report our findings and recommendations to the House. Under Rule 91(5) of the *Rules of the Legislative*Assembly of Nunavut, the government is required to table a formal written response to reports of Standing Committees within 120 days of their presentation.

As I noted at the beginning of my opening comments, the Standing Committee will be holding hearings throughout this week on reports of the Auditor General and related matters. This will also provide an opportunity for Members to discuss the Office of the Auditor General's upcoming work, including next year's report to the Legislative Assembly on the important topic of public housing.

I would like to conclude by addressing some housekeeping matters.

I ask all Members and witnesses to ensure that their cellphones and other electronic devices do not disrupt these proceedings. In order to assist our interpreters and technical staff, I ask that all Members and witnesses go through the Chair before speaking.

Members of the Standing Committee have been provided with a number of documents for their ease of reference during this televised hearing. For the benefit of our witnesses and interpreters, I ask Members to be precise when quoting from or making reference to specific documents.

This hearing is being televised live across

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Nunavut on community cable stations and the direct-to-home satellite services of both the Bell and Shaw networks. It is also being live-streamed on the Legislative Assembly's website. Transcripts of the televised hearing will be posted on the Legislative Assembly's website at a later date.

I now invite the Deputy Auditor General to make his opening statement and introduce his team. Thank you.

Mr. Hayes: *Ullaakkut*/good morning. Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to be here in Iqaluit today to discuss our audit report on child and family services in Nunavut, which was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on May 30 of this year. With me today are James McKenzie, the principal responsible for the audit, and Liliane Cotnoir, director.

We looked at whether the Department of Family Services and the Department of Health, with the support of the Department of Human Resources, provided services to protect and support the well-being of vulnerable children and youth and their families.

We found failures in all the areas we examined, starting with the Department of Family Services' response to reports of suspected harm to children. We reviewed 92 referrals and found that for 20 of them, the department had not done the required screening to assess the child's risk and circumstances. As for the remaining referrals, 60 of them required an investigation because of risks to a child. We found that half of the investigations were not completed.

For children and youth placed in foster care in the territory, the department did not have evidence that essential screenings and checkins were done. In the case of 23 children, youth, and young adults who were placed in

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care outside the territory, we did not see evidence that community social service workers checked in monthly with these vulnerable young people, as they were required to do. These check-ins are important to ensure their well-being and to confirm that they are receiving the level of care they need.

We identified a number of persistent root causes that were linked to the department's failure to protect Nunavut's at-risk children and youth. They include funding, the inability to hire and retain permanent staff, and a lack of housing, office space, and timely training for community social service workers.

These challenges were compounded by poor information management practices. For example, the Department of Family Services did not have reliable data to answer the most basic question of how many children and youth it was responsible for. Having access to reliable, accurate, up-to-date information in a central system and training staff to use it is essential for continuity of knowledge and informed decision making.

For the past 12 years, the departments we audited have all agreed with our recommendations, but we have yet to see vulnerable children receive the protection they deserve. In fact, our three separate reports since 2011 paint the picture of a system that has failed the children and families that it is meant to protect and support. For this reason, we made the decision to not issue more recommendations in this third report, as our previous recommendations still stand.

This report is more than statistics, trends, and a compilation of facts. In May, when this report was released, the Auditor General spoke of a system in crisis. While the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a rapid

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Given the gravity of the situation, we felt an obligation to use a different approach. This included not issuing recommendations, but also included sending letters to the Deputy Minister to convey the deeply troubling nature of our early findings. Similarly, when the Auditor General released this report in May, she called for a whole-of-government approach to protect the territory's vulnerable children and youth. We asked the Government of Nunavut to compel the three departments, the Department of Family Services, the Department of Health, and the Department of Human Resources, to collaboratively take urgent and necessary concrete steps to help safeguard Nunavut's children and support the territory's families and communities.

In response to our findings, the Department of Family Services is preparing an action plan, which should include actions and contributions by other departments from across the Government of Nunavut. Our office will monitor the implementation of this plan and work with the government and the Legislative Assembly on solutions that will make a difference for vulnerable children and youth.

The issues we raised are long-standing and systemic. We recognize that they find their roots in socio-economic issues that are broader than a single audit, but they still require each of us to ask the question: what needs to change for these children and their families to receive the help and support they need?

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Mr. Chairman, this concludes my opening statement. We would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have. *Nakurmiik*/thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hayes. At this time, I would like to invite the Government of Nunavut's opening statement. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation) Good morning, Mr. Chairman (interpretation ends) and Members and Office of the Auditor General officials.

My name is Jonathan Ellsworth and I am the Deputy Minister of the Department of Family Services. I am here to present opening comments to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Public Accounts during the televised hearing on the 2023 Report of the Auditor General to the Legislative Assembly on Child and Family Services in Nunavut. I am joined today by the recently appointed Associate Deputy Minister of Family Services, Sandy Kownak, also by my colleague, Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs Deputy Minister Mr. Jimi Onalik, Ms. Megan Hunt, Deputy Minister of Health, Ms. Victoria Madsen. Assistant Deputy Minister of Health, and Ms. Kristie Cronin, Deputy Minister of Human Resources.

I took on the role of Deputy Minister just days before the Auditor General tabled the performance audit on child and family services in Nunavut. The Hon. Margaret Nakashuk, the Minister of Family Services, and I fully accept the contents of the performance audit. We clearly understand that this is a crisis. We also fully accept the findings of the two previous reports tabled by the Auditor General in 2011 and 2014. We are deeply committed to making the changes that need to be made. Under our direction,

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our officials are moving forward with a roadmap that lays out a whole-of-government approach. Our solutions and action plans focus on safeguarding Nunavut's children and youth. Meaningful collaboration is key. Work includes all levels of the department and government; as well, it will require community and Inuit stakeholders to engage and, when necessary, the department will take steps to shift priorities to respond to the changing environment.

Over the last three months, the department has made progress in addressing the Auditor General's findings. The department is actively addressing capacity challenges. Our focus is on bolstering operations, staff safety, and information management to ensure effective service delivery, while prioritizing the safety and well-being of Nunavut's children and youth. I will briefly list some of these initiatives for the record.

The department will be tabling a revised budget in this House for consideration that will seek to achieve additional human and financial resources.

1. Strengthening Workforce Capacity

Our commitment to staff well-being is evident through our commitment to provide a dedicated counselling service for community social services workers, a workplace violence strategy, and an occupational health and safety framework. A quality assurance position and caseload analysis will further ensure that an appropriate work-life balance is available while delivering effective support.

2. Advancing Training and Professional Development

Progressing toward enhanced service, our comprehensive core training program with

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Inuit cultural competence emphasis is underway. Specialized training fund agreements will secure multi-year funding for training and professional development for Mental Health First Aid, family resource workers, managers, and supervisors and foster care coordinators. Onboarding and professional development opportunities for social workers are being elevated, aligning them with essential skills for best service.

3. Re-profiling Positions, Recruitment, Retention and Facilities

Our immediate efforts include re-profiling positions and reinforcing the family wellness interprovincial desk functions. We are facilitating the recruitment of community and social services workers, with plans to fill 20 additional indeterminate positions by fall of 2023. Efforts are also underway to double fill positions, meaning a new minimum of two social workers in communities, to improve service levels is in play, but recognizing that it is contingent on available office space and staff housing. We continue to work with the housing corporation and the Department of Community and Government Services to ensure housing and office space are allocated efficiently to address this priority. To date, modular units have been allocated in four of the highest need communities: Sanirajak, Sanikiluaq, Kinngait, ammalu Pangnirtung. The department has renewed agreements with Arctic College to support the training of social workers.

I just have a technical issue, Sir. Please a brief indulgence.

Thank you.

4. Information Management and Technological Solutions

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technological solutions, Mr. Chairman, we have initiated the implementation of Matrix, the Family Wellness Integrated Case Management System software, and it marks a significant step towards achieving records standards. Projected for completion by fall of 2023, the initiative addresses recommendations from the Auditor General's reports and establishes a case management system. The electronic platform ensures secure and confidential documentation of client information, accessible to authorized personnel across Nunavut, enabling effective tracking and recording of case details, referrals, screenings, investigations, service plans, and other case notes by workers.

5. Quality Assurance

Mr. Chairman, our dedication to out-ofterritory clients is evident through the resources we have applied to this desk. The department's immediate actions involve assessing and assisting every out-of-territory client with the aid of six full-time Inuit client liaison officers in southern jurisdictions. Collaborating with the Department of Human Resources, we are re-profiling other positions to better cater to the unique needs of these clients.

The department is also modernizing the Standards and Procedures Manual. This vital update streamlines processes, aligns with Inuit societal values, and ensures adherence to legislated obligations. Emphasizing increased accountability, the revision encompasses standards, procedures, onboarding, and ongoing professional development. A quality assurance process will monitor program efficacy, with evaluation to gauge responses to audits and client needs and outcomes.

6. Communication Enhancement

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Mr. Chairman, we have also engaged a communication enhancement initiative. Proactive strides in communication include collaboration with a contract resource to create a comprehensive communication strategy. This strategy will develop transparent internal and external communication frameworks to assist in keeping the public informed about our progress. A communication needs assessment prioritizes sharing our responses to the Auditor General's report, emphasizing transparency and accountability. This communication strategy is underway and is intended to be finalized for implementation in early winter of 2024.

In addition, the Child Welfare Partnership Committee strengthens communication and collaboration between the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, and regional Inuit organizations. The committee facilitates dialogue on federal Bill C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. Focusing on community level success, the committee initiates collaborative work plans and legislative revisions, including the Inuit Custom Adoption Act and the Adoption Act.

The department has worked extremely hard to bolster the relationship with the Representative for Children and Youth. This includes regular meetings with her office through the lens of enhancing outcomes for children and youth in Nunavut.

7. Strategic Plan

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we are in the process of developing a strategic plan. The strategic plan is being developed to actively address the gaps identified in the Auditor General's report. The strategic plan is being developed in close collaboration with other departments, including Inuit organizations

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moving forward, and it will ensure a meaningful and measurable outcome. The plan will consolidate departmental actions that have been required from the 2011, the 2014 and the most recent audit. It addresses the Auditor General's findings in each of those situations and it lays out future steps for action and change. The strategic plan will address long-standing issues within the department's organizational structure. The department has shared our commitment to finalize the strategic plan with the Auditor General, and we plan to collaborate and continue collaborating with their officials as we implement our response to this report.

I would like to emphasize the importance of collaboration within our government and with Inuit organizations to ensure the success of these initiatives. As we move forward, we will remain transparent in our communication. I would also like to acknowledge our frontline staff who work tirelessly every day to serve Nunavut's children, youth, and families. They continue, despite the challenges articulated within the Office of the Auditor General's report, to push forward with dedication, and we are striving to give them the resources and support that they deserve.

Mr. Chairman, my colleagues and I are ready and willing to address any questions or concerns this Committee may have. *Qujannamiik*, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. We may have a slightly different version of your opening comments. I know that we are working with the Minister's office to make sure we get the updated version, but it is on the record as well.

Just before I go to the Committee, I just have a clarification on No. 6 here, your Communication Enhancement in your
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bΛLϟςċΔϤͼϧϼϭͼ, άλρης 6, ΔΔϤσ ϽλρΓιρηρίστης opening comments. You speak to the Inuit Custom Adoption Act and the Adoption Act, of looking at some revisions. I'm assuming that one of those revisions is the name of the legislation because currently it's under the Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act. Could I just get a clarification that there's a legislative proposal coming forward for that, Mr. Ellsworth?

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, Sir, I apologize for the mistake on the name of the legislation and that is the Act that we will be coming forward with to provide revisions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you for that clarification. I would just invite Committee Members if they have any opening comments to the opening comments. Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank everyone for being here today.

I would also like to begin by recognizing the significant role that our community social workers play in our communities. The challenging role of being a social worker is likely one of the most challenging jobs in Nunavut, especially in communities where there is only one social worker, requiring them to be on call 24 hours a day and also requiring them to take on the entire caseload of the community.

I would also like to thank the Office of the Auditor General of Canada for deciding to do a third audit on child and family services in Nunavut. I know it's common to do follow-up audits, but this is the first time I have ever heard of a follow-up to a follow-up audit, highlighting the severity of the situation. I have also never seen an audit come with a warning label that the content "may negatively impact readers." I would also like

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to recognize the opening line, where the OAG states that "This audit report describes a crisis."

Mr. Chairman and Members and those listening, I have been calling on our government to do more to protect the vulnerable individuals, children, and youth in Nunavut. Far too often, children are victimized and we hear about it in the media and know it's going on. It has been documented that Nunavut children experience rates of abuse 10 times higher than the national average, and I believe that this is in fact a crisis.

In addition, there is a stigma surrounding sexual abuse and victims often feel ashamed and suffer in silence. We must speak about this reality if we wish to see it end, which is why I think it is so important that we're having these discussions here today, but those discussions must go beyond this room. Nunavut must start openly discussing it and encouraging victims to come forward and seeking assistance. I encourage our community and every other community to talk about the issues that must no longer go unspoken.

I fear that not enough is being done to ensure the safety of our children. I recognize that the RCMP, our social workers, and health care professionals are doing the best that they can to assist, but they usually provide assistance to children and youth after they become victims. I believe that more can and should be done to prevent harm before it occurs. The Government of Nunavut is struggling to put out a fire when it should focus on sparks before they become a flame.

Child abuse is an issue that I have raised repeatedly since 2017, and again, the government must do more to fulfill its obligation to ensure the safety of all children

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Mr. Chairman, and those listening, our discussions over the next two days will be difficult and sensitive and may be triggering for some listeners. Committee Members will be asking some very tough questions. The audit was very critical in the shortcomings and failures of the Department of Family Services and their inability to meet the obligations as set out in Nunavut's *Child and Family Services Act*.

However, with that in mind, I would like to assure everybody in appearance today and those listening, that myself and the committee truly appreciates the role that everyone plays in protecting our vulnerable children, such as our social workers, the RCMP, and our health care professionals. Although we will be having some very challenging questions and some critical debate, I would just like to assure everyone that the objective of this Committee is to ensure that the Government of Nunavut is on the right track. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lightstone. Well said. Ms. Brewster.

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Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you everyone for your opening statements. I too, was struck by the opening line that this audit describes the crisis. What this audit does is it tells the story of the system, and what is missing is the voices of the children. I want to acknowledge the Department of Family Services for the progress that they have made to date. I was very happy to see some of the progress that has been made.

I just want us all to take a moment to acknowledge that though we are talking about children in care today, the issue of the '60s Scoop of our children has been going on for generations. In the past, the system was not our own system, and we must consider our own legacies as leaders and the impact that the work that we do as public servants and as legislators has on people for generations.

I again would like to acknowledge those families and individuals who are impacted by foster care to say that as we are deliberating today and seeking answers and solutions, that you are first and foremost in our thoughts. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. Do any other committee members have any comments to the opening comments? Mr. Kaernerk.

Mr. Kaernerk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A warm welcome to you firstly, along with your officials. It goes without saying that we face crises on many fronts, in reading the contents of Auditor General's report. The findings identify our territory as being in a crisis as there is even a warning label attached to the report.

It has been mentioned on occasion that our children and youth form the basis of our

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PYPY CHOLY 2497 CHOCYLPY CHOUSE ACYDA'-J LHOWDA'-J'M future, and we need to build a solid foundation for them. Personally, in looking at this issue, since the time I was first elected back in 2017, our elders along with our unique culture in Canada, and with our communities receiving only temporary services via air travel.

This means, that the Department of Family Services who shall be looking into this matter, indeed, on how we can create employment opportunities, as well as housing for our communities continues to be a challenge, as it has a tangible effect especially in smaller communities who have no options to turn to when they require counselling.

Many people no longer know who to turn to, and this impacts the communities where Inuit are getting employment opportunities throughout Nunavut, but our elders' who already possess this knowledge, wisdom and life experience are slighted and need to be carefully analyzed as a potential resource, especially by the Family Services and Health departments.

Here is my reasoning, our elders traditionally served as the educational foundation for our children, preparing them for their future roles in society, and this ability was retained. The legal barriers come from the legislation enacted by this legislature, even with these truths already well known. How can we incorporate into existing social and life skill training processes, the accumulated knowledge of our elders and to have that knowledge fully accepted and acknowledged?

We have to look at the whole system of service provision holistically via the principles of *Pijittirarniq* and *Inuuqatigiinniq* currently being lip serviced by our own government. Lip service is the worst kind of

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Either that or including people with actual life experiences and knowledge about life counselling skills who can be hired into positions, and we need to turn to this existing resource. Our elders form a large part of our cultural traditions, and it hurts to see them ignored by the loss of inclusion.

We have seen numerous reports from the governments and different bodies, and especially on reforming the social worker role at the community level to ensure fuller participation in local events. The shortage of housing is very visible here, and possibly we have to be more community-based if we're going to take the proper going forward. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Kaernerk. Any other committee members have comments? I'm just going to explain a little bit of how we're going to proceed with this. As the report is listed in paragraphs and pages, I'm going to name certain paragraph parameters that we're going to address in our lines of questioning to keep some structure so we're not all over the place for our officials, and just for the committee members to be able to keep track through the report.

I'm going to start off with "At a Glance." It is the third page within the report from the Office of the Auditor General, and the first name I have on my list: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I had mentioned in my opening comments, this is the first I have ever seen of a follow-up to a follow-up audit. I guess my first question will be to the Office of the

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Auditor General. I would like to ask: what specific reasons or circumstances prompted your office to conduct a third audit on Nunavut's Child and Family Services since 2011? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lightstone. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you very much for the question. The significance of this subject matter can't be understated. We're talking about the children and youth of the territory, we're talking about the community social service workers who support them, we're talking about the families that need support, and we're talking about the communities that deserve support and we need to help out.

We did two audits starting 12 years ago, and another one 10 years ago, and the findings were not good in those audits. In the middle years, we had other topics that we wanted to look at, and we had a limited ability to do follow ups, but this was always going to be on the radar given the importance of the subject matter. We know that the Representative for Children and Youth had been monitoring some of the work that had been done by the department, so we were keeping tabs on that, but we had a plan to come back and look at this.

It is uncommon for us to do a follow-up of a follow-up, as you have mentioned. However, in certain cases like this, we do follow up. We are looking at different ways as we have more resources ourselves right now to be following up on outcomes and improvements made, and where there aren't improvements, bringing these forward to the Legislative Assemblies and Parliament in the case of the federal work that we do.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hayes. Maybe if you just closed off acknowledging the Chair,

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and then the mic operator will know when to transition back to me. Mr. Lightstone, please go ahead.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that response. I agree; the significance of the situation cannot be understated given the impact it has on those who are most vulnerable, as well as those in positions who have the responsibility to ensure their safety. I would like to thank the Office of the Auditor General again for conducting this third audit on this significant subject matter. It's unfortunate that it was necessary, and it was very unfortunate of the findings.

I know that the Standing Committee in the Fourth Assembly was monitoring the developments made by the Government of Nunavut to address the recommendations in the former audits. However, that fell off the radar during the Fifth Assembly, and our Committee did not follow up with the Government of Nunavut and the Department of Family Services on meeting those recommendations, and for that, I believe that we must accept partial responsibility for the situation allowing it to continue.

However, I can assure you that this situation will not be allowed to fall off the radar again, and I hope that this Committee and the next Committee in the Seventh Assembly will continue to ensure that there is development in this area.

My next question will be for the Office of the Auditor General again. As I indicated, the first line of the report indicates that this audit report describes a crisis. I would like to ask if the Office of the Auditor General can elaborate on how your office measures and determines when a situation is classified as a crisis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lightstone. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you very much. As the Auditor General stated when tabling this report, we found failures in every area that we examined. In addition, this audit relates to findings that have been known in long-standing problems.

As mentioned, we had two previous audit reports and in response to the recommendations in our report in 2014, you'll see in the department's response often the words "over the short-term, the department will do something." It follows on, depending on the recommendation, but it's framed as over the short-term. We're now eight years after that audit report and those commitments, and we're still seeing these problems. Put simply, we're talking about the protection of children and youth.

These are some of the most vulnerable in society, and when we take the failures as a whole, we found that 'crisis' is the best way to describe our findings. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hayes. Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that response. I would now like to pose the same question to the Government of Nunavut officials, and I do recognize that the term "crisis" was mentioned in your opening comments, but I would like to ask again: would you agree that the overall situation for children and youth and their families in Nunavut is currently in a crisis situation? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I

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agree wholeheartedly that the report and the reality on the ground for our social workers and for families that are in need of an intervention is a crisis; in fact, a serious crisis. This crisis extends not only through all levels of the Department of Family Services, but it reaches most government departments.

Mr. Chairman, that is why the importance of an implementation of a meaningful strategic response to this crisis is required. There is no "in the short-term" or "in the long-term." This is something, the reality of which has resulted from many years of funding issues within the department, and the initial departure from the Department of Health and Social Services, Sir, and in my view, in my considered opinion, a lack of a meaningful response coming from the previous reports that have been tabled in this Assembly. Mr. Chairman, it's my position that it is now time, and it has been time for many years, to respond to this crisis. We need to do it in a way that creates safety for our children and for our families in the community, and resources for social workers who are providing them the services that they are legislatively entitled to. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth for that response. Given the crisis situation that we find ourselves in, the challenges that the Government of Nunavut has in ensuring the safety of our children and youth, I wholeheartedly agree that the government must provide additional resources to meet the needs of the current crisis situation, but as I previously mentioned in my opening comments, yes, we need to be reactionary, but we also need to be proactive, not just putting out the fire, but really killing the

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In the previous Assembly, when I was raising these issues, I tabled Greenland's strategy to address child abuse and neglect, which focused on a number of key areas to really break the silence in their communities, and at decision-making tables such as this, but also increase public awareness and having people travel around communities; I think they were termed as champions, to talk openly about it and encourage others to do the same.

I really think that in order to address the crisis, and of course, I agree with you, we need to apply the additional resources necessary, but we must also make that effort to be proactive and really address the root causes. Since I tabled that Greenland strategy almost three years ago in November 2020, I would like to ask: has the Government of Nunavut put thought into recreating a similar strategy here in Nunavut to really address the situation, as opposed to providing the best reactionary measures that your capable of? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. During the early course of our response development, we did a deep dive into various literatures available, including the Greenland report, Mr. Lightstone, including reports that have been conducted, such as the Coalition of Canadian Social Workers report, internal departmental reports, and other reports. There are a lot of reports. What I can tell you and this Committee is that our strategic plan will not only seek to be reactionary to the immediate needs and responses to the findings of the Auditor General, but we will also engage, as you had mentioned Sir, proactive measures to begin addressing the root causes in terms of why individuals and families come into contact and intersect with

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a system that was not designed for them.

In my respectful submission, Mr. Chairman, this strategic plan must be built by members of the community. It must be owned by all of us. It must be recognized as a tool to help individuals through challenging crises, crises arising from the legacy of unresolved trauma, as we all know, that live in our communities. It needs to be trauma informed. It needs to be through the lens of Inuit societal values and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*. So to answer your question, Mr. Lightstone, we have done a deep dive. We want to make sure that this plan is sustainable in the long term. We want to ensure that it responds to the immediate needs and efficiencies of the department, but then moving towards a longer term approach to building and strengthening and preventing folks from coming into contact with the judicial system, which often our work at Family Services results in. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. The next name I have on my list: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the final line of your report's overall message here in "At a Glance" states, "We are prepared to work with the government and the Legislative Assembly on future steps to address the findings." I would like to know from the Auditor General's Office whether or not there has been work so far with the Government of Nunavut, and if you could elaborate further on how you do anticipate working with the government and the Assembly to address these findings, and in what capacity would you work on future steps? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, we have had multiple engagements with

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senior officials in the departments and, in particular, I would mention the Department of Family Services. We have been exchanging correspondence and we have been informed of the work that has been underway since our report was presented in May. We will be continuing to monitor what's happening and we're mapping out right now how we're going to stay abreast and stay up to date on what is happening and what the departments are doing.

Normally, audits are backward-looking. We look at what has happened. We identify areas for improvement. What we are trying to do as an office a little bit more is being involved in design work and helping to make sure that there aren't gaps or there aren't things that are missed along the way. We're proposing that we might be able to play a role like that as the departments are planning to update their strategic plans or update their guidance and standards. We can be involved in support by providing an objective and an impartial view of what's being planned.

We recognize that the Representative of Children and Youth and others have roles to play as well. We want to be respectful of the roles that others have to play. Ultimately, we are not the authority on resolving the issues that we find in our audit, but we want to be a partner in terms of achieving positive outcomes for children, families, social workers, and communities. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hayes. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for that response. Just a quick question on that, has the OAG stepped in, in the past to help first, the Government of Nunavut, related to the past audits or to any other organization or government that has

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been audited for any reason? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you. I might use two examples; one in performance audit. We regularly do early design work with the federal government when they're looking at climate change and sustainable development issues, so we are in as they're planning their policies and early implementation. This is not completely foreign to us in the performance audit area.

On the financial audit side of our work, there has been an effort by our office over the years to help support capacity. Whether it's for chief financial officers in this territory or in other places, we have always been keen to help out, which might and sometimes involve stretching the normal lines of what an auditor would do, but in the interest of the best outcomes and accountability and transparency, we're always prepared to do that. This is something that has happened before. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you for that response. I would just like to pose the question to the Government of Nunavut team about how the team sees that relationship working and what the team requires and what kinds of supports or assistance are you seeking from the Office of the Auditor General. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it's evident on review of the report that's before us today for examination. It's clear that there's a level of accountability that wasn't present in previous responses and that

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accountability starts at the frontline and extends all the way to the executive team and even higher, perhaps.

How I envision us working with the Auditor General is exactly as Mr. Hayes has stated in the sense that we want to make sure that the response to their findings are not only meaningful and sustainable, but that they will result in lasting change. As has been stated in this Committee, Sir, we've had regularly follow-up discussions with the Auditor General. We're building collaborative relationships with many members of their team.

As soon as our draft plan is prepared, which we hope to have it ready as soon as possible, we're going to be engaging their team through that lens: does this respond adequately to your concerns? Will this result in safer families and children being properly taken care of? Will the investigative processes be undertaken in a way that meets best practices and standards that we will be implementing as we transcend this process?

I think, in response to your question, it's an ongoing relationship and there will be times, I suspect, where we get to a place where our colleagues at the Office of the Auditor General tell us, "You might want to consider looking into this in a little more depth because we have this view of your approach." What it means from our perspective is that we need to be open and willing to accept that positive and constructive criticism as we develop these plans and as we implement them.

A key piece that I think the department has struggled with historically is that we've had the Quality Protects Action Plan, for example, Mr. Chairman, and we've had other responses in place, but I don't think we've had the partnerships that we're seeing today

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as it pertains to a whole-of-government response and engaging colleagues at the Office of the Auditor General, engaging with the Representative for Children and Youth. Through our whole-of-government approach and response to the findings of the Office of the Auditor General's report, it means all of us need to be a part of the development, implementation, and the success of responding to this. It's a crisis.

We all live in community. We all have either nieces or nephews or children. We have all struggled at some point or another during the course of our lives, and our department needs to be responsive to those needs. This oversight, this enhanced accountability framework that I will discuss in further detail as we move through these proceedings, is incumbent upon all of us to be a part of. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to be clear, following the release of your report, Nunavut's Premier issued a press release on May 30, 2023 stating that the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will establish a Government of Nunavut audit and support function, and develop a performance accountability framework.

Acknowledging the expertise that the OAG has and the comments made just now, I'd just like to know: to date, has your office provided or been asked to provide any support or advice to the Government of Nunavut officials with respect to this initiative, knowing that when we build something we should have expertise right at the forefront so that what we build is the best tool possible? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

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Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What I would like to say is no, we have not had discussions yet, but I certainly anticipate that we will. As Deputy Ellsworth had mentioned, one of the entry points will be their strategic plan, their actions going forward.

One of the areas that Mr. Hayes had mentioned is that we do look at things like strategic plans. We've looked at, for example, the federal government's strategies regarding sustainable development. We have criteria that we will look at such as: are the commitments clear? Are the expected results clear? Are there timelines and accountabilities? All of those are very much aligned with things that we would expect to be in a performance framework, if you will. That would be our first step, to look at the strategic plan but also the evaluation framework that's anticipated to be associated with that plan. That is something we understand will be built in so that it's not only a plan, but there will be efforts made to monitor its implementation.

What I can say is that, obviously, our office is in the world of performance audit, not only just our team members, but we do have experts in our office who can also provide insights in terms of what makes a good performance accountability framework and what kind of measures we would be looking for. That's the type of lens that we would take to assess that type of framework. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. McKenzie. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Mr. McKenzie. When we consider action on a crisis, we are now four or five months since the report was tabled. What is the timeline for creating a response

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in a crisis? Is it four weeks? Is it four days? Is it four months? Is it four years? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: When we were preparing this report and moving through the audit findings that we had, we took the unusual step of writing to the departments about some of the findings. We sent a letter in December 2022, informing the department of some of the concerns we had about child protection and risks that might be there. We identified some suggested actions that should be taken. We followed up again in February as our work progressed to provide another batch of information to the department on the same type of subject. In those cases, when we are talking about the impacts on children, the effects on the families, we expected immediate action.

In terms of timeline, I don't know what more I could say than "immediate." To us, that means right away. In terms of the other pieces of our report, whether it is relating to information management or housing, we recognize that some of those root causes take a little bit longer to address. However, seeing progress in the short, medium, and long term is important. We often asked that departments and agencies that are responding to our recommendations provide timelines so that it gives a marking post that people, like all of you on this Committee, can hold the government to account in achieving their progress. I would like to bring us back to the initial letter that we sent in December. Seeing progress on that; this is too long already. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Can you just elaborate on the responses that

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you received from those December and February letters? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Yes, thank you. On page three of our report, it is part of paragraph 11, we identified that there were 48 percent of the cases where there had been follow-up. The department told us that there were follow-up actions taken, but we received no evidence to support those statements. Likewise, 33 percent of those cases, the follow-up was underway, and in 19 percent of the cases, follow-up hadn't started at all.

I would highlight that this report came out almost six months after we sent that letter and essentially, in 52 percent of the cases follow-up hadn't been completed. In 48 percent of the cases that follow-up had been done, we didn't see anything more than just a statement that there was nothing else that needed to be done for those cases. We were concerned about that because of the other findings that are contained in our report about evidence and about the lack of action that had been taken. I suppose that is the best information that we have regarding the follow-up.

The Deputy Minister has informed us about actions taken in relation to planning, but I don't have more information right now as to the status of those cases. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for that response. I realize that that is a couple of pages ahead, however, I think it is really important to take this opportunity to ask where those children are, and have they been followed up on? This information was not shared with us in any of

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the opening statements, and as I said earlier this morning, these are real children. These are real families. They are connected to us individually. They are connected to our communities. They are connected to our education system. Who is following up on them? Are these cases still out there in the netherworld where these children, who potentially are in danger; have they been followed up on, and if they haven't, why haven't they been followed up on? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I share your concerns with respect to the actions not taken immediately following the receipt of the December management letter. I arrived at the Department of Family Services the week of April 24, or around that time. That was one of my first questions after having received the management letters from the Auditor General. I recognized at that time that quite a bit of work could have been done to immediately respond to their findings. I was advised at the time that all the matters were followed up on and I was told by the Office of the Auditor General that they did receive a statement to that affect, however, they did not receive evidence to support that statement.

Mr. Chairman, I have instructed and can confirm that all those matters were followed up on. I have received evidence to support that conclusion. We have engaged as a reaction to this an immediate reaction, a framework where there is regular follow-up with children in care, with children out-of-territory, with adults out-of-territory, but I think, and I don't want to sit here and purport to make excuses to this committee, the crisis is described. It is evident that the department failed in its obligation to children and to the necessary standards that the work of this

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department should engage and should be accountable for.

Mr. Chairman, I can't speak to the reasons why previous administration did not respond in a meaningful way to the Office of the Auditor General, but I can tell this Committee and the public and everyone, that it is our duty and going forward these situations will no longer occur in our communities.

Now, recognizing that we still face significant human resource challenges, recognizing that those challenges are exacerbated by a lack of adequate housing and office space, and notwithstanding those realities, we have taken steps where there are no social workers in communities to do regular visits, to make sure that families are supported to work through other Family Services resources, but we need to do more.

I agree that this crisis doesn't mean that we take six months to a year to develop a plan while we leave everything sitting. It needs to be, as I've described it to some of my colleagues, we need to turn up the volume on all the pieces, and that includes ensuring that standards are being met, that children are being followed up on, that investigation processes are being undertaken in a way that aligns with standards and best social practice. As we continue to respond to this performance audit, as I mentioned earlier, the accountability piece is going to be something that engages all levels of government, and in fact, this Committee, and the House generally speaking. In response to your inquiry, I have it on good evidence that all these matters were followed up on. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I

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would like to hear from Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs about their participation in the development of this strategic plan, and that includes holding Family Services accountable. That lack of evidence of follow-up really concerns me, just knowing from my own personal experience with dealing with the foster care system with family members and knowing that there is the potential that children are in harm's way and that the Government of Nunavut isn't doing the basic tracking to ensuring their safety, I would like to hear more about what EIA's function is in this crisis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. I will remind Members to refrain from using acronyms. It doesn't help the interpreters as well as the public of understanding. We are all familiar with the lingo, but everyone that is listening isn't. Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I just want to start by saying the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs fully acknowledges and supports the characterization around this table that this is a crisis requiring a whole-of-government response. The findings through this audit have made us understand there are some systemic issues within the government that we need to quickly address.

You had alluded earlier to the performance audit function that we hope to bring into place into the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, to continually follow up on issues that stem not only from this audit, but from future audits.

We have, I think, a strong financial lens to look at audits. We have some work to do to develop the performance and the operational responses to the Office of the Auditor

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General. That is something that we hope to have for this Assembly's consideration in the coming budget. Primarily though, we have been directed at the department by cabinet to ensure that the needs that are identified by Family Services, in some ways, where the path clears to make sure that the department is able to achieve and receive what they need from other departments in the government from the budget process, the supports that they need.

In this instance, we have been more than in other budget development years, asking for business cases. We are asking for information in making sure that other departments that interact are able to respond quickly so that we can have something in place. This has been a standing item at the Deputy Ministers committee meetings where we check in to make sure that the department has their short-term needs met, or if they don't, there is a plan in place to address those.

I think from my department's perspective, the goal is to build out that function to make sure that these things are properly followed up on, and in the second instance, to make sure that MLAs will have substantive business plans and budgets to consider in response to this crisis. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Deputy Minister. I did say, "Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs" first, and I will remember not to use the acronym.

I'm just recalling the Premier's statement about taking bold, decisive action for transformational change. I'd like to know what bold and decisive actions are they \\(\text{CP\chi^c} \delta \quad \qua

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planning to transform the system to protect the children. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I think there are two aspects to this. The first piece is working with the Department of Family Services to make sure that using existing appropriations that this Assembly has approved and existing policies to ramp up the staffing and supports, either through double fills, or we have had some conversations about expanding the limits of contracting out functions in order to achieve some short-term needs. Also, I think it is, as we have all heard here today, this is 12 years since the first audit, and we fully acknowledge that there are no magic silver bullets here. Part of this process here is to give the Department of Family Services some time and space to respond substantively to make the systemic changes. I think the goal here is to make sure that what is presented to all MLAs in the coming budget session is something that will really hopefully achieve many of the shortcomings that have been identified. I hope that answers the question. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Onalik and thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just going back to Family Services and professional practices, are social workers responsible to a set of professional practices? Who holds them accountable, and would it be bold and transformative to hold social workers accountable to keep adequate records and to take decisive and bold action on issues of child abuse or any other concerns that may arise regarding children who they become aware of through reports? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you. We'll start off with Mr. Ellsworth and see if Mr. Onalik has anything to follow up.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the member's point, there is not a regulatory body established in Nunavut that would be similar to, for example, the Law Society or the College of Physicians or what have you that sets standards and levels of competency for social workers. This is dissimilar from other jurisdictions in the north and in Canada generally.

However, part a transformative change requires assigning resources to the community social workers, empowering them to make those bold decisions, making sure that they have the tools and resources to accommodate the collaterals that will arise from the decision, Mr. Chairman. In addition, it is clear on the face of the report that there are not enough social workers. Often, I have spoken to many of them. I've been told that they want to engage preventative kinds of practice approaches, but because of the serious nature of the issues that they're dealing with, often times they are in a protective status where there is significant risk to a child or a family which doesn't allow them to engage in this sort of protective measure that we see that is articulated clearly within the legislation and within the federal Act.

Where I am going with this, Sir, is that we are working diligently to make sure that we can get them the resources, not only in the short term, but in the long term, and this goes to some of the ways that we have re-profiled some of the positions to respond to that standard that you spoke of. While we don't have, again, a regulatory body that would oversee the competence and other sort of activities of the social workers, it is something that we have looked at, and is not

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Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes would like to respond as well.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you. I would start by just saying that documenting is not what I would consider to be bold and transformative, and the reason why I say that is documentation in these kinds of cases is fundamental for the continuity of care and protection for these children. So I wouldn't interpret the statements that the department has made as being contradictory to that.

We can unpack this a little bit later, but bold and transformative change would probably involve taking creative and innovative looks at the way the government works; breaking down silos. It's exactly why the Auditor General recommended and wanted to emphasize a whole-of-government approach. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hayes. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Hayes. That was exactly my point. Hearing again that human resources are an issue, and that the department is looking at different ways to address that, what we know is following the release of the Auditor General's report, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated issued a press release on June 15, 2023, that stated NTI's Social and Cultural department; I'm using NTI because it's actually a quote.

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NTI's "SCD will continue to research potential opportunities for NTI to become more involved in providing and overseeing prevention services for Inuit children and families."

I would just like to know, today we heard a little bit about the partnership with NTI in the opening statements, and I would just like a little bit more information about how NTI has reached out to the Government of Nunavut and what additional potential support or initiatives have been discussed for NTI to play a preventative role in child and youth welfare in Nunavut? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Mr. Chairman, if I might ask my colleague, Mr. Onalik to respond to that, please.

Chairman: Thank you. Go ahead, Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Since we received that overture from Nunavut Tunngavik, we have actually expanded the partnership committee table that we have, as a whole, with Nunavut Tunngavik and the regional Inuit associations to include a table specifically on child welfare. As you can imagine in the summertime, as we are coming out of the summer, we are hoping to have open dialogue with Nunavut Tunngavik and the regional Inuit associations and have a table for that for us to lav out where we are headed in terms of strategic planning and then to hear those operational concerns from Nunavut Tunngavik. From a structural point of view, there has been a definite, and albeit a recent pivot, I think, to creating a place for these discussions to take place.

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(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just wondering, in light of the fact that this is a process that is still in its beginning phases, which I can't emphasize enough, really concerns me, and I think it concerns everybody here that the action on this crisis is happening at what feels like a snail's pace because these are real children and families that we are talking about today, in crisis, and they are getting through every day while this slow response moves forward.

In the discussions with Nunavut Tunngavik, have there been discussions about the possibility of prevention services that could immediately be taken up by this very important partner? As Nunavut Inuit, I look to that organization as a helping organization for me as a Nunavut Inuk and for my family and my community. There is a sense that there should be some responsibility and that the means might be there where they are absent in a government response. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We are anticipating hearing exactly that from Nunavut Tunngavik. I don't want to presuppose what they are coming forward with. I think we acknowledge the Government of Nunavut has very specific responsibilities, and this process of interacting with Nunavut Tunngavik is not intended to handoff our responsibilities to anyone else. We have legislative responsibilities to our families and to our children that we intend to fully honour.

The opportunity, I think, with a conversation

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with Nunavut Tunngavik and the regional Inuit associations, is perhaps to have organizations with a bit more time and space to start looking at the longer term preventative measures collaboratively. We are still headed towards to our first full committee meeting. We have had initial meetings to deal with the structure and how we'll interact, but in terms of the substance, we are hoping this fall to have those meaningful conversations.

Our focus right now, and I want to be really, really clear, is we have a long list of things that we need to get our act together on today, and hearing what my colleague from Family Services has indicated, I think our immediate effort is to make sure that we are aware of where all of our children are, or where the kids in-care are and then we can expand into that more strategic conversation as we get into this pre-plan.

The conversations with Nunavut Tunngavik and the regional Inuit associations will be collaborative as we develop the strategic planning, not only for this, but as it has been mentioned, our housing plan greatly impacts this conversation, and I think we have had examples in the very recent past where we weren't able to send social workers to communities because not only was there no housing, there were no hotel rooms available as well.

There are all these conversations that are connected to make sure that from the frontline out that we are able to provide these supports. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Mr. Onalik for that response and for bringing up housing. I got a little bit

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excited because I thought that maybe you were referring to the social determinates of health that clearly have a role to play in addressing child abuse in Nunavut.

I would like to pivot, and as soon as you said it, I thought of Ross Geller, but I would like to pivot to the health team to hear from them. I'll stay on the subject of Nunavut Tunngavik's potential role in having an impact, and I do acknowledge that Mr. Onalik said more of a longer term. However, I think we know that in partnership with the federal government during the public health emergency, that Nunavut Tunngavik helped to feed families. For the first time ever in Nunavut, we were able to guarantee that every single family had enough food to eat every single day because we know that people who are healthy are better able to fight off, specifically it was COVID, however, we know that the long-term impacts of having good nutrition impacts education, it impacts everything in your life.

When it comes to the potential role for Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated to have an impact on prevention and the safety of our children, what role could they play in helping to deal with the housing crisis, with food insecurity, with everything that impacts the social determinants of health? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the Member for the question. I think these are incredibly important conversations and one that, from a social determinants perspective and I'm really pleased that the member used that language, and talking about boldness, and all-of-government approach is just one part of the solution. It's an all of Nunavut approach that is really

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going to help us continue to improve the lives of children and families across this territory. Our relationship with key partners, like Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, is incredibly important, because it brings together opportunities to look at role, scope, functions and leveraging the strengths of different organizations, government, community level service providers, and community as a whole.

As we continue to do our planning where we're looking at more opportunities to be integrated, to have a clear and common vision, to have sound direction together, and to be paddling in one direction, it may mean that we do different things, but the things that we bring to the table and that we do are for a common good in improving the lives of children and families.

Our ability to make sure that our goals are common, that we have the right level of knowledge, skill, and funding in place, that we're directing that work, that we're empowering others to step in and do that work, but also that level of ensuring that we're paving that path for the traditional knowledge of sacred elders and knowledge keepers to also interweave around our responses to the way in which that we support community and families. That integration really is the strength to that, because no department, no organization is going to solve these challenges together. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for that response. I would just like to talk about how important it is to provide mental health supports to families who are in crisis. The overall social determinants of health that impact mental health and how the Department of Health is

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We know that ensuring that families are well-fed, well-housed, and that they have access to mental health support in order to move through whatever personal crisis might be bringing them to this system, so if I could hear from the Department of Health about how that's being woven into this response, I'd really appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Member. You're absolutely right. Ensuring that mental health and wellness services to all Nunavummiut, in different ways, is incredibly important. One, for our children who are currently engaged in the system, but also for children and families who were hoping to ensure that they don't become part of the system, or for our families whose children will be returning home to them, and ultimately, that's an important goal for us.

So there has been work underway to strengthen our mental health and addictions services across the territory. Part of that work, of course, has been with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated in the establishment of the Nunavut Recovery Centre, a centre that is Inuit-designed, Inuit-led, and will also be Inuit-staffed, as much as possible. So ensuring that that option closer to home and in-territory will be available soon for community members is incredibly important.

We've also made sure that there is funding at local community levels for land-based

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programming and healing, which we know is really important, those sacred teachings that come from the land, those opportunities to be out on the land working through your challenges and strengthening your resiliency through traditional practices.

Our paraprofessional program; that has also been incredibly successful, where we're making sure that local Inuit people are going through a process of laddering their knowledge and skills and being able to offer programs and services at the community level that are targeted and directed right at children and families, that often include very traditional practices and processes, learning through activities that are traditional, cooking together, having important conversations around things like sexual abuse, family violence, neglect, and trying to take away the shame and stigma of what families may be going through and offering help.

We also have the Healing Through Talking line that is available 24 hours a day to all of our community members as another option to be able to be responsive, to intervene, to navigate, and to also help to support referrals across the territory and outside. So those are some of the areas that have been instrumental.

Also, the training that has been part of our work to ensure that paraprofessionals and health and wellness staff across the territory have the necessary skills and training to identify abuse, neglect, and sexual assault, to be able to know what to do with that, who to contact, what their obligations around reporting and standards are, to make sure that there is integration and coordination across different departments. Much of that work is taking place and now in action, not only with the Department of Family Services, but across the government as a whole, to talk about where we have opportunities to

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leverage different areas that support things like mental health.

Mental health is not simply just about being able to access a counsellor, which we're increasing and having mental health nurses, but making sure that people have welcoming, supportive, and appropriate places to go. Whether that's for education, whether that's for housing, whether that's for family services, where they can meet their needs, so that every door is the right door. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: I think I've exhausted my line of questioning for now. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: If I may, just to get a clarification, Mr. Ellsworth and Mr. Onalik have spoken about a strategic plan and there was some vagueness to the timeline. With some of the discussions with stakeholders, such as Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated just starting, where is the government on their timeline for a strategic plan to be brought forward, especially if they are looking at consulting with the Office of the Auditor General as well? Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The timeline is as soon as possible. However, recognizing the importance of engagement and consultation with not only internal stakeholders but also with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the regional Inuit organizations. We have defined an initial strategic plan to be developed, hopefully, before the end of the fall so that we would have something tabled in this House for you in the winter sitting.

Chairman: Thank you. I'm sure we will be following that. I have no more names for my

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>>Committee recessed at 10:40 and resumed at 11:00

Chairman: Thank you. I would like to call the Committee meeting back to order. As I had mentioned previously, we're going to be doing the report in sections by paragraph. We will move on to the introduction, paragraphs 1 through 8. I'll ask Committee Members to go to those pages in their books and acknowledge the Chair if you want to lead off questions. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, government officials. My question will be for the (interpretation ends) Auditor General. In paragraph 2 of your report, it notes that social and economic challenges such as inadequate housing, food insecurity, poverty and remoteness creates a complex range of issues that put some children and families at risk. Did your audit evaluate the housing status or levels of poverty or food insecurity experienced by individuals and families involved in the cases you reviewed? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Malliki. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This audit was not about the root causes of the intergenerational trauma that we mentioned and the socio-economic pressures that we mentioned. We recognize that there has been a difficult history, but the focus of our report was on the protection and support for the children and youth today. Some of the social and economic pressures mentioned will

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likely continue if the action is not taken. That's why we identified these root causes that we will discuss later in the report that hopefully the government can take collaborative action to address. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hayes. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is unfortunate to hear since this shows the lack of a comprehensive review although it is a very substantive issue revolving around welfare and food insecurity, which is a rather large concern here in Nunavut, especially considering the ever-increasing inflation costs.

I will be asking this next question to our government officials. (interpretation ends) In paragraph 3 of the Auditor General's report, it notes that the office's 2014 audit found that the Department of Family Services made unsatisfactory progress in complying with key child protection standards. To what extent does the Department conduct ongoing reviews of its progress in respect of the Auditor General's findings from the office's 2014 report? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question, Sir. As I mentioned earlier, I understand that following the last audit, the government of the day developed what was called a *Quality Protects Action Plan*. It seemed that that plan and supplementary reports were tabled in the Assembly of the day, leading all the way up into 2017, if I'm not mistaken.

It's my considered opinion that we need to do more as a department than just simply state that actions are completed. Those **Δ⁶/
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Quality Protects Action Plans said "complete, complete, complete" in the documents that I reviewed leading up to today's appearance, and it has been difficult for me to find any underlying evidence to support those conclusions. While I can't speak of the reasons why that that is the reality of my finding, I can speak to what we're going to do moving forward.

Mr. Chairman, as we mentioned earlier, this plan needs to be robust. It needs to respond to all of the findings of the Auditor General's office. It needs to bring in our partners across the departments that have a role to play in integrating our services to ensure that they align with the needs of Nunavummiut. It has to have an evaluation framework; it needs to be measurable. We need to be able to measure whether or not the steps we are taking to address these issues are actually making positive change.

To answer your question, Sir, I'm not confident that actual change took place following the last audits because, Sir, if they were, with all due respect, we likely wouldn't be here today. I can assure this Assembly and Nunavummiut that the plan that we intend to implement will be sustainable, will be measurable, will have routine updates to this committee and to the Assembly, generally will be made. We'll be showing that we have significant steps in collaboration with not only other departments of government, but also, as mentioned earlier with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, regional Inuit organizations, not-for-profits that we engage with, to ensure that our response is built from the ground up and that we can all own this plan, not only as a whole-of-government approach, but a whole-of-Nunavut approach.

It will take all of us independently and collectively to work together to break down the barriers of the systems and processes that

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It will be really important that this Committee and the House generally hold us accountable to these standards and expectations. That expectation also goes through the department as a whole and all the departments that are partners in all of this.

What that means to me, Sir, is that the strategic plan should not only define the "what has to happen," it must also define the "how is it going to happen," and in order to hold the people that are responsible for discharging the how piece of it, we need to have work plans. There needs to be measures in place for the people that are discharging these functions so that we can ensure that this plan is meeting its intended objective. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the clear response. All constituents need to be properly represented because we do it on behalf of our people, and especially for the children and youth in school.

Can the official explain what other planning has been done for their staff? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Mr. Ellsworth, did you get enough of that question to be able to respond, or would you like the member to rephrase?

Mr. Ellsworth: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, I think I missed 75 percent of the Member's comment. My apologies.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki, if you can just condense and just get to your question.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What I stated was that we need to be served properly in Nunavut, especially for the children and youth. I would like to know what planning has been done by the Department of Family Services to hire more staff. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you, Sir, for that question. I think it's clear on the face of the audit that we do need more staff and we need staff that reflect Nunavummiut. As we go through this process with our colleagues at Human Resources, we need to create opportunities and pathways for Inuit to come into the fold of the department and to come into the fold of the government generally.

Early plans include looking at ways for career planning with our partners at the college that would see pathways created for people who are engaging in the social work programming that the college offers, either with the Bachelor of Social Work or the Family Resource Worker training, and to create pathways that are not only available, but meaningful. That means looking at adding support services for those that are going through these processes, leveraging job opportunities that will not only see them on the frontline, but will see them in the various

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capacities within the department. I think we're all aware here that much work is required to achieve the objectives of the government's Inuit employment plan, and so we're looking at creative ways to do just that.

More to your point, Sir, this plan needs to reflect our communities. It needs to look like Nunavummiut. It needs to recognize some of the challenges that exist within our communities, and to be really innovative to respond to those challenges. Oftentimes, as a government we find ourselves working through processes that seem to be processes for the sake of process. We need to look internally and externally through the lens of breaking down barriers, breaking down areas where it makes it difficult for Nunavummiut to participate meaningfully, not only in the development of the plan, but to come in as employees, and to ensure that our public service is reflective of Nunavut's demographic.

I know I've gone a little bit further than what your direct question is, Sir, but our plans include, as a next step, engaging communities to find out what their views are to ensure that this plan, again, is not only reflective of all of Nunavut's diverse communities, but is also responsive to the specific needs of individuals, and we need to be really flexible in the way we approach these potential program offerings as we move forward. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. Before I go back to Mr. Malliki, I would like to get some input from Ms. Cronin. I do realize that you're still fairly new to Nunavut, and I think that's why I think the committee needs to hear your perspective on some of your early observations on some of the available low hanging fruit of progress. Ms. Cronin.

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Our role as a department is to provide a service in ensuring that departments, such as Mr. Ellsworth's, has the right people in the right place at the right time, and I think, as evidenced in this report, there is opportunity for us to do better.

There are macro solutions, which is not the intent of your question, but micro solutions are... you know we're faced with those every day, where we have an opportunity to help break down the barriers that were mentioned in terms of our staffing process, and our policies and procedures to help departments be successful.

That's evidenced in our policy manuals, but also, and we'll get to this later in the report, is our functions in our own areas where we're understaffed, where there's an opportunity for us to increase our capacity. The HR is key in helping to ensure that departments are successful, and we're anxious to play an active role in that.

We have a group of very hard-working individuals who have been faced with a lot of reactive work, and you need to get to the proactive work as well, which is the macro pieces that maybe over the next couple days we'll have an opportunity to dig into a little bit better as well. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to that.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Cronin. I do acknowledge that we will get into a little bit deeper into the staffing later on in the report, but I just wanted to get some of those preliminary comments. I think they're valuable. Mr. Malliki.

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My next question will be for the Auditor General (interpretation ends) As described in paragraph 4, your office examined whether three government departments provided certain services from January 2019 to May 2022. Given that the current audit was conducted almost a decade after the follow-up audit, how did your office account for changes in departmental mandate, policies or program delivery that may have occurred since 2014? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I might ask Mr. McKenzie to add to my answer here. When we did our audit in 2014, the period that we were looking at was from March 2011 until August 2014.

The Department of Family Services was created in April 2013, so it was... . I think I got the dates wrong. Let me go back. Our audit period was March 2011 to August 2013, so there was a very short period after the department was created. It was a consolidation of child and family-related programs from six different departments, right?

So, our audit really wasn't able to see the impact of the creation of that department. The other thing that happened around the time of our 2014 audit was the passage of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* that created that important position.

So obviously those two things were a big part of looking at changes in mandate for this audit. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Mr. McKenzie might be able to answer a bit more.

Chairman: Thank you. You can supplement Mr. Hayes' response, Mr. McKenzie.

Mr. McKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To supplement Deputy Hayes' response, we also took into consideration... . Essentially because we have looked at procedures, for example; we looked at the policies and procedures that were in place during the audit period, so we didn't go back to the previous audit and use those as a source of criteria, if you will. Rather we looked at, for example, the standards and procedures manual that was in place, we used the structured decision-making tool that had been adopted by the department, and we used those as the basis for looking, for example, for compliance against standards.

We looked at what was essentially in place during the time period of the audit that we covered. We also, in recognizing that there had been changes, in terms of the organizations, that's why we included the Department of Health and the Department of Human Resources in the audit, recognizing that those were obviously developments with the split of Family Services from Health, and also just given the roles that they play. We felt that it was important to include those as part of the audit as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for clear responses to my questions. I would still like to direct my questions to the Auditor General's office. (interpretation ends) Paragraph 5 of your report directs readers to the "About the Audit" section for further details. At the bottom of page 19, it indicates that you

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integrated questions about the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals into your audit approach. Can you elaborate further on this aspect of your audit and how it is relevant to Nunavut's situation? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. McKenzie.

Mr. McKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In terms of the sustainable development goals, this is an initiative that our office has taken on now for about five or six years, so we are purposely looking at the sustainable development goals in all of the audits that we're conducting at the federal level and at the territorial level.

There are two concepts behind the goals; one is the concept of not only serving current generations, but also taking into consideration future generations. That was really the spirit of the sustainable development goals that really influenced a lot of our thinking and the work that we did, but also the notion of not leaving anyone behind. That is kind of one of the underlying, again, concepts or principles of the sustainable development goals and was relevant with respect to the work that we were doing in terms of looking at the child protection activities of the department.

The specific goals that we have looked at, there were a number of them, but probably the most relevant would be, just for reference, sustainable development goal 16 and it's one that we often consider. It's around developing effective and accountable institutions, but it also has a target related to ending child abuse. Again, so we use those kinds of overarching themes within the design of the audit and the way that we approached the audit work that we are undertaking. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also thank you for that clarification. Now, Inuit culture has no comparable culture throughout the entire globe, so it requires providing real respect to this unique culture of Inuit. Particularly related to our residents whom we represent where overarching services will be provided. I wanted to firstly speak to that in this commentary.

I have another question to the Deputy Minister of Health. (interpretation ends) Paragraph 7 of the Auditor General's report lists a number of service areas in health which directly relate to issues of child protection. What is the current status of the department's specialized pediatric services? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the Member for your question. A few things that have taken place over the last while are some updates around policies.

The Internal Child Welfare Policy that was recently revised, really, is around supporting frontline health care workers and their duty to report and mandatory reporting. That draft policy is in its final stages. It does create standardized processes and collaboration with the Department of Family Services for communication pathways and effectiveness of the important roles and functions that each area plays.

Also, the Pediatric Sexual Assault in Community is a new policy that was recently created. It really is around supporting health care providers in being able to understand clearly the performing of their medical and forensic assessments of children who may **LcP**: 'dታ°a广', Δ^b/ 《ÞĊ':. 'dታ°a广', Ċ°a a_aΔ^b/√σ. ΔΔ^c Δ፫¹⁶d/⁸U d'ትቦታኦ'b'ር⁶ቦ¹L' ዾα'√Δ^bĊΓ', Δ^bΛቦታኦ'በላ^bb°σ'da¹⁶)U₂ላ¹⁶ Ċ°a ዾαΔ^c ΔΔ^c Δ፫¹⁶d/⁸U. Λ₂ላ³ป
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have experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault and other forms of violence. In the completion of that, which is coming in the next few months, there will be significant training that is cross-training not just with the Department of Health and our frontline staff, but also an integrated set of training with the Department of Family Services.

We also have made sure that the No SANE In Sight training is available to all of our frontline health and wellness professionals. It is self-guided training that really was developed by the Internal Association of Forensic Nurses and so it was made open to all of our nurses across the territory since 2021.

We have also had two recorded trainings that have taken place on pediatric sexual assault examination kits because we know it's very important when we're working with children and especially when we think about the importance of safety and culturally safe care that that training being guided in a way that isn't just around the clinical assessment but also the important aspects that our health professionals understand in serving Nunavummiut people, the societal values, and common practices and also the availability of interpreters to help engage in conversation and ensure that there's common understanding and a level of safety as well.

We have the community nurse orientation, which also is focused on duty to report, and that makes sure that it also includes an understanding of the child and family services legislation and Act and where the interconnection between the role of the health professional and the role of Child and Family Services is at play so that it's very clear and there isn't a blurring of those lines, but really, an appropriate and proper practice.

The last piece that I'll talk about is around

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pediatric services that also provide different options right at that local community level to our nurses and health professionals in our health centres. We have the virtual pediatric sexual assault line; one for the Qikiqtaaluk region, the Kivalliq region, as well as the Kitikmeot region, one is served on-call 24/7 for any known or suspected child neglect or sexual assault. We have physicians from our counterpart hospitals that will be able to provide support, examination, recommendation, treatment, and those kinds of things. We have the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg as well as Stanton Hospital in our Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, the retort from the Deputy Minister of Health included mentioning this issue, which I want to add onto, in terms of schools being included, as students enrolled are numerous. On more than one occasion, I have noted along with others, that teachers are usually on the forefront of ascertaining cases of child abuse.

I wonder which of the officials can provide a response to that question. Are students involved, or rather are teachers involved or other frontline school staff? These workers are generally on the frontlines when it comes to noting potential cases of child abuse. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Hunt, did you want to lead off the response to that or should I go to Mr. Onalik? Oh, Mr. Ellsworth? Okay.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the current version of the consolidated standards and procedures manual that we all engage, it places a positive response protocol for not only social workers but GN school

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staff, medical professionals, the RCMP, and others in responding to reported child abuse and neglect. Social workers, by statute, are required to investigate whether the child needs protection as provided by the Act and they must ensure that the child is safe, following that initial review.

Historically, there has been cited a lack of information sharing between relevant departments in this regard. However, as I mentioned earlier, our departments are taking steps to ensure that these integration of services through the training that my colleague, Ms. Hunt, earlier described, staff who are in these positions in schools and others have a cognizant awareness of their obligations to report where they suspect issues of child abuse or neglect are living within or by certain individuals that they are there to serve. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you for clarifying the roles and responsibilities in this area, as it is quite a critical part of protecting our children, as any children ought never to be placed in these risky or potentially threatening situations as they are our future.

My next question is for the Auditor General. (interpretation ends) Your audit addressed the roles and responsibilities of the departments of Family Services, Health, and Human Resources for the purpose of this audit. To what extent did you reach out to other Nunavut-based entities which are often involved in addressing issues relating to children, youth or families in need of protective services including the RCMP, the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth and the Arctic Children and Youth Foundation's Umingmak Centre? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Cotnoir.

Ms. Cotnoir: It was very important for us to meet many people working for local organizations and organizations representing Inuit. We met with representatives, for example, at organizations like Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, we met with people from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Tungasuvvingat Inuit, the Kitikmeot Friendship Society in Cambridge Bay, and local organizations in the area of social work in Baker Lake. We also met with the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, the Canadian organization representing Inuit women in Canada, and the Representative for Children and Youth. We also met with representatives of the RCMP at headquarters and also in some communities we had visited, but also through the phone in other communities.

We also had discussions with people working at the Umingmak Centre and met with Legal Aid Nunavut. We also had discussions with the Public Guardian, and the Children's Aid Society. We also had discussions with organizations out-of-territory because the departments are also dealing with institutions in the south and Inuit organizations are also providing services there, so we met with the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, the Alberta Children's Service in Alberta, and the Child and Family Services Authorities in Winnipeg.

We also had discussions with the Ottawa Health Service Network. When we visited communities, we had discussions with representatives working for the hamlets, so we had meetings with the senior administrative officers, and everywhere where we could, we also visited the installations or infrastructure they had in place. We also had interactions with international organizations and federal organizations, so we had discussions with an expert working for the World Health

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Organization in the area of child protection, and we had discussions with researchers working in the area.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for having met with many individuals. I'm proud of the work that they have done for the need for public care for Nunavummiut having met with so many different organizations and individuals. My next question will be for the government. (interpretation ends) While the Family Wellness Division of the Department of Family Services has the primary role in providing support services for children, youth and vulnerable adults who may require protection or specialized support, how often does the department collaborate with staff from such other departments as Education and Justice to address the delivery of relevant programs and services? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you. This collaboration is inherent in a response that's going to be meaningful to the findings of this audit.

To your point, the frequency of those collaborations, I would say, are regular or monthly. We meet regularly at the DMC table, and we discuss issues that transcend our respective departments, but we also engage with community organizations such as, like you mentioned, Umingmak Centre. We work in collaboration with that group of individuals.

When a child or youth needs to be interviewed during an investigation of child abuse or neglect, to date, that organization has provided assistance to more than 350

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children. One of the key pieces to a responsive action plan to these issues and to issues that are outside the scope of this audit, and something that I think we need a lot of work done on, is that we need to collaborate with all stakeholders. There needs to be a common path that we're all on together to ensure that not only are specific mandates are able to be carried out, but to ensure that their funding envelopes are responsive to their specific needs to ensure that they have capacity to staff their positions, to ensure that we're playing a really complementary role in the way that we discharge our mandates specific to not one department, but collective to all departments.

To answer your question, Sir, collaboration is happening; it has to happen, it needs to continue happening, and it needs to be done through the lens of respect for our diverse opinions and views, recognizing that we all have different skills and strengths to bring to the table, but focusing really together, very clearly on intentional moves towards positive change. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I thank you for your response. (interpretation ends) In October of 2020, the Minister of Family Services tabled the Surusinut Ikajuqtigiit Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement, which is intended to improve coordination of responses to suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. To date, how well is this agreement being implemented? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Malliki is correct, that agreement is in place. The agreement does include necessary

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In my view, it again, through collaboration with these departments and through this integration assessment that we've been undergoing at many levels of the department, not only at the executive levels, but at the working levels, it's clear that there's room for improvement, but it's clear that there is a collective objective of ensuring that its implementation is meaningful.

I recognize that this agreement is from 2020, and we're three years into it, and I again won't sit here and purport to provide excuses to this Committee, but I can say, since I began my work at the Department of Family Services, we have been collaborating in a way that is meaningful and that will result in the full implementation of this agreement. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. The next name I have on my list, Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few follow-up questions to Mr. Malliki, but before I begin, I would like to note that the last number of years, I've been raising my concerns over the uncoordinated effort of the Government of Nunavut to meet its obligations to promote the best interests for protection and well-being of children and youth, and other vulnerable populations. I want to thank the current government for recognizing the crisis situation. I would like to thank the Office of the Auditor General for also recognizing the crisis situation. This was something that I had raised in 2019; the high rates of child abuse, the significant numbers

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of registered sex offenders in the territory, and the alarmingly high numbers of registered sex offenders who have convictions of crimes against children, as well as the number of high-risk repeat sex offenders in the territory. I asked the government of the day to declare the situation as a crisis given that there are so many issues that have been identified over the years, as well as through these OAG reports, our audits. It wasn't just me in 2019 asking the Government of Nunavut to declare this issue a crisis, but also one of our more recent Children and Youth representative televised hearings. The child and youth rep had also asked the Government of Nunavut to declare a crisis over this situation. After repeated calls to label this a crisis, I want to thank the current government for actually doing so. I look forward to seeing a strategic plan in the coming months that will have some traction in addressing and preventing these types of situations.

I would like to follow up on Mr. Malliki's last question in relation to the Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement that was tabled in October of 2020. I had raised my concern over this recently in question period, specifically that although this agreement does allow for information sharing between partners, social workers, educators, healthcare professionals and so on, I was hearing that when children were apprehended because their safety was at risk, that social workers were not willing that information onto school faculty. Teachers and other school faculty were not aware that the parent or guardian were not supposed to be in contact with the child. In addition, when a registered sex offender is released from custody from incarceration, they're given strict requirements, such as staying 100 feet away from playgrounds and other areas where youth congregate, and again, that valuable information was not being passed

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on to school faculty.

In follow-up to the question, I would like to ask if that portion of the information sharing in the Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement: one, if social workers in the Department of Family Services are sharing that information with school faculty when children are apprehended; and two, if the Department of Justice is also sharing that information with school faculty when registered sex offenders with convictions against children are released into the public and into a community? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The agreement basically creates a framework for the reporting that you are describing, Mr. Lightstone. I would be dishonest if I sat here and told you that yes, everything is working perfectly, because I can't say personally that I'm aware that it's working perfectly, but I can commit to this Committee and to Nunavummiut, that we will take collaborative steps to ensure that the spirit and intent of that agreement is working to the best that it can.

That's not the answer that I want to be providing to your today, but in the spirit of transparency and accountability, I recognize again, that there is a lot of work that we must do together to strengthen not only our core mandates, but to embrace these agreements that have been in place for perhaps far too long of an implementation period. Mr. Chairman, that's my response. Thank you.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth, for that response and your honesty.

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Moving on to my next line of questioning, it's going to be to the Department of Health, again, in follow-up to Mr. Malliki's question in relation to the department's specialized pediatric services. I would like to thank Ms. Hunt for providing a detailed response about all the different initiatives across community health centres and regional health centres and at the hospital.

In the past at one of our televised hearings, I think it might have been with the OAG's audit on support for youth and post-secondary students, one of the issues that came up was counselling services for youth. If I recall correctly, at that time, the Department of Health had indicated that there were no specialized mental health workers or psychiatric specialists or individuals who specialize in treating children and especially children who have suffered through abuse and traumatic events.

I would like to ask if the Department of Health would be able to provide us with an update on what type of specialized counselling and other services are available for children who have experienced child abuse or other traumatic events. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question. Mr. Chairman, if you will allow, I would like to have ADM Victoria Madsen, who is our ADM of Mental

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Chairman: I knew we would get Ms. Madsen engaged at this around this time. Ms. Madsen, please go ahead.

Ms. Madsen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Lightstone, you're right; I remember that and I remember reporting that.

I do want to say that when we say that there isn't a counsellor that specializes in counselling children, it's not to say that we don't have counsellors and therapists that are quite specialized in a general sense. It's very important for us in Nunavut to have people come to work that have a lot of experience in a lot of different groups. We don't have the luxury of people who just specialize in one area. We ensure that all of our clinicians have training in this.

One of the things that we have done is the trauma training symposium. That's something that the Mental Health and Addiction Program did with the Arctic Children and Youth Foundation. We did it in '21 and '22 and it's scheduled again for next month. That's very important because we give very specific training on talking with youth and children about trauma. That training, by the way, also helps the staff in their own work when they're engaged with individuals and working through trauma. We have to keep our staff strong.

Getting back to the children, we also have a very good relationship with Umingmak that's run by the Arctic Children and Youth Foundation. We do have ongoing support from a group called Radius. They're quite well known internationally for trauma with children. This group meets with our frontline staff, including our paraprofessionals, twice a month and they talk through cases, they give advice, and they give supervision so that we

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can continue to give as much help in territory as we can. When a child needs more than we can give, we do work with out-of-territory services, as you know, and continue following. That community of practice that we have developed with this Radius group and all of our workers together throughout Nunavut help us continue to learn from each other, support each other, and support the children as best we can.

In summary, we might not have someone who is always in territory that specializes with youth, but we're making sure that people have the tools to do so. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Madsen, for your response. In the past, I have raised my concerns over the lack of data collection with regard to child abuse in Nunavut. We know that the Department of Family Services doesn't have a caseload management system to put this information together, but it's not just the Department of Family Services that deals with these types of investigations.

The Department of Justice and the RCMP are involved, but at the last I checked, they're unable to find that information or get that information, the number of reported instances of child abuse in Nunavut. The courts were unable to put that information together, the number of individuals convicted with crimes against children. The last I had asked, the Department of Health also did not collate that information, the number of times health care professionals had to deal with children who have reported cases of child sexual abuse.

My next question is: does the Department of Health now collect that information of how

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Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Madsen.

Ms. Madsen: Whenever someone is referred to Mental Health and Addictions, we complete information that does go into a data system. It would record why the individual came forward. As you can appreciate, sometimes people come forward for one reason and we discover that there are other issues. I tell you that because it means that the data we would have is probably underreported. Yes, we do have data, in answer to your first question.

In answer to the second, absolutely, if we know of any child that needs help, we would connect them with counselling. My DM mentioned the Healing by Talking program. That does have a counsellor that deals specifically with children and this service is out of territory, but it's offered virtually. Though we always try to make sure that someone sees someone in territory, when we need to use those kinds of services as well, there's a continuum that we would go through.

If you remember the paraprofessionals, one of those positions is youth facilitator, so again, extra training and making sure that children have someone to talk to. You can see a continuum of different services that we would give the child, what they're ready for, what they're willing to engage in, and things like that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Madsen. Before I go to my next name on the list, I'm going to recognize the clock and we will break for

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>>Committee recessed at 11:54 and resumed at 13:27

Chairman: I would like to call the committee meeting back to order. We're here to discuss the Office of the Auditor General's Report on Family Services. The next name I have on my list under paragraphs 1 through 8 is Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have several questions, not that many, regardless they intersect with the foundation hereby I wish to pose this question. It was partially referenced in earlier questions. Nonetheless, I want to be clear in my understanding of this matter, hence my wordiness and request for in-depth details related to this matter. It is completely tied into this matter that I have witnessed in past work, which I want to clearly understand here.

This speaks to this matter referenced prior to this question as members asked questions on it, specific to the Department of Health regarding youth and children. I wish to ask my question specifically to earlier commentary related to our youth and the health concerns they have. We seem to be focusing entirely on that, so I wish to advocate this specific issue.

The Qikiqtani General Hospital where they may be diagnosed with mental health issues, and I want to ask about this discrepancy when youth are not feeling comfortable, related to the Qikiqtani General Hospital, what happens during that procedure and what steps are taken when the youth is incarcerated in that place?

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to a safe room as far as I can ascertain. I wish to hear more details on the operational issues related to this aspect of their mandate over our youth, what is included, what is needed, for example, why are our youth treated like felons? This is my question, to ensure all these hidden aspects are brought to the surface.

Mr. Chairman, if I'm out of line, please let me know. Nevertheless, my question relates to the areas where these young people seem to be taken into custody and a guard stationed outside of their room. They're usually referred from the smaller communities to the general hospital.

Is that the proper way to deal with a mental patient or how do you deal with those types of cases? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. As the scope of the audit deals with that subject matter, I will allow the question under the introduction. I think it does warrant a response. Ms. Madsen, please go ahead.

Ms. Madsen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to be honest; I agree with you. It does feel like they're brought into custody and it's not the best. I'm going to talk about the assessment process, what it is today, and what it is we hope to do.

When a youth or child is brought to the hospital for assessment and if it does look like they are a harm to themselves or others, they are brought to a safe room. You're correct. The security outside the safe room gives the feeling of custody. It gives the feeling of negative. We would like to change that. We have done different things over the years trying to replace security guards. We do need someone there to ensure safety, but what we're trying to do is change the idea from security to someone more clinical. It

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has been difficult. I don't want to repeat staff shortages as an excuse. We're looking at, at least having security wear plain clothes if we can't get more staff outside these rooms.

Back to the assessments, the youth or child is assessed by a mental health nurse and we also have access to a mental health doctor like a psychiatrist, and if we can't give the best service in Nunavut, we do have to transfer the child or youth out of territory. We do need an escort and we try to go to places that understand Inuit culture.

We try to send family as escorts. We try to get the child back as soon as we can. We try to communicate to people, but I will agree that the feeling of custody is a negative one and we need to work a little harder so that the child doesn't feel that. I hope that answers your question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Madsen. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that, and Minister, you stated earlier in your verbal response that various means of safety provision measures were attempted or tried for that person or individual.

Again, I would like to direct my question to the Department of Family Services or maybe not. Perhaps I should direct my question to the Office of the Auditor General.

On page 6, my question relates to the report submitted by the Office of the Auditor General. I believe that this requires going through an administrative process. As Inuit, we have no literary based historic cultural events, only oral. It's entirely based on an oral historical anecdotal knowledge dispersal method.

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Nothing is written down in many communities and this creates a problem due to Inuit being an orally knowledge-based culture. While documenting your findings, I imagine that you were required to provide literature or written material for the facts. How does the audit process work? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you for the question. You are correct that in our audit work we look for evidence and a lot of the times we are looking documents; evidence that has been captured on paper or in a computer system, but equally important for our work is interviews and speaking to people that have been doing the work. In some cases, that will be department officials. In other cases, it might be the community social service workers.

As we went through our audit, we asked for information in evidence. We asked to interview people that had experience in dealing with these children and we did not get evidence that showed that the work had been done to follow up and to have face to face meetings with the children and youth that we had been looking at in the sample; the case files that we had selected to look at.

I want to make an important clarification here: we know that the social workers were often temporary employees. There might have been a lot of turnover, and indeed there was a lot of turnover. We don't want to stand here and criticize or critique the social workers for the incredible work that they do, but when we are asking the department about the work that they have done to make sure that these children are safe, there isn't anything for us to go on to see that there has been the follow-ups and check-ins.

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For us, I think the important point that we want to make looking forward is that there needs to be information that gets passed on from the social worker to the next social worker, or from the social worker to the health professional who helps these children so that there is a continuity of care, that there is a string of care that helps the child or the family, or the community make sure that everything is moving well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): That statement is entirely true. We are aware of our need for proper procedures specific to toddlers or younger children, along with vulnerable young people; our fellow Inuit, and this requires further exploration to ensure that steps required to be implemented are fully felt and respected. This has to be on top of the list of our priorities.

Here I wish to move sideways or laterally to this matter, actually, prior to making this segue, perhaps, Mr. Chairman, with your discretion, I can (interpretation ends) comment on (interpretation) on this issue unrelated to our discussion, but still short and succinct. I ought to have commented earlier at the start of this committee hearing. Nonetheless, we must ensure that an Inuktitut copy of the document becomes available shortly therein. If this report is specified as required to be in Inuktitut along with these accompanying documents, I wish to see both the English and Inuktitut copies accompanying the substantiations since we represent Inuit in Nunavut. I want to ensure that all official languages are respected, recognized, and appreciated when providing such documentation.

This substantiation sheet was unavailable in Inuktitut, such as the one I am waving here.

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Okay, I have it here. That is fortunate. Regardless, for the others, I am very pleased that these are available. I also want to request that if your department is contracting out any auditing work, corresponding Inuktitut documents should be provided since our constituents must understand the issues we are debating.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to move on to the next department, specifically (interpretation ends) to the Department of Human Resources, (interpretation) and I am unsure if this query was submitted by colleagues towards this matter prior to my questions because I was distracted. (interpretation ends) I just want to go ahead and ask these questions that relate to the audit that found that the Department of Family Services made unsatisfactory progress in ensuring ongoing human resource capacity to fulfill its mandate. To what extent has the Department of Human Resources reviewed their progress in supporting the Department of Family Services in respect to the Auditor General's findings from the office's 2014 report? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Killiktee. Ms. Cronin.

Ms. Cronin: I will defer to my colleague on that one.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) The Department of Human Resources works to support the Department of Family Services in meeting their capacity needs, and I think we have all recognized since this audit was brought forward that we all need to do a better job. There are two parts of how capacity is addressed, and one of them is the department making sure that the structures

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It is my understanding that through the contracted resources that were available to Family Services, they have gone out and we're in a competition for social workers and with a really high uptake on that. I think overall, we recognize it is not just looking at one department individually, but we need the Department of Human Resources to grow at the same time the Department of Family Services grows so they can match the support there. I hope that answers the question. We have really focused on providing short-term contract resources to the Department of Family Services to allow for increased staffing. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. I believe Ms. Hunt wanted to supplement the response as well. Am I correct?

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you to the Member for the question. I definitely agree my colleague's comments. I would just add a couple of other things that I think are helpful in terms of some of the progress that has been made over the last while.

Many of you will recall when Health was here in the House not that long ago, that the critical staffing measures and putting into action a plan around recruitment, retention of health care professionals, mental health nurses, nurses, and all areas of group five, but specifically, when we think about this Δ⁶νοΔγ⁶νοπλ⁶νος αντος α

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conversation, the role of health care professionals working in an integrated way. Being able to create that area of retention of our hard-working staff, and our ability to recruit the right staff at the right time with the right skills has been a significant focus because we know continuity and stability of staff is what really is going to create the foundation of relationships and trust so that as children and families access services, they are able to do that without telling their story over again and be able to receive the right service.

Also, the nursing road map, where we've engaged deeply with health care professionals to understand what we are doing well and where we need to improve. Being able to look at the safety and the culture of the workplace that our staff work in is important, so that also is a critical measure and step that has been taken as we roll out that around education, training, retention, but also leadership and making sure people have the knowledge, tools, and oversight to do their jobs effectively to ensure the safety and well-being and health of Nunavummiut. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you for that response. I'm sure that we will have some more detailed questions when we get to the staffing section as well. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you for clearly explaining this complex aspect, and I appreciate your efforts to enable my comprehension of this process, and in understanding this better, I would like to now ask if what you responded with related to recruiting and contractual term emplacements, yes, hiring term contractors.

My next question relates to available positions whether these are permanent positions, or temporary placements that are

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available, and ask if this example can be incorporated into a coherent response on whether or not this distinction is applicable, and this is my additional question to you.

When promoting specific positions, regardless of these positions being permanent or causal positions, how does that apply towards our social worker position advertisements? The people training to become social workers have been increasing exponentially over the past several years. Have any investigations been undertaken to see whether this can be amalgamated and additional to the present criteria requiring social workers to be bilingual in both Inuktitut and English? Maybe I'm talking a bit outside of what we're supposed to be asking about, so I'll stop here for now. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Killiktee. We do have an opportunity later on to get deeper into the recruitment and retention and the training component.

Just for the viewing audience and just for the record, the Inuktitut interpretations or translations of the opening comments are already available on the Assembly website. The report is on there in Inuktitut as well.

I will move on to my next name: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you for recognizing me again, Mr. Chairman. I hope that you will indulge me in the next couple of questions because I do realize that we will be talking about information management later on. However, Madam Cotnoir, in an earlier response, indicated a number of different organizations that were interviewed as part of this review. I'm really curious about whether or not any of those organizations were able to present any data on children in care in

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Nunavut, whether or not there are any organizations that are collecting any data on those children and of course, whether or not, to their knowledge, is there a national database or a national child abuse and neglect database system that could also be fed in to provide information to inform this process because we know that collecting and analyzing data to measure and verify the effectiveness of services helps organizations to make informed policy decisions towards improving outcomes for children and families? We know that Nunavut is struggling with collecting data or Family Services particularly. However, I don't have a clear understanding of whether or not there are organizations within Nunavut or outside of Nunavut that are collecting data on these very important children. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Cotnoir.

Ms. Cotnoir: Thank you for your question. First of all, the responsibility for collecting data on the services provided to children in Nunavut is really within the Department of Family Services. It's not the responsibility of other organizations, so it is very important that they take that task very seriously. It is very important that they know what the needs are and what kind of services are provided, when and how.

We did not have discussions on data on children that are taken care of by other organizations, for example in the south. However, our office does not have an audit mandate to audit that data, so usually we cannot use that kind of information, and also there were some confidentiality issues that they had deal with in those organizations. They do not share their data with external organizations. That is why we could not use that type of information. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes, you wanted to supplement?

Mr. Hayes: Yes, thank you. Just to signal that Statistics Canada sometimes has information that can be helpful to get a picture of many of the questions that you raised. I want to emphasize the point that Ms. Cotnoir mentioned; the importance if confidentiality, particularly in light of the sensitive information that we were dealing with in this audit, has to always be kept in mind. These are really difficult situations for children, families, but I think the point that your raising is an important one.

As has been mentioned throughout this hearing so far, it is a whole-of-government approach that we are talking about and that we are emphasizing. I think some of the other witnesses have mentioned a whole-of-Nunavut approach and everybody needs to be engaged. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate those responses. I wonder if the Office of the Auditor General could share with us some advice or examples about ways to ensure that, especially if you take.... We know that there are interagency issues and there are interdepartmental issues. Is it possible to ensure that within the programs and services provided by this territorial government, that they can share information at least interdepartmentally, in order to provide better services? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you. I am not an expert on the privacy legislation that applies here in the territory, but I can share that when we look at the audit work that we do federally, I

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What does that mean? In practice, it means that if there are barriers to sharing information across departments, sometimes even within departments, those need to be broken down. That might need a legislative solution. That is something that members of the government might be able to answer a little bit more. When we come across those challenges to sharing information that compromise or put in question the services and outcomes for people, we will raise those. That is probably the best answer I can give you on that question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. I am sure, again, that we will get into that a little bit later on. I know one thing that was discussed at our Committee meeting was the interagency coordinator protocols and how they are being implemented that was created in 2015, so just to give the government officials, there will be questions coming along down the pike on that one.

The next name I have on my list is Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) This is a question to the Auditor General. In paragraph 9 of your report, it states that your early findings during the audit were alarming. Can you provide further details on why you felt it important to immediately

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bring your concerns to the department's attention? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. My Co-Chair just nudged me along to the next section, and I did not have any more names under paragraphs 1 through 8, so just to confirm with Committee Members that there are no more questions under that line. We will proceed to paragraphs 9 through 16. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Right off the bat I have to say that it is unusual that we would write a letter to the department while we are in the course of doing an audit work. For the most part, in normal circumstances, the Legislative Assembly would be the first to receive our findings when they are finalized and it would come in the form of a report. However, in cases where there are serious health and safety concerns, we have done this before. I think the last example for us where we have done this was in a federal audit where we were looking at temporary foreign workers and the living conditions that they were experiencing both before and during COVID. They involved health and safety and we wrote a letter to the federal Deputy Minister in that case.

In this case we are dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in the territory; the children and youth who need support and protection, and we found 92 cases that we had concerns about. We wanted to make sure that the department had the information that we had already identified that it could act on immediately. I must say, as I mentioned before, when we write these letters it is a big step for us to do that and we expect that the department takes it very seriously and acts immediately. I will stop there, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Sammurtok.

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Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In paragraph 10 it says that you sent a letter in December 2022 to inform the department of a number of concerns with respect to the lack of evidence that cases of neglect and abuse have been investigated and gaps in case management and supervision. Were you satisfied with the department's response? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you. We weren't satisfied with the response. As we mentioned in paragraph 11, there were a number of cases that were not followed up on and in 48 percent of the cases, while the department said that there was follow-up that had been done, we didn't evidence to support the statements that were made. We wouldn't have been looking for perfect evidence. If we are going to be honest, we recognize how difficult these cases can be to follow up on and the work that faces the community social service workers, but we would have expected to see evidence showing that the follow-up and the screening had been done by the department. I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is going to the government witnesses. In paragraph 9 of the report, the Auditor General indicates that the concerns were brought to the attention of the department without delay following the early findings of the audit. What steps did the department take to address these immediate concerns? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Sir, for your question. As I

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mentioned earlier in a similar question, and as the Auditor General's office has pointed out, in order to satisfy their inquiries around the status of file work and the need to follow up, some form of evidentiary-based document should have been provided at the relevant time. As I was not there at the material time of the receipt of that letter, I can't speak to why that course of action was not followed.

I am advised that, and I think the Auditor General has pointed out, that they've received confirmation that follow-ups had been conducted. I think I can honestly state for this Committee that that's an insufficient response to an Auditor General's early findings. In my view, immediate steps ought to have been taken to ensure the status of every single one of those files, and a proper response proffered to the management letters that were tendered in December 2022. I can say that since I arrived, I have received evidence that all matters were followed up on and the appropriate steps were taken following the response by previous departmental officials.

Mr. Sammurtok, I hope that answers your question, but as I stated earlier, since then, the department has undertaken a wholescale review of all of its clients and ensured that their statuses are compliant with the legislative obligations articulated within the *Child and Family Services Act* and standards and procedures manuals. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Just before I go back to Mr. Sammurtok, Mr. Ellsworth, you had mentioned that you were satisfied with the information and documentation that was provided to you on the follow up to the files in question. In your opinion, do you feel that that information that you received would have also satisfied the Office of the Auditor

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Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would suspect it would have satisfied their needs in the sense that it identified exactly the course of action that specific social workers took with respect to those files. I would have shared that information, and certainly I would have taken advice with respect to the veracity or the validity of that response at the time. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman: Thank you for that. Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is going to the government witnesses. Paragraph 11 of the audit report indicates that the Office of the Auditor General identified possible follow-up actions, including face-to-face follow-up with the young people involved in the cases to address concerns raised. How often are face-to-face follow-ups conducted as part of the department's procedures? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Sammurtok. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I understand it, the standards and procedures require one face-to-face contact with children receiving services and their family at least once per month. Children need to be seen physically by the social worker. At least every second visit ought to be in the home if they are in a situation of a voluntary support agreement or a plan of care agreement.

One private contact with the child or children receiving services should be conducted every

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two months in the case of ongoing safety concerns. Families believed to be in need of protection, but where children remain in the home under some form of care agreement, one face-to-face contact with the child or children at risk with their family once per month, and the children need to be seen individually and separately at least every second visit, and one private contact with the children outside of the home every six weeks. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is going to the Auditor General. In paragraph 11 of the report, it states that 47 cases were identified for follow-up and your office identified possible follow-up actions the department could consider. The department's response of March 2023 provided information on the action it took to respond to concerns raised. What kind of supporting evidence did you anticipate receiving to demonstrate that the follow-up had occurred? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. McKenzie.

Mr. McKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for the question. As we noted in the report, we did see that the department had written that they had responded in various forms on a case-by-case basis, but there was also documentation. The standards and the procedures, for example, speak to risk assessments, screening reports, and investigation reports, that we would have either had asked for because we didn't see them in the file. That was the type of information, if you will; the documentation.

As we do note, though, there was some form of response, but it did vary by community. Again, it really was more on the documentary evidence side and the types of

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documents that they do produce in the course of looking at referrals and following up on the referrals. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Just before I go back to Mr. Sammurtok, I just want to remind Committee Members we are on paragraphs 9 through 16, the Early Findings section. Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Auditor General, in paragraph 12 it states that the department's response did not alleviate your unease about the safety and well-being of the children and youth you had identified. What were your main concerns? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you. Our main concerns were that we did not see the roots of systemic changes, the transformational changes that we would have wanted to see, whether it was the follow-ups that were supposed to be conducted or the actions happening within the timeframes that the Deputy Minister has just mentioned.

As mentioned, we have more than 52 percent of the cases here that had not had the follow-ups completed by the time that we finished drafting our report. That was a long time. For us, what we had hoped to see was that these children had had reasonable follow up, that the consistent contact was happening, and that the department was able to show that the children that needed additional protection were getting it, and additional support were getting it. Where everything was working okay, they were back in the regular process of contact every month or two months as required.

I am hopeful that this report will bring those kinds of changes forward. Thank you, Mr.

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Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is going to the Government of Nunavut. Page 3 of the Auditor General's report includes the breakdown of information provided by the Office of the Auditor General regarding follow-up activities in response to concerns raised in the early stages of the audit. Why was no information provided for the 19 percent of the cases addressed? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my understanding that they either did not have the ability to provide information about these follow-ups or they did not in fact follow up. Again, as I mentioned earlier, the standard of proof, in my view, is evidence-based in nature. Like the Auditor General's office recently mentioned, they needed to see some tangible sort of information that would lead to a confirmation that these follow-ups had actually taken place.

I cannot speak to why the administration of the day did not provide any information about its follow-up on the children or youth in question, but I can confirm that all of these matters have been followed up since then. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Still going to the government department; paragraph 12 of the report states that the department needs to introduce long-term and sustainable improvements to its process of responding to reports of suspected child abuse. To date, what steps have been taken to develop and introduce major changes to this

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process and how will you evaluate if those changes are effective? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Sammurtok. There are a few pieces that would respond to your inquiry around what we are going to do to introduce long-term and sustainable improvements.

The initial piece, of course, is actually ensuring that the current standards are being upheld and so that is the immediate or the short-term response. Recognizing that there is clear evidence in the report that articulates a serious records management concern on the part of the department, I believe there is reference to the fact that it doesn't even meet GN policy on records management, and it certainly doesn't meet the protections standards set out in the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

What this tells us as leaders now, Sandy and I, at the Department of Family Services, is that in addition to not only ensuring that standards and procedures are being carried out in the intervening time, that in the long term, we need to introduce revised standards and procedures that speak to clearer direction around what record keeping means; what is expected of staff. In addition, record keeping is not bold, as the Auditor General's office mentioned earlier. Record keeping isn't a bold initiative, so I can't characterize it as such, but what we have to do is step back and recognize that right now, social workers, in addition to keeping written notes, they also are required to file them in, I think, three or four different file sharing frameworks, if you will. What this creates is of course unnecessary redundancy, but it also creates extra work when they need to be focusing on providing services to children and youth.

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However, recognizing that this is not an excuse, I am just trying to contextualize the question or our response. The long-term solution, Sir, involves not only the streamlining and revision of practice standards, but also the implementation of the software solution I described in my opening comments. Parts of this software solution right now, we hope to have launched in the fall very soon. Right now, we are engaged in what is called "user acceptance testing," so we have many members of our team currently using the software solution to ensure that it responds to the records management and privacy needs of the organization. In parallel to that, we are also undergoing what is called a "privacy impact assessment." This assessment is a requirement of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act as it pertains to new software solutions that the government intends to implement.

Taken together with the immediate action of directing staff to compliance, ensuring that there is oversight in the compliance regime, developing a longer term solution with respect to where this critical information can be stored in one place and accessible by several members of the practice team, there is also a side piece of this in the sense that there is a point in the Auditor General's report where we are discussing right now, referrals were not followed up, investigations were not followed up, they were not closed, and plans of care were not issued. This system also envisions a tickler, so that as a soon as a referral is entered, then it will tickle to the next level of oversight and that person will be responsible for ensuring that that file continuity or process is undertaken in a way that aligns with the standards and procedures that we are developing in parallel to the implementation of the software solution. Mr. Chairman, thank you. I believe that responds to the inquiry.

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Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. There was a component at the end of Mr. Sammurtok's question on the evaluation on the effectiveness of some of these measures. Maybe if you could elaborate a little bit on that, Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Certainly, Mr. Chairman, and apologies for the oversight. Like I had mentioned earlier, and I think I have expressed with my colleagues and with stakeholders, is that this software solution is one small component of a very broad and encompassing strategic plan. I think where we get caught up often times is that there is no evaluation metric. I called it early in my advocacy days, if you will, "analysis paralysis." We looked at the issue, we defined plans, but we never actually implement them or measure whether or not we are successful.

I can't speak to the details of an evaluation framework for you right now, Mr. Chairman, but what I can say is it perhaps one of the most important components of our strategic response in the sense of not only defining what we are going to do to ensure that this reality ceases as soon as it can, but ensuring that it is meaningful, sustainable, measurable, and that we can use the data points arising from that to report back to this Committee and to the House, but also to inform decisions at the management level about whether or not we need to take steps to change course in the sense of that evaluation tool should tell us early on this isn't going to work, or this isn't working and we need to pivot.

A really important part of the evaluation framework from my perspective is our collaboration with the Auditor General's team in the sense that we want them to tell us and come in and say "No, no, guys this is going to work, but this small piece you need

to rethink and this is why you need to rethink it." It is so important in the sense of being open to that critical and constructive criticism to make sure that our data management, our record keeping, and most importantly, the way that we interact with children is above standard and has a quality and character that meets the needs of the children that we are here to serve. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is for the Auditor General. (interpretation ends) Paragraph 14 notes that your office issued a second letter to the department in March 2023 with respect to the health and safety of the department's employees. What specific information was collected in that early stage of the audit that identified an issue? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Madame Cotnoir.

Ms. Cotnoir: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for the question. Through interviews we learned that there were concerns about health and safety issues in the Department of Family Services, and that there were incidents involving the security of staff and that staff had experienced drastic situations and had not necessarily received the support needed to help them recover. That is why we also looked at what system and programs were in place to support the staff and help recruit the staff because this could also have an impact on retention of staff

We found that there were key elements missing; key elements that are required by the *Nunavut Safety Act* or the occupational health and safety regulations. There were no

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Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are concerned about our government employees and we should support them to be in a safe environment. My question is to the government: have these been implemented by the department? Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Mr. Chairman, if I might, for this response to my colleague, Ms. Sandy Kownak, the Associate Deputy Minister, please.

Chairman: Thank you. We'll just go through the Chair first, Ms. Kownak. I would like to thank Ms. Kownak for being a witness. This is the last one being called upon. Please proceed.

Ms. Kownak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We do not want our staff working in a toxic environment, but currently we have many case files within our Department of Family Services, to work on office procedures or protocols followed to allow for a safe environment, and we are working on that at this time.

Furthermore, another aspect is related to considering the heavy workload of our employees based on the emotional stresses faced by our social workers. As an example, Δ •/**^{\circ}** (ጋኒ/ $^{\circ}$): የժታ $^{\circ}$ $^{\circ}$ Γ'C LCP.

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there is telephone support available from other counsellors who can provide the emotional support required, and further, another program we offer is based on this new position that will offer support services for our employees undergoing turmoil or extreme emotional stresses, or if they are at risk.

This is another service we are working to provide, along with the office procedures towards that, as well, this new position to be created will specifically be for risk management services, or those that require further support for this position of an (interpretation ends) occupational health and safety coordinator (interpretation) and this is the position we are working to fill currently. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for that response. They do need our support. This question is for the Auditor General. (interpretation ends) Paragraph 15 indicates that the department does not have a system to collect and manage occupational health and safety incident reports. Did the audit identify how this information is currently recorded? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Madam Cotnoir.

Ms. Cotnoir: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question. When we ask for the incident reports that involved the safety of staff during our audit period, we were told that they were not managed at headquarters and we were asked to ask the regional director, but the regional director would have the copy of the report that they were responsible for, but they would not necessarily have the incident report that had been produced while other regional directors

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were in the position. We have no idea how many incident reports had to be produced and were produced during our audit period. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the planning work, and here I am querying our government officials; when you are undertaking a planning exercise without knowing the exact number of employees who faced risks in their official capacity, or if any abuse occurred, how can this plan be prepared properly to face these challenges if we do not have current reports outlining the types of incidents faced? I would like that to be answered first. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You raise a valid point, Sir. In order to be able to adequately service the needs of our very important frontline staff, we need to know the challenges that they experience on a daily basis.

As the Auditor General correctly pointed out, currently there is no mechanism by which incidents find their way to the people in the chairs of those who make decisions. The response to this as an interim measure has been an informal reporting mechanism so that we know when things are happening on the ground, but the longer term, recognizing that that is not sufficient long-term and sustainable approach, we have done a number of things to sort of address this that will be a part of the strategic plan. We take their well-being and safety very importantly. We need to be cognizant of the fact that we're not dealing with the frontline realities that they are dealing with. We are not seeing the things that our social workers are seeing.

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To respond to this very critical aspect of the report, first, we have engaged with a dedicated counselling service so that our colleagues have access to resources that are trauma-informed and equipped to resolve trauma at the outset of their engagement in critical incidents. There are debriefing opportunities and such. It doesn't speak to the critical incident reporting that is required. We are in our early stages in the development of an occupational health and safety program and a workplace violence prevention strategy. This strategy needs to do two things; it needs to not only identify ways that conflict can be resolved when it happens as between our colleagues, but it also has to be front-facing in a sense of how do colleagues address their own safety when it comes to situations where they may find themselves in a conflict that is escalating to a potentially violent situation.

We don't have data to support this review and so the second part or third part of this is the communication strategy that I spoke to lightly earlier, in the sense that creating information pathways so that we know at the executive levels exactly what is happening on the frontlines and so that we can engage our partnerships within the department or the government and other stakeholders to ensure that their safety can managed in a very appropriate way.

Again, we have engaged external support to define what this program looks like and it will be built on through engagement with our colleagues and external stakeholders. We are well underway in that process. As an oversight mechanism, we have also had initial discussions with the Workers Safety and Compensation Commission to ensure that whatever program we define is in line with the *Safety Act* and it does respond adequately and meaningfully to the safety needs of not only our staff, but our clients

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and the interconnectedness of the work that we do in the community. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Before I go back Mr. Malliki, it was mentioned earlier that there are gaps in the Health and Safety Policy as well as the lack of health and safety committees within the department. Mr. Ellsworth, you just mentioned that there are some new steps that have been taking until this strategy is fully developed and implemented. Maybe if you could elaborate a little bit on what safety measures are put in place for staff currently until some of these decisions are finalized. How is the reporting? How are staff that are out there in the frontlines being able to access services right now until those decisions are formalized? Mr. Ellsworth?

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. An important part of the work of social workers involves safety planning. Safety planning includes risk assessments. Risk assessments often happen sort of as a matter of course, if you will, in terms of recognizing that some folks may be more likely to engage in combative or conflicting type relations. That risk assessment is a constant. Where we get the sense that somebody may become violent or is agitated for reasons that are beyond the scope of the intervention, we engage immediately with our colleagues at the RCMP.

To answer your question, Sir, the immediate response is a communication response. We need to know where these incidents are happening. We need to be able to respond quickly to ensure that not only does the situation resolve amicably through the lens of resolution and de-escalation, rather than engaging the justice system, but also to identify what can we be doing better to help our clients, because oftentimes the reason they are running into conflict in their lives

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are beyond what the social worker is trying to do. It also involves messaging and clear information and understanding that people have unique and distinct needs when it comes to a clinical social work approach and practice.

I think I am rambling on a little bit now, Mr. Chairman, my apologies. What I am getting at is that until we have a clear line of sight in terms of deployment and implementation of these pieces that I mentioned to you already, the key is communication so that we can be responsive and identify where people do find themselves engaged in trauma-inducing situations, that we apply the resources that are currently in place to ensure they can maintain that healthy work reality. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you Mr. Chairman. With no information gathered, I would like to direct my question to the Office of the Auditor General. How many incidences of physical assault, verbal abuse, and threatening behaviour against workers were identified in the course of the audit? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. People came forward to speak to us during interviews. I don't have an exact number that I can give you in terms of the number of verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, or physical assault cases, but the number of people that came forward is not one, it's not two, it's not three; it's more than that. It is a relatively high number. Saying that, even one is enough. That's a high number.

As we stated, the reasons for this is because this information was not getting captured in

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the incident reports and the management occupational health and safety processes. The department needs to take some action on this. This is serious. The work that we are asking community social service workers to do is already difficult and this makes it even harder.

We are concerned that this could be a recruitment or retention challenge for the department if there is physical abuse or threatening behaviour or verbal abuse that is happening. How do you get people to want to come and do this work? A strategy and concrete actions to take safety measures and put them in place for the workers on the ground is important. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you for that, Mr. Hayes. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you Mr. Chairman and I also thank the officials although no figures were provided as it is obvious there is more than one, we are discussing. I now would like to query your officials on paragraph 13 where it states in the written form (interpretation ends) The Office of the Auditor General put forward possible follow-up actions to address concerns relating to the safety and well-being of children and youth but that it is the department which is responsible for determining the appropriate actions in the identified instances. Did departmental officials consider the Auditor General's proposed follow-up actions appropriate, or were other courses of action followed to address the concerns raised? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that paragraph 13 ties into paragraph 12

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around the safety and well-being of children that the Auditor General had identified as being concerning. I mentioned the immediate actions we took earlier in these proceedings, but perhaps I can elaborate on some of the actions that were going to take moving forward.

We have begun developing a comprehensive set of initiatives and actions to enhance our operations, staff safety, and information management. These efforts collectively serve as our proactive response to addressing longterm critical concerns and they aim to ensure effective service delivery while maintaining a focus on the safety and well-being of children and youth in Nunavut. As you have heard, you will be reviewing a budget for the coming fiscal cycle that will seek to enhance our financial and human resources to further expand our capacity and to do better. What we are doing now is we are working within our current funding allocation to do just that and to start taking those steps to identifying where those better pieces are. I mentioned that our strategic plan is not only about what has to be done but how, which is really important. It will also include contingencies, as I mentioned earlier.

The potential increase in staffing for the department will directly improve our ability and capacity to enable health and healing specifically by creating more Inuit-specific programs and services, increasing the number of Inuktitut-speaking counsellors, and employing more Inuit in care-focused positions. As you've heard, we also have engaged this comprehensive strategic plan which I've been very fortunate to have members of our team be a part of the development of this. This is just early days though. This plan has to reflect Nunavummiut's needs. It has to encompass the views of all of us, including, as I mentioned earlier, community, Nunavut

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We did that immediately after I took office, if that term is appropriate in this circumstance. It includes key actions that will allow us to better operate in compliance with the legislation and the *Child and Family Services Act* and updated standards of procedure. We need to achieve significant change through this strategic plan and it needs to be sustainable. That is the key part of this and a key message that I've shared with my colleagues, not only at the DM table, but internal to the Department of Family Services.

As I mentioned, there needs to be a communication plan; a robust response to making sure that the public knows what we are here to do. There is a common misconception and I worked at legal aid. I know what the parents feel when their children have been apprehended. There needs to be a shift in the dynamic of what the relationship looks like as between the way we operate in our communities and how we can help to improve realities for people. It needs to be a wraparound service. This service needs to not only integrate what the Department of Family Services also has available in its career development and income assistance side, but it also brings in our colleagues with the Department of Health including mental health, and the departments of Justice and Human Resources.

My point being is that there is an important aspect of the strategic plan that will require a very clear focus on role, scope, and function of each of our respective folks and looking at ways to integrate those services so that when... I think I heard it earlier today; people tend to hop around from "maybe I'll go to the Department of Health for this, or maybe I'll go to social services, or maybe the

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The communication plan also has a fundamental piece in terms of informing the public of these things. I think we haven't done a great job at that, so there are various mediums, particularly in today's day and age of technology that we could be engaging to ensure that if people are struggling, that they can enter key words and there will be resources available for them that will identify who they can see in their home community and receive services that will respond to their very important personal needs.

A fundamental tenet of this plan also includes training, prioritizing training. We read in the Auditor General's report that people are on four-month contracts. We read that often times, they go as long as 19 months without the core training. This is significantly problematic in my view, so our priority during the course of this strategic plan will also ensure that the onboarding training happens as soon as it can. The training modules are being developed not only internally, through the training fund at the Department of Human Resources that I discussed in my opening statement, but also with contract resources that will ensure that this onboarding training not only speaks standards and procedure; it also goes to understanding what our communities are made up of and Inuit cultural competence.

I think we hear the word 'cultural'.... What's the word that I don't appreciate, Mr. Chairman...? "Cultural awareness." If you're going to come to Nunavut and work in our communities, we want to make sure that you are equipped and you understand the

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nuances of how our communities operate, and the very different views that community members have in terms of government services, again, through the lens of shifting that paradigm to ensure that people know that we want to help them, that we are here to help.

Of course, I spoke pretty specifically about the matrix solution, and I won't go into that, but an important piece of this aspect of this plan, again and finally, is this evaluation piece. This is what we are doing, Sir, to respond to these needs. We want to make sure it's sustainable. It will be sustainable because everyone, I hope, will be a part of the solution and will collaborate with us, and will be really honest about their views and about how they think our services should function in community and generally and collectively, recognizing that Nunavut's communities are diverse amongst one another. They are not all the same. Every community has very distinct and unique needs and need to be addressed meaningfully in a way that responds to that community.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that responds to the questions. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also thank you very much for the response because some individuals might think that social service workers are there just to take the children away or to apprehend the children or the youth. They are not informed about what services or what the Department of Family Services does. I just wanted to add that.

I have a question on paragraphs 14 through 16. (interpretation ends) Paragraphs 14 through 16 of the report address employee health and safety. The Department of Health

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contracts security services in more than half of its community health centres, while the Department of Education has implemented a database to track incidents of violence in schools. What discussions have been held across Government of Nunavut departments to address the security risks faced by frontline workers? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Member, for the question. You are correct that the Department of Health implemented the enhanced security personnel across our health centres and within our hospital settings. One, around the safety of patients, but also the safety of staff. So that is one area. We also have formal incident reporting and tracking processes. Anytime there is an incident in our health centres or in hospital, we do have a formal process of documentation, so that those incidents are reported to the right place, they are followed up on and that appropriate actions are taken. That may be around patients, we also have the Office of Patient Relations, so information sometimes also goes through that process, and that is tracked.

From an employee's perspective, it may be about using some of our employee's assistance programs. It could be the utilization of our other programs and services. It may have the requirement of the Department of Human Resources, other departments, or outside departments as part of the response, depending on the nature of the incident that occurred. I hope I've answered your question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. I believe you answered a good portion of it, especially related to the Department of Health, but I

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believe what Mr. Malliki was trying to get at, maybe Mr. Onalik can speak to this one of interdepartmental discussions on health and safety for frontline staff, not just with the Departments of Health or Family Services or Education. It seems to be a more common occurrence of having to utilize security services in a number of our frontline service offices, so I'm hoping that there has been some discussion interdepartmentally on this topic. Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Yes. This is a really difficult conversation. It's one that we are trying to work through. We tend to have, in a lot of our communities, and this is something that in the past perhaps we've looked at them as the Department of Health safety plan, the Department of Justice safety plan, and others. In many cases you only have one employee or a small number of employees in each community who are affected by that safety plan.

We've had some discussions about structurally how we respond for all GN employees. I want to acknowledge to every GN employee out there that we know this is a problem. We know that we haven't done a great job in supporting especially the frontline in their health and safety needs. No one should be afraid to come to work. No one should be feeling like they're putting their personal lives in jeopardy to do this important work.

It's one of these things where I wish I could say, "Yes, we've got an immediate plan that can respond." We get into some big dollar amounts, as we have seen through the Department of Health, really quickly as we start to look at how to provide physical safety outside of a police setting, which creates some other issues. I think we have been looking at a number of different options.

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Cabinet has asked us to look at a number of different options and I'm hoping that at least some interim steps for the broader health and safety supports are reflected in this year's budget that you will be considering.

We recognize that in many cases this is a physical space issue with limited office space in communities, so we have an individual working in one office in one part of a community alone, and this is a broader issue that we are hoping to address through looking at the process, looking at staffing, and looking at infrastructure as well. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Just again, before I go to Mr. Malliki, I think it has been mentioned a couple of times now that there is a probability of a budget request coming forward to the Assembly. Particularly, that usually entails person years or positions. Maybe if Mr. Ellsworth would be able to educate the Committee on current staffing levels department-wide, as well as if Mr. Ellsworth also may have the information on counsellors and social work staffing levels. If you don't have that material handy, maybe we could receive it prior to the appearance tomorrow morning. I will give the Deputy Minister an opportunity to respond if he has that information available. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I will indulge your indulgence to allow me to obtain very clear numbers on that piece. I can tell you there are 47 funded community social service workers at the present time, 28 of which are filled, and that leaves, of course, 19 vacancies; notwithstanding the fact that we believe that additional social workers are required to enhance our capacity in the sense of service provision and standards compliance.

Complementary to that, I think we need to recognize that bringing in additional

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 individuals will require additional Department of Human Resources support, corporate services support, and others. While I can't speak to specifics of what the ask will be, I can say that we are looking at all of those pieces when it comes to potential submission for consideration by the Assembly. I will get the detailed information for you by tomorrow, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. I appreciate that commitment. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Part of my question was not responded to. I was asking about the Department of Education. They have put together an incident reporting policy and they have planned for that and set it up. Can the Department of Family Services do that? Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Malliki. Mr. Ellsworth mentioned earlier that they are in the process of establishing that data system as we speak. Do you have a timeline on that, Mr. Ellsworth?

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the things I've come to realize working in government is that things seem to take significantly longer than I would expect, recognizing that there are several processes engaged for every piece of change management that needs to happen. I don't want to overcommit. I do want to overdeliver, and so I'm hoping, together with the strategic plan we will be seeing something in winter that will also articulate what the response is to the incident tracking needs of the department. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr.

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Chairman. I also thank the Deputy Minister for the response. This will be my final question. (interpretation ends) What policies or programs are currently in place to address the safety and protection of frontline government workers? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik: I apologize, Mr. Chairman. I missed the question there.

Chairman: Thank you. What the member is asking is: what programs or policies are currently in place to address safety and protection of frontline government workers? Mr. Onalik.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you. (interpretation ends) I appreciate that this is serious in many ways. One of the issues that we have had is we have approached this from multiple departments from multiple angles. I think we recognize the opportunity that exists with some reinvigoration of the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs to really look at how we approach frontline workers' safety and find some consistency across.

It sounds like a bit of an evasive answer. I apologize, but it's something that we are grappling with at the moment. We have some very strong systems in place. We have really good, through the protocols that we have in place with the information sharing protocols that we have in place through the RCYO agreement for example, we share data across departments now. I think we just need to find a better government-wide approach to ensuring there is consistency across department and across regions and across communities. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you for that response. I think I would like to get Ms. Cronin's take on some early observations of her observations of health and safety across the territory frontline workers. Ms. Cronin.

Ms. Cronin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, so I have identified we have corporate positions within the Department of Human Resources that are unfilled, so I think there is an opportunity for us to leverage those positions, recognizing that they are specialized and they do require a very unique skill set, but I do think as an organization we could benefit from some corporate health and safety and really support these departments that as indicated, are somewhat going their own direction. While that is good and positive, I think there are gains to be made by working collaboratively.

We will continue to explore our options in filling those positions; again, unique skill sets that can really help us.... You know, we've talked about risk assessments and hazards and putting protective measures in place to protect our staff, and not to repeat what's already been shared, but our employees are our most important asset and I think, in some ways, we are failing them. I think that is disheartening to a number of us. We look forward to being able to make some improvements in this area. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. I appreciate that response and I didn't get any sense of evasiveness from you, Mr. Onalik. I know it's not a one-size-fits-all from one department to the other. There are different obligations of frontline staff and different situations that can create more confrontation in some scenarios. Just to remind Members, we are on paragraphs 9 through 16. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Since we are talking about workers' safety, I think it is really important to note that we have had a pretty fulsome discussion right now about peoples' physical safety, and there is no denying how important that is. I think it is really clear that what used to be abnormal events of violence have now become normalized. If I could hear from the team at the Government of Nunavut what measures are in place for psychological first aid or critical incident stress debriefing, because we know that when workers do not feel safe, it affects their ability not just to do their jobs, but to also even go to work. If I could hear from the Government of Nunavut team about that, I would appreciate it, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Just so we could get the overarching, I will ask Mr. Onalik to respond first and then I will go to the other witnesses. Thank you.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We do have employee assistance programs available across the government, but I think the exciting piece, and this is a little bit different than my previous point on trying to find ways to collaborate across departments to improve immediate physical safety, we also need to recognize that we have employee groups with very, what feels like, really unique challenges and have specific either psychological needs or the ability to talk to somebody who understands what they do every day.

I'm excited by some of the work that is taking place at the Department of Family Services to have tailored supports for their frontline workers, and in many ways, like the Department of Health and I know, the Department of Education, has sought to increase the level of supports for their employees based on what it is you do every day.

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I think something that is really important and a lesson we learned quite a few years ago now, is even the ability for employees to be able to help each other. I think when it comes to very frontline service, the Department of Family Services and social workers are the last to have single social work communities. I can only imagine if you are working a 14or 15-hour day, it would be nice to be able to even have somebody to share the workload, but also just to talk about what you experienced. That is one of the pieces where I think, not to prejudge the will of the Assembly in any future budget discussions, I think there is general acknowledgement that this is not a great situation. We should not have single social work communities for a number of reasons, and this is one of them.

Within the confines of the existing budget, and I know that Jonathan and the team at the Department of Family Services are looking to find interim ways to get around that, but I am hoping as part of a bigger package that will be a portion of what the Assembly has to consider. Perhaps if Mr. Ellsworth can talk about some of the Family Services-specific employee supports, or Megan, if you have something to offer on the mental health supports for employees, we are more than happy than happy discuss that further. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. We will start off with Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Mr. Onalik. As I mentioned earlier, a critical piece of employee wellness is making sure that they have access to services that can respond to their wellness needs.

One of our responses includes a dedicated clinical counselling service for the social and wellness teams. What we hope to achieve by

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offering this very specialized service to them is that we will enhance their long-term mental health and well-being. Of course, that is complemented by the comments that Mr. Onalik just made in respect of moving away from this one social work community where essentially, you are on-call 24/7. That does not, in itself, provide for a healthy work life balance. In addition to the clinical counselling, we need to engage in this process of a caseload analysis to ensure that the work that we are asking social workers to do is proportionate or equal to what their peers might be doing in other jurisdictions, particularly in jurisdictions with indigenous community members.

We want to reduce staff turnover through ensuring that colleagues have the tools to be able to identify colleagues at risk, to ensure that they can offer support services and connect them with external resources that we are defining as we speak. We need to engage a critical incident response debrief regime where, in situations that result in vicarious trauma on the part of the social worker or frontline service delivery person, that we can ensure that these debriefs and interventions address these critical incidents and walk through a healing process to ensure that they're not suffering from long-term trauma induced struggles, as it pertains to their work and outputs.

We need to do better at workplace wellness outreach, checking in and making sure, "How are you guys doing?" It is more than just these questions that I'm asking. I do not have a direct answer for you right now, but we know that we need to do more and that's what we have sought out to achieve in the course of responding to the safety concerns that the Auditor General has raised for our frontline staff. We want to make sure that there is coaching and mentoring opportunities available for staff, not only in

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We need to look at occupational health and safety folks that have a focus on ensuring that we have exhausted all avenues of ensuring that our teams are well-supported in the work that they're doing and to make sure that we're compliant with occupational health and safety legislation, internal standards, and perhaps more importantly, some of the standards around ensuring... it goes to this retention piece. One of the issues that we see is that there are four-month contracts, and often times people won't want to reengage those contracts because we don't do well enough in ensuring that they're onboarded properly, that they know what resources are available to them, that they have access to dedicated counselling and mentorship opportunities and menteeship opportunities or whatever the case may be.

Another suggestion that we are reviewing is the critical incident and debriefing response specialists within the department that will serve not only clients, but also staff members. I know I spoke loosely on that, but it is my position that I don't think one position is going to be enough to respond to the unique needs of our communities. I think it is important to contextualize this a little further, Mr. Chairman, if I may.

When we have an intervention with one child in our client files, it means that we are involved with probably a family of 5, 10, or 20 people. If a social worker has 10 files, that means that they are engaged with 200 people,

all coming from unique and distinct circumstances, all with varying levels of trauma, or what have you, Sir. Recognizing how this impacts that individual's capacity to actually do clinical social work in a way that is responsive to those 200 peoples' needs, is something that's really important to us. I think, to respond to your question, these are some of the measures that we will be engaging as we go down this path of revitalizing the Department of Family Services to ensure that frontline service delivery agents are supported not only in a management concept but also in a mental health well-being focus.

Lastly, I will close with this: we're looking at also mirroring some of the incentives that the Department of Health has looked at with critical workforce incentive packaging. I think monetarily, sometimes a lot of the social workers that we work with, they're not here for the money, but it does make a difference because of the very high cost of living, because of the very significant issues that they're dealing with, and so we need to consider all of these pieces in the context of ensuring the wellness of not only our frontline to ensure that they're providing services that proportionate to the needs of their clients, but all throughout the ranks of the department and throughout the departments generally speaking. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question. I will try and make this brief, just to add onto what I've heard from our colleagues. Really what we are talking about is the overall and general wellness of our staff and community members as a whole, and caring for the caregivers, which every department and all of our Inuit organizations and other partners do with us,

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We have a number of things that we have in place through our mental health programs where there is postvention and critical response, not just for significant incidents where their staff have been a part of supporting community when there has been a death or a serious accident, but for the compounding day-to-day interactions when people are struggling at their most vulnerable times. So making sure that debrief is in place, making sure that mental health services; services that we are also encouraging our community members to use, and that we're encouraging our staff to use, like healing by talking and things like that.

We also make sure that we are connecting with community champions and seeking guidance from our elders and community who understand resilience, who can help inform our practice and our response with one another. Also, making sure that as a part of our annual performance reviews, that we're talking to staff about their wellness plans; the education, training, and the supports that they need as they experience and as they walk through offering services to community members and one another during difficult times. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you for that. As I go to Ms. Cronin, we had had a discussion off camera on an employee wellness division within the Department of Human Resources and I think this is a perfect segue for Ms. Cronin.

Ms. Cronin: A couple of things come to mind in terms of opportunities for us to have an impact in mental health as a human resources department. One is a review of our health and benefit plan, so really looking at our psychological benefits. There are often barriers built into our plans that prohibit

employees from leveraging this, so taking that review and really seeing that they have access to a variety of health professionals. There are also a lot of gains that have been made in the digital space. Given that we're remote it's even more important to have access to those professionals and with the new technology, there are a number of individuals that you can contact at any time of the day so you don't have the barriers that might be previously in place.

Another opportunity for us is our return-towork programs and our wellness divisions. Unfortunately, another area that we don't have fully staffed, but this is an opportunity for us to put programs in place that have an impact, but also to give our off-work employees the support that they need to hopefully facilitate a return to work because we do have a number of individuals that are not well, and they are not in our workforce. We know statistically that the longer someone is off, the harder it is to get them back to work, and it's not a good thing to be off work for your mental health. There are definitely opportunities for us; capacity still being something we struggle with, but we do feel that this is a core responsibility of our department and an opportunity for us to have an impact again through the Government of Nunavut. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's so hard to decide which one of my follow-ups to use. I'm going to take this opportunity, because performance assessments were mentioned in a response, to talk about how often performance assessments are actually occurring. We know that this is a cross-government issue and that it relates to casuals.

We've heard that a number of service

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employees are casuals and so we also need to know whether or not exit interviews are being done with casuals who are not renewed or decide not to be renewed. Mr. Chairman, if the Department of Family Services team can talk to us about how often these mandated performance reviews are with their team at Family Services, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster, and I appreciate you acknowledging the exit interview process as well, too. In a perfect world those would be mandatory so that the government would have the information available to them to make a better workplace. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I understand it, it ought to be a requirement that annually performance reviews are being undertaken. During the course of my professional evolution, if you will, this is a tool that we used at legal aid to ensure that we were achieving our objectives in a sense of recognizing that we were a very small group of professionals with a very limited budget, and we had some pretty laudable objectives to achieve in the sense of access to justice.

In my early career at the Department of Justice included me working with staff to develop these very clear work plans and using those as a tool to assess performance. I think my colleague spoke eloquently about the fact that we also need to engage "What does your career path include? Where do you want to be? Are there laddering opportunities here? How can we support you to access training opportunities to see your growth into your full potential?"

To answer your question, Ms. Brewster, I would like to believe that work plans have been in place at the Department of Family

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Services. I came in just after the last fiscal cycle, but I can assure this group if I am there in a permanent sense, which I hope to be, as I mentioned earlier, our strategic plan will have subordinate work plans where we are measuring not only the success of the plan, but the success and achievements of our teams to make sure that we are actively supporting positive outcomes in respect of not only their personal growth plans, but also the success of the implementation of the strategic plan. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Before I go back to Ms. Brewster, Mr. Onalik would like to respond to that as well.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I'm not fully disagreeing with my colleague here, but we don't do a good job of this in the Government of Nunavut, and to me, we keep talking about capacity, capacity, capacity, and I've been in other conversations in this room, that there is a feeling you don't want to use capacity as an excuse, but I think this is a fundamental context in which this whole discussion is happening.

We are at a 40 percent vacancy right now and not only are we at 40 percent vacancy; we've seen in the last two years since COVID, for a number of reasons, the rate of departure is increasing every month. For a while there, and I apologize I don't have the latest statistics, but the Government of Nunavut, up until early summer this year, was on track this year for losing 1.6 employees net per day. In this environment where we are asking outside of the Department of Family Services, across all departments, and we are asking our employees to not only do their own job; we're asking them to do multiple people's jobs.

We have acting supervisors who become

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acting managers, who become acting directors. There is a cost to capacity. I agree with you that so much of what we need to do is have these very real conversations with employees, have the exit interviews, have the ongoing more than just the check box of performance reviews, but that takes time. In a context where you're trying to do three or four peoples' jobs, and you're dealing with the Departments of Family Services, Health, and Education, and you're dealing with emergencies and crises all day, it's hard to find the space to do the things we should be doing.

I'm not offering this as an excuse. I actually just want to, for those Government of Nunavut employees who are watching, I just want to make sure that you're heard and seen because we ask too much of you, generally speaking. I'm hopeful, as a part of this discussion and other conversations as you have going into budget and business planning, that we are able to really rethink how we are able to support all of our employees, because with so much of the conversations we are having right now, I really am proud of the direction we want to go.

You have a group of deputies who want to lay it on the table and say "We have a problem, we have a crisis, and we need to fix it," but I want this Assembly to be aware that so much of the response to these issues comes down to changes in policies, changes in programs, changes in legislation. Sixty percent of our policy divisions in the Government of Nunavut are vacant today. We have entire departments with not one indeterminate policy employee.

I think we are trying to figure out how to manage this Department of Family Services' crisis as a priority, but this will come at the cost of other things. I just want to be very 4∿ινθρ∩ροΔ°α'σ'>ρ < αριριτις

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upfront. We are attempting to stay a solid direction and things we want to accomplish, but the risk, and we would be lying if we said it's not a risk, until we can figure out how to turn the tide on capacity. There is a danger that many of these things we are talking about just won't happen. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That was a big can of worms I opened there. I think it is critical that you're saying you're losing a net of 1.6 employees per day. To me, then the most critical stopgap that we can do is to interview them; give them exit interviews. Why are you leaving? There is clearly a huge pool of people to advise what the barriers to success are in maintaining a job in our public service. I know personally from my experience, from having carried many roles and responsibilities at the same time and only being paid for one. I know what that is like, and I really do appreciate the level of commitment that people do have to their work as public servants. It's easy to kind of make of joke of it, however, I know that there is an ever smaller and smaller growing number of people who are really carrying the heavy loads of the work of this government, and it is infinitely appreciated.

I would ask that that become an absolute priority. I think it's really safe to say that even though the deputy promised not to use the word "capacity" in this room, I think it's really apparent that my colleagues at the table are willing to approve almost anything to help to address these issues. What we need is for you to come with those requests and you'll get the support because it is clear to us that change has to happen.

I didn't hear a clear answer on whether or not these critical incidents stress debriefings are Ċºd
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occurring, but I think they are, and I hope they are for social workers and other workers at the Department of Family Services.

I would just like to go back to supporting employees and with the knowledge that it was said here that, not in these words, but peer support is really important and really effective. I would like to know how often social workers and those frontline workers for Family Services are connecting and how they're connecting. Is there a regular monthly conference call that connects them together? Is there some kind of a regular team's meeting that people can jump onto if they have the time? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can confirm that it's the nature of the social work practice to regularly engage with colleagues. I can't speak directly to the specific frequency of these engagements, but I do know that they are regular. I know that I myself engage with all levels of the department regularly. As a matter of course, I need to take the temperature on the frontline and know where supports are required. To answer your question, Ms. Brewster, they're happening; I can't speak specifically to the frequency. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Before I go back to Ms. Brewster, I'm going to acknowledge the clock and we will take a 15-minute break. Thank you.

>>Committee recessed at 15:21 and resumed at 15:45

Chairman: Thank you. I would like to welcome the Committee and witnesses back to the Office of the Auditor General Report on Child and Family Services in Nunavut. We're currently on paragraphs 9 through 16

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in the report and Ms. Brewster still had a line of questioning going. Ms. Brewster, please proceed.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would just like to go back and correct myself because, before I said it, I didn't actually look at my highlighted note here regarding the critical incident stress debriefings. I think what I heard was that we would like to do it or it's a plan to do it or a plan to implement those critical stress debriefings.

I would like to hear whether or not there was a policy or a protocol in place regarding critical incident stress debriefing. This is more for the employees so that they hear and they know for sure what the commitment is so that they can be empowered to cause action on a critical stress debriefing if needed. Is there a timeline that states exactly what will happen and when it will happen, when there is a critical incident involving our staff and as well, when will that be implemented? If I could just have a really brief response to that, it just makes it easier to soak it in. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Brevity is certainly an art form, but it will be implemented at the same time as the strategic plan. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that response. Just to be clear, is there any kind of a policy or procedure in place right now that public servants can refer to when they're involved in a critical incident? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. Mr. Ellsworth.

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Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are critical incident reporting tools defined within the framework of the standards, but it doesn't speak to the need for the wellness piece of the needs of employees and so this will be a part of our Occupational Health and Safety Plan, which will include policies around what resources are available and what steps need to be taken in the course of reporting and the department's obligations to employees in that context. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that response. Can we just hear the advice that employees could use today when it comes to a critical incident, who can they go to or who can they call? There is a role that management plays. We have heard about the employee assistance program as well. Just to be really clear so that people know how to access the support that they need in the absence of the implementation of that program. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the current process, Ma'am, is such that critical incidents are reviewed by supervisors. Employees are advised of the current employee assistance program that is available to them. However, again, we do recognize that this isn't sufficient within the context of the delicate work that social workers undertake on our behalf and so this is where we're going with the enhanced access to services for critical incident debriefing and response. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Next name I have on my list: Mr. Simailak.

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Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon. I just have a quick follow-up I wanted to question here. First of all, good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for coming in and all the work that has been done, and welcome to Nunavut.

Earlier Associate Deputy Minister Ms. Sandy Kownak mentioned a bit about support at the local level for frontline workers, I think she was referring to. I am looking for a bit more clarification. Is the department looking at, perhaps, some more courses or a way to decompress, perhaps through the interagencies at the local level? One example we can use is pretty much in every community, the Arctic College Community Learning Centre is available evenings and weekends. I brought this up many times, as some of my colleagues already know, but that's a space that's secure and quiet and privately available. We could do that for supports for parents as well, how to cope with losing their children to the system.

I'm wondering and looking for a bit more clarification because I'm hoping that the department is not only looking at annual regional conferences for their workers. I think it really needs to be done at the local level, twice a month maybe. If I just could get a bit of clarification on that, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't think the pathway has been defined yet, Sir, but I do believe that we need to look at all of those options that are available to us and that includes not only assessing what facilities exist within communities that can play a role in providing space for these kinds of discussions, but with brevity in mind, it also goes to this reality that we need to integrate our services. Oftentimes we do

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know that police and health care workers and social workers and justice officials are often managing one incident, if you will.

I think the plan does include reviewing what in-community options do exist, recognizing that there's strength, and also relying on community-based not-for-profits and other organizations, and perhaps elders where they're available and willing to participate in sort of debriefing those really critical incidents and providing for opportunities to discuss and resolve some of those challenges. I believe my colleague, Mr. Onalik, would like to speak to that, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. I got that indication as well. Mr. Onalik, please go ahead.

Mr. Onalik (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I think that's a really good point and we started the early work process to look at ways we can have all GN workers who work together in communities. We are doing inventory of things like office space and facilities, with the goal of having for safety and comradery, to be able to work together instead of being the only person from the department in one office and then someone else being the only person from one department in another office.

Are there options to put people under one roof? I think, based on that comment, we can expand the scope of that to include opportunities for underutilized infrastructure because surprisingly, when we did the first look, we need a lot of infrastructure, but there is also a lot of underutilized infrastructure in communities. I think that is a welcome suggestion and we can add that to the scope of that work. (interpretation) Thank you.

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Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is more just of a comment. Now, I am very happy with the responses I just received, especially Deputy Minister Ellsworth's mention of elders. That is an untapped resource in Nunavut that always seems to be forgotten. We constantly praise elders for their wisdom and knowledge, and they are natural counsellors and they should be highlighted more and actually utilized more. It could help lessen the employee burnout, which is very important, and it could lead to a happier life and happier home.

I have always been very cognizant or have tried to be anyway myself not to bring work home into my family life. My spouse, who I am very thankful for, notices at times that I am very quiet and she knows it is work related and then we leave it at that. I do not want to see the 1.6 net daily, is that what you said earlier, Mr. Onalik, of employees leaving the Government of Nunavut? I do not want that to increase. That's over 580 a year we're losing and these are the critical frontline workers we need to ensure that we keep longer and not increase the net loss of employees leaving. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. If I just may add to that, I know that in a number of different professions, to be involved in the community, you need to have that time available to meet with elders, go out boating with your neighbours, go out on the land and see this great territory and meet great community members that you're there to support. Unless our employees have that free time to be able to do that, they're not able to fully encompass the roles that we're putting them in. I have said that many times; I couldn't help but say it again.

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Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My first question will be for the Office of the Auditor General. Paragraph 17 of your report states that your audit "found a number of significant deficiencies in how the Department of Family Services responded to reports...and how it supported children and youth in [foster] care..." Can you describe the different types of deficiencies that were identified? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Quqqiaq. Mr. McKenzie.

Mr. McKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In terms of the types of deficiencies, maybe the best way for me to answer your question is to.... Essentially this paragraph outlines the deficiencies or our findings with respect to the response and follow through on referrals, as well as our findings on the section on foster care as well, surely an encompassing paragraph. We found deficiencies, for example, or gaps, if you will, as outlined in Exhibit 1 in terms of following through referrals to see were they acted on and did they result in an investigation. Other deficiencies include, for example, we didn't see evidence with respect to check-ins for children and youth that were in foster care or out of territory.

I would almost point to the table of contents, although it might not get to that level of detail, but it talks about the failure to act on reports, of suspected harm, little action on plans of care, and lack of oversight. Those are observations, but equally important is the second part of that paragraph where we talk about that there are a number of long-standing issues and the root causes that we

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talk about in the report. The reason I say that is because, as Deputy Hayes had mentioned earlier, we see that there are some underlying root causes that are really behind our observations. The way I kind of summarize it is that the people who are the face of the Department of Family Services, the community and social service workers who are in the communities, are really not getting the support and the tools that they require to be successful, to succeed.

That essentially is how I would wrap up the response to that question is that we did see deficiencies or gaps. We have outlined what we think are root causes that need to be addressed and those root causes, whether it's workload, for example, or training, are really what need to be addressed in order to put the community social service workers in a position to be able to meet the standards that the department has set for them. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to ask the Government of Nunavut witnesses now. Paragraph 18 of the audit report states, "Employees of the department are required under the *Child and Family Services Act* to respond to cases where a child may be in need of protection." How does the department ensure that all employees are aware of their responsibilities and duties under the legislation? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it's evident on the face of the findings that the department hasn't been doing that and considering all the relevant factors, this is why this is a crisis.

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In terms of what we have done since, we have done a focused sort of directive with a complementary training piece around the standards that need to be well understood by our frontline practitioners. Those standards include receiving an intake, ensuring that it's reviewed within 24 hours, depending on the nature of it, whether or not an investigation has to ensue, following that, and ensuring that investigations are done, really, in a timely way. I think the standard requires 30 days.

Then building on that, we also recognize that there's a role for supervisors to play in this context as well. Supervisors need to, obviously, supervise the work of the social workers, but it's incumbent on all layers of the department to make sure that these standards are not only being trained on and recognized and respected, but also that they're being discharged in a way that meaningfully responds to the incident that brings social workers into contact with families. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be going back and forth. My next question is to the Office of the Auditor General. Exhibit 1 of your report describes action taken or not taken in response to referrals made to Family Services workers. During the audit period, did the department provide reasons why actions were not taken? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you. We did not get any reasons from the department for why the actions were not taken, but our report did focus on the root causes which, through our audit work and discussions with the department, we landed on as important

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factors. Mr. Ellsworth has just talked about training and that, I think, is an important aspect of it. When you have temporary staff moving through at a relatively quick pace and the training doesn't get to them, even while they're an employee, that's a problem and that's a challenge for both the department and the employees. Likewise, the staffing gaps and the housing and office space challenges provide reasons why some of these actions haven't been taken. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Government of Nunavut witnesses, how does the department ensure that all employees follow the appropriate standards and procedures to address referrals that they may receive? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Quqqiaq. Mr. Ellsworth responded to that question in the tail end of his last response. Did you have another question?

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I didn't realize he already answered that question and my apologies for asking that question again. Exhibit 1 of the audit report describes actions taken or not taken in response to referrals made to the Department of Family Services' workers during the audit period. How should referrals be handled when they are received by staff? Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is for the Government of Nunavut witnesses.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Quqqiaq, for clarifying that. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I mentioned, the standards and procedures of the department articulate the timing with which we respond to referrals. Standard

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Chairman: Thank you. Just before I go back to Mr. Quqqiaq, I understand Mr. Ellsworth, you answered a lot of those particulars earlier, but I think the crux of the question is: in Exhibit 1 in the report, there are a number of cases that actions were taken and a number that weren't taken. I understand those are the parameters of what should happen, and I believe that was the exact question, but since taking over the Department of Family Services, have you done your own investigation to see what actuals are now with recognition of this report coming out a number of months ago? Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I didn't personally investigate these matters, but through the work of the regional directors and other senior leadership at the department, early on in my career, if you will, at Family Services we recognized that immediate action needed to be taken and that there needed to be a focus, as I mentioned, Mr. Chairman, on training and oversight; the oversight piece probably just as important as the training piece.

The Auditor General of Canada made very clear reference to the fact that we don't do well when it comes to training. A lot of it has to do with the transient nature of the people that we employ on very short-term contracts,

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and so coupled with the fact that this immediate step was taken, we need to do better as a department in terms of the onboarding training that I discussed earlier, the ongoing professional development, and finding ways to retain people for longer periods of time than just four months. I think of myself of having had the privilege of visiting many of Nunavut's communities in my early career at the court; one week was not enough. In four months you're just barely getting to know people.

Going to your point, Mr. Chairman, around being able to engage with the community and participate in cultural activities and these kinds of things, I know I'm going a little outside of the question, but I think it goes also to this idea that there needs to be a concerted, principled and structured response to these findings. It needs to be sustainable and it needs to withstand scrutiny and evaluation. Although it is clear on the face that their findings are not very positive at all, it does set the stage and it creates a framework for us for action, and that's exactly what we intend to do, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the information of the general public, this is for the Government of Nunavut witnesses: can you describe the difference between the safety assessment and risk assessment? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A brief indulgence, if I may.

My apologies. Standard 205 in the Social Workers Standards and Procedures discusses what a safety assessment entails. I apologize.

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I wasn't prepared for this detailed question, but I do have the information available to me if you will bear with me, Mr. Chairman.

Here we are. Apologies. Thank you for your indulgence. A safety assessment must be completed and documented as part of the investigation of a referral for any child protection or family violence matter. What it means is that we want to evaluate the immediate safety of a client where there are concerns their status. Community level social workers complete a safety assessment for any child protection matter when placing youths between the ages of 16 and 19. If risks are identified as a part of that safety assessment, then it requires a safety plan to be undertaken as the next step.

During the course of defining what the safety assessment entails, they also are required to consult with supervisors and clinical professionals to ensure that their next phases of the process are reflective of the needs of the client. The responsibility of the supervisor boils down to reviewing and approving the safety decision and plan, or providing feedback around any necessary modifications that need to be undertaken.

I believe the second part of the question was risk assessment. Thank you. I apologize again. It doesn't appear that my materials have this, Mr. Chairman. If I may indulge the Committee to report back at a later time with this information for the Member, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. That is not a problem. If you could provide that with the other information that you will be providing tomorrow morning to the Committee, I would appreciate it. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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I'll move on to the Office of the Auditor General. Paragraph 20 of the report notes that failures in taking the required steps to address referrals "...are also missed opportunities to assess whether families require support such as parenting, mental health, or addictions services." Did your audit record how often families were assessed as requiring such supports and what steps were taken to ensure that they received them? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Hayes. Sorry. Mr. McKenzie.

Mr. McKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Maybe the best way for me to answer the question is to use an example as we do after Exhibit 1 and in paragraph 21, which talks about plans of care. That essentially is if there is an investigation, for example, and there is conclusion that there are supports that may be required or services, they would be outlined in a plan of care. We did not look at each individual case, but we did see that in the plans of care, that is where that type of information is documented. That is where we would see the results of the assessment in the investigation and then the determination of the types of services. That is where it gets reflected or captured is in, for example, the plan of care. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you for that, Mr. McKenzie. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My next question will be: did your audit investigate how often families that were assessed and referred for such supports as parenting, mental health, or addictions services actually receive additional assistance from the Department of Health? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. McKenzie.

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Mr. McKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, probably the best way for me to answer that question is to refer to paragraphs 21-22 where we talk about the plans of care that would capture those types of information and we would be looking for the department to be following up and monitoring on that plan of care to see if, in fact, whether it is programs from the Department of Health or otherwise are being accessed. That is where we saw gaps in terms of the follow-up, which would help determine or answer some of those questions. We didn't look at it specifically, but we did look at where the plans of care were being followed up on and was there evidence to show that they were just tracking that type of question: are they getting the types of services that the people need? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Exhibit 1 of your report shows that an investigation following the screening-in of a referral must be carried out within 24 to 72 hours of the referral. Did your audit identify whether any investigations were conducted outside of this time frame, after more than 72 hours, and if so, how many investigations were conducted later than required by departmental standards and procedures? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Quqqiaq. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you for that question. We weren't able to accurately identify how many of these investigations were conducted after the period of time that they were supposed to be done in. The reason for that was the audit team went to tremendous efforts to piece together the information that they could from varieties of sources. Getting information was challenging and we were trying to paint the

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Obviously, there were a number of cases where screenings weren't done, where investigations weren't done, where risk assessments and safety assessments weren't done. It's possible that even in the ones that were done, they were late, but we can't give you a clear picture on that. This connects in part to one of the root causes that we identified and that's the one on information management, keeping accurate records so that we can see how quickly the steps that are supposed to be taken are happening and where they're not happening, as Mr. Ellsworth mentioned earlier, having followups and ticklers to make sure that they do happen. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Moving on to the Government of Nunavut witnesses, paragraph 20 of the audit report notes that the failure to follow up on referrals also resulted in missed opportunities to assess whether families needed such supports as parenting, mental health, or addictions services. How often do such family assessments occur and what steps are taken to access the relevant services for them? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Regular follow-ups, as I articulated earlier, are a requirement of our standards and procedures and it is apparent that that wasn't happening at the material time of the audit. As I mentioned earlier, we have taken immediate steps to address these. It's part of the continuum of the process as it pertains from referral to investigation, to follow-up, to additional referrals and integration of other services that are available through

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government services.

One of the contributing factors to our reality in terms of why these follow-ups weren't happening, which I know is not a part of your question, but I think it's important to state for the record, is that as the Auditor General has stated and we have stated, there is not a proper record-keeping mechanism for staff. A couple that I have come to learn is that there are various methods of keeping files and following up, or there was, and following up on referrals and investigations. There was no consistency and we hope to address this with the implementation of the software solution together with our initial and immediate actions of improving the screening and investigations at an operational and regional level.

We have engaged in informative discussions and feedback with our teams throughout the ranks in terms of the expectation and the role they play in ensuring that our standards of compliance are met in a meaningful way. We have injected immediate staff support in terms of our earlier discussion with the peer support mechanisms. We have ensured that there are shared examples of screening procedures to serve as reference material for all staff.

Again, targeted training objectives and initiatives are in development and ready to be deployed, I hope, in conjunction with our strategic plan. How often? The standards that I mentioned earlier around the weekly follow ups and such, and if you want me to go into detail again, I'd be happy to do that, but basically the standards that are at play for us are the standards that we re currently embracing in terms of making sure that we do follow up on a regular basis and in accordance with the standards and procedures that are in place at present. I hope that answers your questions, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you, and before I go back to Mr. Quqqiaq, I would just like a clarification. When we talk about a plan of care that involves multi departments, how are current plans of care handed off? In this case, maybe the Department of Family Services to the Department of Health might be a good example, I would like to hear from both of you. In addition to that, how is it envisioned to improve so that those gaps or breakdowns do not occur in the future? I will start with you, Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You made reference to a plan of care. Oftentimes, a plan of care committee is established when a social worker believes that child is in need of protection and the parents agree with the need for this service.

Plan of care committees can be established following an apprehension, or if the child is returned to their parent or guardians care within 72 hours of that apprehension. A plan of care committee may not need to be established if the investigation shows that there are no ongoing protection concerns and if the child was apprehended but returned within 72 hours and there are no further protection matters that need to be addressed.

This plan of care committee often engages many of our staff. It should include, as the legislation provides for community involvement as well. We have not gone down that road as far as I can tell in terms of the community level plan of care committees and the family wellness planning committees. In terms of engaging with our colleagues at Health following the identification of perhaps, for example, treatment needs that any one of the family members may have in the context of the reason of why they came into contact with our social workers in need of assistance. I think those would be assessed following our referral to our colleagues at the

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Department of Health. I may be somewhat mistaken in that regard, Mr. Chairman, but perhaps my colleague Ms. Hunt can elaborate on what happens next.

Chairman: Thank you. That is the point I am trying to get to, is that there have obviously been breakdowns in these handoffs, and if there is a committee that is meeting, where are these gaps being created, whether it be artificially or just through the course of business? Ms. Hunt please.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question. I think your point is well taken. What should happen and what does happen? I think there are lots of good things that happen, but the report from our Auditor General really highlights where these gaps are.

In terms of a plan of care, a plan of care is always maintained in the responsibility of the Department of Family Services because it stays with the child. From the committee perspective in terms of what's identified within that plan of care; if there is an area of service that is under the umbrella of the Department of Health, then it's the Department of Health's responsibility to work as part of that integrated team-based care surrounding that child and family to make sure that those services are provided. Then, to continue to be engaged with that Plan of Care Committee for ongoing feedback to make sure that if there are challenges or further services required, those are being supported, identified, and followed through upon by that group, which may include many other departments or community agencies that are a part of that child's plan of care, and then of course the consideration around the rights of indigenous children that will also consider the cultural considerations, their connection to community, language, elders, and culture

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incorporated into that. Health, of course, has a responsibility to ensure that aspects of their health care services meet their cultural needs as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Hunt. I appreciate the additional information. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the Government of Nunavut witnesses and the Auditor General's office.

This will be my last question, Mr. Chairman, for the Government of Nunavut witnesses. How does the Department of Health address referrals from Family Services for families that require additional supports and services? This is for the general public's information, Mr. Chairman, and that's my last question.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Quqqiaq, and I do apologize. I kind of took your question away from you in the last one where I was getting further details. I didn't realize you were going to follow up. That has been asked and answered already. Do you have any additional questions?

Mr. Quqqiaq: No, that's it, Mr. Chairman. We're all here for a reason, we're all here to help the children, we're all here to help the families, and I appreciate these hearings. I don't have any more questions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Next name I have on my list: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just for the record, to put it really simply, regarding the question that Mr. Quqqiaq asked, the safety assessment is to determine an immediate risk to a child and a risk assessment is to determine future risks, and that's just like the really basic way of

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viewing it.

My question is for the Office of the Auditor General and that is on the issue we have been focusing on, children who are at risk within their own families, and I would just like to ask whether or not there was any review of whether or not there are children who are experiencing maltreatment in foster care. I know that many children who are in the foster care system are at very high risk for all sorts of abuse; physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Was there any look to measure whether children experienced that abuse and neglect while in care and in the responsibility of the stare, which is Nunavut? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. You're jumping ahead a little bit. We have a specific section on foster care coming up, paragraphs 26 through 31. Just to maybe save a little bit of time later, I will allow Mr. Hayes to answer this one. If you have any follow-up, maybe you could direct it at the appropriate time. Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Haves: Indeed, so I'll keep my answer short. We did look at a sample of 51 files of children in foster care. That sample was drawn from five communities that represented the various regions and also, it represented both small, medium and large. We identified gaps in contact and check-ins with these children. There are some examples at paragraph 29 where we signal that there were children that were no longer in their foster placement and living elsewhere, that the department didn't know about and learned after, and indeed some examples where the children who were taken from their parents were back living with them. There are a few examples where we didn't conclude on maltreatment, but there were concerns about that. I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman; we can cover that later. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was actually actively avoiding trying not to ask questions about information management because I'm really excited about that, so I apologize for that.

I'll just go back then to the Government of Nunavut's responses regarding the services to families post investigation. What I understand is that there's the intake and then the investigation phase and that often, families, regardless of whether or not their children are still in care or they're back with them, as we have heard, are not necessarily receiving those supports.

Just for clarity, because I have been having a little bit of trouble focusing on the longer answers, what are the exact services provided to families post investigation and what are the standards that facilitate that action? What are they called and whose job is it to implement them? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ma'am, for the question. Just going back to clarify the risk assessment question, so the risk assessment as it relates to child protection matters under the legislation is supported through the structured decision-making framework. This fuses both safety and risk planning related to the ongoing needs of the situation. There are also risk assessments that are specifically related to family violence, which are somewhat different than the above intervention. They involve a different level of criteria but also could be inclusive, depending on the situation.

With respect to the services provided and

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who is responsible for ensuring, again, the plan of care, if we're still in that context of discussion, the services could include provision for where and with whom the child will live, identifying options first through the consular family; second, identifying support services to make the child's home safe. That could carry a myriad of different options in terms of accessing services for parents or children: counselling; access to the child by a parent where the child will not be living with the parent; the child's social and recreational activities; the responsibility is delineated of any person who becomes members of a plan of care, a committee or group, among others. The responsibility lies largely with the frontline social workers and the supervisors and managers to ensure that those plans of care are carried out and they're clearly articulated.

One of the steps that the department has taken since.... It's a little more of a recent step and that is the sense of getting early involvement with legal counsel on the development of plans of care. This is a two-fold thing and it is very early days, but I do want to share with this Committee, on the part of the department, early involvement with our retained legal counsel to ensure that the plan of care is done through the framework of first prevention and maintenance of that family unit and to ensure that services are being offered to them in accordance with their needs.

The second piece is something that we're still building on, but I've had early discussions with legal aid and which I have told this Committee where I grew up is that we identified early on that oftentimes when parents are in a crisis, if you put a document in front of them that is going to get their kids back, they're going to sign anything they can. Let's be honest; I would sign anything I needed to, to get possession of my children

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back into my home. The problem with that is something in law called informed legal consent and in order to ensure that our plans of care are not only legal from the department side, we want to make sure that the users of our service are getting advice with respect to their legal rights as it pertains to the plan of care and the department's involvement in their lives.

Although it's early days, legal aid and the Department of Family Services are looking at mechanisms that we could engage that would ensure that individuals who are in the process of developing a plan of care do have access to legal counsel to ensure their rights and their children's rights are met, but in addition to ensuring that the legislative framework is well respected and that the timelines that we know are involved with these plans of care are also being well understood by all the parties and in compliance with the legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster, I think we're kind of delving into the next...let me finish. I don't have any other names under paragraphs 17 through 20, so I'm going to make a Chair's decision and we're going to move on to paragraphs 21 and 25, and Ms. Brewster's already engaged in those pages, so you can continue right on. Thank you.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have been really impressed by the transparency today. Let me just take another moment to acknowledge how refreshing this is because if we don't identify the problem and if we don't admit that we have a problem, we cannot solve it, so this is a great day in Nunavut.

With that in mind, how often does the department and the team follow the appropriate legislation regarding the plan of care and, if it doesn't always happen, why

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and what's being done to address that? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's an excellent question. How often? The direction from my office has been that any time a plan of care is even being considered, the staff should be consulting legal counsel. We need to engage the legislative framework through the lens of which it was intended and that is the lens of protection and prevention.

There is opportunity for that not to happen and that opportunity arises when we haven't done a great job of ensuring that people are aware of these directions. One of the pieces that is incumbent on leadership and management in the Department of Family Services is this ongoing awareness campaign of what the requirements are for social workers and managers and leaders during the discharge of their duties. If there is an opportunity for this to happen, for example, Ms. Brewster, we don't want it to happen anymore. I think it's very clear on the face of this report that there have been significant gaps in our service delivery.

Again, going through this accountability, we're trying to establish checks and balances throughout the ranks and engaging legal counsel, who does have ethical and legal obligations as it pertains to their conduct on files. We're hoping that with this additional oversight together with the impending implementation of the strategic plan, this moving forward, I hope, will no longer occur during course of the practice of the social workers.

Again, at any time, you can have any plan in place and a perfect review model, but we're all humans and humans do make mistakes, and so that's why this check and balance

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466,2676 ystem will be really important, not only using the enhanced Matrix Software Solutions but also the enhanced directives and the enhanced engagement that is happening in the ranks of the staff at Family Services. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that response. I know from lived experience the parents who are in need of support for many reasons. You mentioned that there's a separate protocol in place for assessing risk when it comes to domestic violence and particularly in incidents where children are being removed because of family violence. We know that women especially are at great risk and that they also want to do everything they can to bring their children home.

It's counterintuitive for a person who is experiencing family abuse to engage the support and help from the same social worker or the same worker who is responsible for protecting the child's safety. How is this addressed? When we're talking about transformative change, we know that this has been an ongoing issue since long before Nunavut came to be. We should be experts on this. People should be coming to us saying, "We need your advice." I would like to hear how this issue is being approached and how we're offering that important support that saves lives. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that your question points out a very important reality for a lot of our social workers and, that is, the fact that there is a stigma around the services that we provide.

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How we break down those barriers, I think, is going to take a multi-faceted approach and an approach that is contained within the plan that's being developed. That includes, again, identifying role, scope, and function within our departments across integrated services, messaging to the public, and just, I think, a rebranding initiative of sorts so that people know that it's not our business to take kids and put them elsewhere, but it's our business to protect that family unit and particularly women and children who live with violence. There needs to be pathways to resources that sees mom and child sort of properly taken care of, not through the lens of separation but through the lens of integrated support with our colleagues at Health and Family Services.

Notwithstanding that, I can't say for sure right now, Ms. Brewster, that we help people to feel that they can come to us. I know that we don't and this goes to my earlier comment around the reality that we're in protective mode. We're in protection mode because we don't have the capacity to be in prevention mode. We don't have the capacity to be and I know that the big "C" is a no-no in this Assembly, but our response seeks to address that issue exactly. I know I have said a lot of words, but I know I'm committed to making sure that our resources are approachable and that people know that they can come to us. We need to set up various access points and mediums by which they can access our services. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Just to remind Committee Members, we're now on paragraphs 21 through 25. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like a more substantive response to that question and I'll just be really clear. Are separate social workers or family services workers assigned to parents to support them in the issues that are creating these issues of concern that bring them into the fold of Family Services? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, Mr. Chairman, that is a primary function of the social worker to begin with is to make sure that the family is getting the support that they need. Like I said, I think we're challenged in that regard with respect to the stigma that surrounds the work of social workers. Thank you.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you. That's great to hear. I'm happy to hear that because I think that knowing that parents can feel free to share about their own issues and concerns is really important. I agree; there's a lot of work to be done to address the issue, like the stigma of needing help and often what happens is people are afraid of that stigma, so they don't reach out for help until it becomes a crisis and the sooner that people reach out for help, the better.

I'll shift to include our guest from the Office of the Auditor General. The audit report notes in Paragraph 25 that in one of the communities visited, regular meetings between Family Services and Health staff had been established to discuss cases. Did the audit review how many communities had established interagency groups and

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information sharing groups to address child protection cases? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Madam Cotnoir.

Ms. Cotnoir: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question. We did look at what was in place in the communities we had visited and we found only one place where there were regular meetings between the Department of Health and the Department of Family Services. What was clear to us, given the interviews we did in both departments, is the Nunavut Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement was not well known and that the key components were not implemented. It is really important that operational procedures are put in place at all levels to make sure that this agreement is implemented. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you very much. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know that we have moved on from the discussion about the human resources side of this issue. However, in that response, there was a clear indication that the training and orientation on those specific plans and directives or agreements seems to be lacking. I'm just trying to recall if we did receive a response about whether or not that training is part of the orientation and if it's okay for me to ask that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I could, perhaps, get the question clarified.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just trying to remember the exact name of the agreement; I have to put my glasses

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on, the Surusinut Ikajuqtigiit Nunavut Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement and what we're hearing is that it's not being fully implemented and particularly because teams are not being oriented to those agreements and it was only in that one community where they saw that one particular community working and it was Health and Family Services. I still say health and social services as well.

How is the Department of Family Services ensuring that employees at the community level are aware of that agreement and taking up that responsibility to pull those interagency groups together? It's not just Health. It's the RCMP. It's Justice. There are a couple of reasons why just the Government of Nunavut should be in the circle of care. However, there are also the really important interagency groups that can help serve their own communities.

If I could boil it back down, I'm now talking too much, how are team members being oriented to that agreement? Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few comments because I believe we did speak to this and perhaps my colleague, Ms. Hunt, might have additional comments.

These kinds of relationships start at the top. That means senior officials of each department need to be engaging regularly and setting the tone and expectations for these interrelated or interagency or integrated services that are required on the frontline. I can't say with confidence that enough has been done on the part of my department with respect to ensuring that these agreements are a part of the core training materials that are

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shared with incoming employees. That admission is not an easy one to make because I know that we have worked very hard in the last number of months to identify these key pieces.

I do know that we have made strides at the community level and with my colleague and her executive team, but there is, admittedly, more work to be done in this, Mr. Chairman. Unless my colleague has additional comments, that would be my response. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll make this brief. To just layer in to the Member's question and also the response from my colleague, I think there are two important things to highlight here. When we think about the Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement and we have talked at great length today, the most important thing we do is stabilize human resources at the community level so that there is a continuity of staff, that there is an understanding of relationship and nuance of community.

What has taken place to date is that we do have our executive teams engage in regular cycles of conversation around the agreement. We have also, as part of Health's RFP for our nursing orientation, ensured that the Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement is part of the orientation and training package. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm really curious to know how many communities actually have well-established and well-used networks within the communities to help the frontline staff address child protection issues. I know it

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I just would like to get a clearer understanding of whether or not... Perhaps this might make it easier: are there any communities that really stand out to Health as well as Family Services in terms of being really successful at addressing child protection issues and, if there are, why do they stand out? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can't honestly sit here and tell you which communities have excellent collaboration happening at the community level; I apologize.

I do know that many of our frontline social workers and many of the community level health provision folks inherently must work together, but I also recognize that facility plays a big role in terms of how they work together. Mr. Chairman, there are some communities where, for example, we have social workers that are working in the health centre and there are turf wars over whose computer and these kinds of things. As we identify these issues as barriers to a healthy, collaborative relationship, we need to address them.

I would say that it's early days in defining and measuring where the successful points are and why they're successful, but a lot of it will, I think, require that we're ensuring that this agreement is being shared, that the expectation is being shared, that there is access to training and other resources to ensure that the agreement can be fully implemented, as I mentioned earlier. Quite

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I apologize that I don't have clarity of answer. I think that if I did consult with my community level teams, I could provide that information and I don't know that I could get it before the end of this proceeding, Mr. Chairman, but I could commit to working with my colleague at Health to bring that information forward for the Committee's consideration before it concludes its assessment and report. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. I appreciate that and I understand the complexity and not to usurp Ms. Brewster's question, but maybe just a list of some of the best practices that are working and some of the low-hanging fruit, again I'll use that term, on some of the challenges.

At this time, I'll recognize the clock. We are on paragraphs 21 through 25 and we will reconvene tomorrow morning at 9 a.m. with Ms. Nutarak, with her line of questioning. Thanks to everyone for what I think was quite a productive day with some good, open dialogue and some good questions, and I appreciate the transparency of the government officials and I'm looking forward to tomorrow's proceedings. Thank you.

>>Committee adjourned at 16:57

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