COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Reference: Effectiveness of state, territory and Commonwealth government policies on regional and remote Indigenous communities

TUESDAY, 25 AUGUST 2009

HALLS CREEK

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

TO EXPEDITE DELIVERY, THIS TRANSCRIPT HAS NOT BEEN SUBEDITED

INTERNET

Hansard transcripts of public hearings are made available on the internet when authorised by the committee.

The internet address is:

http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard

To search the parliamentary database, go to:
http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON

REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Tuesday, 25 August 2009

Members: Senator Scullion *(Chair)*, Senator Crossin *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Adams, Johnston, Moore and Siewert

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Moore, Scullion and Siewert

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Back, Barnett, Bernardi, Bilyk, Birmingham, Mark Bishop, Boswell, Boyce, Brandis, Bob Brown, Carol Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Cormann, Eggleston, Farrell, Feeney, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Furner, Hanson-Young, Heffernan, Humphries, Hurley, Hutchins, Joyce, Kroger, Ludlum, Lundy, Ian Macdonald, McEwen, McGauran, McLucas, Marshall, Mason, Milne, Minchin, Nash, O'Brien, Parry, Payne, Polley, Pratt, Ronaldson, Ryan, Stephens, Sterle, Troeth, Trood, Williams, Wortley and Xenophon

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

a) the effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response, specifically on the state of health, welfare, education and law and order in regional and remote Indigenous communities;

b) the impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities;

c) the health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities; and

d) the employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

WITNESSES

AHCHOO, Mr Henry, Halls Creek People's Church 35

BANKS, Ms Valma, Project Officer, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Council 61

BARNES, Mr Stephen David, Proprietor, Taylor's Store, Halls Creek 87

BATES, Mrs Kathleen, Pastor's wife, Halls Creek People's Church 35

BEDFORD, Mrs Patsy, Community Language Development Office, Kimberley Language Resource Centre 24

BEDFORD, Ms Joan, Committee Member, Ngaringga Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation Safehouse 92

BUTTERS, Ms Jane, Private capacity 24

BUTTERS, Ms Vicki, Manager, Kimberley Language Resource Centre 24

CASSON, Miss Siobhan Katrina, Language Development Officer, Kimberley Language Resource Centre 24

CLARE, Mr Chris, Chief Executive Officer, Warmun Community (Turkey Creek) Inc. 13

DEEGAN, Ms Bonnie, Yarliyil Art Centre 24

ELLIOTT, Mr Jamie, Halls Creek People's Church 35

FLORISSON, Miss Laura, Congregation member, Halls Creek People's Church 35

HILLS, Mrs Mildred Mardina, Board member, Halls Creek Aboriginal Corporation 49

JOHNSON, Ms Eva, Community Care Worker, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Council 61

KNIGHT, Mrs Olive, Central Kimberley Director, Kimberley Language Resource Centre 24

LOESSL, Mr Christopher, Clinical Services Manager, Yura Yungi Medical Centre 61

McGINTY, Ms Thelma, Yarliyil Art Centre 24

MORTON, Mr Stewart, Vice-Chairperson, East Kimberley Director, Kimberley Language Resource Centre 24

O'NEIL, Ms Virginia, Executive Assistant, Yura Yungi Medical Services 61

OLSEN, Mr Warren Keith, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Halls Creek 2

REICHEL, Mr Robert Stewart, Halls Creek People's Church Inc. Frail Aged Hostel 35

REICHEL, Mrs Dale, Manager/Coordinator, Ngaringga Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation Safehouse 92

SAMPI, Mr Franky, Community Care Worker, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Council 61

SHEPHERD, Dr David Keith, Private capacity 75

THOMPSON, Mr Graham, Halls Creek People's Church 35

TRANCOLLINO, Ms Lulu, Yarliyil Art Centre 24

Committee met at 8.48 am

CHAIR (Senator Scullion)—The Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities is holding a public hearing as part of its inquiry into regional and remote Indigenous communities. The committee took evidence yesterday in Fitzroy Crossing and will hear further evidence in Broome tomorrow, Wednesday, 26 August. On behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet, and we pay our respects to the elders past and present. The committee is due to report to the Senate on 26 November 2009 and it welcomes submissions from interested people and organisations.

Before this committee starts taking evidence, I advise that all witnesses appearing before the committee are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to their evidence. Any act that disadvantages a witness as a result of evidence being given before the Senate or any of its committees is treated as a breach of privilege. However, I also remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute contempt of the Senate. These are public proceedings, although the committee may agree to a request to hear evidence in camera or may determine that certain evidence should be heard in camera.

[8.49 am]

OLSEN, Mr Warren Keith, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Halls Creek

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement and at the conclusion of your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Mr Olsen—I thought I might start with a little bit of background. I have been working in local government for a little over 30 years now and 15 years of that has been spent in remote communities around Australia, outback communities at Brewarrina in New South Wales, Yalgoo in Western Australia, Georgetown in far north Queensland and for the last 21 months in Halls Creek. Most of these communities have been predominantly Aboriginal communities, Georgetown being the exception. I guess what I have to say today is based partly on my experience here but obviously my knowledge and experience from other places will creep into it a little.

There are a number of issues that I did want to talk about today. I guess the first one would be land tenure, which is a bit of a difficult issue in a lot of the communities around here, particularly in remote communities. When I say it is difficult, it is difficult in a number of ways, one of which is because the legislation under which local government operates often assumes a certain sort of land tenure. As an example, the Health Act 1913 of Western Australia imposes a number of obligations on the landowners or the land-holders and the role of local government is to check that those obligations are being met in respect of health standards. This council had a case based on a problem in Mardiwa Loop about 13 years ago with sewage overflowing and flowing through a house. At that time the community at Mardiwa Loop I understand did not have any form of land tenure, it was Aboriginal Lands Trust land, and it went to the Supreme Court, which effectively decided that the Health Act of 1913 or at least sections of it are not effective where land is held by an instrumentality of the crown. That was 13 years ago and there has not really been any significant change. There has probably been other case law. That is one of the problems, that local government provides services that were traditionally property-based services and your system of land tenure may not really fit in with the legislation. We still do our best to do things. In fact, last year we had to issue orders at Mardiwa Loop where a house had sewage flowing through it. I think the tenure has changed a little in that time. There is a corporation now which actually has a management order. So we did that. But sometimes we are doing our best under what I like to call the bluff and bulldust act of 1908, because the Health Act 1913 does not necessarily apply.

There is another thing about the lack of land tenure which affects the communities themselves. The Balgo community has no tenure at all over of the land which it occupies; they are essentially squatting on Aboriginal Lands Trust land out there. In the project that we recently did to look at a business plan for trying to provide local government services to those communities, one of the issues was that there was no land available. There is no land available to establish a depot, for example, or an office or to provide staff housing or any of those things, which I guess kind of limits your options for how you are going to go about that.

The third observation that I would make is that the lack of the normal sort of land tenure in these communities prevent Aboriginal people in those communities from accumulating and effecting an intergenerational transfer of wealth in the way that most Australians do.

This council has broken ranks, if you like, with the Local Government Association in that our council has said that we regard all the people in Halls Creek as being our citizens wherever they live and this council is really wanting to deliver local government services to the remote communities.

The other issue I need to talk about is the access roads. One of the big problems the shire has is that we have the responsibility for the Tanami Road, the interstate road that links Alice Springs and that area with the ports of the Kimberley region. It is also the major supply line for a number of communities down in the desert region. I would have to say it is an extremely poor road. Suppliers do not want to supply anymore because of the state of the road. I have had letters from the Department of Housing, which now has housing management agreements with those communities, saying they cannot get tradespeople to go out to those communities to do work. The community stores are writing to me about the level of breakages and their freight costs, not to mention the letters we get from the pastoralists and so forth.

The impact it had in terms of us developing a business plan to provide services on those communities was that the committee overseeing our project did ask us to provide alternatives. Our plan essentially is about capacity building in those communities to provide their own services, for reasons that I will get to shortly. But they did say, you have to have a backup service plan, you have to have some alternative means of providing services. So we did seek from various potential providers quotes for the provision of services and, quite frankly, they were not interested. I suppose remoteness is part of it but it is not just a function of distance. You can be a long way away with good transport links. You really become remote when you have got very poor transport links. So that is an issue, and probably the road needs about $60 million worth of investment on this side of the border. Frankly, our shire does not have that. On the other side of the border, I understand that the Northern Territory government is investing quite heavily in the road, so it is going to be half a good road—it will be a good road as far as the Northern Territory border. However, we do get funding for provision of access roads to Aboriginal communities. I am not sure of the exact figure but for the whole of Western Australia that funding comes to somewhere over $3 million, of which this shire gets a very large proportion; we get $650,000 a year. On the Tanami Road, $650,000 a year buys a few truckloads of gravel.

I knew before I accepted the job here that there was a project to develop a plan for servicing what they call the remote communities, but I was here quite some time before I came to the realisation that we were not even providing services to what they call the town communities. We were not doing very much for Mardiwa Loop or Red Hill or the Nicholson Block, other than refuse collection services. When we were asked to submit bids for the projects for what we were going to do with the funding for Aboriginal community access roads, I asked my staff to put in all the projects that really were to do with those sorts of roads. Notwithstanding the fact that there was quite inadequate funding, I thought you should not tailor your bids to the funding available otherwise those in government who are responsible for this are never going to know how much demand there is for it. So we put in a number of bids.

One that we thought was quite important was to improve the access road to Yiyili. Yiyili is a community that is about 120 kilometres west of here and it is five kilometres off the highway. The community is largely dependent on its art gallery and the income that is derived from the sale of the works of its artists. There is only five kilometres of road and it is a dirt road, and I have got to send a grader 120 kilometres down the tar seal to grade it. So that is a very expensive exercise. This being the somewhat impecunious shire that it is, it gets graded once a year. It really should be graded more often as a dirt road—ideally four or five times a year.

For $650,000 we could make a substantial improvement to that road that would make a really big difference to that community. They would be able to attract more tourists in off the main road, particularly tourists with caravans, who are often reluctant to go on dirt roads. It would make a difference to us as well because it is not really that economical to be sending a grader 120 kilometres to grade a five-kilometre road. That was a project that we thought was a fairly high priority. Quite frankly, I can spend $650,000 on the Tanimi Road and in three months time you would not be being able to see where the dollars went. This is something that would make a big difference in somebody's life or the life of a community and would have an everlasting effect. We did modelling over a 50-year period and it certainly had a positive rate of return. That was based on what we are currently spending on it, giving it one grade a year. If you modelled it compared with what we should be doing for the road then it had a very high rate of return indeed.

We got a letter back, because the funding for these Aboriginal community access roads is filtered through a committee in Perth. A committee in Perth has determined, apparently at some stage in the past, that our Aboriginal access road funding is to be spent on four roads, the Tanami Road, the Lake Gregory Road, the Balgo access road and one other road. We cannot do the projects for anything that is not on that list. That is quite discouraging. I would rather be spending the money to good effect making a difference in the lives of a community and getting a positive return to the council, which will free up funds that we could do more things with than being forced to spend it where you are not going to be able to see the difference in three months time.

I have taken this up with a representative of the Main Roads Department who sat on the committee that is overseeing our project on the services provision, and he said that that is the system that was agreed to back in 1992 or 2002 or whatever. So I guess we have got these institutional obstacles. All I can really say is that if we are going to make a difference, if we are going to get better outcomes in terms of life outcomes for Aboriginal people and close those gaps that we are all wanting to close then a few systems are going to have to change. If we carry on with the same old systems we are inevitably going to get the same old outcomes. The plan that we came up with for delivering services into these communities is all based on the concept of building the capacity into those communities to deliver the services, for a number of reasons, one of which is that people out there need employment and business activities. It would be pointless for us to deliver those services from afar while everybody sat around in the communities collecting unemployment benefits or whatever kind of transfer income that they get. So we saw that as important.

Those communities are looking for economic growth and opportunities. To be perfectly frank, they have had enough of CDEP. They want to get off it. They want real jobs. As I indicated earlier, there are not really any alternatives. With the current situation various private sector

contractors have no interest in going to those communities. It is not really practical for me to be mobilising people out of Halls Creek. We do not even have enough housing for the staff that we need to service Halls Creek let alone housing them here to send them 400 kilometres down a bad road on a regular basis.

We anticipated a model where, obviously with considerable effort put into training people and giving them skills to do these things, they would be able to deliver these services on a contract basis back to the shire. Our role in that would be basically setting standards and supervising the contracts to make sure that the work was performed. It has been put to me that, through various agencies, those communities have been getting money for decades to provide these services and it has not necessarily been working. So I have been asked: what difference is it going to make for the shire to be doing it? I think that the difference is really that we are on the ground and it would be on a contract basis that services get delivered before money is paid for the satisfaction of those services, which is quite a different model from transferring money directly from Canberra et cetera.

The other impediment that we had in terms of building capacity in the communities is that quite a number of them have experienced instability in their administration. We are talking about community CEOs here. They have a very rapid turnover. Whilst we have established pretty good relations with the Tjurabalan communities that we have been working with over the last 18 months or so, it is a case of being very hard to keep up with who is there and who is not. Ringer Soak has just been through I think three CEOs in the last two or three months. In the 21 months that I have been here, the Billiluna community has been through three or four CEOs. Unfortunately, last week I understand that the Mulan community lost its CEO of some 12 or 14 months service. That is really a significant problem. Until the communities can get stable administration, they are frankly going to go about as far as a local government would go if it kept changing its CEO on such a regular basis.

Senator ADAMS—What are the main reasons?

Mr Olsen—One of the reasons is that a lot of them are not really meeting the market. They recruit CEOs and pay them what I would pay a really experienced rates clerk. They are out there in these communities basically working 24 hours a day and trying to be all things to all people. They have no support really. Since I have been here we have had a bit of a support network with the Tjurabalan CEOs and have tried to have regular meetings to share a problem. Before that I do not know who they called. If they had a problem I guess they had to carry it themselves. Three of the Tjurabalan communities do not provide their CEOs with a motor vehicle, so they are confined to the community. They can walk around the community, but they are confined to the community. If you invite them to a meeting, they have to get a ride with somebody else.

I guess there is the potential for them to upset people on their boards or something if they do not give them everything they want. The CEO has a bit of a problem in that they are meant to be running some sort of credible administration but often they will have demands put on them that they feel they need to rightly refuse. That puts them in a very difficult situation. Often agencies will come along and say, 'This community needs a youth worker'—and it probably does need a youth worker—they fund a youth worker, pay them $10,000 a year more than the CEO and give them a motor vehicle.

I understand you have a copy of our business plan. To provide local government services to the Tjurabalan communities, one of our proposals was that those CEOs would essentially become our employees and we would properly remunerate and resource them. They would still of course have to service those communities and those boards, and that means maintaining good relations with them, but there would be some sort of arbiter in the case of a dispute. This is in much the same sense that in local government there will often be a mayor's secretary. The mayor's secretary works for the mayor, takes instructions from the mayor and has to maintain good relations with the mayor obviously, but they are actually an employee of the local government, not directly the mayor's employee.

CHAIR—This is obviously quite a comprehensive proposal. Who is it targeted at? I understand that it is supposed to be a stand-alone business model. The local government business model would be based on an invoicing rates basis but, given what you have said, my assumption is that that is not the thrust necessarily of the proposal. It is laid out that these are the sorts of services and this is how much they are going to cost. Who have you sent that to? Have you sent it to the Commonwealth? I understand that you have sent it to the Western Australian government. Have you sent it to FaHCSIA?

Mr Olsen—I understand the study was funded indirectly by the federal government. The money came through the state government and there was a senior officers committee that I reported to, which comprised representatives of state and federal departments—FaHCSIA, DIA, the Department of Local Government, the Department of Main Roads—

CHAIR—Where is that up to?

Mr Olsen—We have given them the report and the report is now in their hands.

CHAIR—About how long ago was that submitted?

Mr Olsen—Two or three months ago.

CHAIR—If I want to talk to them would they be identifiable as a committee or a group?

Mr Olsen—The secretary of the group is Michaela Maine at the WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development.

CHAIR—It might be useful for the committee to write to them and say, 'When you have made a decision about these matters, it is quite clear that this would be a very good model. It is a plan and has been submitted.' We would be very keen to hear, no doubt not before you do. We will be in touch with them to see what they are doing and see if we can get some direct feedback. But failing that, we would appreciate it if you get some feedback you pass it on to the committee.

Mr Olsen—I will certainly let you know.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you had any correspondence with them since you put in the report? Have they been back to ask you any questions?

Mr Olsen—There were some other reports produced as part of the study along the way. I met with them after they had the report. It was an opportunity for them to ask some questions. I answered those questions to the best of my ability, but there has not really been any correspondence.

This project started certainly before my time. It was initiated under the bilateral agreement, and of course the bilateral agreement has been superseded. There seems to be a little bit of uncertainty on the committee about where that then left the outcome of the project. There are a number of issues in there that we did not attempt to address. I guess other things were happening at the time. The Western Australian minister for local government asked the local government advisory board for a report on what it costs. I understand that was to be used in negotiations with the Commonwealth government. The local government advisory board asked all the local governments what it would cost and nobody had the slightest idea. I cannot vouch that the accuracy is as rigorous as I would have liked, because there were certain information gaps that we did not seem to be able to do anything about. I guess it is the first time that somebody has actually put a cost on the thing.

CHAIR—In your evidence you mentioned part of future is engaging Indigenous individuals living in the communities to deliver these services, which is something I would agree with. Are there any particular services that in the shorter term we have the sorts of skills for, including occupational health and safety and all the normal nightmares that get in our road? What are the low-hanging fruit in terms of service delivery?

Mr Olsen—Refuse collection and tip site management. All four communities have very good tip sites but they are not being properly managed. The communities are interested in doing things that they can do with their hands. Most of the communities own a grader or, in some cases, limited other roadworking equipment. That is what they have always wanted to do and we have an opportunity to build on that interest. Part of the plan was to bring in an organisation to train and mentor them so that they could run some sort of a roadworking business. Certainly this shire is not overendowed with roadworking capacity and we have lots of roads to look after.

Senator ADAMS—Have you applied for other funding for the Tanami, and how far is it along? I note you have put a cost of $60 million on it in your submission.

Mr Olsen—At the moment I have a proposal, and I have a meeting with council later this week. I sought quotations to get a proper study done and I would like to get a cost-benefit study done so that we can actually measure this. It is all very well to say lots of people are complaining, and I am sure that in your travels around Australia you probably do not go anywhere where there are not lots of people complaining about something or other. But I think we have to get some hard data and assemble some facts around that. Following that, we will make some serious submissions on the future of that road. But at this stage we really need to do the homework.

Senator ADAMS—The Northern Territory have spent a lot of money on it, so they must have done a survey of the amount of traffic. I know that it is building up all the time.

Mr Olsen—We certainly have traffic classifiers out there now gathering data. There was a long period here where they were not doing that sort of homework, but we have people out there

now. What we want to demonstrate is what the benefits and the economic multipliers would be of proper investment in that road.

Senator MOORE—You only go from the border to here, so I guess Derby takes it from Halls Creek to the coast.

Mr Olsen—No, it comes out onto the Great Northern Highway in our shire.

Senator MOORE—So it is not classified as a highway under the old terms. You just have to take it from the border to here, where it meets the other highway.

Mr Olsen—That is correct.

Senator ADAMS—I would like to go to the refuse collection. You are a part of the regional group, aren't you?

Mr Olsen—Yes, we are.

Senator ADAMS—Yesterday we heard evidence from the Derby and West Kimberley shire on the same issues. Will you be discussing your plan at that meeting, and how you are going to support the services for these remote communities? What sort of feedback are you getting from the other shires as far as what they are doing?

Mr Olsen—The other shires have taken different tacks on this. They have basically said—and this is the common line most local governments have been encouraged by WALGA to take—'Until somebody starts putting some money on the table or telling us exactly what you want us to do and how much you're going to pay us, we're not interested in doing it.' So it is really this shire that has said, 'Well, we don't think this is good enough; they're all our citizens and we should be doing whatever we can within our means for them, and obviously we can't do very much unless we get some more means.' The other question we have left unanswered in our study is: where does the money come from? That is somebody else's decision, I guess.

Senator ADAMS—You said that each of those communities has a good refuse area despite the fact that they are not being managed well, but what have you done practically? Have you dug a huge hole with a bulldozer? How have you controlled it?

Mr Olsen—I understand that those tips were installed by the Centre of Appropriate Technology. They have a level area, are fully fenced, have a good trench and have signs that say, 'Dump your putrescible waste in the trench and your green waste here and your old fridges over here, and tyres.' Unfortunately, nobody is doing any of that and that is the problem. They have such good tips that, if they were sorting the refuse, the putrescible waste trenches for example would last for years. Already this week one of the communities rang up to ask us to dig more trenches because the trench will not last very long if you start dumping fridges and car bodies and things in it. So it needs that sort of management, and that means supervision. That applies for us here in town as well, to be perfectly frank. My experience is that tips that are not staffed and supervised cannot comply with their licence requirements because, left to themselves, people will just dump rubbish wherever. In the future we will get to the point where there will be no unsupervised tips in Australia, because the only way that you can comply with your licence

requirements is to have them supervised, and that will probably mean that tips will not be open all of the time. In small communities they may have restricted hours but they will be supervised.

Senator ADAMS—Who collects the rubbish in your communities?

Mr Olsen—We have a contractor in Halls Creek and the other communities have had CDEP doing it, but it has been a bit of a sporadic effort. I think some of them actually had refuse collection trucks, which are quite specialised but, if that breaks down and they have no means of getting it fixed, refuse collection stops for maybe weeks, months or whatever, which is one of the reasons, in consultation with the Tjurabalan committee, they decided not to go down that track in future but to have smaller refuse bins and to collect them more frequently without having to use specialised equipment. If you have small refuse bins, they can be manhandled onto a trailer if necessary. So essentially it has been a CDEP effort.

Senator ADAMS—Coming back to the petrol sniffing, for the record, how is Halls Creek dealing with the issue and how many petrol outfits do you have here that sell petrol? Is it two or one?

Mr Olsen—I think it is three; but, having said that, I do not think they all stock petrol all of the time.

Senator ADAMS—Are you aware if there is any Opal fuel sold here in Halls Creek?

Mr Olsen—No, I am not aware of that. My understanding is that we do not have a petrol sniffing issue in Halls Creek. There was a bit of an outbreak at Balgo earlier this year, but there is now a kind of rapid response strategy in place throughout the Kimberley and it got a fairly rapid response.

Senator SIEWERT—I will pick up where Senator Adams left off with the petrol sniffing and link it to the alcohol restrictions. There has not been an increase in other substance abuse since the restrictions were implemented?

Mr Olsen—I am probably not the best person to answer that. I really do not know.

Senator SIEWERT—I will follow it up. In other towns we have found that you need to deal with a broad range of substances so that you are not swapping between substances.

Senator MOORE—I am interested in the reaction of the communities to your proposal and the plan that you have put forward, in particular the change of supervision. The CEOs have always been employed by the community and subject to direction and termination by the community. Taking that away from community ownership and giving it to the shire is a major change. What has been the reaction of the local communities to that change?

Mr Olsen—I have to say that I do not have any direct community reaction to that. I have had the reactions passed on to me by the various CEOs of those communities, who were pretty much in support of that.

Senator MOORE—Did you have a consultation process with the elders and the chairpersons?

Mr Olsen—We had a number of consultations with them, particularly in the earlier days, but we have not managed to get back to them since the report was published.

Senator MOORE—Two and a half to three months ago?

Mr Olsen—That is correct.

Senator MOORE—What is your plan for working with them now, though? That is a public document talking about a significant change to their governance. What is your plan for discussing their future with them, particularly as the document is in the state where it is a proposal only?

Mr Olsen—There is a fairly detailed consultation plan as part of the project. We would take that back to meetings with the communities and with their councils. There was one other issue I wanted to talk about. One of the most difficult things in the plan—in the end there was not much we could do about it—was emergency services. Last year I was at a meeting of the Kimberley Country Zone in Kununurra and we had a presentation from fire and emergency services. At the end of the presentation my shire president, who had had a problem with a fire on her station, asked who people should call in the event of a fire breaking out. The answer that we got was that if you were reporting a fire in town you should ring 000 and if you were out on a pastoral station you should call your bush fire brigade on whatever its number is. I suppose in the 21st century it would be really good if you could have one number to ring if you had a fire. I think it was fair to say that everybody was appalled when he went on with the explanation to say, if you were in a remote community, not to bother calling anybody, because nobody would come. We did look into whether we should be establishing brigades out in the communities and getting some training. In the end it was just getting a bit difficult to get quotes to train and equip people out there.

Last week there was a fire in Yiyili. I have had a number of reports from that. We did not actually learn about it until it was all over but apparently they rang FESA and FESA said to ring 000, so they rang 000 and thought that some sort of fire unit would be dispatched. They went up to the highway to wait for it and after a while they gave up. They rang the police in Halls Creek, who promised to follow it up for them. Presumably as a consequence of that they got a call from a senior FESA officer to say that no fire unit had been dispatched nor would one be dispatched and that it was a local government problem.

When I was at Yalgoo the local government ran the fire brigades. The CEO of Yalgoo is also the chief bushfire control officer. I had access to firefighting equipment and I ensured that at least some staff had training in structural firefighting. I would have had no hesitation in dispatching appropriate staff and equipment to a fire anywhere in the shire irrespective of whether it was on a community or a station or whatever. However, that is not the situation here in Halls Creek. We have a volunteer emergency service unit which is run by FESA. I do not have any firefighting equipment or trained personnel. Obviously there is nothing that I can do about it if we are having a fire on a community.

CHAIR—It would be very useful to us if you could provide to us on notice a date, some of the names of the people who were involved, some of the names of people to get in touch with and that sequence of events as best you can recall. Perhaps the committee can write to seek an explanation from some of those jurisdictions that responded in the way they did.

Senator MOORE—Or did not respond! I am being diplomatic, I know.

Senator ADAMS—Yesterday we had evidence from a community that they had the fire hydrant but they did not have any hoses and they did not have anything else. Who was responsible? It was much the same thing—no-one. They just sit there and get burnt out, with no help.

Mr Olsen—That is the case. I understand they did put the fire out but they were fighting it with garden hoses. Because they had no training, nobody disconnected the power first.

CHAIR—There are all of those occupational health and safety issues. There are people with small garden hoses inside buildings. You do need a fair amount of training and a recognition of different things that are on fire and the toxicities of different sorts of smoke. As you would be aware, it is not a simple issue. I think it is a very important issue, Mr Olsen.

Senator MOORE—Mr Olsen, do you know how many people on these communities are on the roll?

Mr Olsen—Off the top of my head, no, I do not.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any information about the last round of local government elections—whether anyone voted?

Mr Olsen—Yes. In fact, our last local government election here was an extraordinary election in the south ward and there was fairly significant turnout. We have just abolished the wards here, so the local government election in October will be on a whole-of-shire basis. We have actually contracted the Western Australian Electoral Commission to conduct that election. It has conducted the last two elections here.

Senator MOORE—How many councillors?

Mr Olsen—We have eight.

Senator MOORE—So they are going to be first past the post, the top eight votes?

Mr Olsen—That is correct. Two of our councillors come from fairly remote communities, so we charter a plane on council meeting day to bring them in.

CHAIR—Mr Olsen, thank you very much for providing your evidence today. It has been quite comprehensive, so the committee may want some clarification or have some further questions on your evidence which will be provided to you through the secretariat. If you have some further information you would like to provide to us as a submission, we are a standing

committee and will be available to take submissions over time so please make any submissions to the secretariat. Thank you again for your hospitality today.

Senator ADAMS—I just have one more question on the amalgamations. You have obviously done your report back to WALGA. What is the feeling of the Halls Creek shire?

Mr Olsen—I think everybody accepts that there has to be change in the world and that we cannot hark back to 100 years of what we have been doing as the reason why we should carry on with anything. Having said that, we believe that in the Kimberley region amalgamations would most likely result in diseconomies of scale. Just from the sheer vastness of the area and the sparseness of the population, I can foresee the need to be trading in a few shire cars for shire aeroplanes. In addition, we in this council have taken the position that we want to move on and start providing a better deal for people not only in our remote communities but in our town communities. We need to integrate them more into the town and treat them more like suburbs, I think. At the moment that is not the position of the other local governments here, so we feel that a lot of the work we have done over the past 18 months or so would be for nought if we were forced into an amalgamation with councils who are not really interested in providing those services.

We have met with other councils in the Kimberley, and later this week the shire president and I will be meeting with our colleagues from the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley. Certainly, as between those two shires, there are risks on both sides. Because Kununurra is booming and has a lot of development pressures we would run the risk of becoming the backwater that gets forgotten about and from their perspective there are risks because we are a somewhat impecunious shire with very big needs. I am not sure that anybody is lining up to amalgamate with the Shire of Halls Creek. I guess we have to keep open minds, but in our particular situation we probably see more disadvantages than advantages, partly because of the vastness of the councils in our region and partly because we are moving in different directions.

Senator ADAMS—In relation to Kimberley council you feel at least you have got open communication with the other shires that are involved with that?

Mr Olsen—We certainly do. In fact just recently we had a big strategic planning weekend and identified what the issues are in the Kimberley that we as a group of councils need to be working on together. We have identified those needs and those issues and we have got a bit of a plan going for addressing those on a regional basis.

Senator ADAMS—Good. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Olsen.

[9.44 am]

CLARE, Mr Chris, Chief Executive Officer, Warmun Community (Turkey Creek) Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. I invite you to make a short opening statement and then I will pass over to the committee for questions.

Mr Clare—I was very interested to hear what Warren was saying. I will put a case to you that there is a vast difference between remote communities. Some are in the circumstances that Warren has elaborated on; others are in the circumstances of the community that I am CEO of. Warmun community is at the moment a model community. It is performing extremely well. It is carrying out all of its obligations with regard to the various problems that Warren elaborated on. I would like to second what he had to say about the problem with CEOs on some of the communities. I have been fortunate enough to negotiate a package which makes it worth my while to stay at Warmun and I have also been fortunate enough to negotiate packages for my senior staff—there would be six or seven of them—all of whom are paid substantially more than the CEOs of the communities that Warren was talking to you about. It is the old adage: pay peanuts, you get monkeys. That is not to disparage people as not being of goodwill; it is just about their capacity to do the job and to provide the drive that is necessary.

Since my arrival—I am heading towards the last part of my second two-year contract—we have tended to erect a theoretical barrier between ourselves and Halls Creek, basically because we are aware of the problems that Halls Creek is facing. We could see the enormous input of funds that both Commonwealth and state governments were putting into Halls Creek, but we saw the need to fix our own community first before we started entering into any negotiations with other communities. We are pretty well at the stage where we can say that we have addressed everything that we wanted to address.

I will say it quite bluntly, because this is my last job so I am not beholden to anyone now: our major problem is with inept government. As a former senior Commonwealth officer I am embarrassed to see the lack of performance by government, it does not matter of what persuasion. The previous Commonwealth government to this government was equally as inept as this current government. I will get onto the issues there that I really want to talk to you about because I am hoping that a Senate committee might be able to raise some of these things in Canberra where they need to be raised.

In my brief paper you will notice that I have said we have two priorities. Obviously, housing is one. The whole housing thing is a shemozzle—it cannot be described as anything else. Somebody needs to cut the Gordian knot on this. I have been there 3½ years now and the negotiations have been going on for at least 3½ years. Nothing has been achieved. I believe the same story applies in the Northern Territory, though I am not sure on that. Now, that is a disgrace. It is a disgrace that a government that can raise an army and do whatever needs to be done to defend our country cannot put the mental and physical wherewithal together to be able to provide reasonable accommodation, not Third World accommodation, for Australia's citizens. So you have got a disgrace there. I do not think I need to elaborate on that one—you would all

know what the problem is. The question is: how do you fix it? I have a view on that. It requires goodwill of government. But I remember that immediately following Cyclone Tracy we had a public servant in Darwin who was then described as El Supremo because he had the call to do what needed to be done. That was Ray McHenry. Some of you from the Territory may be aware of that. I think this housing problem needs something similar. We need to get somebody in there who really has some clout, knows what they are doing and has the backing of all governments to do it.

The other issue is the one of mental health. Whilst we have a very, very well-functioning community, we do not have a healthy community. We do not have a community where its mental health is up to scratch. Underlying all of the dysfunction caused by alcohol—violence and so forth, and they are just the physical expressions—there is a history that goes back to the days even before the station. The Aboriginal people themselves are carrying this history of abuse and it now permeates everything that they do.

We have been fortunate to employ a mental health psychologist, Darrell Henry. As far as I know he is the only fully-qualified Aboriginal psychologist in the nation. We pay for him to come to our community once a month and he is starting now to delve into the underlying reasons for the problems. That once-a-month visit to our community will cost us in the order of $84,000 a year, which we are meeting ourselves. So the poorest of the poor are meeting the cost of a qualified, highly-respected professional that they will open up to. My view is that, as it is one of our priorities, perhaps your committee might go away saying, 'Let us address the underlying causes.' Don't just address the problem by saying that you are going to close the bottle shops down and so forth—address the underlying causes. We believe that that is starting to work on our community, but there is a long, long way to go and we do not have the financial resources to keep funding it. So that is our second priority.

Regarding the specific issues that we would ask you have a look at, you are now talking to a highly-qualified administrator. The biggest problem that we have, as I have said, is government itself. When the Prime Minister made his apology speech, his first speech, he made the statement, and it is clear and unequivocal, that remote communities would, because of their difference, be treated in a most flexible manner in the delivery of government services. I put it to you that exactly the opposite has happened. FaHCSIA is such a centralised operation that it does not matter. There are no negotiations with communities whatsoever—none. There are negotiations after the event but there are no negotiations as to what the community might need or what it would like to recommend should be done. That applies to every facet of FaHCSIA's operations. For the past 2½ years, we have been advised by imprimatur, 'This is your budget for the year.' No discussion, no negotiation, no talk about tips or what you do about anything like that: just get on with the job. That is not the way to deal with a remote community.

Every component of FaHCSIA's operations is totally and completely centralised. When I speak to their officers that have worked for me in the past and I say, 'Why is it that you are not having any negotiations whatsoever with these communities?' they say, 'Because it is set down in Canberra.' All your silvertails sit around a table in Canberra and they come up with dream scenes for Australia and say that this is the way things will operate. Common sense tells you that it will not work that way, that there should be at the very least discussions and negotiations.

I refer to CDEP, just to move on to another agency. You will see in my briefing that I refer to possible claims and the potential that we had to take the decisions of DEEWR to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. It worked like this. When they advertised nationwide the tender process for the new CDEP service providers, we put in a tender. As a remote and relatively small community, we put in a tender which proved in fact that we had operated an extremely efficient CDEP operation, the only one in the East Kimberleys, by the way, that was efficient. We knew that the others were not applying the no-work, no-pay principles—we were. But okay, we had cut ourselves off and we were determined to run it properly.

When the CDEP in Halls Creek went belly up about 18 months ago through mismanagement the government officers decided to allocate the CDEP operation in Halls Creek to an organisation called East Kimberley CDEP, which is a Perth based CDEP operation operating out of Kununurra. So it operated in Kununurra and it operated in Halls Creek. It flew right over the top of us. Ours was very efficient and very well run.

Guess what. Our operation was not approved for the tender process. No reason was given. Our operation was given to East Kimberley CDEP. They did not apply for the tender. I put it to you: how do you get a tender if you do not apply for it?

Senator SIEWERT—How do you know they did not apply for it?

Mr Clare—We were told by the government. As a former administrator, I can see what has happened. It would be far more convenient to have one operator operating Kununurra, Warmun and Halls Creek than having one operator operating Kununurra and Halls Creek and a small operator—ourselves—running Warmun. I believe that was a disgraceful decision, but we chose not to challenge it because I do not believe that you get anywhere challenging government if they are set on a path.

So what we now do is exactly what we did before. We run the CDEP totally and completely. When you run a successful CDEP operation and you locate people into full-time employment you are paid a bonus for that, and that is one of the problems we now have. It is that bonus that operated the previous year when we scored above expectations. It went into our coffers, enabling us to do things like employing the psychologist.

Where is that bonus going now? It is not coming to us. It is going to a Perth based operation, operating out of Kununurra. So all the requirements of governance, community decision-making and economic management have all been totally ignored by the very departments that one would expect would take those things into account. So that is another of our problems, another one of the issues that I wanted to raise.

The final one is the issue of ‘all of government’. All of government, to me, means phalanxes of brand new, four-wheel drives, $80,000 to $90,000 a pop, calling in to see us as two-hour tourists in the dry season. Apart from the irritation of that, because we have to pander to some of them, the major problem that I have is that they all generate paperwork coming out your ears. Guess where the whole lot goes. It comes down as if through a great big funnel—boom—to these tiny little communities to handle. I see new positions being created in government hand over fist. I see when people are generating work to justify their position within government. It is very obvious. No thought whatsoever has been given to asking whether the communities have a

capacity to handle the administration, or whether they should be given some help in handling it, or whether instead of creating some new public service positions they should provide some administration support for the communities.

I will give you an example of a problem there. We operate a remote service and an accountancy firm does the work, so we send pretty well everything down to Adelaide and we are serviced very well. We do that at the behest of government itself. That was seen as being the most effective way of managing it and I agree that it is. You get half-baked bookkeepers on these communities, I can tell you, and you end up with chaos. This works extremely well. We had to go to tender for those accountancy services. The tenders ranged from $100,000 to $250,000. We chose the $100,000 one which, to be honest, had previously been providing our service anyway and we ran with them. FaHCSIA in Perth, in its wisdom, halved its allocation for accountancy services. When we asked them why and how we were we going to meet the cost the response was, 'It's very simple, we have a formula that we provide which is that you can only have four per cent to eight per cent of your total budget for accountancy services.' To the question of where we were going to get the money from, the answer was, 'Charge every other department 10 per cent of whatever grant you get as an admin fee.' That is what we have been doing. But we are now down to a situation where we have $25,000 that we receive from the government demanding the service to pay for a service that is costing us $100,000. They are just some of the administrative problems that we face. I might leave it at that.

CHAIR—You may have to take some of these questions on notice. You talked about having a package and it being a better way to go about security in terms of the tenure. How many local Indigenous employees actually have a package of that nature?

Mr Clare—When I arrived 3½ years ago there were none, there are now eight. Over half of our staffing structure are local Indigenous people. That was a very deliberate strategy of mine.

CHAIR—Do those eight have a long-term package?

Mr Clare—No, they are all year by year but at the moment I am signing two-year contracts subject to funds being available, so all of our staff are asked to sign the same and have. I now have a very stable staffing structure.

CHAIR—What sort of level of employment would you have in this community?

Mr Clare—It goes through CDEP, through municipal, through housing maintenance to administration. We have an early childhood centre which won the award last year for the best in Western Australia, not just for an Indigenous service but the best in Western Australia. My wife is the coordinator and she is a highly experienced person that has run these services elsewhere. In that centre last year for the first time one of the workers in the community achieved certificate III status and has now moved into studying for her diploma in early childhood education. For the first time, we have real succession planning. We have an aged persons home for which we have one full-time and four part-time staff members and there are seven very aged people there. It costs us a hell of a lot of money to run. In fact we put $150,000 of our own money into its operations each year to keep it running. Because of where we are we cannot get high-care status approved without substantial expenditure on the facilities.

CHAIR—Just back to the employment numbers, Mr Clare, how many people in the community would be on Newstart? Would it be half or three-quarters of the community? How many people in the community are effectively still unemployed?

Mr Clare—Unemployed?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Clare—We did a bit of a check of this. It was some months ago now, so it might be slightly out of date, but we found that, of employable people who did not have a reason for not working, there were only 10 that were not working. There is a consistent push in our community to get people to work. There is psychological and quite overt pressure at times applied. It is pretty good.

Senator MOORE—Is that 10 men and women?

Mr Clare—These were mainly young men.

CHAIR—Are you able to find out how many people you have in each house in the community in terms of overcrowding—the average number? Perhaps you could take that on notice.

Mr Clare—I can take it on notice, but I can tell you that one of the aspects of overcrowding that are often overlooked is resource sharing. For example, you will have three families living in the one house and, when there are funds coming into that house, they will share them, and that allows for better survival. But we have had up to 20 people in one house.

CHAIR—Okay. Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go back, firstly, to the issue of the aged-care facility. Last year, the minister announced that they were going to be focusing on Indigenous aged care. Has there been any progress there? You haven't had any contact?

Mr Clare—It is news to me.

Senator SIEWERT—It was following the issues in the Northern Territory, if I recall properly, and Thursday Island.

Mr Clare—I think you will find that the government has been so focused on the Northern Territory that the Kimberleys is the last place on earth—but that is just my observation.

Senator SIEWERT—You said you are not high-care accredited; presumably, then, you are getting low-care packages?

Mr Clare—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. And you said you had seven residents?

Mr Clare—Seven, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Those packages are obviously much less than high-care packages, so are you actually providing high care?

Mr Clare—Yes. We have to.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Mr Clare—Our coordinator is currently developing a proposal to Canberra to make a bid for those high-care packages, because the low-care packages are $11,000 a pop while the high-care packages are $30,000 a pop. It is a big difference.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, plus you get different day rates.

Senator ADAMS—What about ageing in place? Have you tried that? Ageing in place means that as they move through from low care up to high care there is a different—

Mr Clare—I must admit I am not an expert on aged care. I know how ours operates. But they are currently looking at that for us.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you have HACC packages?

Mr Clare—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Separate to the facility?

Mr Clare—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—About how many of those would you have?

Mr Clare—I think there are about 11 of those.

Senator SIEWERT—Which packages are they?

Mr Clare—Can I take that on notice?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, that would be great.

Mr Clare—Because, as I say, I am not an expert on aged care.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to quickly ask about CDEP. Can you tell me how it is now operating in the community.

Mr Clare—How it now operates?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Mr Clare—Yes. Previously, my CDEP manager, who was very good, ran a very effective operation. When this new crowd were given the job, I said, 'Let's sit down and work out how we're going to do this.' They were delighted to have somebody there who could run an efficient operation that they do not have to worry about, because with this place in Kununurra they have got enough headaches of their own. So what we do now is totally run it for them. I am currently in negotiations with them because they are now starting to try to micromanage my manager, to pull him down to not being able to approve any expenditure over $500. Previously, the way it worked was by formula: the number of workers that you have is multiplied by a certain amount and you end up with what is called the operational budget. Now, I have gone back to these people and said: 'Hang on, you are contravening our agreement. Sit down with us, work out what the budget is and then give this man the dignity of his position and allow him to do what he was doing previously, otherwise we will lose him and you will lose him.'

Senator SIEWERT—Can you tell me how much they make effectively running it from Perth-Kununurra? There is obviously money that used to be in the community now going out of the community and to another firm.

Mr Clare—Absolutely. The cream is gone.

Senator SIEWERT—So the community is effectively not making any money out of it.

Mr Clare—No.

Senator SIEWERT—But there is a coordinator based in the community.

Mr Clare—He is a manager. He is the CDEP manager and the works manager—'works' being municipal. He does both for us.

Senator SIEWERT—Effectively, the change has been that money has gone out of the community. Do you still have the same number of CDEP places?

Mr Clare—Yes. You are hitting the nail right on the head, and I should have covered this. Pretty well every decision that we have had has come from a government that is absolutely besotted with remote service providers—and I have had arguments with them over and over again—and has effectively removed governance, jobs, income and self-pride from these communities and slotted them into regional towns. Already, Kununurra—

Senator SIEWERT—They are their own—

Mr Clare—There are plenty of jobs in Kununurra. But they are absolutely taking all the resources. That is for the convenience of government. It is not for anything else. We can manage it if we can get some efficient people in Kununurra to go down. Too bad about that place. They can go from Kununurra down to it and manage it. We actually got rid of the service providers that the Western Australian Department of Housing foisted on us 2½ years ago because they were totally incompetent. The same government attempted to foist them back on us recently. We refused to go along with it. We now have an operation where we will work directly to the Department of Housing in Halls Creek, thus removing the middle man—which is what we were

after all along. For the sake of 'feel-good think-good' by government, these middle-men operations are removing the chance of these communities to improve themselves.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator MOORE—Mr Clare, you obviously speak the language. Having been a bureaucrat for years, you are finding that is no advantage in trying to communicate?

Mr Clare—It is.

Senator MOORE—I would think it would have to be.

Mr Clare—It is.

Senator MOORE—Communication is one of the big issues. I have been trying to trace this for a while. Lots of people are talking but no-one is listening and getting the message. Do you have any suggestions for how we actually get people engaged?

Mr Clare—I do not know how you turn a titanic around mid-course. I come from a different period of government. I come from a period where consultation and dialogue were what had to be achieved. Now I think it is the total opposite. On the decisions made under the previous government, I have a view. As I said to you, I do not owe anyone anything now. I found the behaviour of the elected officials who were running ATSIC totally and completely offensive. It was so bad that something had to be done. The problem was that when something was done the baby was thrown out with the bathwater. All the administrators—each of whom may have been people of goodwill who were terribly embarrassed about what was happening—were shunted to the side. You are talking about administration. Your corporate memory on administration has now disappeared. I do not know if this is correct. I was talking a couple of weeks ago to Fred Chaney, a former boss of mine. We were talking about how appropriate it would be to place Canberra public servants on remote communities in the Northern Territory. I said, 'I don't want to see any, thanks very much,' and he was of the same view. There has to be some training. There has to be some cultural awareness. It just does not work. Anyway, that is another matter.

To get back to your question: I am fortunate because I do know who to talk to. Most of these communities have no idea who to talk to. I honestly do not know how they handle all of that paperwork I told you about, which comes down like a funnel. If you were to back me up against the wall and say, 'Well, really, what do you think should happen?' I would say there should be decentralisation and delegations to regional centres—that is, to Kununurra, Broome and your other regional centres throughout Australia. Senior public servants should be decentralised and given substantive delegations. Do not let them go there for any less than two years because they will only want to follow the career path. Say, 'If you go there at that level, you're there for two years and that's the agreement.' Then you might see some progress.

Senator MOORE—That is the model that there was for ATSIC officers.

Mr Clare—I do not know. I did not work for ATSIC. I was pre-ATSIC.

Senator MOORE—I have one last question before the chair gets upset. Are you part of the proposal that the local shire has put forward about changing CEOs' status from being employed by community to being employed by the shire?

Mr Clare—Not at all.

Senator MOORE—Not at all?

Mr Clare—I have not been consulted on that. Remember I told you that we had a—

Senator MOORE—I am not sure of the geography. That is why I am asking.

Mr Clare—We stand alone, quite deliberately. We wish Halls Creek well in dealing with the communities that it deals with. Even though we are within Halls Creek shire, we want to run our own community well and that is what we are doing.

Senator MOORE—Thank you. They are not listed in the proposal?

Senator ADAMS—I would like to ask you about how the arts centre is going. You said, with respect to your psychologist, that there was an amount of money that you had to make up. Is that coming from the community coffers from the art?

Mr Clare—No, not from the art.

Senator ADAMS—Where does it come from?

Mr Clare—It comes from the earnings that I was explaining through CDEP and so forth. We have managed our money extremely well. We are able to meet emergency things like that one. The arts centre has been very successful, as you are probably aware. At the moment, with the economic downturn, it is finding it difficult. In fact, the community at a regular meeting recently agreed to loan the arts centre some money to see it through a difficult period. That was because the art industry has virtually collapsed. The arts centre have not taken that up because they think things are starting to pick up. It is starting to look as though things are slightly better. That arts centre pumps around about $600,000 to $700,000 a year into the community—that is, $300,000 to $400,000 for its operations and $600,000 to $700,000 into the community. Without that $600,000 to $700,000, I do not know how people would survive. It would not exist.

CHAIR—So most of the people who are receiving the funding that flows from the arts centre would be artists or employees of the arts centre?

Mr Clare—Yes, artists. They are all artists.

CHAIR—So they would not be on Newstart?

Mr Clare—No.

CHAIR—That is why it might be a community with quite a lot of—

Mr Clare—No. There are not many of them, actually.

Senator ADAMS—There is just one other thing. This committee has done two inquiries into petrol sniffing. Have you had any problems recently with petrol sniffers?

Mr Clare—No. We do not have a problem with petrol sniffing at all.

Senator ADAMS—You did years ago. It was probably when it was Turkey Creek.

Mr Clare—No, certainly not for some years. But we have seen an increase in ganja recently. I remember the question that you asked Warren. I have only heard anecdotally. With people in Halls Creek that I know and respect I check out how they feel the liquor laws are going, and they are very positive about what has happened as a result of the new liquor laws. But they have said to me—and remember that this is anecdotal—that they are seeing a major upsurge in the use of cannabis.

Senator ADAMS—Is Opal fuel sold there at all?

Mr Clare—No. The Opal people came to see us, and we said, 'There's no point; most of the people in our community have petrol cars anyway, and there has never—certainly not for some considerable number of years—been any petrol sniffing.'

Senator ADAMS—I was very interested in your succession planning with the early childhood centre for when your wife leaves. That is very good, because it would be dreadful, after winning such a prestigious award, to have it collapse because the person who is driving it leaves.

Mr Clare—It is on the point of collapse at the moment because it looks as though FaHCSIA, through its funding cycle, will not be funding—or may not be funding; we are negotiating at the moment—the positions for this current financial year.

Senator SIEWERT—Why?

Mr Clare—As it was explained to me, they have set the funding for the next three years at the same level as it was over the past five years. That funding was not called up until the last two years of the previous five years, which enabled us to employ the staff and so forth, but they have averaged it out over the past five years, so it is not going to meet that level that we are currently getting. I have written to the minister, and there are moves afoot on the succession planning issue. The same thing is happening with me. I have a middle-aged woman, a mother, there who is currently doing her university degree in Indigenous community administration at Curtin University, I think. She will be finished with that by the end of next year. Whether she will then have the confidence to step up is the question. I think she will probably still need some mentoring, but there are signs there. If we could get a positive reaction and support from government on these sorts of issues, it would make things a hell of a lot easier.

CHAIR—How many CDEP employees do you think would be in the childcare centre?

Mr Clare—Two.

CHAIR—The childcare centre is a Commonwealth responsibility.

Mr Clare—Yes.

CHAIR—As you would understand, the Commonwealth, when they made the changes to CDEP across governments, said that any Commonwealth work that is being conducted in the communities will be paid for by the Commonwealth, which will be not a notional CDEP but full-time employment; that would be the case.

Mr Clare—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you understand why the CDEP is still operating within a Commonwealth establishment?

Mr Clare—I am not sure, to be very honest. I will find out, if you would like me to answer that one, because it is certainly applied to every other facet of our operations but did not flow through to early childhood care.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence today, Mr Clare. There may well be some points of clarification or some further questions which will be provided to you through the secretariat on notice. Should you wish to make further submissions or clarification on the evidence you have provided today, you can also make those through the secretariat. Thank you very much.

Mr Clare—Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 10.23 am to 10.37 am

BEDFORD, Mrs Patsy, Community Language Development Office, Kimberley Language Resource Centre

BUTTERS, Ms Jane, Private capacity

BUTTERS, Ms Vicki, Manager, Kimberley Language Resource Centre

CASSON, Miss Siobhan Katrina, Language Development Officer, Kimberley Language Resource Centre

DEEGAN, Ms Bonnie, Yarliyil Art Centre

KNIGHT, Mrs Olive, Central Kimberley Director, Kimberley Language Resource Centre

McGINTY, Ms Thelma, Yarliyil Art Centre

MORTON, Mr Stewart, Vice-Chairperson, East Kimberley Director, Kimberley Language Resource Centre

TRANCOLLINO, Ms Lulu, Yarliyil Art Centre

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. I invite you to make a short opening statement and then we will go to questions.

Mrs Knight—We are very privileged to have you hear our submission, the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. We do have many issues with languages, which we will present to you later on. As a director, I have many, many concerns, as we do as a language centre as a whole. Thank you.

CHAIR—Would anyone else like to talk to us more about what the language resource centre does, some of the challenges that you have and what sorts of things you think should be happening?

Ms V Butters—The Kimberley Language Resource Centre is a regional organisation. We have members from right across the Kimberley representing the 28 languages that are left in the Kimberley. We have a board of 12 directors. There are four members—two male and two female—from east, west and central Kimberley. Our main purpose is to maintain and to continue the status of languages in the Kimberley.

CHAIR—How do you go about maintaining your languages? What sorts of programs do you have?

Ms V Butters—From years and years of having linguists and researchers coming in from all over the world and working with these old people, taking this language from them and taking it

away, we are working on language documentation being repatriated from Japan and places like that.

CHAIR—From how long ago—20 years?

Ms V Butters—Yes. With the board, we have changed our way of thinking. We are saying that, to ensure that the languages survive, we have to make sure that the kids are hearing the language. Instead of people coming in and working on the languages, we have to start taking control of the language situation ourselves and to start doing the work ourselves. We have to start training up our people to be the linguists and to teach them to read and write their own languages and to be able to pass it on to the kids.

CHAIR—How is that going?

Ms V Butters—Not good.

CHAIR—How interested are the kids?

Ms V Butters—It is not so much the interest of the kids; it is just trying to change this way of thinking—the Western way of people coming in and doing the documentation. To apply for funding, we have to have a product at the end of it—a book, a dictionary. That is not how we want to go. We want to be able to take our kids out bush and immerse them in the language so they are hearing it and picking it up. There is really no product at the end of that. For us to be able to get funding to do something like that—we call it teaching on country—it is very hard. There are no criteria that fit this.

Mrs Bedford—As Vicki said, to get funds we have to have a product at the end, and that is very hard for us. As Indigenous people, we look at language and our culture as an identity that makes us who we are. Our language will never go away. Our language is what we stand on; it is the foundation of who we are. If we do not have an identity, we will just fly in the sky. At the moment, that is being broken. All the Indigenous children from the day they are born have a language other than English. We do not come from an English-speaking background. It is Kriol and it is our own Indigenous language. So we have this block that comes up when we step into the doors of a Western world to learn English. It is very hard. They are saying that Indigenous people are failing in education and in whatever we do. First and foremost, based on that view, we will not have our cultural festivals or our Indigenous art works 20 years down the track, because the language is the core of all the things that we do as Indigenous people. So we are saying that this is how the directors on our board have changed it around: 'Hang on. Let's get our language strong because our language holds our culture; it holds the knowledge. We can go hand in hand with the Western world if we are only given a chance in what we want to do with ourselves to make us who we are.'

Miss Casson—Could I respectively ask the senators if they have read any of the briefing materials that we provided? This document here, which is the one that is a PowerPoint presentation, very clearly sets out your question about what the organisation does and what the issues are. Because we have prepared ourselves for this hearing based on having provided these documents, I am wondering whether there is a possibility of assisting people to answer the questions by drawing from them, or is that not the way this hearing works?

CHAIR—Miss Casson, my questions are merely to have some engagement. If you have a better way of doing that, by all means do it. I am not trying to put people down. I am just trying to get some feel for what is happening and what some of the challenges are that they have. We have read the briefing material and how things works, but I guess the questions are just to elicit some conversation.

Mr Morton—I am not much of a speaker. I have not been to school much. I am from a background of Aboriginal people. For me, things are pretty hard for me now because I cannot understand what you are saying. I have a broken-down English because I have not been brought up in the Western world that we are talking about now.

Being out there in the bush is how we want to teach our kids. If you go out into the bush, you would not know how you could survive there. It is pretty hard for young people to be taught by white people. Out in their cultural land they do not know what they can find there. It is pretty hard for them. Now it is pretty hard for me to get out there and look around because I am stuck in town with the work, and I am losing my black culture from thinking in English. It is hard for me to get back to my own kind of life.

We want to see the government support the language with more money so that we can teach our young people to build their feelings inside them of where their country is and where their own language is and things like that.

I make artefacts. I make spears, boomerangs, shields and all that. Sometimes people come up and get us in a movie camera and we talk language. The elders show it at the school but the school is not always that with us. That is one thing: we get knocked back for the things that we want to do.

CHAIR—In the specifics of your submission—you may want to take this on notice—you said that you need more resources. I know there is a contracting environment and we are all struggling for resources. You say that most of the resources want some product at the end. I guess that is the way of government. We do fund a number of organisations which, I guess, file reports but do not necessarily need a product. Do you have any ideas about the nature of the reporting you would like? I know what you do not like. You do not really want to have the product at the end. It is a bit like linguists who come from overseas and produce a work of some type. What do you think would be a better system? Would it be just providing recurrent funding, to be able to do this sort of work? What sort of a system would you like to see?

Ms V Butters—The main issue is when the submission rounds are open and you are writing your criteria that are set down in wherever—Canberra, Perth—on how your project fits into the conditions that they are giving the funding out of, we would not usually fit those criteria. What they see in Canberra as the criteria for this year, whatever they may be—documentation, archiving—are not what we need. We need to be able to take our kids out bush to teach them and that does not fit. It is not a high ranking against the criteria that they are giving out the money on. So we do not get the money.

Miss Casson—Just to be technical, they use a system of ranking languages by how endangered they are. This comes down to counting numbers of speakers. This has come through from the Western academic approach, from linguistic anthropology. These criteria do not

actually look at individual people, families or communities to find some older speakers who have crucial language and knowledge of country. They do have a huge amount that needs not to be lost, that needs to be passed down. Some of it has passed down and you actually get variations within communities, even within language groups, as to whether young people are speaking, whatever it is. The way the criteria are set out, they ask you to say what the language is and how endangered it is. If it is very endangered, they would like you to do a documentation project where you come out with a grammar or a dictionary, rather than being able to say that, if you have one elderly speaker, they can be just as effective in a language nest as they are giving all of that information to the technical expert and it is not going back into the community. From my linguistic side of things, that is how I would analyse the criteria as sometimes preventing—

CHAIR—I am not particular familiar with the funding application in that area. I am not sure whether other members are. In the general area of culture exchange, we have a number of other demographics in Australia—from Cambodia. Greek is a big one on the eastern seaboard. I am not sure where they get a lot of their funds from but I do know that the culture, particularly language, is huge in the Greek community. They go to great lengths to have weekends away and do all sorts of things to ensure that their kids continue to speak the language. I am not at all sure what sort of assistance comes from government. It may be worth looking at that. Thanks for the information on that area. I am not really sure how we should proceed with it. Clearly, the only area you appear to be applying for is access to languages. As late as yesterday, I heard evidence about other organisations, from childcare organisations who spend time in the bush with parents, grandparents and children—which is some respite from tensions in communities—where those same issues about culture and language are transferred. I know their funding comes from a completely different source. Have you looked at other areas of funding for those sorts of initiatives, from outside the language based area?

Miss Casson—I do not think so.

Ms V Butters—There have been communities across the Kimberley who have gone out and got this type of funding and brought it into the language centre, like what you are doing at Wangkatjungka. You have the funding for your community and then you bring us in to help you support the language side of it with the kids. How we are resourced, we only have five permanent staff across the Kimberley. That is the way we have to go. We have to support the communities themselves to get their funding, then we go out and support them or we get into partnerships with other organisations to make the money go around because there is not enough money for staff.

CHAIR—How do you see your immediate future? Is it sustainable but at a much smaller level than you need or is it that future funding does not look secure?

Ms V Butters—It is sustainable.

Mrs Knight—The funding is quite insecure at present because of, as you realise, how unrecognised we are—the status level. It depends on the requests of the communities. Myself and other communities have requested teaching on country. We have seen the desperate need for children to have two-way learning, part classroom and part bush, because of the loss of their culture and identity. This is what we are worried about in the future. It more or less depends on what the requests of the communities are. We have spoken before about the requests coming

from the grassroots level. This is not what someone has said from the top—'We'll give money for this and that'. This is what we are asking. Unfortunately, the top does not look at it this way. It does not consider the fact that the grassroots are asking for certain projects and things to be done for us. The level of response we are getting from the top is poor because of the fact that we have stated already, that we have been categorised, that the languages are not seen as very important.

Let me add that we do not want to see an incident, which was created in past policies, smoothing out the dying pillow, as it were, which is not going to happen. I am a positive person. I am going to see that our languages are revived and are going to survive. We want to ask you senators if you could possibly look at this and see it as a very important issue, that the languages our children have been growing up with and their culture are maintained, that they are strong in the future. This will help them to survive. This will help all of us to survive, regardless of who we are of this great country.

Senator MOORE—One of the issues, as Senator Scullion was saying, is that there is specific academic funding for protection of the linguistic background. That is where you have people looking specifically at the language. You have mentioned in your submission about how that works. I think your request is more of a cultural basis about community building and community maintenance. It is which element we focus on. It is a real issue in terms of funding. You have to find the right box. I have seen the presentation and I met with some of the elders 12 months ago on this issue. It is much more than the language. The language is a stimulant but it is much more than that. It is the whole community growth and celebration of the community. I take it you have had a lack of success in applying for some of the existing programs for your specific work. That is something we can look at with funding bodies. I am interested to see whether you have had the opportunity to meet with any of the ministers, either at state or federal level, to talk with them about what you are hoping to do.

Miss Casson—I think some of our board members across the Kimberley might have done. At the state level, Brendan Grills is quite supportive—that was prior to being in the position that he is now in politically. I think the issue is like you are saying, and Patsy can express a lot better about how central language is to everything. I think that academic process has taken language and community over here. It does not matter which minister you sit down with. For example, with the interaction we have had with the state and federal education ministers, the federal minister says go to the state minister, but the state minister does not seem to be jumping on board at the moment. The Kimberley District Education Office is not listening at all about any sorts of issues to do with integrated curriculum. It comes back to the basic foundation of the Kimberley being 50-50 Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal. In some of the communities we are working with, the schools are 90 per cent or more full of Aboriginal kids, including here in Halls Creek. Still the process is coming from that Western perspective. We have met with ministers and we have had board members talk directly to ministers, but I feel they do not know where to go with it.

Senator MOORE—Have you looked at a program that looks at non-Indigenous students? I am sure the education department are looking at how a program services their whole client base. Your focus is very much on Aboriginal children being able to link with their history and learn their language and maintain their culture. Have you looked at a segment of the program to look at non-Indigenous kids so that they can have, without learning the special bits of the culture, at

least some awareness of the importance? In terms of a package, the education department would be looking at how they get the best response. They will be looking across the board. From the little bit I have heard, I have not heard whether you have something that looks at people like me, who have no Aboriginal background but are very keen to learn about it.

Miss Casson—It is accounted for. The organisation itself does things like cross-cultural training. It comes back down to the demand. We could do a lot of fee-for-service work in the non-Aboriginal and government sector. With that integrated curriculum document we are trying to say to the education department that this goes both ways. You start in the community with the Aboriginal kids but once it gets into the school it is also raising awareness with the teachers. The teachers need to be in on the process. I think Olive may want to talk more strongly about accounting for mixed classrooms or non-Aboriginal students once the curriculum is in the school.

CHAIR—As you would be aware, in the Northern Territory there has been a very long and bitter debate about bilingual classes. If you are going to school to learn an education that gives you the key to a wider experience in the community then English is a fundamental of that. The argument that appears to have won out in the Northern Territory is that it should be done in English because it has a wider benefit. It also appears to recognise that as part of the school curriculum perhaps we should have an approach of ESL and the sort of stuff you are talking about. The debate is far from over. I know that has been a decision recently made by the Northern Territory government because there were a number of schools doing one thing and a number of schools doing another. It was about consistency. It is a very difficult issue. That debate has certainly been going for 20 years in the Territory.

Senator ADAMS—How many children speak a language other than English as their first language when they come to school? I am a mother of two sons. As far as parents teaching the children, have they started off with English or their own language in the community?

Mrs Knight—I would say that the children are being taught their own language. The most traditional of the language may not be taught. The non-traditional language is Kriol. That is more or less the language that they appear at school with. They bring Kriol along with them, even though they have bits of other languages. The more remote you get you will get children speaking their traditional languages as their first language. We would like you to see the difficulties these children contend when they come into Western learning where English is the first language. They are given the Australian standard of English at school, but then they have to think in Kriol and their traditional language. That is the difficulty.

Ms Butters—Their teacher, who could be fresh out of university and up from Perth, could have no idea what these kids are saying. They are speaking Kriol to the teacher and the teacher does not know what they are saying.

Miss Casson—Along with the diversity of languages is the diversity of language situations. You cannot predict whether a kid's first language will be a traditional language. Even within one language group that varies based on family and who is still speaking. That is one of the problems for the language centre in supporting all of these groups across the Kimberley: the government wants to approach it by looking at it in one way whereas the organisation is set up to deal with all of those differences and to work with the community and to understand each community and

place. The integrated curriculum that the organisation is working on looks at all of those different aspects—whether the kids are coming from in town or a remote community and whether there are non-Aboriginal kids in that situation.

This is very different from the Territory where they were first language speaking kids going into school and it was a bilingual program. There is really only one language that could be in that situation in the Kimberley. That is why the comparison is hard to make. In that debate about bilingualism a paper by AIATSIS has just been put out, but it ignores international research in this area. I think it comes more down to the particular Australian Aboriginal situation in dealing with government and in dealing with the situation. I think the intervention in the Territory has made decisions about things that stand back from looking at that particular area of bilingual education, for example.

CHAIR—Let us say that we can wave a magic wand and have bilingual education tomorrow in the Kimberley. How many teachers do you think we could rustle up with teacher qualifications that would have any skills in the second language?

Miss Casson—Non-Aboriginal teachers?

CHAIR—Any teachers who are qualified who have the capacity to teach things apart from—

Miss Casson—Languages are not in that strength of a situation to be educating in the Western curriculum. This document about the early years of integrated teaching talks about the kids starting from when they are young. In their own communities families should have the right to choose if they wish to continue their traditional Aboriginal languages and to do that they need to be able to do it in a more culturally appropriate and traditional way, even if they are living in towns. People can think through that.

This is preschool. I know at the moment there is the nought to five approach of assimilation—I will use that word because it is the best way that I can think of it; it is assimilating the kids into the English education system. But in those early years if the community has the kids with them, once they get into the school system, when they go into kindergarten at age five, you start looking at the two-way thing. It is not necessarily about bilingual education; it is about who the kids are already and how the education system deals with Aboriginal kids who are not English speakers. They may not be always traditional language speakers—they may be Kriol speakers, but that is still not English. They are culturally not Western, which is the approach that the curriculum takes. That question is moot I think. It is not about bilingual education and it is not about Aboriginal people being qualified to deliver a curriculum in a Western way in their own language. It is a little bit different to that. That is why the discussion has to happen better. This, as you said, is not the opportunity to get into talking with people who are here and the other board members.

CHAIR—You have to acknowledge that it is a very complex area, particularly in the circumstances you are providing to us. As you say, often with English as a second language there is an assumption that your first language is the language that you are trying to protect. In this case, often it is not. Kriol is not threatened. Kriol is perhaps your first language, but we are talking about a language that is neither your first language or English. I am not so sure what role the schools—

Miss Casson—Culturally the kids are from those language groups, aren't they? Culturally they have that knowledge, but they might not always have the language with it.

CHAIR—I also understand that we had a request through Ms Bedford that we be joined by some more witnesses who wanted to talk briefly about an arts centre—or lack of—in town.

Ms Deegan—Here at Halls Creek we do not have an arts centre. There has not been one for a long time now, but the people still love to do their artwork. They go to TAFE every day and they do their art at TAFE.

CHAIR—What happened to the old arts centre?

Ms Deegan—We had a lady who was running the arts centre for us, but she was not very friendly or good with artists. She always said, 'You do rubbish art,' and this and that. People did not want her on, so she moved on and left the place like that.

CHAIR—So does an arts centre still exist? Could you take me and say, 'There it is'? Is there still a building there?

Ms Deegan—No. The arts centre has been in different locations.

CHAIR—You say you go to the TAFE at the moment. Is that where you all gather? But that is not an arts centre at all; it is just a place that you can paint.

Ms Deegan—It is a learning place, but the people do all sorts of art—sewing and different kinds of things.

CHAIR—Can you remember roughly how many people used to use the arts centre when it was open and operating? Eight? Nine? Ten?

Ms Deegan—More than that.

CHAIR—Do you think that if there were an arts centre to be found in the community here that the same sort of numbers would go?

Ms Deegan—If there were an arts centre I think the numbers would rise, because we have people from the outlying communities like Balgo. They come into Halls Creek and do their art here. They sell it on the streets, in the pubs or anywhere.

CHAIR—One of the things we do from time to time is undertake to write to the appropriate minister—there are probably two in this case—to ensure that they are made directly aware of the circumstances here. We will send you a copy of that letter, but we will basically be asking for advice on funding streams and what you should do to have the arts centre replaced here. That is what we are able to do for you. We will make sure that the ministers are aware of your request. We will make sure that is done immediately.

Senator MOORE—Have you approached the minister as a group before and explained the loss of the arts centre and what it means to people in Halls Creek?

Ms Deegan—No, not any of the ministers.

Ms V Butters—Through my work at the Yiyili language centre I also support this. Just last week they put in a submission to Country Arts here in Western Australia to see if they could get some funds for an arts development officer to come in and help this process for three years. But we will not know the outcome of that for a couple of months yet.

CHAIR—So that was a Western Australian government application?

Ms V Butters—Yes.

CHAIR—We will try to follow that up, but I still think it will be useful to highlight to the ministers responsible.

Ms V Butters—It would be very useful. Any help they can give would be.

Miss Casson—I think the question to be asked is why millions of dollars were put into every other town and a couple of other communities in the Kimberley, and Halls Creek was not actually regarded as being a place that they were going to fund an arts centre, but they have built new ones, like the Mowanjum arts centre, and these guys have been here for years trying to get this going.

CHAIR—Do you know if there was a specific application at that time or in that funding round? Can you recall whether they were the same?

Ms V Butters—I think it was just recurrent funding that they were getting and the money that they were getting was not enough to keep the centre running. The rent was very high on the old post office.

Ms Deegan—The last arts centre we had is in the corner—it used to be the old post office. The rent was very high and the arts centre could not operate for very long.

Senator ADAMS—Firstly, I gather there are six women on the shire council. Have you had any help from the council as far as your request goes? Have you approached the shire council?

Ms Deegan—To tell you the honest truth we did ask the shire if they could give us a place at the old shire before—that is going back three or four years—but we never got a response.

Senator ADAMS—Have you done anything now? You have got a CEO who has been here 21 months he told us today. Have you been back to the council or to the ladies that are on the council?

Ms Deegan—No, because of the knock-back before. We are not sure about trusting people anymore.

Senator ADAMS—Councils change. I think it is great for Halls Creek to have so many women on the council. A lot of other communities would be very happy to have that number. I

think you have got people there that you probably could approach and see. It was four years ago and things have changed.

Mrs Bedford—I think the shire did offer them space but the shire had conditions. These artists want a building that they can go to all day every day. The conditions are that you come in the morning, you work there and then the kids come in the afternoon. That is not what they want. They want a building that they own and they want to take control of it. The shire will go halfway with them, but they want the children to be involved, doing their activities at this time of the day. But that is not what the artists want. They want people to be in there but at the same time, they say, 'You mob go and the activities will be done.'

Senator ADAMS—This was four years ago, not recently.

Mrs Bedford—They talked about that last week.

Ms V Butters—I can give you an example. As Stewart said, he is a craftsman—he does carvings and artefacts. We have got an old area that the language centre is using and earlier this year we said, 'You can sit down here and do your carving.' He and his men come in there and do their carving. He approached someone in the shire—I am not sure what her position is—to help him write a submission to try to get some money to get this thing up and going. They do not do that. That is what you were told.

Mr Morton—Yes.

Ms V Butters—She sat down, she took all the notes. He gave the purpose of the project. He laid everything out. She took all the notes but then she turned around and said that they can't do that. They have got their plan and they are going to go with that.

Miss Casson—There was a feasibility done for the arts centre. Susan Congreve came up. It was a very good overview of the situation. I can provide a copy of that by email. At the time, the shire and one of the community groups—a reference group or something that was happening at the time—took a couple of negative observations out of that. They cut it out and emailed that around, saying, 'This is the reason why we do not think we should be funding an arts centre.' When you look at the whole document you can see the big picture of what could be done. One of the things was the marketability. They wanted to comment on the fact that, as Bonnie was saying, there are artists from different areas that come in and work, so there are all different styles there. Rather than saying that that variety is marketable for Halls Creek, they wanted to say it is not the same as, for example, Mowanjum, where it is the Wandjina art, or Turkey Creek, where they have a particular style of art. Those kinds of things have all been piling up over the years. There are all sorts of things going on that just seem to contribute to this group in particular sitting back here trying and trying, but we just do not know.

Senator ADAMS—Have found a suitable place? Could you go to the shire and say, 'We think this could work here'? Is there anywhere in the town that would be suitable? You could start and then have your plan resurrected.

CHAIR—In any event, we will be writing to the ministers and we will highlight that as an issue for Halls Creek with them. Between now and when you receive copies of those letters it

might be useful to have a look at sites and those sorts of things. But I know you will be doing all that, and you are across those matters far better than us. If you can provide the document, Miss Casson, I would appreciate that.

Miss Casson—Okay.

CHAIR—The evidence you have given has been quite comprehensive, so I am sure I will need to clarify some issues. We will provide questions on notice to you through the secretariat. If there are other issues that you think should have been brought to our attention but that you have omitted you can always provide that information to us. We are an ongoing committee of the parliament, so we are always there. This does not end, so we would always welcome more submissions or information from you, which can be provided to us through the secretariat. Thank you very much for providing evidence today.

[11.26 am]

AHCHOO, Mr Henry, Halls Creek People's Church

ELLIOTT, Mr Jamie, Halls Creek People's Church

BATES, Mrs Kathleen, Pastor's wife, Halls Creek People's Church

FLORISSON, Miss Laura, Congregation member, Halls Creek People's Church

REICHEL, Mr Robert Stewart, Halls Creek People's Church Inc. Frail Aged Hostel

THOMPSON, Mr Graham, Halls Creek People's Church

CHAIR—I welcome representatives from the Halls Creek People's Church. Do you have any additional information about the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Reichel—As well as being a member of the church, I manage the Sobering Up Shelter and the Community Night Patrol, which is government funded. I am also acting on behalf of the administrator for the Frail Aged Hostel.

Miss Florisson—I am attached to the People's Church as well. I am a new youth worker; I arrived in town about five days ago!

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses has been previously provided to you. If anyone would like to make some brief opening remarks, please do so, and then the committee will ask questions. Who would like to kick off?

Mr Reichel—Please speak up, everyone; remember what we talked about—anything you would like to say. This is all about them listening to you mob.

Mr Ahchoo—We would like to get a good sized bus to take kids and old people out bush for picnics and things like that, and give them time for games.

CHAIR—Do you have a bus at all at the moment?

Mr Ahchoo—We have got a small one, but we need a bigger bus to take more people.

CHAIR—How many people can you get on your bus now, Henry? How big is the bus?

Mr Ahchoo—Five or six.

CHAIR—It is a six-seater? Okay. How big do you think the bus needs to be?

Mr Ahchoo—For 22, so that we can take the kids out for a picnic and the old people from Frail Aged.

CHAIR—Just generally bigger; you are not sure exactly how big.

Mr Elliott—And Henry is talking about going out bush as well, so it must be a suitable vehicle to do that.

Mr Ahchoo—If we can get the kids educated about the bush, we would like that. And then we would like to have bus travel for people from other communities who come to visit their relatives at the Frail Aged Hostel.

CHAIR—How far away are the other communities that you visit?

Mr Ahchoo—We have got Balgo, Billiluna, Mulan and Ringer Soak.

CHAIR—They are all a fair way out.

Mr Ahchoo—If we can get accommodation for them near the hostel, they can visit their old people.

Mr Reichel—That is a separate issue, though, Henry, I think; is that right?

Mr Ahchoo—Yes. It is all run by the Halls Creek People's Church; it is all included. The Frail Aged Hostel—

CHAIR—So do you have a hostel in Halls Creek?

Mr Ahchoo—We have got a nursing home there—aged care.

Mr Elliott—We have Ringer Soak approximately 160 to 200 kilometres along the Duncan Road, and then we have Billiluna, which is probably the same distance along the Tanami Track, and Balgo and Mullan, which are even deeper out into the desert. Basically, with a lot of the frail and old people from these areas, you have a lot of the family members coming in from these communities and visiting. Basically, when they do come in, they either camp around the flats or maybe come to other households and cause overcrowding situations. Henry was talking about how it would be good to have a transient hostel sort of thing where people can come in and stay at this accommodation while they are visiting their old people before they lose them.

CHAIR—Has there been a history of any hostels in Halls Creek before—Indigenous Hostels Australia?

Mr Elliott—There was a hostel—and there still is a hostel here; that is for kids, though. That closed down for a while. It is just back up, and it is run through DCP. They are also, as you are probably aware, probably going to be starting another hostel up out at Burkes Park. The Department of Housing and Works purchased the land out there. That is predominantly going to be for workers' programs so that people get into employment and have a place to stay in that capacity.

CHAIR—What other things is your people's church involved with in Halls Creek?

Mrs Bates—I would like to talk about the Halls Creek Frail Aged Hostel a bit. We are thankful that the frail aged hostel is there. We have been running it for many years now, with old people from the different areas. It has been going really well, but it seems people are still on the list asking to come in. There are a lot of other people from outlying communities who have to be turned away because we have not got enough beds there for them. Maybe it would be good if the frail aged could have a piece of land where they can spread out more and where people can be cared for.

There is also the Halls Creek Sobering Up Shelter. It is good that we have been able to have that, but now it has slowed down a bit. It has been great for us, because we know that when the grog stopped there were people in the communities who really wanted to find their ability to stand on their feet again, because a lot of people are talking. I have been talking to some of the younger ones who used to just spend every weekend drinking and not care about their kids or look after them properly, because the grandmothers are the ones who usually care for the kids who are around. But just this week I heard that some of the young women are getting together and want to go camping out. They are asking us for a tent so they can go out and camp with their kids out bush. It is really something good that is happening since the grog stopped. We would like to help these people like that and help them pull themselves together. Now they are able to think, to do things in their home and to look after their schoolchildren and other people.

Another thing that I was thinking of was that sometimes you hear people saying, 'I'm not good at this,' because they have been on a drink for so long. They just need to learn to pick up again and walk and to do things in their home again such as cooking meals for their kids and also hunting with their kids and taking them on picnics. It is like green shoots coming up out of the ground. People are starting to rise up. There is another thing that I like to see happening and that a lot of them are talking about. When I was in this town, Halls Creek, before, only the airstrip was here in those days. I was brought up on a station near the old town, just in the bush there. I have been here in Halls Creek when there was no town here, only the airstrip, and I have seen a lot of things happen. It started off well, but since grog came in it has messed everything up. Now I would like to see a place where people can have a home out in the bush—a place where people can gather and go for a few months and where they can pick up again and learn how to cook, how to feed their kids the right food again, how to hunt for their bush tucker and bush feed again and how to really care for their kids and teach them hunting skills and so on, because that is what they are missing.

I was brought up in the bush and we used to enjoy those bush things. I remember that we used to go walking a lot. There was no transport in those days and we used to spend time walking in the bush or riding horses. Our parents had a station and we used to do a lot of horse riding. I would like to see a place just like our home was when I was a child. It would be way out of town where people could go and learn things again. They could learn their skills again. A lot of people are hopeless and useless. They are drug addicts and after grog and after living on grog for so many years they have no hope. They are just walking around with their heads down. This is so difficult to say. I know that many of them are my people and that is why I would like to see them being given an opportunity where they can spread out again and pick up things and start doing things again. Maybe we need some funding to start off this place somewhere, wherever it is possible, where people can start living again. That is all I would like to share.

Mr Elliott—Just on what Auntie Kathleen is talking about, with respect to the frail aged, we had got alcohol restrictions in this town for a reason and that has had a huge effect on people's health. Everything is well documented about the lifespan of Aboriginal people and because of that we have come through a phase now where we have got the restriction in and everything—the atmosphere—feels a lot better. People come in and you find more tourists here now and it is a much better place to live in.

But the fact is that the frail aged care hostel does a magnificent job in looking after all the old people. My grandmother and Auntie Kathleen's mother are there at the moment and the care that they are given is fantastic. It takes pressure off family members and they give them the right care as well. The right things are there for them like disability services and stuff like that, and it cuts a lot of slack off the Department of Housing and Works in coming in and having to upgrade houses and provide purpose-built houses.

As for the waiting lists, I reckon it would be a great thing if there were to be another spot for the frail aged and another section in the hostel. Now that the Department of Housing and Works has purchased a huge block in Burks Park and they are going take out power, I think that it would be a wonderful opportunity to have another section out there for the frail aged. Basically, that is away from town as well. All of our old people love the bush life.

CHAIR—How many people are on the waiting list, Jamie?

Mr Elliott—I am not too sure.

Mr Reichel—It might be 10, as I understand it. There are two issues. One is about having enough staff to support the additional beds. There is not even enough area on the existing land that we have and land is at a premium in Halls Creek. The other issue is trained staff. There is a very heavy emphasis on training up Indigenous and local staff but, because of the nature of needing, I think, some 35 staff at the moment to grow further, they often advertise around Australia to bring people in. But the restriction there is having accommodation for them. Some years ago I think the frail aged hostel bought a couple of blocks of land and accommodated about 10 or 12 people there just with transportable buildings. But we are still restricted in being able to increase the number of beds for the frail aged by getting enough staff and then beds in the hostel itself.

Mr Elliott—Another thing that Auntie Kathleen touched on is the importance of getting back out and doing things as a family. I think that what you are going to find over the course of your stay in Halls Creek is that that is going to be a constant message coming in from a number of people.

I am working on incorporating a body called the Halls Creek sport and community association. That is about taking advantage of the opportunity that we have now that alcohol does not play a major part in our community. We need to start, like Auntie Kathleen said, lifting ourselves up and providing these activities so we can start being active. If alcohol comes back in some form or if people go somewhere where there is alcohol, they will be healthy and strong enough to say: 'I've been through that. I've started this sort of life now. I'm not going to go back to that way.' The Halls Creek sport and community association is about maximising sporting events and activities and keeping people active, and it does not matter in what sport. If someone

comes into town and wants to know how to get things up and running, we want to have a strong group here that can assist them in setting up, say, T-ball. T-ball does not exist in Halls Creek. If you want to have T-ball here, let's make it happen.

Auntie Kathleen talks about old people wanting to go out to different places. We want to have the capacity to say, 'No worries, we're going to do that.' I want to try and get corporate sponsorship from all the business in town of the Halls Creek sport and community association. The members will be all the people of the town. We want to develop a yearly planner with certain events. We want to cater for young adults, adults, seniors—all groups. We just want to keep people active and mentally healthy. At the moment, as everyone can agree, you get to a certain age and, without a car, you sit and look at one another, watching the years go by, watching time tick by. There are a lot of things that we would like to do with our families but we are restricted. Through this central body, my idea is to create more activity and more excitement.

Families are the major foundation of success. I work for Clontarf and they like to talk about how much we do and all that. But that is nothing if you do not have a good, solid family. The chances of a kid succeeding in life without a family are a lot slimmer. But with strong families I believe that anything is possible. Auntie Kathleen said that in her day nothing was here in Halls Creek. Yet members of my family became lawyers and teachers, and they started school at the age of 13 or 14. They had fewer opportunities, but experiences working on the land and stuff like that ingrained toughness into our old people. Since alcohol came in we have needed two or three teachers in a classroom to settle kids down to get them to do their work, and they still do not know how to read and write properly. I am talking about 16-year-olds who can barely spell their own name. I sat in a class today where there was a 15-year-old who, looking at numbers from one to 100 in columns of 10, could not find the number 55. We have all this support, everything is around us, and yet we are worse off than we were before.

I do not have the exact answer, but I think it starts from healthy families. We need to start helping to grow healthy families through anything, just as long as you start from somewhere. My things are sport and community activity. That is what we need to start bringing success back into this town. Many successful people have come from this town. Two Olympians come from here: Anthony Martin and Nova Peris-Kneebone. Their ancestral roots are right here in Halls Creek. The McAdam brothers played AFL. Brendon Thomas played footy for East Perth. If you want a successful town, this is the one. There is so much talent. Edward Jessel just came back from Melbourne after going to the Qantas AFL Kickstart Camp. There are only 50 selected from around Australia, and he came from this town. He has a bright future ahead of him. He captained the Claremont under-14s in the WAFL. We have character. Alcohol abuse, drugs, low self-esteem, no education and those sorts of thing have just shattered our community over the years. But now we have a great opportunity to start lifting things up again.

CHAIR—The stuff you have been telling us, Mr Elliott, has the common theme we have heard in terms of the need for a diversionary program. Now the restrictions have worked, there is definitely a need for a program. Yesterday, Wes Morris gave some evidence that he was disappointed that the Western Australian government did not appear to be right on it, but there is a time frame of about three months to a year. I am quite sure that will be reflected in this committee's deliberations. That has been the common theme and we will be writing to the Western Australian government asking for some clarification about where they are up to, given the evidence that has been provided to us. We will give them an opportunity to correct that. This

committee's report will be tabled on 26 November, so it will be included in that report. That is fantastic evidence. Thank you very much for it.

Mr Reichel—Henry, you started off by saying a couple of things. I do not want to see those things lost. You made a couple of good points, but we quickly moved on to other things. Do you feel that you stated those fully? Are you happy with the way they were put forward?

CHAIR—You talked about a bigger bus and what you wanted to do with those things.

Mr Ahchoo—Yes, to take everyone on outings—old people and kids.

CHAIR—Sometimes it is not only a diversionary program; it might be some element of infrastructure that allows those things to take place. You would be running those things in any event as part of the people's church—is that right?

Mr Reichel—That is right. We are trying to do that anyway. As Jamie was saying, obviously our Christian values, our Bible-based values, are very much about the family unit. Jamie talked about the family being strong and Henry has also picked up on that and said that it would be great if the kids could spend time with the older generations and have some context to go bush and spend some time together, remembering the culture and hearing the stories in a healthy environment free from alcohol. We have used some of the resources of the frail and aged hostel, the shelter and the volunteer staff from the church to be able to do that sometimes, but there are limits in our resources.

CHAIR—Mr Reichel, I understand you run a couple of programs—the night patrol and a sobering-up shelter. Could you tell us the status of both? Anecdotally, we have heard that there has been a big downturn in demand.

Mr Reichel—We have had about an 80 per cent reduction in numbers admitted to the sobering-up shelter since the restrictions kicked in which has been a great turnaround. There has been a slight increase in the last month where it would appear people are gradually getting supply lines for alcohol a bit more in place. We went from, say, five to 15 a night on any given night before the restrictions and are down to one to 1½ per night on average. In the last month that has gone up to about two or 2½ on average. There could be a bunch of reasons for that. It is similar with the night patrol, where we are operating more as a community with the bus runs. Half the people might be intoxicated, typically when the pub closes. A lot less street people are intoxicated, which is good news for the community as a whole. Half the people that we pick up now are families and kids out in the fresh air and needing a way to get home safely. The night patrol is more of a community bus run in that sense between about four o'clock and midnight. The primary times are when the pub closes at eight or nine at night and between, say, 4.30 and 6.30 when people are wanting to get off the street in the cooler weather. There has been a great improvement. We are very supportive and are keen to see the alcohol restrictions stay. My wife works at the safe house for domestic violence. She will be doing another session with you. Across the board, including in hospitals and schools, it seems like there has been a big improvement. From our perspective, from a church perspective, we are now finding that people are more open to living life to the full and we are able to talk more about what makes life worth living. It has been a good step.

CHAIR—What infrastructure do you have now to run the night patrol, for example? You have some vehicles and transport. What are they?

Mr Reichel—At the moment, we have a building that is funded by the Drug and Alcohol Office through the Department of Health. It is staffed five nights a week but is not normally used during the day. In the last several months we have tried to open it up more for community use—for playgroups, a music program, a kids program on the weekends and for young adults. Those are the programs that we have mainly implemented.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that the shelter building?

Mr Reichel—That is at the shelter.

CHAIR—What about the vehicles?

Mr Reichel—For a vehicle we use the night patrol bus. I am restricted in what we can do with that during the day, but it is still a resource.

CHAIR—By contractual arrangement?

Mr Reichel—Contractual, yes, but also the committee has agreed that we have a finite resource. The funding we get for the night patrol—

CHAIR—How big is that bus?

Mr Reichel—It seats 11.

CHAIR—So that would be perhaps more suitable. The reason for these questions is just that I can see that for the next tranche someone will say, 'Oh, by the way, everyone is fine; sorry, no shelter, no night patrol,' but if you are thinking of a diversionary program somebody could couch the application on the basis of saying, 'What we would like to do is maintain this existing resource but perhaps make it more flexible so we could take some of the resources in terms of the shelter and create a diversionary program, but if things recede again we would still have the capacity, because the resources are the same, to go back to that other area.' Certainly I would see scope for some flexibility there.

Mr Reichel—That is right. The church committee has put submissions to our funding body for permission to do that and we have just started opening it up a bit more. As an example, we are drawing on other resources that we have to start up a music program. The question in our minds is: if people are going to stop drinking let's give them a reason to stop drinking, so what else will they do with their time during the day? There seems to be a love of music and a strong interest by men particularly in the community to learn instruments such as the guitar, so we are employing part time a couple of musicians to teach people how to play music and opening up the shelter for that purpose during the day when it is not normally used. It has been a great tool to be able to use under the church banner with volunteer helpers as well as some employment of other staff to make those sorts of things happen.

CHAIR—Excellent.

Senator SIEWERT—One of the comments we have had at Fitzroy Crossing and in other places I have been is about the lack of rehabilitation services and ongoing support services. I am just wondering if that is the case here. If it is the case, have you sought funding for providing some rehabilitation services?

Mr Reichel—I do not know if you mob want to comment on that. I have only been in town a few months myself so that is why I am very keen for my friends and colleagues to speak about the needs in the community. Jamie, you probably are switched on a lot more about what other resources are in town. I know there are some rehabilitation services but, from what I have observed, not enough. The thinking at the moment is that if in three to six months the numbers continue the way they are at the moment for the sobering-up shelter, it will be hard to justify the budget we are given for funding to stay open exclusively as a sobering-up shelter. The thinking with our funding body, the Drug and Alcohol Office, is to possibly change the whole focus of that building and the funding away from intoxicated people to a drug and alcohol office that is more like a hub, so we might employ more rehabilitation services that way. I am very enthusiastic to see that kind of thing take effect. Does anyone want to comment on that? When we had a meeting this morning one of my friends made a comment that there is nowhere to get away from everywhere people move and live in the community. If they want to choose not to drink, their friends or family are around them constantly and offering it to them. I think one of you said it would be good to have a place to get away, to be able to overcome the addictive nature of what they are trying to escape and then, when they are strong and have broken the habit, to come back in and re-engage with society. Was it you, Kathleen, who was saying that?

Mrs Bates—Yes.

Mr Reichel—Do you want to speak anymore about that?

Mrs Bates—If we have a place out of town somewhere, people can go there and learn how to do things again without the grog and how to build up their self-esteem. Just the other day one of the young girls, one of my nieces, said to me, 'I wish there was a place where we could go where we can just build up our self-esteem.' She is a brainy girl but she got tangled up in alcohol. She was saying, 'I wish there was a place where your self-esteem can be built up again.'

Mr Reichel—Did that answer your question, Senator?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, it did. It was very useful, thank you.

Mrs Bates—I was thinking about maybe way out of town, where there is no alcohol, no drugs—some place like that.

Senator SIEWERT—I told a bit of a lie—it answered part of my question, but you did ask Mr Elliott if he had an idea of what support services are available in town at the moment.

Mr Elliott—What sort of support services?

Senator SIEWERT—I am particularly focused at the moment on rehabilitation, but there are other services that people are talking about. For example, evidence that we received from Fitzroy Crossing was that there are issues around FASD and getting support services. Is that an issue

here? They were saying that they need services to help support those children in the education system, so there are a whole range of things. Now that people are starting to come off the grog, they are thinking that they want to do exactly what you have just suggested, Mrs Bates, and that is get on with their lives, but they need support to do that.

Mr Elliott—There are a lot of services about, but I am not too sure about the support. I have been a bit concerned about that myself. I know of a man who frequently goes to prison. I used to work for the Department of Housing and Works, and he came up to me and said, 'Brother, I want to buy my own house. How do I go about doing that?' Him asking that question just demonstrated to me that this is one bloke where the penny has dropped and he is thinking: 'I want to change my life. How do I go about doing this?' He goes through a stage where he works all the time. Then, after a while, things get tough and he gets back onto alcohol and goes straight back in again. He is at a stage in his life where he can only make one mistake and that one mistake means that—bang!—he is straight back behind bars. There is very little margin for error right now. I thought: 'What is there for him? He's someone who is crying out for help but just can't get it.' I cannot find any really good program for young men or anyone in that situation.

For the young people there is the Clontarf Foundation support program, but my biggest problem with our program is that we are restricted by school policy. There are a lot of kids out here who do not see schooling as important. I think school started here in 1954. Therefore, we are a very young place. A lot of their parents and grandparents have never been involved with the school system. A lot of the kids are actually the first generation to go to school. Therefore, they do not really understand the importance of it. They are not getting that from their parents. But our school at times expects them to make decisions that people whose families have been to school for generations cannot even make.

Our program is about trying to get kids really engaged. We are trying to create activities. We are trying to create an environment that says, 'Hey, come to school! We'll help you out. We have gone away to Kununurra and Katherine for a footy trip. We have gone away on camp, so come along with us and get back into the school system.' But it is not working for us because you have to come to school 75 per cent of the time to be able to go to camp. I have said to the principal, 'You've got to think about the social dynamics of our community, where we have come from.' If a kid comes to school for 73 per cent of the time, I get in trouble for taking them to camp because they are two per cent shy of the target. Something has got to give. Because I work for Clontarf, Clontarf's major focus is keeping a relationship with the school. When the principal is set in his ways and will not change how he wants to do things, the constant message I get is, 'Jamie, you've just got to work with it.' I do not feel as though I am doing my job effectively by allowing that. There are a few a few internal issues to do with insurance, where we cannot run our own programs. So, in a sense, even though we are meant to be there for the kids, I do not think that we are able to use our full capacity to have that impact on these kids' lives, because of red tape. There is nothing really here for girls.

Senator SIEWERT—I was going to be my next question. What about the girls?

Mr Elliott—And there is no early intervention program. I have had 18 months with Clontarf. I am a member of this community. I have lived in Perth. I volunteered my time for a lot of youth services before I took on this position. Clontarf have a good model. I do not fully believe that

their model is the answer because they do not incorporate our young ladies. They also do not incorporate early intervention.

Early intervention is critical, as we all know. It is a well-known fact. There is no early intervention program in this town for our kids. I have three kids in the school—a nephew of mine that I look after and my two daughters. My daughter is eight and she is at the top of her class, but the majority of the kids in her class do not really know their ABCs and their education is too far behind. The gap between the best and the worst students in literacy and numeracy is massive. I am fortunate that my older daughter works independently and is not much of a hassle for the teacher, who could be thinking, 'How are we going to run a program that is going to be better for her?' My biggest concern is this. I am from Halls Creek. I want to stay here, but I am likely to move on in the near future or later on because I am concerned about my kids and their education. I might be doing the right thing by my kids in looking after them and making sure they go to school all the time, but the social problems and what has existed in the past are potentially weighing down our good students and unravelling all the good work that our good families have done. Those problems are contributing to the whole problem that exists within Halls Creek.

We need an early intervention program for our kids. If we can get them into school at an early age and work with them intensively in the classrooms then their education is going to be at a much higher level. As you know, we scored miserably in the NAP. We were one of the lowest in Australia. It is imperative that we come up with some sort of a model that is going to lead our people out of poverty. As we all know, education and solid families are the key out of poverty. I am really focused on that.

Senator ADAMS—Miss Florisson, you have only been here five days.

Miss Florisson—Yes, five days.

Senator ADAMS—What is your plan? We were just listening to Jamie. Will you be working with him on different issues?

Miss Florisson—Yes, I will be. My position is a new position. It is through the education department and the shire and is funded at the moment only for a year. I am just sort of finding my way in that position. In a lot of ways, it is unwritten so I am trying to figure that all out at the moment. I am working through the education department with a team that already exists through the shire. There is a youth services team that works out of this building and this room. My position is attached to that but flows onto the school. There have been a few issues with communication between the youth services team and the school. I think they are hoping through my position to kind of resolve some of those information issues and to work a bit more as a team. One thing I am really hoping to do is to get something happening for the girls. I am really trying to get to know people and to gather a bit of information to try and get on with it.

Senator ADAMS—That is good. Jamie, local government elections are coming up in October. Have you thought about it?

Mr Elliott—Someone has asked me the same question. To be quite honest with you, I have not really thought about it. I have just been trying to get on with what I need to do. I am one of

those people where thoughts come into my mind, 'Bang, bang, bang,' and there is too much. I have told myself that I have to rein myself in a bit. My first priority is my work and to make sure I do that effectively and move forward. People have mentioned it and in the back of my mind it has floated by. I have not really given it any serious consideration.

Senator ADAMS—I just think the evidence that you have given us today and your leadership qualities—and those are the reason that you have got the job you do—show that you should consider it. For this town to go forward I think they need younger people as well as older people and middle aged people. From what we have heard from you, because of the program you are doing and, now that we have a link up, this town has a new start. I would look at that position very carefully because I think you would do a very good job. You would be a great asset to the community in that respect. You might think that your job is everything, but by perhaps taking that next step forward to be on the shire you would be able to help them with their direction as far as the people that you are dealing with go. They are the future of this community. We might just chase you up to see if you have put in a nomination.

Mr Elliott—Thank you, Senator. I will think about it.

Senator SIEWERT—Don't feel pressure or anything!

Senator ADAMS—No, no. I am from Western Australia, so you have a bit of a problem there! On aged care, which is one of my main interests, I note that you have said that you have a seven-bed hostel that has been built up to 25 and that you are looking at further plans but that there is nowhere to build. Have you applied for beds? What is the story in the last funding round?

Mr Reichel—The administrator is not here, so I cannot be sure of the detail, but in general terms—from conversations with him over a long period of time—essentially he has the money at the moment under the funding arrangements and a bit of money left over each month. As soon as we have places to put the bedding and as soon as we can accommodate staff, we can contact one person on the waiting list and get them in. I am not sure if I am answering the question correctly.

Senator ADAMS—I was looking at funded beds. Every year the department or the Commonwealth have a round. In Western Australia, unfortunately—because of the lack of capital funding—a number of the Perth providers send their licences back because they cannot get capital funding to build new facilities. That was really the leading question. You have this new area developing and you are talking about hoping to have a frail aged hostel in that area.

Mr Reichel—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—How are you going to do it?

Mr Reichel—I can tell you what has happened so far. Jonathon, you would know better than me, having been on the committee for a long time. Jonathon is pastor and has been chairman for a long time. As I understand it, because we are not for profit, sometimes there is profit left over and the funding body for the hostel has been very relaxed about making sure it has been used up every year, knowing that we are using it as intelligently as possible. An example would be that, although I am not sure if we are allowed to use it under the contract to put new accommodation

in—as it is not a capital budget—the funding body has allowed us to do that for the greater good, which is to take on more clients in the aged hostel. There is currently money left over in a reserve fund to be able to support the process of growth—whether that is capital works or something else. An example is that just in the last 12 months we have acquired a new bus, a capital item, for $50,000 out of reserves and another $90,000 block of units to accommodate four more staff and put them onto existing land. We have squeezed the buildings a bit closer together and put in new ones so that we can still accommodate for future growth. That has all come out of existing funding amounts.

Senator ADAMS—That is very good. It is hostel accommodation. It is low care?

Mr Reichel—Yes, it is.

Senator ADAMS—Are there a number of community aged care packages in the town?

Mr Reichel—I am not sure what that means, I am sorry.

Senator SIEWERT—They are home care packages. Community care packages are looking after people in the home.

Mr Reichel—I do not believe that comes under our funding arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT—I missed whether they were low care or high care packages.

Mr Reichel—Most of them are high care. There are only about two or three out of the 25 that are low care.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Mr Reichel—But one is self-funded, so I believe that is not a government funded position. But only one out of the 25 that is purely privately funded, if that makes sense. That is what I have heard.

Senator ADAMS—Hostel care is usually low care. It is not high care.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. So, although you call it a hostel, it is actually an aged care—

Mr Reichel—It is very much more a nursing home, yes. I think they changed the term to 'frail aged hostel' to emphasise the nature of it. In fact, the administrator, Graham, has always been a big thinker. He has been a great asset to the church and to the hostel. He has been there about 15 years. But he would love to have a dementia wing, for instance. One thing he has identified is that a number of our clients and people in the community are suffering from dementia. He tried to buy three blocks of land next to the property but it was put over as a transport unit. He would have loved to have had room to expand and to grow the place like that.

Senator SIEWERT—I asked our previous witness this question as well: have you had any interaction with the new process that the Department of Health and Ageing is running

specifically working with Indigenous communities on aged care? Do you know if you have had any contact with that new approach?

Mr Reichel—I cannot be sure, sorry.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you take that on notice and ask your manager? I would be very interested to know whether you have been getting increased assistance through that new emphasis.

Mr Reichel—Is that where CDEP finished—

Senator SIEWERT—No, it came up because of the episodes around aged care in the Northern Territory. The government then announced that they were putting some emphasis on helping Aboriginal communities with aged care because it is a real issue in many communities. I am wondering whether you have had any contact.

Mr Reichel—I will certainly try to find that out.

Senator SIEWERT—I would be fascinated to know who is getting that help and if it is being effective.

Mr Reichel—As I understand it, no. I think our understanding has been based on the number of beds each year under a three-year contract that is renewed if we meet accreditation.

Senator SIEWERT—This was about aiding accreditation, getting people up to the accredited standards et cetera.

Mr Reichel—As I understand it, I believe they have met all of the standards and I do not think they have received any extra funding for that.

We were talking about rehabilitation, and that was one of your questions. I just want to make a very quick comment. If I am incorrect in saying this then please correct me, but one of the issues we obviously respect and the government respects is a person's free will. So when we are talking about alcohol restrictions and helping to bring in support services and rehabilitation services, ultimately the person will choose to go down that path or not and we need to respect that. We do not have any qualified people like councillors or rehabilitation experts based at the shelter or the church or the frail aged, but we would see our role as a church person in the community and as a church in the community, regardless of operating these services, as one where we try to help people perceive that there is hope to change. We provide a support role—loving people, caring for them, helping them get to a point where they want to make a change away from alcohol and drugs—and then we would network with the other organisations that would offer those counselling services. So although we are not the specialists in rehabilitation, we see our role as more of a support role to help people want to make a change. And when they see that they can change, we will support them every day if we have to to get them over the line to make a change in their life. That is why Kathleen was saying that if we could just get them out of town, away from families—sometimes family love them to death, but offer them the temptations that they do not need, and it is so hard for them to leave it behind.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. As with many of the submissions we have been hearing over the last couple of days, there is a comprehensive amount of evidence. There may well be questions of clarification or further questions of the evidence, and we will provide those if necessary through the secretariat. You also may decide there is something you have forgotten or left out and would like to provide on notice, and that can also be provided to the secretariat and that will come to us that way. Thank you very much for providing evidence today.

Proceedings suspended from 12.13 pm to 12.50 pm

HILLS, Mrs Mildred Mardina, Board member, Halls Creek Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses has been provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement. At the conclusion of your remarks we will go to the committee for questions.

Mrs Hills—I am thankful for the opportunity to speak here because for too long people have been asking, 'Who is listening to us when we raise issues?' This is a good opportunity for us to raise the issues and hopefully get something out of it. The Halls Creek Aboriginal Corporation is actually a spin-off from Ngoonjuwah Council Aboriginal Corporation.

CHAIR—Could you tell me a little about that corporation.

Mrs Hills—Ngoonjuwah Council Aboriginal Corporation is currently in voluntary administration. It went into administration in 2007. Halls Creek Aboriginal Corporation was formed in place of Ngoonjuwah. We have nine board members on the board of Halls Creek Aboriginal Corporation. Two of them, me and Angie Bidford, are from the original Ngoonjuwah Council Aboriginal Corporation. We were led to believe that Ngoonjuwah Council Aboriginal Corporation would be given back to the Halls Creek community after they have had discussions with the Commonwealth government over assets that Ngoonjuwah acquired while we were delivering the CDEP program over 17 years. We were told that we had over $2 million in debts to the Commonwealth government. That is why we went into voluntary administration.

After we went into voluntary administration, we found out that the $2 million that was supposed to be given to Ngoonjuwah Council Aboriginal Corporation was actually given to the shire to build a pool. So, really, we should not have gone into administration. We were not insolvent. But we found that out afterwards. The administrators found out that the ICC had used Ngoonjuwah's name to give $2 million to Halls Creek shire for the pool. Ngoonjuwah was not even mentioned when they had the opening of the pool.

CHAIR—What happen to the licensee?

Mrs Hills—Sorry?

CHAIR—The individual or company that used the name to get the $2 million for the council.

Mrs Hills—I have no idea what happened to him. It was the ICC in Kununurra, I believe. Alistair Brown was the manager at the time.

CHAIR—When was this—late 2007?

Mrs Hills—In 2006 Ngoonjuwah were only given six weeks notice that we were not successful in running the CDEP. Although we had been running the CDEP for 17-odd years, in six weeks Colin Nagle decided that we were not competitive enough to win the contract. We were not aware that there was also another person applying for the contract. Ngoonjuwah was running the CDEP for 17 years and all of a sudden, in six weeks, there was a problem running it

and they took it away from us. They never gave us a chance to fix things. We were working with the ICC at the beginning of the year, in 2006-07, and that changed how we worked in the town. They had policies that we had to abide by. We had to go out and say, 'The ICC has said this. We can't work in your remote community when you are 50 kilometres out. You have to come into town, sign on at Ngoonjuwah and then go back out to work.' So they just made things harder. At the time we were not aware until May 2007 that we were going to lose CDEP. In June we had lost it. A letter was written by Colin Nagle at the time. The community found—

CHAIR—Who took the CDEP over?

Mrs Hills—East Kimberley CDEP had taken over from a Kununurra team, but at the time when we were putting our e-sub in we were not aware that we were competing against another organisation for it. We were just told that we had lost it and we needed to transfer everything over to East Kimberley CDEP. The East Kimberley CDEP worker who had gone and worked for them had done our e-sub previously. She had submitted our e-sub and then six months down the track she was working for the East Kimberley CDEP. We felt that we were wrongly done by. ICC used us as board members to do their own thing. Ngoonjuwah had a construction business, Ngoonjuwah Earthmoving, and we had a couple of blokes who went and got their certificate IV and we were training boys in machine operating so that they can get jobs in the mine. We were also doing building construction work, and all that was prior to us losing CDEP.

CHAIR—When you lost CDEP what happened to those extra training—

Mrs Hills—It just fell in a hole. It just closed down. There was just a skeleton crew and that was there just to tidy up. Everyone else moved over to East Kimberley CDEP, and they did nothing.

CHAIR—Does East Kimberley CDEP have a training scheme?

Mrs Hills—They did not have at the time, and I still believe that they have not got it now. People have been complaining about CDEP and what they are supposed to be doing. They are supposed to be doing training but we have four training organisations in town as it is. Everyone is getting trained but no-one is getting new jobs.

Senator MOORE—Did you write to anyone about the fact that you believe that your organisation was badly treated?

Mrs Hills—Yes, I wrote to the Ombudsman two years ago and stated our concerns—what I have told you now and a little bit more. At one stage Alistair Brown of ICC—and I alleged this in my letter to the Ombudsman—tried to bribe me over the phone. He did.

I call them vultures. I said that they had a group of people that sit over here and the community goes down there and they send someone over there. For six weeks they go in there and try to fix it and they cannot. Then they are moved on to the next place. That is what happens in the Kimberley. ICC just moves people around the Kimberley to different places.

People do not want them there. We know what they are like. We had one guy come to Halls Creek from Balgo. He worked five days there, sat with me most of the time during the day,

getting information from me. At the end of that week he presented Ngoonjuwah with a bill for $11,000 for consultancy work that he did—and he was just talking to me and I was giving him information. That was the type of stuff that ICC was supporting here in the Kimberley.

CHAIR—Did you pay them?

Mrs Hills—No, I did not. I said, 'We are not paying you that.' Alistair Brown actually told me, 'If you do not pay him, it will jeopardise your last quarter's funding,' and that was for 2007.

CHAIR—Did you arrange with this individual to come onto your community as a consultant?

Mrs Hills—No.

CHAIR—The agreement was with the ICC? The ICC sent him. Did you know that you are going to get a bill?

Mrs Hills—ICC put in a change manager right at the beginning when we started investigating our CEO. At the time I was getting information from local businesses and so on about the CEO going in with a purchase order and buying food and I was sure that food was not going to Ngoonjuwah; it was going into his own house. That was the sort of information I was getting. So I started to investigate his role and what he was doing. Then I found out that a lot of things that he was doing were wrong and with the support of the financial adviser that we had engaged and our CDEP coordinator, Dave Havell, and Myra Spurling, we found out that our former CEO was actually doing some wrong dealings. So we suspended him and in the meantime while we were during the investigation, we engaged a lawyer and an accountant to go through all our books. They found that there was a lot of stuff that was not right.

But ICC did not want to hear anything of it. The CEO actually presented a bill to Ngoonjuwah, saying that if we were going to dismiss him this is how much we owed him—$20,000. ICC had tried it to get us to pay that. We got in touch with an industrial relations officer who said, no, and that he would work it out. In the end he found out that we only owed him about $2,000, though he was putting in a bill for $20,000, and ICC was going to support that and was asking us to pay it. We said, 'No, we are not going to pay that. We are going to get advice from somewhere.'

CHAIR—It seems a long time ago, unfortunately. Has anything happened since then?

Mrs Hills—No. When we went into voluntary administration I gave that information to the administrators at the end of 2007, I think it was. I gave them that information. I said that I could not prove it but that they just had to look at the purchase orders and stuff like that and they would be able to see whether he had purchased stuff that belonged to Ngoonjuwah for his own personal use. That is in the administrators' hands.

When we went into administration we were told that we would be kept in the loop on a monthly basis, and we have not been. At the moment we feel that the people we have engaged now to look after our admin staff, and our lawyer who lives in Darwin, feel that they do not want to part with that now. They are saying that they are still in negotiations with the Commonwealth government for all the assets and that is what is holding everything up. Once the Commonwealth

releases their hold on the assets and hands them back to us, apparently we can get up and running again. But the main obstacle is that the Commonwealth government wants the assets that we have acquired. Ngoonjuwah has got four houses, two offices and two sheds with accommodation and most of them we are leasing now to make money to put back into our kitty for the time when we do get up and running again. We are supposed to have an annual general meeting next month but it is a waiting game and we are waiting on the administrators in Darwin and the lawyers to tell us what is going on.

CHAIR—When do you expect them to be able to provide you with some advice?

Mrs Hills—Probably in the next few weeks.

CHAIR—If you have got an AGM on, that is something that they should be working towards. You should not be running your AGM around their arrangements. Generally speaking, their deadline is the AGM coming up. Under the Corporations Act there would be requirements for them to meet.

Mrs Hills—They said that in mid-September it is all going to come down. They are supposed to send out a 24- to 28-day notice and it is now nearly the end of August. This process was from October last year. It was to be finalised in October last year. Then it was to be finalised by April. April has gone. Now it will be finalised by August. We are halfway through August and they are saying September. So we just do not know—

CHAIR—Who are 'they'?

Mrs Hills—Medina lawyers are looking after the Aboriginal corporation and—

CHAIR—That's Brett Medina?

Mrs Hills—Yes, and Meertens are looking after Ngoonjuwah and they are the ones that are saying that they are in negotiations with the Commonwealth government because they want the assets back. We do not want to give the assets back. We are saying that we can use them better than they can. They live in Canberra and we live here and we have got the assets here and we can utilise them better than they can.

CHAIR—The Commonwealth reckons that you owe them as a company greater than—

Mrs Hills—Yes.

CHAIR—Is that probably right? No, do not answer that, because there are legal proceedings afoot and it may have an impact on them.

Mrs Hills—I would say no. We own them. We worked our guts out for 17 years running their CDEP program and then they just take them, just like that, and leave us with nothing. I have only been on the council for 4½ years in that time since 2004.

CHAIR—Is there something else that you want to talk to us about?

Mrs Hills—Relating to the town?

CHAIR—For sure.

Mrs Hills—I write for the paper, the *Kimberley Echo*, on a monthly basis on issues relating to Indigenous people. There are a lot of issues relating to Indigenous people in this town. One of them was the health one that Doreen Hester came in with recently. Another one is that we feel that the local shire are not providing essential services to the town such as footpaths, for example. Mardiwah Loop are about a k and a half up the road. They have been there for 15 or 20 years and they do not have the footpath. When it rains here the grass grows very high and a bloke was killed on that road at night. One guy said to me that on a Friday night people just lie out on the road, so it is dangerous. We say to the shire: build a footpath. So the shire builds a footpath that leads straight to the local Kimberley Hotel and straight to the corner store. That was the footpath that they built a decade ago, and we still have not got a footpath out here on the highway for women and children. We only have two public toilets, one male and one female, and they are electric. Tourist buses pull up on a Wednesday with 20 or 30 people and there is a big line. Our Shell roadhouse does not offer good service for the tourists in the town. Diesel here is over $2 a litre in some areas here. People need these things to survive and the prices of things are just going up. People are saying, 'Prices are going up, yet our wages are down.' The whole community needs a big change for the better. We need to make the shire more community minded.

Senator ADAMS—You have that opportunity coming up in October, haven't you?

Mrs Hills—Yes. I am thinking of running for council.

CHAIR—Senator Adams has been pointing out that there is an opportunity for everybody. There are six women on the council already, which is not usual in many circumstances, so there are great opportunities.

Senator ADAMS—You have talked about the footpath and the toilets. Have any groups actually approached the shire on the toilet situation?

Mrs Hills—I wrote something in the paper recently about the toilets, so hopefully the shire read the paper and take note of that. But I have not personally written to them and told them.

Senator ADAMS—Have you spoken to any of the shire councillors?

Mrs Hills—No, but I am friends with a couple of them. They would listen to me, I suppose.

Senator ADAMS—That is what local government is all about. That local person is there for you to grab and twist their arm a wee bit. If you start and then other people take it up, the whole community can push them pretty hard to see if they can put in a facility like that. That is going to add to the town, especially with the number of tourists that come through here. How do you feel about the town since the alcohol has been more or less cut off?

Mrs Hills—Since the alcohol ban there have been opportunities for agencies to nut out what their programs actually are. Right now we have four family support programs in town. People

are questioning: why do we need four family support programs in the town when none of them are working? Halls Creek is such a small town that those four different agencies running family support programs are targeting the same person, so to speak. That person gets sick of Joan coming from here, Valma coming from here and Christine coming from there. They are all coming from different agencies but trying to deliver the same program.

I went to a meeting a few months ago where we were saying that with these programs—we have TAFE, we have Kimberley Group Training, we have CDEP plus Job Futures, so there are four training organisations in town. Why do we need four? Who are they targeting? Are we getting any success out of the training? I think we are getting too much training and too much support and the families are overwhelmed with what has been going on since the ban and the sexual abuse stuff has come out. They just want to go back to the basics and start from the bottom and say, 'This is what we want.' They want to make it work from the bottom up, not from the top down. That is what people have been saying—that we need to deliver our own policies or to make something up that will work for the community.

We are in the process of getting a load of women together to come up with ways to deal with foetal alcohol syndrome. That is something we need to do ourselves. We do not need the government to tell us that; we need to make it our own business to work on foetal alcohol syndrome, to talk to the women if they are drinking when they are pregnant. That is in the pipeline but we are looking for funding. The language centre is helping us to get that going. We need to take control of our own destiny. We cannot just to wait for government to do it all for us. Let us start from scratch here, to see whether the government will listen to us when we say, 'This is what we want. How can you help us?' That is the line I am taking with the community. I am trying to make the community be more responsible, more proactive in making a better life from themselves. I said to the community, 'Once the government see us doing something for ourselves, they might want to help us.'

Senator ADAMS—It is always the hardest thing to get funding. If you have a solution, you have a much better chance of being able to attract funding. You have the four training organisations but I have had a number of complaints that it is fine for everyone to be trained up to get their certificates and all the rest of it that where are the jobs? Who is going to mentor them and take them through until they can get a job? Would you like to enlighten us a little bit on that? Are there any jobs of these people who are being trained?

Mrs Hill—There are jobs available in town but they are taken up by outsiders, so to speak. A classic example is the shire office. I read in one of their recent papers that they had over 32 staff members on the shire. I can count on this hand how many of them are local Aboriginal people. That just goes to show that there are at least 30 local jobs if somebody could do the CEO job. If they were trained in running the shire, a local person could do that. Jamie Elliot could do that, if he was trained up. He would be able to run this town. We need to put them into those places but we get people from outside and the houses are being taken over by people from the outside. Local people, especially Indigenous people, if they get employed locally they are not offered a house. If I am employed locally, I am not offered a house; if they employ you locally, you will be given a house. That is how it is in Halls Creek.

CHAIR—Everywhere is the same across Australia, so do not feel any different but it still does not make it right. It is one of the real issues. There is a qualification level which is a reality in

many communities. You just do not have anyone to step into the CEO shoes. Maybe Jamie could but generally you do not. To have people at that level, if you do not offer them a house they will not come to Halls Creek. What house? There is no other house to rent. So they just do not come. That is what they say, 'If you're coming from outside, there's a package here for you.' It causes a great deal of tension, particularly in smaller and more remote communities. Locals have 20 people in a house. 'I'm living with three other families, trying to get everything together, yet the bird I have to work with is doing the same job as me, but because she's white, she gets a free house. How good's that? What do I have to do?' Move to another town perhaps.

Senator MOORE—Or move to another community. An example was given to us in the NT that, if they move to another community, they get house.

CHAIR—So it happens everywhere. We have heard much about the diversionary programs. I think you were here when Jamie was talking about the need. What are the fundamentals of a program about re-engagement and pathways to employment? You have a lot of experience in this community. What sorts of opportunities are there? What should be the basic values of some diversionary programs in Halls Creek?

Mrs Hill—First and foremost we have to make kids realise that education is the key. We have to make them realise that they have to go to school, that they have to learn to read and write. There are 18-year-olds who have left school now and cannot read and write. We are saying, 'What's happening at the school if these kids cannot read and write?' Some of them can. They are there every day because their parents force them saying, 'You've got to be there.' Jamie works at school so his kids are there all the time anyway. Jamie is married to my niece, so I can say what I want about him.

I have worked at the school. I was at the canteen and I have also worked in years 1 and 2 in St Joey's at Kununurra. We have kids who are struggling in school and we have the real bright ones all in the same class. The teacher is working with the bright kids and as an aid I am sitting there looking at not the dumb kids but the ones who are struggling. These kids are saying, 'We're the dumb ones, eh, Miss. That's why you're with us.' They can see that the teacher is with the very bright kids. I think the bright kids need me there. They know enough about that subject that I could just support them. The teacher needs to be working with the kids who are struggling. That is happening at this school too. The aids are left to work with the kids who are struggling and the aids are not trained up enough to engage with them. I am saying that it should be the opposite. Teachers should be concentrating on the struggling kids, getting tem up to scratch. The ones who are bright enough should be able to work with the aids supporting them because they can do the work. I have seen it. If we cannot get them doing stuff at the school, there is no point planning for them at the end of school.

Jamie says we need more sporting programs. Football is the main one. There is hardly anything for girls. We always seem to forget the girls. What can attract kids to the school? You have teachers at the school who are in it for themselves. they are here for only two years. They just want to make their money and then they are out of here. They plan to do two years and then they are gone. That is about the same for every government department—'I'm only here for two years and then I'm gone.' They are not going to make a commitment in those two years.

CHAIR—Do many of them stay?

Mrs Hill—A couple would stay five years or more.

CHAIR—That is a long time.

Mrs Hill—They are the ones who are really dedicated. You can see the difference. They are actually with the kids, even after school. We have to work with our kids. Maybe Kimberley Group Training should be running programs in the school. Maybe TAFE should also be running something in the school so that instead of leaving school and finding a job a kid can go over to TAFE.

CHAIR—In the same environment.

Mrs Hill—Yes. Being a small community, we should all be able to work for the same objectives. We have to get our kids educated. They have to get a good job. There are jobs around here if there are people who are educated enough to apply for those jobs. If nobody local applies, somebody from outside applies, they come to town and they have got the job. I think people are reluctant to apply for jobs because they do not know how to. There are jobs around.

CHAIR—Do they think there should be some sort of formalised process so that if somebody wants a job and it is advertised, they want help getting that job. They need help talking about what that really means—the process of applying, what is expected out of an interview, how you have to present.

Mrs Hills—I think CDEP and Kimberley Group Training do provide that.

CHAIR—Do they provide that in town? Do people know about that?

Mrs Hills—I hope so. They have been here long enough to be able to let people know what they are on about.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert?

Senator SIEWERT—Chair, I think you have covered everything. I do not know what to ask.

CHAIR—It has been a broad discussion. I want to ask about gender. Mrs Hills, you made a comment that not much seems to happen in terms of opportunities for the young women. I cannot speak for the others, but I have certainly heard anecdotal evidence that, in relation to the passage of youth, the young men became lost because there was simply nothing out there for them to be or do, but for the young women it is about being a mum. That is really respected in the community. It is applauded and it is supported. People have said to me—right or wrong; and I would be interested in your view—that that is one of the principal reasons that people focus more on the men. They have more need but the women get left out. Motherhood should not be their only choice, particularly when they are so young. What sorts of things do you think we could do? There are so many jobs that they can do. There are administrative jobs. There are entry level jobs, probably more so in the traditional fields.

Mrs Hills—The school needs to be open to the community. Instead of the school delivering just the core learning bits, it should expose the kids to the community. Once they leave school,

90 per cent of them probably will not leave town. They will probably end up living in town: marrying and having kids and staying here. Other agencies need to go into the schools. The kids need to be aware that the alcohol centre is there. The alcohol centre could go into the school and say, 'We're here to provide this service for people who have alcohol problems.' I did not know what a standard drink was until I went to a workshop with Community Development Employment Program in 1992. I thought a standard drink for a women was a half a glass. I did not know what it was until that day. I was thinking: 'We sit down to a session and have two or three cans and we are way over the limit, straight up.' So we need to tell the kids that.

The agencies need to have programs built into the schools so that the kids are exposed to the community. The police need to run a program down there about their role. The kids might think: 'I might become a police officer. I might want to become a nurse. I might want to become a health worker.' We need to have those agencies running programs in the schools. The language centre really wants to get into the school to run language programs. That is a good thing. We should have them there. At the same time, we should also have these other agencies running programs in the schools so that the kids are exposed to everything, not just to learning how to read and write. In reality, when you leave school, this is what you are going to be left with in the town. That is what we need to do.

We need to concentrate on the schools, work with our kids, get local Aboriginal people into the schools and deliver programs through the agencies. We need to be in the kids' faces all the time saying, 'This is the option you have got in town when you leave school; or, if you want to go further, you can go off to college—go to Perth or wherever.' We need to expose them to the reality of the town they are living in.

CHAIR—Do you ever have the Croc Fest come through town? The Croc Fest is associated with the Territory. It is an exhibition with carpenters cutting and building things, people laying bricks and people doing butchering and so on.

Mrs Hills—Yes. They came here a couple of times. That is the sort of exposure the kids need on a daily basis.

CHAIR—Yes. That is what I am saying.

Senator SIEWERT—And not just every couple of years.

Mrs Hills—Yes.

CHAIR—The Croc Fest provides industry exposure. There have been a whole range of programs in the past—I have to say that it was not that long ago. It was part of VET—vocational education. Once a week, people representing a different vocation such as child care or nursing would come and talk to you.

Mrs Hills—I think it is the sort of thing that should happen. Our kids need to be exposed more to the reality of where they are living and what they are doing.

Senator SIEWERT—We were talking about CDEP earlier. What do you think about how it is operating now?

Mrs Hills—I have not had much to do with CDEP since Ngoonjuwah was taken over. A lot of people have made comments about it. CDEP bring training programs down here. One instance was when they employed a couple to come from Kununurra to go down to a station and run a six-week horsemanship program. They paid them over $100,000 for a six-week training program. They had a young fellow who did the training. The local Aboriginal people were saying, 'Why didn't they get us to do the hands-on training? We've got certificate 4 trainers in town who can assess them in training. Why did they have to send someone from Kununurra to do this training when we had local people to do it?' That is what people are saying. CDEP are overlooking the experience and the qualifications that the local people have in station work and they are bringing a jackeroo to teach them how to be ringers. They are the right programs but they are not the right people delivering the programs. They are getting outsiders to come in when local people would be a lot cheaper.

CHAIR—Do you think there is an opportunity to highlight that to people? Do you think that they do not know that the locals are here and available, or maybe they think they do not have the right skills to teach?

Mrs Hills—I think they could not be bothered asking. They just think: 'I've got a friend who can do it. Let's ask him.' It was a family who came down and ran that show. A mum, a dad and a son ran it. The mum was actually the CEO for the East Kimberley CDEP. She engaged her husband and her son to come down and run that program. That is what people were up in arms about. They were saying. 'How can she get her husband and son to run this program?'

CHAIR—You actually cannot. That is the answer.

Mrs Hills—Well, she did.

CHAIR—I know. But normally people would say that that is a serious probity issue. Under the contractual arrangements with the Commonwealth—there is an attachment on probity processes and tendering and subcontracting, because this is done through the Commonwealth—that explains all of that. However, some exemptions do exist, but you have to go through a process, which is usually an approval by the minister.

Mrs Hills—People were making that comment.

CHAIR—That sounds unfortunate.

Senator ADAMS—You mentioned the foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. There has been a lot of media about it. I am a mid-wife so I am pretty interested in it. Is it as bad in Fitzroy Valley and Halls Creek as the media have portrayed?

Mrs Hills—I spoke to a lot of people about this. I have a lot of friends and family who were in the same situation: drinking when they were pregnant. Most of them are making that comment, 'I was drinking when I was pregnant but my son or my daughter has not got that problem.' I look at them and say, 'Yes, actually, your son doesn't look like he has got foetal alcohol syndrome compared to that one over there that we know has.' One lady said to me: 'I've actually got a house. I've got a place where I can cook my food, so I am putting three meals a day into my stomach.' That is how she justified her drinking and why her baby did not come out

with foetal alcohol syndrome. She has a house. She has somewhere to cook and provide three meals a day, and she does have three meals a day. A lot of my friends and family that I know drink always have food in their stomach.

I used to work for DCP. I worked for them for over 10 years. A lot of the women that I have worked with who had failure-to-thrive babies and foetal alcohol syndrome babies never had a house. They never had a kitchen to cook in. They were always living off take-away food or tinned food. We were saying: 'Is that where the difference is? Is that because you've got good nutritional food going into your belly?' There is a difference there. This woman is having three meals a day. She is drinking heavily but she has not produced a foetal alcohol syndrome baby. And this lady here, who will probably go to the shop and get chicken and chips, and that is her one meal for the day, is pregnant and the baby is not getting all that nutritional food into its system and it comes out with foetal alcohol syndrome. I do not know the answer. We were trying to find out what the difference was, and we asked, 'How come your baby didn't come out like that when you drink just as much as she does?' She said, 'I've got a kitchen and I eat three meals a day,' and I thought, 'Well, maybe that is it.' We were trying to figure out why one is different from the other.

CHAIR—We will try to provide you with some expert advice on the matter. I think it will be interesting for us to have that answer, and we will pass that on to you.

Mrs Hills—I will take it back to the mother.

Senator ADAMS—How old is the baby of the woman who had the three meals a day that she could cook?

Mrs Hills—Her eldest is about 24 or 25 now and he has a job on the mine. She had been drinking from the age of 18.

Senator ADAMS—You said that with the women's group you were going to do something about it. What exactly are you going to try to do?

Mrs Hills—We were hoping that we could get a group of women together—most of the community women together—and gather somewhere and brainstorm ideas about how we can deal with this. We were hoping to get together and start talking about it: 'This is real; they are talking about us. We are the women who are living in the town, and they are talking about us producing foetal alcohol syndrome babies, so let's deal with it.' Basically, that is what we were hoping to do with the language centre and Yura Yungi.

Senator ADAMS—Have you spoken to the health services or the Aboriginal medical service?

Mrs Hills—Yes. Donna from Yura Yungi was at that meeting and so was Vicki Butters from the language centre. They were the two that we were using to put in a submission and try to get some funds and work on getting a gathering of women together. There was talk that the Fitzroy mob might want to join us as well. It was just something that we came up with and thought, 'Let's deal with it ourselves and come up with ways to deal with this.'

Senator ADAMS—With the alcohol bans in both Fitzroy and here, that surely should help a little bit. As long as the young women are fully aware of the problems—

Mrs Hills—It does not because the pub opens at 11 o'clock and they are down at the pub at 11 o'clock and they are drunk by the time the pub closes at two. They walk past where I work. I see them walking to the pub and then I see them come back staggering. I said to them, 'You got drunk on light beer?' and they said, 'Nah, we drink full strength beer over the counter.' So the ban has not really helped. It just took them away from home and took them to a place where they can drink for four hours. The kids go home and the parents are not home because the pub closes and opens and closes and opens again. So the parents go up and down. It actually just took them away from their home or where they drink here, where the kids can actually see them on their way home. It has taken them to the pub—away from the home and away from their kids. And they are spending more money. They are spending more money over the bar than they would buying half a carton at the takeaway shop. So it has just made it worse, I reckon.

CHAIR—So you do not think that the levels of drunkenness in the town and the fact that people were drunk without supervision with kids around are—

Mrs Hills—I do not—

CHAIR—I know what you are saying and I am not trying to talk you out of it.

Mrs Hills—I can honestly say that I have not seen that, because I do not live in town. I come to work and then I go out of town. But during the day I see parents—I know mothers who have little ones—walking that way and then by two o'clock they are walking back again and they are drunk. Then I think the pub opens again at five or something like that until about seven and then closes again. As I say, it takes them away. They could go and get their takeaways and go halfway down the road and get a drink and then go home, but now they have to go to the public. So it has created more problems.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, thank you, Mrs Hills, for taking the time to give evidence today. We may through the secretariat provide you with some questions on notice or clarification. If you could leave some contact details with the secretariat, we will get in touch with you regarding that information that we undertook to supply.

Mrs Hills—Thank you.

[1.35 pm]

BANKS, Ms Valma, Project Officer, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Council

JOHNSON, Ms Eva, Community Care Worker, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Council

LOESSL, Mr Christopher, Clinical Services Manager, Yura Yungi Medical Centre

O'NEIL, Ms Virginia, Executive Assistant, Yura Yungi Medical Services

SAMPI, Mr Franky, Community Care Worker, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Council

CHAIR—Welcome. For the benefit of the *Hansard* record, could you please state the capacity in which you are appearing today?

Mr Sampi—I work with Valma. I go around checking on young mums and dads and how they are looking after their kids as well as some of the older ones and making sure that they are taking care of their kids instead of drinking. That is what I do every day—go around and check on them.

Mr Loessl—I am the clinical services manager for Yura Yungi. While I am here I want to pass on the apologies of our CEO, Comalie Manolis, and our IT/population health manager.

Ms O'Neil—I am the executive assistant for Yura Yungi and I am here to talk about a few issues, which I will get on to later.

Ms Banks—I am a Jaru woman, and I speak my language and know my culture. I am also a project officer for the ABI program that is running at the moment looking after young babies and mums and dads.

Ms Johnson—I work with Valma. I am one of her workers and I do the same work. I am also a director for Yura Yungi.

CHAIR—Thank you all very much. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I invite you to make a short opening statement or just start talking to us about the sorts of things you want to talk to us about and then I will ask my colleagues, the senators, to ask some questions.

Mr Loessl—Today we are here to represent two organisations—firstly, Yura Yungi Aboriginal Medical Service. As you probably know from your briefing, we are a community controlled service directed by a board of 10 directors. We also have the ABI project—and Valma Banks is here—which at the moment comes under the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Council in Broome but hopefully very, very soon will shift over towards us, like a few other services. What

would we like to talk about? I would like Valma to introduce her program, because unfortunately the funding for this project is finishing at the end of this financial year.

CHAIR—What was the name of the project?

Mr Loessl—The ABI project. I will get Valma to introduce you to that properly. Unfortunately, the funding for this project is disappearing at the end of the financial year. So we are obviously quite interested in what will happen from thereon, because it has been an extremely successful program within the community. After that, we would be quite happy to talk about a few issues we have in terms of Yura Yungi—what our plans are, what we do and where our downfalls lie at the moment in terms of infrastructure and circumstances—if that is all right with you guys.

CHAIR—Certainly.

Senator MOORE—Do you know for sure that the money is ending or do you just know that this round is over?

Ms Banks—It is funded until June 2010 and there is the possibility of an extension.

Senator MOORE—I am just trying to clarify whether you have been advised that it was over. Sometimes that happens, there is just funding for a certain period of time, but the current status is that you are funded until 2010 and you have no idea whether it is going to go on. I just want to get that clear in my head because I had not heard that it was definitely ceasing.

Senator SIEWERT—How long has it been funded for? What is the funding cycle?

Ms Banks—If it was a program that was running then next year would be the fourth year, but we started off in 2008 with the program.

Senator MOORE—You are only just getting started. That is what happens.

Ms Banks—Our program is based on getting community together. I have photocopied this for you to have a look.

Senator MOORE—That is the shirt you are wearing Ms Johnson? I was wondering what that logo was. It is very cute.

Ms Banks—This is where we are at, how strongly the program is running so far and about the communication with people and cultural respect.

CHAIR—Geographically, how far out of Halls Creek do you run the program.

Ms Banks—Basically around Halls Creek. Other communities like Balgo, Billiluna, Mulan and Turkey Creek have asked if we can run the program there but that is just out of our reach.

Senator ADAMS—Are you restricted under the program as to how far you can go?

Ms Banks—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—How many kilometres outside of Halls Creek can you go?

Ms Banks—Maybe 80 k out of town. That is the furthest community we have visited so far.

CHAIR—What specific things do you do?

Ms Banks—We speak about health, foetal alcohol and Down syndromes. It is based on chronic disease and breastfeeding. We speak about breastfeeding because the bottle is no good.

Senator ADAMS—Do women have to go to either Derby or Broome to have their babies?

Ms Banks—Yes. The pregnant mothers go to Derby or Broome or they are even sent down to King Edward Hospital in Perth.

Senator ADAMS—If they are going to have problems.

Ms Banks—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—When they come back, is that when you take over the role or have you been working with them before they have their babies?

Ms Banks—Before they have their babies.

Senator ADAMS—How long before? When would they come to see you in the antenatal clinic?

Ms Banks—It is about three or four months until we find out who is pregnant in this town because it is all a Kinder Surprise! At that stage we know who to check on and how they are going and their mother is not stressing because of the baby stress.

Senator ADAMS—Do they come and say to you, 'Look I'm pregnant, I want to be under the program?' Do you approach them? How does it work?

Ms Banks—It is the family who approach us and say, 'So and so is pregnant would you be able to get her to go to the clinic because she is young, she is embarrassed.' We guide her through antenatal.

Senator MOORE—Is the clinic with you or with the hospital?

Ms Banks—With the hospital.

Senator MOORE—You link in with the hospital?

Ms Banks—We link in with the hospital and the community health service.

Senator ADAMS—Who accompanies them to Derby or to Broome? Does anyone from your organisation go with them if they have no-one?

Ms Banks—If it is single mum, it would be her grandmother, her mother or her sister.

Senator ADAMS—She would not go unaccompanied. The community would go with her.

Ms Banks—Yes, to guide her through. Someone who has knows the ropes of having a baby would guide her through.

Senator ADAMS—When she comes back, what is your role then?

Ms Banks—The community health service takes care of the baby's weight and make sure it is up to standard.. If it is a community mother who comes into town, before they can go back to the community, they need to know the weight of the baby. We might get informed that the baby is very sick and we need to keep an eye on it and to inform the community health nurse about where the mother is, how the baby is getting on and how the mother is. After that if the baby is doing fine, we get back to the community health nurse and they get back to the community itself.

Senator ADAMS—So where would that mother stay if she did not have family here in Halls Creek and she was from a community way out?

Ms Banks—Halls Creek is based on family support. Everybody knows each other and everybody accommodates everyone.

Senator ADAMS—So someone would take her and help her?

Ms Banks—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I am interested, Ms Banks, in exactly what you do. The program was introduced to look at the welfare of mothers and babies on the basis that there needed to be more healthy children, because of concern about baby weight. So what do you and Ms Johnson do in the program?

Ms Banks—We talk to them and show them pictures of how they can benefit from it and be better parents by looking after hygiene and nutrition. We show them pictures so that they can relate to them and look after their own welfare and wellbeing at home.

Senator MOORE—So you work with the mums on nutrition and how to care for their kids?

Ms Banks—Yes.

Senator MOORE—We talked with some people yesterday in Fitzroy Crossing who work with a mobile playgroup. It seemed that that was also linked to the same idea—helping people to develop parenting skills. Do you have services of that nature in this town? Do you have a playgroup that works with parents to develop their parenting skills?

Ms Banks—No, not really.

Senator MOORE—One of the issues we find is that there are so many programs. It is like a huge bucket and you are just scooping out of it. It seems that everyone has the same intention because everyone wants to have healthy children and good parenting—because that is so important. But it is about how we best do it. Senator Adams has a longstanding interest in foetal alcohol problems. That has been getting a lot of focus on this community because of activists saying, 'This is no good.' Have you been involved with that at all—that is, working with young mums and prospective mums to educate them about foetal alcohol problems?

Ms Banks—Yes. We have shown them pamphlets and pictures of what they can expect if they have been drinking right through their pregnancy.

Senator MOORE—Does it work?

Ms Banks—Sometimes, but not always.

Senator MOORE—It is the best we can hope for. That program is about people waking up and looking to the future. If you could link what you are doing with the foetal alcohol education process, that would not be a bad thing to do from a funding perspective.

Ms Banks—Yes.

CHAIR—Mr Loessl, perhaps you would like to continue.

Mr Loessl—Yes. We are in the process of getting together a training kit so that we can do some more active training, some hands-on training. Valma is also planning to do some camps for the young mums and stuff like that, which will be good. As I said before, Yura Yungi are a community controlled service. We mainly provide primary health services to the whole of the community, not just Aboriginal people. We look after Caucasian people in the community as well. The problem we have at Yura Yungi is that we have a very small building and we are rapidly growing. I have been with Yura Yungi for only 3½ months. I used to be up at the hospital. We just did our stats for the last financial year. Over the last six months we had an increase in activity of over 25 per cent, which is really, really good and very positive to see. The whole organisation got restructured about four months ago and that seems to be quite successful.

One of our main issues at the moment is that we are outgrowing the facilities we have—that is, just physical space. We are also looking at growing our service into the surrounding communities. One of the plans for the near future is Ringers Soak, for example. We want to take Ringers Soak back under our wing, with Valma's program. Certainly, further down the track—that is obviously years away—we want to go back to the desert communities and see if we can provide services down there. So we are looking at massive staffing problems or recruitment and retention problems, mainly because of housing—and I am quite sure you have heard that all day.

Senator MOORE—It has been an ongoing theme.

Mr Loessl—Virginia, you can talk a bit about housing.

Ms O'Neil—We have got a few houses, but the only problems we have are that we do not have much money for maintenance. I think when the houses were built they were not even painted.

CHAIR—Have people been paying rent for them?

Ms O'Neil—People are in there but some of the houses were that poor that you could not really collect rent off them. I have just been there this year. I have come from the hospital as well but I have lived in Halls Creek just about all my life. The housing situation needs to be looked at. A lot of staff are overcrowded in the houses. Living conditions are not very good. We have got land for houses but we need money to build houses. Another thing could be if we could get access to government houses where the maintenance is already taken care of by government so we do not have to have that big expenditure every time. Even the clinic itself is not really designed properly as a clinic. There is a lot of fixing up there. I think we just need a brand new clinic, to tell you the truth, because everything is not really done to the occupational health and safety standards.

CHAIR—Have you talked to anyone about that? Have you discussed it with West Australian Health or the Commonwealth?

Ms O'Neil—No. I have only been in the job for three or four months and I do a fair number of jobs—I fill about eight positions—so I am pretty flat out. Housing is one of the issues. I have not spoken to anyone, only my CEO, and she has heard all the arguments. This is the first time I have probably had a chance to speak to some area of government, besides the hospital.

CHAIR—Mr Loessl says the demand is increasing.

Ms O'Neil—Yes, and we need a bigger area. It is getting smaller and smaller and we are getting bigger, but the clinic is not.

CHAIR—Can one of you give us a bit of a snapshot of the relationship between the hospital and the medical centre? I know you do everyone in town. Is it just a different level of primary health care? What is the division?

Mr Loessl—First of all, the hospital is obviously a curative institution. We do curative services as well, but our main focus is primary health. If we do curative things we are looking for opportunistic care as well at the same time, so we have systems in place to ensure that we do that. The hospital is a government institution, while we are a community controlled service being funded by the Commonwealth, OATSIH mainly, and various other organisations and programs that we get our funding from. In terms of the relationship of the hospital and us, we had some major changes in town lately, with a new director of nursing up there and having me down here now, which is probably helping because coming from the health service I know quite well what is going on up there, after 5½ years.

We are starting to link our services together. For example, our child health program works very well with Community Health and Yura Yungi together. The immunisation clinic is held together—for example, things like the trichoma prevention and preventive treatment are done together. We are also linking a lot of services for sexually transmitted diseases. This also flows

into the alcohol centre here and into the sober-up shelter. There are a lot of connections slowly but surely starting up between the hospital and the Aboriginal medical service. Hopefully, that is the plan for the nearer future: we want to do many more things together. Recently, and this was probably one of the most positive things for quite a while, the breast X-ray bus was in town so we had a women's expo, which was like a junction between the hospital and us, and I think we went very well with that.

Like I said, we are trying to get services for more people in this community and we would like our outreach to go much further. At this stage obviously we have got funding issues with staff and stuff like that. That is the reason why, for example, we are not spending money on getting a maintenance person. We would rather spend it on an Aboriginal health worker or something like that, because we are trying to get out more in the community instead of people having to come into the clinic, especially in terms of child health, sexually transmitted diseases and chronic disease. We are going out quite a bit at this stage.

We just heard about the new family centre which is proposed for Halls Creek and we certainly want to put up our hand for that—there is no question—because obviously one of the main requirements of the centre will be health and education. So we are very interested in jumping on board there and providing services there.

CHAIR—Do you know what the timelines for that are?

Mr Loessl—I know that the building side of things is very, very tight at the moment. I think they have to have this building up within the next 12 to 18 months, I think they said. We had a meeting, last week I think it was, purely about the design. It was not even about the governance structure or anything like that. It will be a community controlled building. But the guys who came down here to discuss design features are obviously only interested in the building at this stage, because they have got this deadline to meet. So it will be interesting, further down the track, to see what the governance structure will be. We will certainly propose having the very strong governance that is in place already as an AMS, with not just the states' support but also nationwide support to, hopefully, take this on and get it going in the right direction.

CHAIR—So you see this as an opportunity for a change of address?

Mr Loessl—Not just a change of address. I see it as an opportunity for expansion, because if we can move our child health program or the new directions program, which looks at child and maternal health, there certainly will be much more capacity for us in this area. The beauty is that, geographically, the buildings will be very close together so it will not be a problem to move around.

Another thing we are trying to do at the moment is to get a maternal program together, especially antenatal and postnatal. At present, we only have one community midwife, and her position sits at the hospital at this stage. We have got the funding for and are actively recruiting a midwife to start up programs like that. That will fall in with foetal alcohol syndrome as well, because this will be very strongly focused on primary health prevention, obviously, and antenatal care. So it is all very exciting. It is far, far away, but it is very exciting.

CHAIR—Okay. Thank you. Questions, Senator Siewert?

Senator SIEWERT—I first wanted to ask about the different funding sources for your organisation. A report came out last week that looked at the number of grants that medical services had, which was enormous. How many do you have?

Mr Loessl—To be quite honest, seeing as I have only been in the system for three months I know a few things but I am certainly not the expert yet. I have spent the last 16 years in the public health system, so this system is completely new for me, because it is, firstly, Commonwealth driven and, secondly, it has a number of umbrella organisations like AHCWA down in Perth, which is the umbrella organisation for Western Australia, and then KAMSC in Broome, which is the umbrella organisation for the region. We obviously have got funding from OATSIH, which is the Commonwealth funding body. We do have multiple programs, like the new directions program and the ABI program, on board, where we are sort of re-evaluating money. But I think that is probably a question our CEO can answer much more correctly than I can. At this stage my sole purpose is to keep the services running. That is my sole purpose—and I am quite happy about that, because I am not very good with money. I like to spend it, but I am not good with it!

Senator SIEWERT—Maybe we could write and ask or take it on notice.

Mr Loessl—I am happy to compile the report. We can send that over to you.

CHAIR—Perhaps you could provide that on notice. If you know in the next couple of days that you cannot, get in touch with us and we will write a letter.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not want you to have to do too much work.

Mr Loessl—Nothing is easy if you are always busy, but if it is helpful, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—In terms of the alcohol restrictions, when we talked to them Fitzroy Crossing said they have seen a marked decrease in dealing with emergencies. They have more outpatients now and have seen a marked change in issues of domestic violence. I wonder what you have noticed so far with the restrictions.

Ms O'Neil—Everyone drinks at home. I went to the pub on Friday; it was empty. Only the people who had a vehicle were at the pub. It has been quieter, but it is not much different. People still go out of town. Pretty much everyone drinks at home.

Senator SIEWERT—I wonder about the number of people. Have you noticed any health outcomes?

Ms O'Neil—They have shifted. A lot of people have gone out of town too.

Mr Loessl—Yes. From a clinical point of view, I am not quite sure how significant it will be for us at this stage. We have lately collected stats and there are some interesting stats, but on the other hand it is very difficult to evaluate them at the moment, because they are basically hot off the press. It is just a one-off at this stage. It could just be a complete coincidence.

CHAIR—Would you be able to tell in one area like trauma rather than longer term health issues?

Mr Loessl—The thing is that, being a primary health clinic, we are usually open from 8 to 4.30. We are usually not in the crucial time frame when things happen, so for us it probably does not make a big difference, to be honest. If you speak to the health department in the hospital you will probably find that there is a significant change.

Senator SIEWERT—And it is too early for the long-term health outcomes, but do you think you will start seeing a difference?

Mr Loessl—It will be interesting in the future. One of the stats I took recently was the amount of female clients between the ages of 14 and 45 who answered yes to being regular drinkers. That has gone down. On the other hand, with the ones we have the instances of drinking at dangerous levels have gone up. The question is if we have fewer drinkers or if it is just a coincidence. Is it due to people bingeing when they get the chance to get their hands on alcohol? I do not know at this stage.

Ms O'Neil—The pub only opens for certain hours, so they try to drink as much as they can before the pub shuts.

Mr Loessl—Unfortunately, we cannot break down in our population health management system the hours of the day and stuff like that, so that makes it hard to post stats. I think the next set of stats, which will be due in about six months, will probably give us a trend—not answers but a trend—towards that.

Senator ADAMS—I would like to talk to you about chronic disease—renal disease, for a start. How are you dealing with that and how many people within Halls Creek have kidney failure?

Mr Loessl—That is a good question. I should have brought the stats with me. I am not sure if we have them here. In terms of chronic disease and kidney disease, our population health management system allows us to commence people on chronic disease plans, which are basically a standardised form of a care plan that requires certain testing, certain monitoring, certain interventions and regular time frames. This is what I was talking about with opportunistic care we are trying to provide. Even if people come in for curative reasons, our front clerks, for example, always print a list of the chronic disease plan off the computer to allow the clinic staff to see what is due and what needs to be done. For example, we can do point-of-care testing for ACRs, which is very helpful. We do regular screening of the whole population. We run the adult health check, for example, which is Medicare item 710, the screening of the 15-to-54-year-old population, and that certainly includes kidney screening as well as coronary disease screening et cetera.

In terms of numbers, we have increased our adult health screening over the last six months by over 25 per cent, so that is a good indication that the clinic has started to work very well. We nearly tripled the proportion of people we detected with diabetes. It is the same for—

Senator ADAMS—Over what time frame has that trebled? How long have they been identified as diabetics?

Mr Loessl—That was in the last six months.

Senator ADAMS—So in the last six months the number has trebled?

Mr Loessl—Those are just the people that we have detected. Just by having increased screening in the first place we are detecting more people—

Senator ADAMS—That is really good, but I am a bit horrified that you have trebled the number that have been detected.

Mr Loessl—If you look at the stats closely you will find that it is due to the increased number of screenings, which is a very positive thing. We are just detecting more people because we screen more people.

Senator ADAMS—I am fully aware of that; with breast screening, people with breast cancer have trebled as well. But it really worries me that in a community like this you have done your screening but come up with three times as many people as you thought. Let us move on to the treatment. What are you doing? Where do they have to go if any of them are at a really chronic stage? Do they go to Derby, Broome or Kununurra? Is that set up yet? I know they have been allocated chairs, but I am not sure whether they are actually up and running.

Mr Loessl—I am not quite sure with Kununurra. At the moment, the working satellite dialysis is Broome for the Kimberley. We try to do a lot of peritoneal dialysis here, which is very useful for people because they can come back to the community. At the moment we have, I think, five people on peritoneal dialysis. There are people in the community asking for a dialysis centre for Halls Creek.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have patients from here over at Derby?

Ms O'Neil—We have some over at Broome too.

Mr Loessl—We have a couple in Perth and a few in Broome at this stage.

Ms O'Neil—And they cry when they see me in Perth. They say, 'I want to go back to my country.'

Senator ADAMS—So we go back to the numbers. Just in the last six months that has trebled. How are you going to deal with those people? Do you have enough staff to get them onto programs?

Mr Loessl—We have two doctors at the moment and one designated health worker working as a chronic disease coordinator. Do we have enough people to look after our chronic people? No. I would love to have at least two more, because it is a huge portfolio. We have two people on most of the other programs. Chronic disease certainly will need more resources. We will look into trying to get more funding for that.

What are we doing in terms of the people we detect? Obviously we try to prevent further harm. We cannot change what has happened already. We continually monitor these people. We have dietitians come into town. We have people like diabetes educators coming into town. We get all these resources for these people and we make sure they can access them. We have drivers, and it is quite easy to put some people on the driver's list. The driver can go out and collect everyone for the specialist—for example, the dietician—and we can run a very successful clinic. What else do we do? Obviously with renal disease we start very early to protect what is left of the kidney. We promote healthy lifestyles and all those kinds of things. As I said, we do regular population health searches and recalls and get those people on a regular basis into the clinic to follow up on their conditions.

Senator ADAMS—With that number of newly identified people, what actions have the doctors taken? Where do your stats go to advise that there is a problem here and it is getting worse?

Mr Loessl—It is a little bit like the stats we were talking about before. The whole way this clinic works has recently changed. The next set of stats will show us really whether it is a significant increase because there is more incidence of the disease or whether it is due to the fact that we have discovered more because we have screened more. At this stage we do not know.

Senator ADAMS—But the point is that you have these people that have been identified with the disease, so the treatment has to have increased. I am trying to get round to the funding. With the community care program that Ms Banks is doing, you are going to have to start to look at funding specifically. There is funding available, so I would not be leaving it too long. If you can take that message back to your CEO, it might help a little bit.

Mr Loessl—Absolutely. We are definitely looking into funding.

Senator ADAMS—It will be interesting to see if there is less alcohol being drunk. It will take a long time, of course, because diabetes does not rear its head with one drink of alcohol. It takes many years of drinking alcohol. But it will be interesting to know whether in 20 years time the statistics change.

Mr Loessl—It is not just the alcohol but the diet as well.

Ms O'Neil—The main diet used to be bread, tea and meat. When they went on the stations that is all they got fed. They could not run away and go and collect food or anything like that. They were just put in the one place and that was that. They got used to that diet. That is where the damper, the sugar and all that sort of stuff came into it, and now it is starting to come out. We are educating people. Valma is saying to put vegetables in meals and talking about how to prepare meals to make them healthy.

Ms Banks—It is expensive to buy vegetables. From fortnight to fortnight they are broke and hungry.

Senator ADAMS—Have any vegetable gardens been started here in the community?

Ms O'Neil—There is no water.

CHAIR—There is plenty of water!

Mr Loessl—There was a community vegetable garden years ago which has unfortunately vanished. We proposed when we were talking about the family centre that parts of the area could have some garden beds for native gardens, in terms of bush tucker and bush medicines, and a kitchen garden and stuff like that. The idea of the family centre is also to have a training kitchen and things like that. Once that is actually going on, it would be very interesting to get people involved in starting something like that back up. The fact is that the healthy foods in this town are very expensive, while the not so good foods are fairly cheap in comparison.

CHAIR—They are expensive in Darwin too, so I just grow my own. For $5 you can get more seeds and grow more food than you can give away. My staff are sick of veggies, and I am there once a fortnight. I am being fair dinkum. If you live in places like Darwin and here, it is always going to cost you more. It does not matter who you are; no-one is picking on you. You are just remote. A crazy thing I have heard here is that they grow them in Kununurra, send them to Perth and then send them back. You wonder why they are a bit left-handed when they get here. I am surprised more people do not grow their own vegetables. It is very easy to do.

Senator SIEWERT—They were saying that water is a problem.

Ms Banks—There have been so many pipeline busts in the sewage. You do not know where things are. You are growing things on faeces and things like that.

Ms O'Neil—Probably the main issue is water. We cannot use sprinklers on our gardens. You can only water on certain days.

CHAIR—Maybe that is something we can talk to the shire about.

Ms O'Neil—It is a bit hard if we do not have the water to do the farming.

Mr Sampi—If you use too much water, they close the whole water down on you. That is what happened.

Ms O'Neil—They were talking about a dam being developed out at Caroline Pool.

CHAIR—It is good to see that you are focused and are talking to people about the value of fresh vegetables. It is sad that they cost so much. It is very hard to convince somebody to spend—

Mr Loessl—We have a dietician in Yura Yungi nearly on a four-weekly basis. There are two or three floating around. They are very active and very motivated. We get a lot of volume in terms of clients through education.

CHAIR—When you go and visit these people it must be pretty difficult. You must know them very well. You are obviously pretty good at it. How do you tell someone, 'You have to stop being a drunk'? I tell myself that some days.

Mr Sampi—Sometimes we have a problem when trying to get the message through.

CHAIR—Do you work a long time with people?

Mr Sampi—Yes, you work slowly with them. Since we have been doing it it is starting to work a bit better.

CHAIR—So do you reckon that these changes with the grog rules have helped your job a little bit?

Mr Sampi—I have been out there this morning and most of the ones who used to do those things are starting to slow down.

CHAIR—So it might be worth while.

Senator ADAMS—Do you use the Patient Assisted Transport Scheme for your people? Is there an increase in using PATS? Can you give us an idea of how many people access it? Are you sending them to Darwin or somewhere else? Where are they going?

Mr Loessl—The actual PATS is done by the hospital. We obviously give out forms and stuff like that. From our side, it is probably pretty consistent. If you want to have the proper statistics, they are collected by the hospital.

Senator ADAMS—We have Dr Shepherd coming. We might have a talk to him about it.

Mr Loessl—It should not be a problem to pull that off the database. It is quite easy.

Senator ADAMS—No. The government here has increased the PATS money quite considerably and the accommodation money, which is really good. I think that might have come out of one of our inquiries.

Ms O'Neil—I think it is a lot better.

Mr Loessl—I think what has helped a lot of people is that they do not have to pay $50 for PATS.

Ms O'Neil—I used to do the PATS at the hospital at one stage.

Senator ADAMS—Okay, I will have a talk to you over afternoon tea.

Ms O'Neil—Only for a little bit.

CHAIR—Afternoon tea will be tragically off the record. Frank was about to provide some other advice. Sorry, mate, I did not mean to interrupt.

Mr Sampi—I was going to mention something about a men's centre. We had some people talking about trying a men's centre.

Mr Loessl—We have a lot of resources for women and children in this town—

Ms O'Neil—And there is nothing for the men.

Mr Loessl—We run a men's health clinic every Wednesday, but that is the only thing that is available for the men in town. The women have the women's shelter and the family centre, which is very focused.

Ms O'Neil—The man just runs away and sleeps in the grass if the woman kicks him out.

CHAIR—That is good—the doghouse. I have spent a bit of time there myself. Thank you for providing the information you have. We have spoken about a lot of things. When we are going through it all again, if we do not understand it properly we will ask the secretariat to write to you to make sure that we understand and do not get the wrong thing. At the same time, if you feel you have something extra you want to tell us and want to make another submission, by all means get in touch with the secretariat who will provide that to us. Thank you very much for providing evidence today.

Proceedings suspended from 2.20 pm to 2.36 pm

SHEPHERD, Dr David Keith, Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome, Dr Shepherd. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses has been provided to you. I invite you to make a short opening statement or commentary on your submission, then we will go to senators for questions.

Dr Shepherd—As I understand it, this is an inquiry into government policies and which ones are working and perhaps which ones are not. I have brought along Fiona Stanley's Bob Hawke lecture in case anybody has not read it, which I think succinctly paraphrases a lot of the things that I agree with. I have never read a document that I agree with more.

Generally speaking, government policies have been pretty poor, both in implementation and obviously in outcome, particularly around health. I am speaking mostly about health. There is very little accountability to be found anywhere in remote Indigenous communities. Most of the work that is done is very operator dependent. Something that might work well in one community usually works well in that community because of a particular person in that community who has a work ethic or an understanding or something rather than just a policy behind it.

I think it is important also to go through the fact that Aboriginal people in Halls Creek have had a pretty hard time of it over the years. They have suffered terrible dispossession. They have been excluded from their country. They have seen their country destroyed, essentially. A few years ago they were allowed access back onto one of the large properties here. It was supposed to be a time of celebration. The language centre took the old people out there. The old people were just amazed at how the cattle had eaten all the countryside away and destroyed their waterholes. It was all fenced off and looked ugly. They thought it was a terrible thing. It turned into a bit of a wailing wake for their country rather than a celebration of the fact that they were finally being allowed to go back onto it.

They still endure very entrenched racist attitudes just about everywhere in town. That most definitely is one of the reasons why they have their own Aboriginal medical service: they feel that they do not get treated properly at the mainstream medical service. They put up with terrible racial abuse, particularly at the pub, which is where they can be easily denied access simply because they are Aboriginal. All sorts of excuses are offered but essentially they are denied access to the pub because they are Aboriginal. Aboriginal people have been asked to pay $100 and get a card. The pub will tell you that they ask everyone for that but they have never asked any non-Aboriginal person. Aboriginal people are moved from one bar to the other. They are told in one bar, in the white bar, 'You have had too much to drink,' but they are quite happily allowed to go into the other bar and continue drinking. So there must be two different levels of intoxication required at the two different bars.

There are an awful lot of mental health issues that come out of that sort of background. I think you have heard it before. The main issues here in town really are housing, housing and housing. In Kevin Rudd's apology speech he made mention of the fact that Australia is the only developed country that has rates of trichoma that are ridiculous, and it is the same with middle ear infections and rheumatic heart disease. These things are nonexistent in Europe and America. We know that they are simply caused by poor sanitation and overcrowding. Halls Creek, along with

all the other remote Indigenous communities, has high rates of these diseases. They are simply diseases of poor sanitation and overcrowding. They disappeared in Western society way before antibiotics. They disappeared when they brought in toilets and hand washing. I understand that Halls Creek is short of water and that is a problem. There are no two ways about that. But I think that government—

CHAIR—Does the shortage of water extend to not having showers and plumbing?

Dr Shepherd—It is used by the state government who have come up here—Alannah MacTiernan and Robyn McSweeney et cetera—as an excuse for not being able to expand their housing. Their two excuses are that there is no land available—which seems to me utterly ridiculous given that you just have to look out the window and see that there are vast tracts of the stuff—and that there is a shortage of water and they are trying to work on the water shortage but that they find it difficult to build more houses while there is no guarantee of water supply.

As far as government policies go, I think there are a few very poor organisational things. I cannot help but mention the split between Commonwealth and state. There have been plenty of recommendations around it. I think that is being reconsidered. I would urge the Commonwealth to take over the hospitals. In this hospital here we run two complete pharmacies. It is one of the most time-consuming things for us, ordering all the drugs and everything in. We have to have one pharmacy for the people who come in and want drugs as outpatients and another pharmacy for people who are inpatients in hospital. There is an enormous amount of paperwork attached to that. We lose two rooms and it is an absolute shemozzle. I think there are a whole bunch of other areas where the state—

CHAIR—Why are there two pharmacies?

Dr Shepherd—Because people who are outpatients are Commonwealth funded. So if you get sick now and you go to hospital and you need some antibiotics the Commonwealth will pay for that; but if you are so sick you need to come in then the state government will pay for that. The main thing is the state government is paying a pittance. We are probably handing $250,000 worth of drugs out of the Commonwealth pharmacy. We would only be handing $2,000 or $3,000 worth of drugs out of the state pharmacy, but they still refuse to come to the party. I have said to them a few times, 'Why don't you give them five grand and be done with it?' We are spending far more than that on the paperwork attached to the whole business of splitting the two pharmacies up.

Senator SIEWERT—Surely the Commonwealth, under the PBS scheme, is still paying for the drugs?

Dr Shepherd—Outpatient drugs, yes, but not as inpatients. That is all state government. The state government pays for the inpatient drugs. Once you come into hospital, whatever you get given is paid for by the state government.

Senator SIEWERT—But the Commonwealth would still be paying the PBS for the drugs that the state is administering, surely.

Dr Shepherd—I do not think so. I think the state government pays for that.

Senator SIEWERT—We will check that.

Senator MOORE—I know they still keep it totally separate, but I think they are only paying the gap, or for drugs that are not on the PBS the state are paying for all of it.

Dr Shepherd—Either way, we are told we have to have two pharmacies.

Senator SIEWERT—It is even more ridiculous when you consider that it is just the gap that the state is paying.

Dr Shepherd—I am pretty sure as well that, because they are Aboriginal medical services that are Commonwealth funded and the community health department and the hospital are state funded, that makes for issues, I think—jealousy and lack of communication and lack of working together—that could be a lot better. Again, those things are often very operator dependent. If you have a person down at Yura Yungi like Chris, who has worked at the hospital in both places, then things can flow and work well. But if you do not have that—if you have somebody who is slightly antagonistic—there are no policies and procedures in place to allow those two organisations to work together.

The other thing that I think works really badly is the education department policy whereby school teachers are only allowed to work in Halls Creek or other remote towns for two years and then, whether they like it or not, they are forced to go back to a metro area. I do not know what the thinking behind that policy is. If it is designed to make sure that Aboriginal kids do not gain literacy standards it is working a treat. If it is designed to make sure that Aboriginal people have some chance of coming out with the same sort of educational standards as non-Aboriginal people then I think it is diabolical.

There have been plenty of cases of people who have come up here and really enjoyed the job. Obviously, there are people who do not and who burn out quickly and then they want to leave, but there have been plenty of people who come up here and enjoy the job and have some idea about it and then are forced to leave because they are only allowed to stay here for two or three years.

CHAIR—Let me get this clear. Are you suggesting that the motive behind that is actually to ensure that Aboriginal people do not get an education, because that is sort of what you are suggesting?

Dr Shepherd—I do not know what is the motivation behind it.

Senator SIEWERT—You were being facetious.

CHAIR—It may not show that on the record. I am just giving you an opportunity to clear that up.

Dr Shepherd—I do not know what the motivation behind it is. If your motivation was to make sure that their education standard is lower then I think it works. I am quite sure that it is a poor policy in terms of the way that it works for people in Halls Creek. The other policy that I think is poor is the fact that many government organisations will allow people who do not live in

the town to be provided with housing. If, for example, you work for child protection here, you live in Halls Creek and you apply for a job, you will get exactly the same pay packet as a person who applies from outside of town. But the person who applies from outside of town will be provided with a house which is worth about $650 a week in rent. The person who applies for the job from Halls Creek essentially gets paid $500 a week less for doing the same job as somebody from outside of town. I think those are all poor policies.

A couple of things that are working well in town are our parenting support unit that is attached to child protection and the group home in town probably again because it has a very good manager there and it is operator dependent. The government policy that has allowed the people in town to have their voice heard and have alcohol restrictions placed here has been a winner for the town. I think you would go a long way to find somebody who did not think that was the case. Certainly, anyone in health, education, child protection or the police would all tell you that it has worked very well.

Unfortunately, our clinical coders only come once a month and sometimes they do not come. They have only come twice since we have brought the restrictions in but there has been a 40 per cent reduction in rates of kids' admission to hospital and a 25 per cent overall reduction in the number of admissions to hospital. The coders do not tell us but I can tell you that there has been a dramatic reduction in the amount of after-hours callouts for the doctors and nurses, which were predominantly alcohol related injuries prior to the grog restriction. Now they are much more mainstream stuff like chest pains, pneumonias and respiratory tract infections.

Senator ADAMS—Your trauma rate has dropped completely, has it?

Dr Shepherd—Pretty much.

Senator ADAMS—Apart from road accidents.

Dr Shepherd—In the 12 weeks before the restrictions were brought in we had 57 presentations that required surgical intervention of some sort or another. In the six weeks after the restrictions were brought in we had seven cases, so it dropped by about 90 per cent.

Senator ADAMS—That is good.

Senator SIEWERT—That is for trauma related injuries?

Dr Shepherd—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Could I ask about the clinical coding? When you say it only happens once a month, could you just explain what you mean?

Dr Shepherd—I think all the hospitals in WA have a clinical coding system. There are these specially trained people who are trained to read doctor's handwriting and go through the notes.

Senator SIEWERT—They do the coding afterwards through the notes.

Dr Shepherd—Correct. Then the stats are loaded up but, as I say, we have not had stats for the last seven or eight weeks.

Senator SIEWERT—I knew about the coding, which is why I was a bit confused about it only happening once a month but now I understand. I knew they did the coding but I did not know how it was done.

Dr Shepherd—It is a very highly trained position and there are only a few of them in the state. We are lucky in fact to have them come once a month.

Senator ADAMS—Are we off the subject of alcohol? Does anyone want to ask questions on that because I want to get on to another issue?

CHAIR—I have been satisfied by the statistics that have been given to me. We have been quizzing a few people on what they think and we have been looking for some specific statistics. That has been very useful.

Senator SIEWERT—I did want to ask one more question on alcohol. Some witnesses today have said that there has not really been a drop in drinking, because people are drinking at the pub; they are going from home to the pub and back again. So they are saying there has not really been a reduction in drinking. But, whether or not there has been a reduction in drinking, the fact is it seems to be having an impact on—

Dr Shepherd—There is no doubt in my mind that there is a massive reduction in the actual consumption of alcohol as well. Although the pub do allow people to drink in what I think is a pretty gross manner, they do still have a cut-off point, because, if you are in the pub and just about to start fighting, the pub see it is in their best interests to say, 'You have had enough to drink; you must leave now,' or they simply shut the pub. It is quite common for them to shut the pub. They choose a time when the noise level starts going through the roof, and that is it—they cut off their alcohol supply. So it is very rare now to see people so dreadfully intoxicated. I have not seen anyone unconscious at the side of the road since they brought the grog restrictions in, whereas before that, on a Thursday or Friday night, you would probably see a few people just lying unconscious on the footpath as you were walking home. You just do not see that level of intoxication anymore. The pub just does not allow you to get to that sort of level. So I think that comment is rubbish, in fact.

Senator SIEWERT—I just wanted to get that on the record.

CHAIR—Senator Adams.

Senator ADAMS—Dr Shepherd, I noted that you have done quite a lot of media on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and it is something I am really interested in too. We have talked to some women's groups today, and they are really keen to start doing something on that issue with the younger women who are either pregnant or at the age where they might get pregnant, to try to dissuade them from drinking alcohol and inform them of the problems associated with it. There has been a lot of media coverage and a lot of numbers have been quoted. What percentage of children in the community, even the ones who are teenagers now, do you think have been affected?

Dr Shepherd—I would have to say I pretty much agree with our regional paediatrician that at least 30 per cent of kids here have—

Senator ADAMS—Some symptoms.

Dr Shepherd—Correct. It is a very wide spectrum disorder. There are 214 different little signs that you can look for, and they give you a score out of 214 and when you reach a certain level they say, 'Yes, you've got it.' But it is clear to me that lots of these kids have it. In the group home the kids are all ones who have been removed from their parents, and the primary reason for that in nearly every single case is that the parents are intoxicated. So, there you have a little experiment in motion, and you can go in there and every single one of those children has the classic features of foetal alcohol syndrome. I think they have got about 20 kids in there at the moment. At least 50 per cent of the kids that I see are affected, because they tend to be stunted—they are small, they do not put on weight—they have behavioural problems and they have all sorts of other associated malformations. So probably half the kids that I see in the hospital have got foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Senator ADAMS—Have you had an interaction with the school about that, now that it is being raised and people are very aware of it, with kids truanting from school and obviously out of control—those sorts of kids? Have you gone any further?

Dr Shepherd—No, not really. Here in Halls Creek, despite the fact that we have a little bit of breathing space now, we have not got quite so far down the track as Fitzroy have. I do not know if you have visited Fitzroy Crossing—

Senator ADAMS—Yes. We were there yesterday and a number of us were there last year as well.

Dr Shepherd—In Fitzroy, they have had James Fitzpatrick, who is a very enthusiastic paediatrician, and there are, to be honest, far savvier community members, people who do not just have the willingness to do something but actually have the capacity to form groups and put things in place—whereas here in Halls Creek that has not been the case. I do not think it is reasonable to expect the doctors or the community health people here at the moment to go into the schools. They just do not have the time. I think if you are going to go down that track of trying to identify and behaviour-manage those at risk and perhaps speak to the teachers, you need to employ someone who is specifically trained in that area, and not the people who are in Halls Creek at the moment.

I might have mentioned foetal alcohol syndrome in the media, but you will find that I mentioned a whole bunch of stuff and they have just picked that out. I do not have a particular interest or knowledge or expertise around foetal alcohol syndrome other than that I see it a lot so I am aware of it. But I do not know that there is an enormous amount that can be done. They always say it is 100 per cent preventable, and 100 per cent untreatable once you have got it.

There might be slight things you can do. The most important one is that those kids need different teaching methods. They need much stricter boundaries. They do not understand 'one, two, three—time out' because by the second time they have forgotten what the first one was for. There are some strategies around that that I think should be implemented. I do not know whose

responsibility it would be, but someone within Health or Education would find that it would be well within Education's best interests to have someone in the school to talk to them about it. Visiting experts have come here, but when they give their talks I do not know that the teachers have got the time to go to the talks and the teachers have not been given protected time to go to those sorts of interactions. But I think that would money well spent.

I do not know whether getting occupational therapists, speech therapists and physiotherapists involved would be value for the money—I think the jury is still out on that, to be honest. I think it helps the families to have a diagnosis and I think it helps the kids themselves when they develop to have a diagnosis. But in terms of how much you can actually do to treat the condition once it is there, I would not be keen to be spending my money on that. I would spend my money on educating those young mothers to be and potential mothers about the dangers of it. I think a lot of the mothers to be and the young girls here know it. They will call those babies, 'That one's a grog baby.' They know what it is. They can recognise it.

Senator ADAMS—They know what it looks like and they do not want one like it.

Dr Shepherd—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—If I understand you correctly you are saying, 'Put the effort into stopping it in the future,' but we surely need to be putting resources into helping those kids that already have FAS.

Dr Shepherd—I agree. It is like with dialysis patients: it is easy to say the money would be much better spent preventing it in the first place, but what you do when you have someone in front of you who, if they do not get a dialysis machine, is going to die? That is a very difficult decision. If I was in government I would try to be seen to be doing something for the people who have got it, but I would really be putting my resources into prevention. I have said on a number of occasions that I think they should ban the advertising of alcohol and they should make sure they have a label on the product that says, 'Drinking while you are pregnant will harm your baby.'

Senator SIEWERT—On the issue of kids who already have it being in a classroom, it was raised in evidence earlier that there are a range of abilities in the classroom, with some kids who are bright and some who are struggling. The kids with FAS obviously are going to be struggling if they are in school—and I have heard off the record in Fitzroy that a lot are not in school. Surely we need to be providing educational support in the classroom for those kids, but that also helps the other kids. If you are supporting the kids who are struggling to learn, surely you are also supporting the kids who are going to do well.

Dr Shepherd—It must be a terrible dilemma, and I speak to the school teachers about it quite a lot. It must be a terrible dilemma to be trying to teach normal children and children who have got this strange and very difficult to deal with behavioural disability. I do not have an answer for that. I think it needs looking into and that some money should be spent on it and resources should be allocated to it, but I am not so sure that that is a health issue. I do not know that a nurse or a doctor—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, it is an education aids type of issue.

Dr Shepherd—I think so. And it is a nationwide problem. Obviously it is magnified out of all proportion in remote communities, but it is not a problem that is only in remote communities. Even internationally, doctors and nurses have only become aware of it in the last 10 or 20 years. Twenty years ago nobody had ever heard of FAS; even though people must have had the condition, nobody had actually identified it. It is only in the last 10 years that in North America and Canada particularly they have started doing some work around it, and now it is trickling out into other areas. I would say in 10 years time you will find that there are lots of resources allocated to it, or I would hope so. I would be surprised if there were not because, now that we recognise the problem, that is the first step in trying to deal with it. I do not have an answer for how you would best go about it, but I think it would be worth getting in some experts. As you say, the Canadian people seem to have the best models. They seem to run it all on a peer basis, where people who have had the condition and dealt with it then teach other people how to deal with it, and it is the same with the teachers who have been able to deal with it. It is an evolving field, and Australia should not be left behind.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—Moving on to diabetes, we have just had the Aboriginal health service here, and they said that they have increased their screening for diabetes and it has come up threefold in the last six months. It has trebled. Have you noticed any tremendous shift in the number of people who are being diagnosed with diabetes?

Dr Shepherd—No, but I must admit that we do not screen them as efficiently as we could. I am actually quite surprised at the low levels of diabetes here in Halls Creek compared with Broome and Fitzroy Crossing.

CHAIR—Is it possible it is just undiagnosed?

Dr Shepherd—Possibly.

CHAIR—Given that it is a very similar demographic.

Dr Shepherd—I would not have thought so. Certainly when people come into the hospital, as soon as they are admitted they would get a sugar done. In Fitzroy, I would say that every couple of weeks we would admit someone into hospital and say, 'Oh, my goodness. This bloke's got diabetes.' Whereas in the six months that I have been here, I think I have found only two people with diabetes. I think that they have been screened very efficiently in the past. It may be that you had some bright-as-a-button person who screened everybody and so many of them have been found. I would say that is a more likely possibility.

Senator ADAMS—It was quite a frightening statistic. He was talking about the technology and what they had done, and he said that it had trebled.

Dr Shepherd—The highest levels of diabetes that I have seen are in the Dampier Peninsula and Bidyadanga around Broome, where they have stupid levels—25 or 30 per cent of people. And there certainly are some very young diabetic people. From Balgo, there is a young girl in town here who is, I think, 11 years old, and she has diabetes and weighs 10 kilos more than I do.

I certainly would not forget about it. I would not have thought it was a red flag, from what I have seen in hospital.

Senator ADAMS—It was just something that arose so I thought I would ask you about it. So as far as dialysis goes, people from here have got to go to Broome or to Derby?

Dr Shepherd—At the very best. As soon as you go into renal failure here, you are given two options. You can have peritoneal dialysis—which means you have a tube that goes in your stomach and you attach yourself to a bag—or you have to go to Perth. Once you go to Perth and go on the machine there, then you have to go onto a waiting list and wait to come back to Broome. Now there is an option to go to Derby as well, which is slightly closer. Those are the two options. Most people choose to go on the bag—even though people who go on the bag do worse than people who go onto a machine—simply because you stay at home.

CHAIR—Dr Shepherd, what we try to do as a committee when we need a bit more information about something, we would normally undertake to write to the state or territory government responsible, or the Commonwealth. I have a bit of a list here. The land availability and water supply assumptions you have made, and you made those points. I think it is worth writing a letter to the Western Australia government including that. With respect to the pharmacies, perhaps they can provide us some rationale. We will ask for the turnover of the actual pharmacy responsible in the state, and we will give them the opportunity to respond. Also we could perhaps include a rationale around the staffing issue of education. We will also mention whether there is any policy with regard to allowing teachers to attend FAS lectures, given the emerging importance of this area. Is there anything else you think we need to capture?

Senator SIEWERT—You did the teacher one, didn't you?

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—The two-year thing.

CHAIR—Yes. In terms of completeness that gives us a lot more information. It is not only for our benefit but for yours, because you brought the issues up. We will provide a copy of the letter to the Western Australian government—

Dr Shepherd—The other one would be the one about housing for nonresidents. I know for a fact that the Department of Child Protection, on that day in particular, will offer housing to people who are nonresidents in Halls Creek but will not offer housing to people who do work in Halls Creek.

CHAIR—I am happy to include that in the letter. I just have to say that as we travel around Australia we find that that is probably the single largest common denominator in any community. The people we have talked to simply say it is a choice. They say, 'The only reason we bring them into town is that they do not live here. We do not have that sort of person here, so the only way we can get them to come to town is to find them a house, because there generally aren't any available or the rent is too high.' From Queensland right across, it has been a common denominator. It does not make it any better; I just reflect on that. That is a bit of feedback for you.

Senator ADAMS—Since the state government changed the PATS guidelines and put the amount of money up, have you had any increase in PATS applications?

Dr Shepherd—Probably. I would say so. The one thing I have noticed since they have changed is that I do not get PATS knocked back. Before, you used to have to try and argue and all that sort of stuff.

Senator ADAMS—And your patients are prepared to go, whereas with the $50 that they had to pay upfront previously a lot of them would not have gone. So that has made a difference.

Dr Shepherd—That has made a world of difference.

Senator ADAMS—Good.

Dr Shepherd—That has been a really good policy, in fact.

Senator ADAMS—Great.

Dr Shepherd—PATS is functioning particularly well.

Senator ADAMS—That is very good to hear. We had an inquiry into it and it took a long time to get the message through. At least WA has come to the party with it. I am very happy about that. The other area is obstetrics. Do you do any deliveries here at all?

Dr Shepherd—Not if we can help it. We have had a few deliveries here this year, but we do everything within our power to stop them. We try not to do them. We certainly tell people that they are supposed not to be having them here. If they come in in labour—unless they come in absolutely just about to have the baby, in which case we have no choice—they can be very close to having the baby and we can still stop it. We can give them a drug and stop it and send them on the aeroplane.

Senator ADAMS—So they go either to Derby or to Broome?

Dr Shepherd—They were being offered Kununurra for a while. Kununurra does do some obstetrics, but I think they have just cut off Kununurra as an option. I am not too sure why that is—whether that is just due to lack of staff in Kununurra or what the reasoning behind that was. But they used to be offered Kununurra, Broome or Derby. Now—you are correct—they are offered Broome or Derby.

Senator ADAMS—When do they have to go? Is it four weeks or two weeks before?

Dr Shepherd—If it is their first baby, they have to go at 38 weeks. If they have had a baby before, they have to go at 36 weeks. So it is a fair bit of waiting around in a strange town, and you are not allowed to take your husband with you.

Senator ADAMS—That was my next question: can you take a carer or somebody as a support person?

Dr Shepherd—The PATS guidelines say that if it is a high-risk pregnancy they are allowed to take a partner with them. We say that pretty much every pregnancy here has some risk attached to it, so most of them do get to take a partner with them if they can. Obviously the partner misses out on work for a prolonged period of time.

Senator ADAMS—And there may be other children, of course.

Dr Shepherd—But if they can afford it—

CHAIR—Where would they normally stay?

Dr Shepherd—They have a special hostel in Derby called the Blue House. They sit there and wait. They are waiting there with other expectant mothers and I think that is not a bad option.

Senator ADAMS—The King Edward hospital is the same.

Dr Shepherd—In Broome I do not think they have such an option. Again, nearly every time a parliamentary committee or the powers that be come up, they get told that we need a hostel for people to sit in in Broome, the same as they have in Derby.

Senator MOORE—Dr Shepherd, I have some questions about the mental health services here. Does the mental health clinic run out of your hospital?

Dr Shepherd—I think the answer to that is yes, but the mental health professional comes down every two weeks—

Senator MOORE—From Derby?

Dr Shepherd—No, from Kununurra. He comes for three days a fortnight, but he tends to see the patients at their homes most of the time. That seems to work for him and for the clients. If he needs to see patients in hospital then he does. In theory, you would probably find that it does run out of the hospital. That is a reasonable service, I think. We all think that the presentations for mental illness are probably going to increase, now that all the alcohol has cleared out of the system, for two reasons. Firstly, the use of other drugs might increase—and I think we have already noticed that to a slight extent. Secondly, once people are a bit more sober they are more likely to notice the fact that abnormal behaviour is abnormal and they might bring people in who are psychotic or who might present themselves as being depressed or manic or whatever.

Senator MOORE—So are people who are having a major episode transported to Perth?

Dr Shepherd—Yes. They are building a secure facility in Broome at the moment, which will make a heap of difference because the transport of these patients is fraught with danger. They are probably the most stressful and difficult patients to deal with. Support from the police officers has really made a lot of difference to how we are able to handle these patients. There certainly has been a good relationship—and hopefully still will be—with the police. They come over and give us a hand. It is in everybody's best interests. They do not have to help, but if we have a patient in the hospital often all they need is for a big, strong copper to sit there and then the

nurses are able to deal with it and maybe we can de-escalate the situation and avert them being tied up in a straitjacket, anaesthetised and sent to Perth.

Senator MOORE—Good. Thank you. I just wanted to get that on the record as well.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Dr Shepherd.

Dr Shepherd—No worries.

CHAIR—There may be other questions of clarification from the committee and you may wish to make further submissions. We are a standing committee of parliament, so this inquiry does not begin and end on a particular date. We are always interested to hear about the issues that fall within the terms of reference that apply to this committee. If you have further information you would like to provide to us, feel free. Please provide it to the secretariat. Any questions or clarification we require we will provide on notice through the secretariat. Thank you very much for the evidence you have provided today.

Dr Shepherd—Excellent. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—We will adjourn for a short break.

[3.18 pm]

BARNES, Mr Stephen David, Proprietor, Taylor's Store, Halls Creek

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence will be provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement. At the conclusion of your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you. Mr Barnes, I note that you have provided a submission today. I have a copy here but, in view of the fact that the committee has just received it, it might be useful if you could go through the basics of your submission. Unfortunately, I understand it relates in many areas to the planning document. We have asked for the planning document to be provided to the committee, but we have not yet seen it. Please proceed.

Mr Barnes—I really thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to come down and air an opinion about what is going on in Halls Creek. At the end of this month, I would have been here two years. I work closely with the Aboriginals of the area. My store is one of the only free enterprises in the Kimberley that employs exclusively Aboriginals. By that I mean Aboriginals of this land that we are on—primarily, Jaru and Kija. In the course of that I have come across a lot of difficulties, and there is one that I would like to highlight. I have given you copies of the deregistration of three Aboriginal trainees. I paid in May 2007 the TAFE fees for Megan Martin to be qualified in a business certificate. I paid her fees again in December 2007.

CHAIR—Can you recall what those fees were?

Mr Barnes—Probably upwards of $1,000.

CHAIR—If you cannot recall the exact figure now, perhaps you can provide that to us on notice.

Mr Barnes—I could provide that evidence. They were paid by cheque, so they are traceable.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Barnes—My point is this: TAFE are funded by the federal government and part of their charter is that they have to operate within national guidelines, as the RTO. By May this year—which was 12 months down the line—Megan Martin had not been assessed on one module, and to get a business certificate II she needs to be assessed on 12 modules. If you cannot get one module assessed in 12 months, how many years or decades will it take for these Aboriginals to upskill?

CHAIR—Where did the assessor come from? Were they outside of town?

Mr Barnes—Kununurra, I believe.

CHAIR—So this is a competency based assessment?

Mr Barnes—There is meant to be training with it as well. You get into quirky issues like where the government sets minimum requirements and then TAFE grab that and that becomes the maximum requirement. But they are grabbing the millions as the RTO but they are not delivering. My point is this: I have just deregistered three Aboriginal trainees—and I have provided documentary evidence to you of that. They are copies of an original document. I stand by everything that I have presented to the committee, and I am prepared to give you very honest feedback on what is going on in this town. My assertion is that if TAFE cannot deliver, even within 10 per cent of national guidelines, why is the federal government continuing to fund TAFE as the RTO in the Kimberley?

CHAIR—Have these cancellations of apprenticeship already gone in?

Mr Barnes—That is correct.

CHAIR—Just to clarify: this was sparked by a failure for the TAFE to come and provide the necessary training and assessment?

Mr Barnes—That is correct: deliver on training and assessment. By the way, I have not cut these people adrift. Nigel, I know that you come from Darwin—because you and I know each other—but I do not know the other people on the committee.

CHAIR—They are a lot nicer than me.

Mr Barnes—You are probably aware of Mason Gallery on Cavenagh Street.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Barnes—I pay Debbie Mason to come from the Northern Territory—at my own expense with no subsidy whatsoever from the federal government—to actually train these Aboriginal people now. My question is: where are the millions that are being pumped by the federal government into upskilling Aboriginal Australia going, when a small enterprise like mine can demonstrably pump in thousands of dollars to upskill Aboriginals from the most base level and not even get a 5c subsidy off the government? Where is the money going? You guys need to be asking that question. I am the face of free enterprise and I am demonstrating to you that we are training people. But where are the government dollars going? I am not after the dollars personally, but it would be good to help the training of the Aboriginal people that I am seeking to upskill.

CHAIR—Indeed.

Mr Barnes—That is part of the story contained in that submission.

CHAIR—So how do these three individuals feel about this? Is there an expectation that there is a certain period of time under which they will certainly be competent and then they know that they need to come and have some training prior to an assessment being done? Were they aware of that?

Mr Barnes—They were aware that there should be training. They were registered as trainees and they are paid as trainees—which means, effectively, that they accept a lower salary.

CHAIR—Has TAFE visited at any time prior to some of the training?

Mr Barnes—In 12 months there were two days last December.

CHAIR—Two days between the three people?

Mr Barnes—I released three staff to be trained consecutively, together. So I would run the store solo to free these staff up for training to maximise their opportunities. The fact is that the opportunities have not been provided. In running a business where upskilling is desperately needed, basically I have had to sack TAFE in the process and say, 'We're going to take control of our destiny, even though it is outside national guidelines, and we are going to upskill using private enterprise mechanisms to achieve that.' That costs me significantly. To get Debbie Mason down from Darwin is not cheap. To pay her, accommodate her and keep her in Halls Creek and utilise those skills for a three-, four- or five-day period costs money.

CHAIR—As part of this process, have you contacted the TAFE prior to this to make clear you dissatisfaction about these matters?

Mr Barnes—Absolutely.

CHAIR—What has been their response?

Mr Barnes—There are two lines of thinking inside TAFE. There is a lady in the hierarchy in Kununurra who says that TAFE is not a training organisation, even though they are taking millions as the RTO. She says, 'We only assess.' So far as I am concerned, TAFE is a tertiary education institution and training should be an intrinsic part of their organisation, as well as the assessment. Business certificate II is allocated something like 320 hours a year. I said, 'If you need 320 hours to assess 12 modules, you guys should be sacked for incompetence.'

Senator SIEWERT—TAFE is registered as an RTO in the Kimberley, so does that no make them a training organisation?

Mr Barnes—Absolutely, that is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—We will follow that one up. You are providing the training now independently. The problem with that is that people will not have certificates at the end of it.

Mr Barnes—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—So their skills are not as transferable as they would have been if they had their certificate.

Mr Barnes—That is correct, but the truth is that they were not going to get those certificates under TAFE under the current regime.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand but the upshot of that is not only that it is costing you thousands but at the end they will have the skills but not the piece of paper to prove that they have the skills.

Mr Barnes—Effectively, I got Debbie down on a trial run in March this year. She came down I believe on a Thursday. We had training Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. We got more skills into the store in four days than TAFE could do in 12 months. That is the bottom line. It does not matter which way you cut the cake; that is the way it adds up in reality. Even though these traineeships have been cancelled, I have not cancelled the people. I have not given up on the people. You guys need to know the reality of what is going on here. There needs to be a degree of accountability. I would raise as an issue of concern to the inquiry the money flow that goes through Job Futures, through KGT, CDEP, these institutions. I can tell you that with CDEP a big problem in this town is ghosting. People get paid sit-down money. They sign the book but nothing gets down for the day and they get paid. People need to wake up.

As an employer in this town, when a person can ghost on the job—and they do that for years with CDEP—it becomes an ingrown culture so that when they get a break and go to private enterprise, they expect to continue that form of behaviour. Private enterprise cannot put up with that sort of behaviour. If you are paying a guy or a lady to do the job, you need that person on the job and you need them doing a good job.

CHAIR—Indeed.

Mr Barnes—It is a systemic problem here in Halls Creek. I know there will be people upset by the fact that I come here and voice that opinion, but it is a systemic problem and it is something that needs looking at. Governments should not be paying people money to do nothing.

CHAIR—Do you have any correspondence between TAFE and yourself in regard to your dissatisfaction?

Mr Barnes—No because TAFE always respond by phone. They are very slippery in their dealings. So far as I am concerned, I am not the only person who has had problems with TAFE. If you talk around some of the training organisations you will find that there are express concerns there as well. I do not beat around the bush; I just say it the way it is.

Another issue I want to raise with you guys concerns me greatly—and it is covered in the cover page of that major letter. It is the disenfranchisement of Aboriginals in and on their own land. I went to a business meeting last year, which in part is recorded in that main letter. The only Aboriginal in the room was my manager. I looked around the room and I said to the people who called the meeting, ‘Where are the Aboriginal business people of this town?’ ‘Oh, the Aboriginal business people—who are they?’ I said, ‘You guys are the Aboriginal industry experts. How come you don’t know them?’ I record some of those people on the second page of that letter.

The thing is that, if government wants policies to work in Halls Creek—and we are talking at federal government, state government and local government levels—there needs to be an engagement with the community. You cannot have a community that is 84 per cent Aboriginal

and totally disenfranchise them from the process as though we are running some sort of surrogate apartheid and then say at the end, 'It has gone through due process so it is going to work.' People have to pull their heads out of the sand and engage the community in a meaningful way. I know that sometimes that involves different processes to non-Indigenous society. I realise that because I run a store with Aboriginal labour. I am the major buyer of Aboriginal art in Halls Creek. But the local government here is running on a line of lies and deception to the state government and to the federal government. That is the message that I am essentially putting in that letter. They operate behind closed doors. They operate to a large degree without accountability. They make it sound as though there is a great need for an art centre in Halls Creek, yet every week I have major name artists coming to the store and painting major works.

There are opportunities here but the local government chooses to ignore it because their agenda is that they want to say to you, the federal government, 'We need $1 million to set up an art centre in Halls Creek.' After art centres No. 1 and No. 2 failed, they now want funding for a third art centre when there is effectively a major art buying business operating as a free enterprise in Halls Creek that costs the government zero. Not only will they come to you for funding to build that art centre; they will also say, 'Now we need a budget of $200,000 or more a year to actually run it.' I would challenge you to show me one art centre in the Kimberley that is running cash flow positive and not relying on government subsidies. That is what we are really talking about here.

CHAIR—Is there someone in town who provides a market for people who choose to paint? I understand that people go down to the TAFE and paint there, but that is not a centre. I know that from time to time they go down there, but I was not exactly sure about their circumstances. Do people in the town provide a market for buying people's art?

Mr Barnes—I am the major art buyer in town. We are sinking a six-figure sum into art each year. We have Warlpiri and Pintubi artists coming across from the NT border to sell their art at Taylors Store, and my advertising budget is zero. The fact is that we do it differently from the art centres. We pay upfront for the art and we do not rip off the artists. We also encourage Indigenous crafts, as in making coolamons, digging sticks, tap sticks, fighting sticks and shields—an art that is dying with the current generation that is in front of our eyes. We put a value on it and we pay them upfront for those artefacts. The fact that today we can buy from in excess of 100 artists from the East Kimberley is indicative that we are doing something right. We buy off about 30 artists at Balgo. They have a government-sponsored art centre there. Why do they travel from Balgo to Halls Creek to deal with Taylors Store? Yet local government goes to the government and says, 'We want funding for an art centre.' It is about time a few truths came out into the open.

CHAIR—Mr Barnes, I do not think we have any more questions. We managed to slip you in, but we have run out of time. If we have some matters of clarification, which we may well do, we will provide those to you on notice through the secretariat. This is a standing committee of the parliament, so if you wish to add to your submission you may do so at any time, and that can be provided to us through the secretariat. Thank you very much for providing your evidence today.

Mr Barnes—Thank you.

[3.34 pm]

BEDFORD, Ms Joan, Committee Member, Ngaringga Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation Safehouse

REICHEL, Mrs Dale, Manager/Coordinator, Ngaringga Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation Safehouse

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I invite you to make some opening remarks or tell us the sorts of things you want to know. When you have concluded that I will ask my colleagues to ask you some questions.

Mrs Reichel—I am new in the area so I am fairly new to all of this. Joan has been very helpful with some input. I am going to do most of the speaking and if Joan would like to speak I would welcome that. I have written down a few major issues. I have an idea of where you are coming from, having heard a bit of what you have done today.

Firstly, I wanted to address the alcohol restrictions. In the business that we are in—providing safe accommodation for people in domestic violence situations—we have found it extremely helpful. Once again I have only been here since the beginning of June, and I am not sure of the dates when the alcohol restrictions commenced. We did notice, according to statistics, that our numbers dropped remarkably when those restrictions came in. So it has had a very positive impact in regard to fewer DV clients. For the first month I was employed there were hardly any clients there due to alcohol related domestic violence. In July the numbers increased slightly. In August they have increased again. I do not really know the reasons for that except that people have been able to obtain full-strength alcohol.

Clients seem to be remaining for longer period whereas prior to this they were coming in for one night and we were not really able to work with the people. They were coming halfway through the night and going home first thing in the morning. The clients that we have had recently have come and stayed for a week or two, which has been very beneficial. We have been able to work with them and to contact a lot of other agencies and service providers in the area to assist them in whatever their needs are. We do what we can and we make support plans and reach out to the other services.

We also have access to emergency relief funds at the safehouse. We provide food vouchers generally. In June and July we also observed that there were very few food vouchers handed out. That was around about the commencement time of the alcohol restrictions. Once again, in August, we are on the increase again. I guess you can draw your own conclusions from that. We are grateful for the alcohol restrictions and we support that. I will hand over to Joan.

Ms Bedford—We find that accommodation in Halls Creek is not the best. There is overcrowding in housing amongst Indigenous people and that is causing illness.

CHAIR—Do you have an estimate for how many people can be living in the one house?

Ms Bedford—Fifteen to 20 people can be in a house, kids included. It is causing abuse and a lot of sickness in the houses. They are put into substandard houses, houses that are in a poor condition.

CHAIR—They seem to go hand in hand—overcrowding and houses in poor condition.

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Mrs Reichel—Joan is in an occupation where she works with children and supports families.

Ms Bedford—I am actually working in parent support with the Department for Child Protection. I am working very closely with my cases. I have found so much going on in the houses, with the overcrowding. There are kids who are failing to thrive and stuff like that.

CHAIR—Without getting into any particular cases, in what ways does the overcrowding specifically impact on the children? I know there are a number of ways and you have alluded to the neglect.

Ms Bedford—You are getting drunks walking into the house as well. They are going home and helping themselves to the contents of the fridge. They are eating the kids' food and stuff and crashing wherever they can in the house.

CHAIR—What about the safety for some of the kids.

Ms Bedford—That is the big part that we looked at—finding a safe place for the kids. We are working with the parents.

Mrs Reichel—There was no full-time manager from October 2008 to the beginning of June. They were unable to employ anyone. I believe the main reason was accommodation. There was nowhere to accommodate anybody if they applied for the job. There was nowhere they could work. That was one of the major reasons that they could not get someone to manage the place. They had a few stand-in people which was great. Fortunately, a house was available for my husband's employment and that is how I was able to come here. If he changed his employment, we would both have to leave town because there is nowhere else for us to live.

CHAIR—So there is basically no private rental market.

Mrs Reichel—There is nowhere available to rent. Not even in a caravan park.

CHAIR—Do you know how much people would pay a week here for a standard house?

Mrs Reichel—I do not really know.

CHAIR—That is okay. We will ask someone else.

Mrs Reichel—Accommodation also needs to be addressed for clients desiring to escape domestic violence. Otherwise, they have no option but to go back to where the perpetrator is or to other family members with overcrowded houses and the same sorts of problems will arise.

They often need to leave town and go to other communities as far away as Broome to escape the perpetrators but we find that all the communities around seem to have the housing problem. I have rung even this week about a client who needs to go to another town and they said, 'Even with priority housing, you'd be very lucky. It is twelve months away.' How am I going to get this woman out of here? She has nowhere to go. We will work something out but we do not have anything at the moment. She has been there a week and a half and I am not sure where she is going. She has two little ones.

I would like to make a suggestion that there is some transitional accommodation made available to our clients so that is a next step. There are some that stay for a couple of weeks and they would be great candidates to have some support, a little less support, but still be able to feel safe and have accommodation on the premises. We have a block next door or there is other land around on the back of the safe house belonging to the DCP I believe.

Other services in Halls Creek sometimes require accommodation for individuals on a short-term basis. We have some vacant rooms that are seldom full but our contracts state that we are only allowed to allow people in for domestic violence and boys must be under 12. The other day we had a client with a 12-year-old boy. They lied about the date of birth two years the wrong way and made the child 14! I do not know who I need to contact. Perhaps the service agreements could be lightened up or have exception clauses for other people because there are the needs of people who attend court or who come to the hospital for a visit, but we have to consider the personal safety of staff and others so that comes into it.

The last point I would like to make is about counselling. A large number of people here require counselling, and I have had a lot of people coming to my doorstep saying, 'Will you counsel me? I have this issue.' Just like people go to the doctor's surgery up the road; I am wondering if there could possibly be a counselling service where people could go if they need help with anything. There are various counselling services but, for example, our women would not necessarily go up to the alcohol centre, because there are men there who are family men, and if they have just been in domestic violence situation they do not want to go up there. There are a few blockages. I think that a child psychologist is a real need—and Joan thinks we are getting one—because we have children in, and they often get swept under the carpet because we are dealing with the parents' needs. The children often just go along with the package. It would be great if a child psychologist were to come.

One other point is funding. I have observed that our budget needs urgent attention. We will look at that, and if there is any way we can reduce it we will. But we simply do not have enough money to provide any extras or even the basics. I will be looking at grants available, because our building urgently requires an upgrade and maintenance, and the vehicles are falling to pieces.

CHAIR—What about the premises here—the shelter itself?

Mrs Reichel—The premises is a Homes West premises, but we are supposed to maintain it.

CHAIR—Can you tell me a little bit about it: how many rooms you have got—

Mrs Reichel—We have four bedrooms, two bathrooms for clients, an extra toilet, and then we have got a huge laundry. We have a big courtyard in the middle, we have a lounge room and a

kitchen for clients, and we have a small office for staff, which is pretty secure for night time. The clients' rooms are also secure. We have an entry, a manager's office, and there is a bathroom for staff.

CHAIR—So the whole place is pretty secure?

Mrs Reichel—It is fairly secure. We have something like a cage on the front, where visitors can come and attend, but we do not allow men to come on the property unless they are doing some maintenance. There are a lot of locks and things that you have to get through. I actually climbed on the roof the other day to get the leaves off, and I could have climbed right over the roof and into the safe house. So I do not believe it is as secure as it could be. I think that men have climbed over there previously.

CHAIR—Do you have any other rules—for example, if you have someone there who clearly needs some assistance, who is a victim, but they are also intoxicated, do you have a rule about being intoxicated?

Mrs Reichel—Yes. We do not allow anyone in who is intoxicated. We would call the sober-up shelter and the night patrol would come and collect them. However, it is not open on the weekends. So we are in trouble if they are intoxicated. I allowed one in the other day, and I shouldn't have. I knew of her situation and she was not violent, so I allowed her to come in.

CHAIR—What would happen on a weekend if somebody were to turn up intoxicated but obviously in need of protection? What happens? Do you just turn them away?

Mrs Reichel—We would call the police or the night patrol—

CHAIR—Okay, but you would call someone. You would not just say, 'Go away.'

Mrs Reichel—No.

Senator SIEWERT—Can we go back to the comments you were making about the decrease and then the increase in the number of people who are coming in? Are the numbers still lower than they were previously?

Mrs Reichel—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—So it has not been a return back to—

Mrs Reichel—No, there has not been a return back to what it was, but I can just see it creeping up.

Senator SIEWERT—I know you said you want some funding for some counselling services; what happens now? How do people get counselling at the moment—or does it just not happen?

Mrs Reichel—I am a counsellor, so I counsel people. We have a few other counsellors in town. There is the alcohol centre, but it is not appropriate for our clients. There is a psychologist who comes into town every two weeks, but that is not always appropriate if the person is in need

now. They cannot necessarily wait until the psychologist comes into town. It is the same problem we have with legal services—although I have just found out we have legal aid right there! I have rung Kimberley legal services to contact lawyers and they have gone, 'Yeah, we'll come down in two weeks,' but by that time the client has gone back home and does not want to put custody things in place.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. Have you spoken to the police or to other service providers in town about the increase in the numbers of people coming in? Do you have any thoughts about why they are increasing again?

Mrs Reichel—I have. My husband works at the Sobering Up Shelter—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, we saw him this morning.

Mrs Reichel—yes—so I have discussed it with him. I have been in a few meetings with the Department for Child Protection. The Minister for Child Protection was up here a few weeks back and those kinds of issues were discussed. There are various reasons maybe. We think the reason is that the alcohol is back, whether or not it is through people bringing it back to Kununurra. I have also heard from different people in the community, 'Oh, we just buy light beer now and then we go and top up at the pub to get drunk.' That is the cheaper way to do it, unfortunately.

Senator SIEWERT—We took evidence yesterday at Fitzroy Crossing, where people were saying that they are concerned that support services have not been put in place to back up the restrictions, and I am wondering if that is the same situation here. What people were saying to us yesterday is, 'We've got a window of opportunity here.' Is it the same thing here, or are the circumstances different?

Mrs Reichel—It depends on if I am looking at it from the women's perspective. All week before I came here I asked my staff, 'How do you feel about the alcohol restrictions?' They said, 'We think they stink,' and, 'How dare they take the alcohol from us.' I said, 'But you can see that there's a difference here and that there are fewer people coming into the service.' I have not seen anyone come in with a serious injury. One person had plaster on their arm, and they said that it was not from the partner. The partner was fighting, but she fell and that was what caused the break. However, the attitude of some people is that this town is no fun anymore because there is no alcohol. So I think that support needs to be in place to try and make some fun in town to bring the community together, not necessarily with drunkenness. I do not know the answers. I have been here only a very short time.

CHAIR—Questions, Senator Adams?

Senator ADAMS—I want to ask you about the process when a woman really has a problem and needs to stay with you. Do you get the police involved and have a restraining order taken out on the perpetrator? How does it work?

Mrs Reichel—Yes, we do. We cannot enforce anything, but we certainly offer them and encourage them to do a VRO. We will either take them up to the police or call the police down. We have got application forms for that. We explain a little about a VRO. We do not know the

detail, but the police explain it as well. But we do ask them to try and protect themselves, particularly when there are children involved. We tell them that they need to keep the child safe, it is their responsibility to keep the child safe, and it is their responsibility to look after themselves as well because that way they can take care of the child. So, yes, we have a support plan and we go through all the different aspects of domestic violence, even going through budgeting and helping them to be able to withdraw their own money, and those sorts of things, because some of them do not even have access to any money.

Senator ADAMS—If that order is broken, what happens then? I know a lot of the women will go back and not understand how it works.

Mrs Reichel—Yes, they do. They frequently go back, even though they have a violence restriction order. We had a client in the last couple of weeks who had a VRO. The perpetrator was driving by regularly and she did not want that to happen. First of all I asked her whether the VRO was still in place, because she had made that previously. She said, 'Yes, it is still in place, and he shouldn't—but I don't want to put him back in jail.' I said, 'How about we ring the police anyway and just have a talk to them.' I rang the police and told them what was happening. They said, 'Does she want to press charges?' She said no. I asked her if she would like to talk to the police officer and I put her on the phone. She said, 'I do not want to press charges, but can you have a talk to him?' I don't know what happened after that, but she took off the next day. Sometimes they leave when I am not there. I have requested that clients do an exit report, asking where they are going and whether they will be safe—that sort of thing. Nothing happened because she did not want to press charges.

Senator ADAMS—They have got to live in the same community and they have got to find somewhere else to live and there are all the other problems associated with it. Do you get many that press charges?

Mrs Reichel—No. However, a few perpetrators have just come out of jail, so charges must have been pressed previously for that to occur. They have come back and moved back in and it starts all over again. Even though they have done a term in prison they come back and move back in. A few have done that in the last few weeks.

Senator MOORE—Mrs Reichel, are you part of the state and national domestic violence network? They have a group of domestic violence shelters that give each other support. They are a national network of people working in groups. We work with them regularly. The issues you are raising are being shared by people working in your groups everywhere. Eighteen months ago I was in Port Hedland and their shelter in a mining town was closing because of accommodation for workers. This is a really serious issue. I think that being part of a network gives people a chance to talk to each other and share and things like that.

Mrs Reichel—We do belong to some women's associations.

Senator MOORE—They are really useful. There is also the national domestic violence task force, which brought down its report earlier this year. Out of that has come an ongoing ministerial advisory group. The stuff that you are talking about is critical. If you get on to those networks and push them together, I think there is solidarity and a stronger voice.

Mrs Reichel—Do you know what was that called?

Senator MOORE—The national report to Tanya Plibersek, talking about domestic violence in Australia, is on the net. It is really valuable in terms of where you go. Consistently we talk about support for community members who have domestic violence issues, which is absolutely important, but support for those working in the industry is critical. I will seek them out.

Senator SIEWERT—The same thing is in Karratha. I think you are thinking of the situation there as well.

Mrs Reichel—I can find other refuges and give them a call to find out.

Senator MOORE—That network is there for you.

Mrs Reichel—I have spoken to a few other managers from different refuges. I was not aware of a network. We are also getting support from the psychologist that comes into town. I am going to join the counselling association. I am getting more counselling clients coming in. I will join that and she will be my supervisor.

Senator MOORE—That professional support is great. It is also for board members, because the board members are working for the community as well as for their families. That personal support for them is absolutely essential. There are networks out there. I will think of them and get back to you with some names and numbers.

Mrs Reichel—Thank you. I appreciate that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for the evidence you have given us today. It was quite comprehensive. We may need some points of clarification and if we have further questions we will provide you with those through the secretariat. If there is something that you think you should have told us or if something comes up that you would like to provide to the committee, this is a standing committee of parliament, so you can provide that to us at any time. That can be provided through the secretariat, of which you have the details.

Committee adjourned at 4.00 pm