



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

## SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS, SMALL  
BUS. & EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE

**Reference: Indigenous Education**

MONDAY, 26 JULY 1999

BREWARRINA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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**SENATE  
EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS, SMALL BUSINESS AND  
EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**Monday, 26 July 1999**

**Members:** Senator Collins (Chair), Senator Carr, Senator Crossin, Senator Stott Despoja, Tchen and Tierney

**Participating members:** Senators Abetz, Allison, Boswell, Brown, Brownhill, George Campbell, Crane, Crowley, Faulkner, Gibbs, Harradine, Hutchins, Mackay, O'Brien and Watson

**Senators in attendance:** Senators Collins, Tchen and Tierney

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

The effectiveness of education and training programs for indigenous Australians.

In conducting its inquiry, the committee will:

- (a) survey the recommendations arising over the past decade from parliamentary, government, commission and agency reports which deal with Aboriginal education and training;
- (b) assess the implementation, ongoing relevance and efficacy of recommendations which seek to raise educational achievement and to employ culturally-appropriate pedagogy to maximise participation of indigenous Australians in formal educational settings;
- (c) examine the extent to which recommendations aimed at improving indigenous people's educational participation and achievement have been implemented by the relevant authorities, and evaluate the benefits which have flowed from them;
- (d) identify any obstacles to the achievement of participation of indigenous Australians in education and training and make recommendations as to how these might be overcome;
- (e) examine recent initiatives which have proven successful in improving the participation rates and levels of achievement of indigenous Australians in the national vocational education and training system;
- (f) formulate advice concerning the development and management of education and training programs by indigenous Australians for indigenous Australians; and
- (g) provide a comparative account of the levels of resources, both Commonwealth and State, devoted to education and training programs for indigenous Australians.

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**Committee met at 9.15 a.m.**

**CHAIR**—I open this hearing of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee. I welcome all observers to the hearing. We are very pleased to be able to visit Brewarrina and Bourke today.

On 9 March last year the Senate asked the committee to review parliamentary, government and commission reports on indigenous education presented during the past 10 years to assess the recommendations made in these reports, investigate the extent to which action has been taken to address them, and identify any impediments to implementation. The committee was also asked among other things to identify any obstacles to the achievement of participation of indigenous Australians in education and training and make recommendations on how these might be overcome.

**CHAIR**—I welcome Miss Barker, from the Brewarrina preschool. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although the committee will also consider any request for all or part of evidence to be given in camera, which is in private. I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite Miss Barker to make a brief opening statement and then we will proceed to questions.

**Miss Barker**—I am the Director of Gainmara Birrilee Preschool. It is predominantly for Aboriginal children. We cater for 25 children per session. It is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. as a preschool. That is about it. I have come back here after 17 years away to teach back in my home town.

**CHAIR**—Miss Barker, some of the reports on indigenous education highlight the importance of preschool and the attendance at preschool. Is this one of the reasons why your school has been established as a predominantly indigenous preschool?

**Miss Barker**—I guess so. Education is important for all children, regardless of background. The earlier the foundation of education is the better way of establishing a better education for all children, I think.

**CHAIR**—But were there particular reasons that indigenous children were not attending regular preschool here?

**Miss Barker**—It would involve lots of reasons why—housing, health, education, opportunities for education. There are just lots of things involved as to why Aboriginal children do not attend. It probably stems from home a lot.

**CHAIR**—So apart from being a predominantly indigenous centre, how else do you overcome some of those problems with that focus?

**Miss Barker**—By being sensitive towards cultural needs. For example, they all pay fees, but if they have a problem with fees I tell the parents to come and talk to me and not to just not send the children. Before I came, if you did not pay your fees the children did not attend. So if you are sensitive towards the needs of our culture then I think you would make more progress with parents sending the children as well.

**CHAIR**—How many preschools are there here?

**Miss Barker**—Only one. There is a child-care centre and a mobile.

**CHAIR**—If I remember correctly, Brewarrina has roughly in the township about 50 per cent indigenous children. Is the number at the preschool the same? Would it be roughly fifty-fifty?

**Miss Barker**—No, probably eighty-twenty.

**CHAIR**—So 80 per cent of the young children are Aboriginal. Where do the non-Aboriginal children attend?

**Miss Barker**—There are places there for non-Aboriginal children as well, but also there is a child-care centre here.

**CHAIR**—Where do they mostly attend, the child care or—

**Miss Barker**—Half and half, really.

**CHAIR**—So there is not a skewed focus away from your centre?

**Miss Barker**—No. It depends whether the parents are working as well.

**CHAIR**—If they need to combine it, too.

**Miss Barker**—If they need children in the centres for a whole day then child care and preschool are involved together.

**CHAIR**—How often do you run your sessions? Is it just four-year-old kinder or—

**Miss Barker**—No, it is three to four and then four to five every day, except Friday. Only the four-year-olds come on Fridays.

**CHAIR**—How long during the day?

**Miss Barker**—Half a day up until one o'clock.

**CHAIR**—But you stay open until three, did you say?

**Miss Barker**—Yes. And 4 o'clock on Fridays as well.

**CHAIR**—Is that for additional care?

**Miss Barker**—No, that is for programming and doing lots of groundwork with the preschool.

**CHAIR**—Hands off activities?

**Miss Barker**—Yes. There are no children involved after 1 o'clock on a Friday. That is just involved with programming and reports and things like that.

**CHAIR**—After 1 o'clock on the Friday. So you have got a morning session and an afternoon session each day, except for Friday.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I understand.

**Senator TIERNEY**—As to the attendance at preschool, what percentage of indigenous children will be attending here out of the town?

**Miss Barker**—I did a report for DETYA not long ago. I think it was 76 per cent of Aboriginal children attending, and that is pretty high for Aboriginal children. It is like a census form within DETYA itself. You need to know how many times they attend, how many times they could possibly attend and things like that. You do a percentage over 100 per cent and then you get 76. You look through the roll and count up how many days they have attended, how many they could have attended and things like that. So it is 76 per cent. It is pretty high.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Yes, it is. So the balance between indigenous and non-indigenous in your centre is what?

**Miss Barker**—Sorry?

**Senator TIERNEY**—The numbers.

**Miss Barker**—It is high priority for Aboriginals, so it is more Aboriginal children than non-Aboriginal children. Also, the way we are funded, as they say, bums on seats equals Aboriginal children. We get money per head of Aboriginal children and none for non-Aboriginal children. So it is a catch-22.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Okay. So how many Aboriginal children and how many non-Aboriginal children are in your centre?

**Miss Barker**—The last I counted it was 48 Aboriginal and about 13 non-Aboriginal children.

**Senator TIERNEY**—One of the reasons it is assumed that attendance in education by Aboriginal children is not as high as it should be is because the curriculum is not as culturally sensitive as it should be. So, given the sort of balance you have got in your school, how do you handle that sort of issue—making the curriculum for your children more culturally sensitive?

**Miss Barker**—Firstly, you have to look at the individual needs of each child. But I think it is essential to have an Aboriginal implementation into the programs so that they can be familiar with the things that they are learning. For example, instead of having six pink elephants you have six kangaroos—things that they are familiar with so that they can relate to and identify with them. I think that is important.

**Senator TIERNEY**—With the 48 Aboriginal children who do attend, what is the regularity of that? Is absenteeism a problem or families moving away for various reasons?

**Miss Barker**—There is quite a lot of that that goes on. Parents move out of town, they move into town. Seasonal work, too, has got a lot to do with it—for example, with cotton, shearing and things like that. But there is a mode where they come in, go out, so you have to cater for that as well—especially catering for a range of Aboriginal children from various places like from, say, Queensland coming here, or from Sydney. So there are different cultural needs as well from each group.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned mobile units. Could you just tell me a little bit more about that—how that works and where it goes?

**Miss Barker**—I think they go around to the isolated areas on properties. They set up playgroup-type things and they set up activities. The parents have to come with their children, though. That is the difference between preschool and the mobile because the mobiles have to go out to the isolated properties and set up activities there. It is like a moving preschool, really.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Are there enough resources for the need out of town?

**Miss Barker**—That is the first time I ever went into the mobile just then. They have a lot of resources.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I meant more in terms of the number of units and frequency of visits to more isolated areas.

**Miss Barker**—I think it is only once every two months that they go and, for example, one property they would only visit twice a year. The visits to the places are not very regular.

**Senator TIERNEY**—One of the main roles of this inquiry is to look at what is happening in Aboriginal education and to pick up what is good practice and what has been tried in recent years that seems to work so that that sort of practice can be spread in other areas. Is there anything you would like to tell the committee about some of the things in Aboriginal education that you think are working quite well?

**Miss Barker**—I think, firstly, before you even try to educate any child, especially Aboriginal children, you have to give them a sense of identity of who they are, what they are and where they come from. If they know who they are and where they come from then I think they will be able to go forward and learn. But if they do not know who they are I do not think they will learn. It is important to give them an identity of who they are.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Are there any techniques for teaching and learning that you apply which you think are things that work particularly well with indigenous children?

**Miss Barker**—As I said, just teach them familiar things that they know of and not foreign things. When I went to school I used to learn about Queen Victoria. Where did she get me? Teach them the things that they know and make it fun as well. When they learn that it is not that structured—you still have the structure there—but also make it fun along the way so that they can be flexible. I think being flexible in learning is very good.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Are you finding that there are materials around that you can use which actually help that style of learning, apart from using what is in the local environment?

**Miss Barker**—What I am doing now is taking photos around the community and perhaps putting them on puzzles and things like that so that it goes back to the self-identity as well. They can see that there are Aboriginal people who pick up garbage and the things in the community that we all can do—not just one culture or whatever—so that they can be proud of themselves and see that they can do it as well. I think that is the way to go.

Last year we had Kinderstart, and I think that is very important. At the end of preschool, after the six months, we start a transition into the kindergarten with stencils and things like that so they can be familiar with it when they get there instead of wondering what it is when they get there. It will be more familiar to them. I think it has been a success so far.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What about commercially produced material for preschool Aboriginal children? Is there much of that?

**Miss Barker**—There is a little bit, but it goes back to your local culture and your groups. If you can relate to that resource then that is good. If you make resources available for your local area then I think they will learn better. Instead of something from Western Australia you could have it from Brewarrina, hopefully.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You would generate it yourself.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Thank you.

**Senator TCHEN**—Is your preschool the only preschool in Brewarrina?

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—It is the only preschool.

**Miss Barker**—For the population it is the only one.

**Senator TCHEN**—How much does your school actually meet the needs for preschool facilities in this general area?

**Miss Barker**—I think we cater very well for the needs of the children. Is that what you mean?

**Senator TCHEN**—No, what I mean is in terms of numbers. Are there sufficient places for all the children who require preschool?

**Miss Barker**—I think so. As I have said, families come and go, so there is often a space there for a child to come.

**Senator TCHEN**—I understand that the township has a population that is about 50 per cent indigenous. Why is it that only 20 per cent of your school attendance is of the non-indigenous population?

**Miss Barker**—It goes back to funding. We are funded from DETYA. If we do not have a percentage of Aboriginal children, we will not get money. So it is mainly for the Aboriginal children who attend there that we get money.

**Senator TCHEN**—Does that mean that there is a pool of children who are not attending preschool but who could attend if places were available?

**Miss Barker**—There is a scale and I make priority. Non-Aboriginal families that are in need get first priority again. So far it works out pretty well here.

**CHAIR**—I think Senator Tchen is trying to establish how much families miss out. If you need to bring in priority guidelines, presumably there are some children—

**Miss Barker**—They go onto the waiting list afterwards. It is like any centre: after you fill your capacity, then they go onto a waiting list. Then, often as not, as I said, families do come and go, so there is always a space or two.

**CHAIR**—For how long has a child been on your waiting list before being placed?

**Miss Barker**—Not very long.

**CHAIR**—A few weeks, a few months?

**Miss Barker**—A couple of weeks, really. We have all these children turning three now, so it is pretty high for the three-year-old list. That is in any centre, regardless of whether Aboriginal or not.

**Senator TCHEN**—What proportion of your students would be from families with migratory backgrounds?

**Miss Barker**—Probably one per cent. It is Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal really; there are not many with multicultural backgrounds. Is that what you mean?

**Senator TCHEN**—No, I am not talking about migrants. You have said that a lot of families move around seasonally.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—What proportion of your children come from seasonal families?

**Miss Barker**—Probably 10 per cent.

**Senator TCHEN**—So you have a core population of about 90 per cent being local.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I would like to clarify what I have understood from some of my earlier questions: a three- to four-year-old child would attend eight sessions a week. Is that right?

**Miss Barker**—No, four sessions.

**CHAIR**—Just mornings or just afternoons?

**Miss Barker**—Just mornings for the three to fours.

**CHAIR**—You have your three- to four-year-old group that runs in the mornings.

**Miss Barker**—Yes, in the mornings.

**CHAIR**—And then you have your four to fives running in the afternoons, except for Fridays when they come in the morning.

**Miss Barker**—Yes. It is a bit confusing.

**CHAIR**—Is that typical for preschools across New South Wales? My son, for instance, is in a three-year-old group and he only attends two days a week.

**Miss Barker**—In order to get the money, you need to attend more than 10 hours a week.

**CHAIR**—These are the indigenous funds?

**Miss Barker**—Indigenous, yes. So you need to attend more than 10 hours a week to get that money.

**CHAIR**—So this is part of a program designed to facilitate indigenous children also moving from preschool into school, I presume.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—What are the fees?

**Miss Barker**—Believe it or not, it is \$1.50 a day. It is very cheap.

**CHAIR**—Yes. I pay \$175 a term.

**Miss Barker**—Yes, this is very cheap. You get a hot meal, transport to and from the preschool. It is pretty good.

**CHAIR**—This is for non-indigenous kids as well?

**Miss Barker**—Yes, at the moment it is.

**CHAIR**—What do you get per head from the government in funding?

**Miss Barker**—Because we are isolated, it is \$2,000 per child.

**CHAIR**—Per annum?

**Miss Barker**—Per year, yes. But that is for Aboriginal children, not for non-Aboriginal.

**CHAIR**—Just to clarify a point I raised earlier: we mentioned that we understood the population in Brewarrina to be about 55 per cent indigenous. I thought I understood you saying earlier that there is a much higher proportion of young children who are indigenous.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Do you know roughly what that proportion is?

**Miss Barker**—No, I do not.

**CHAIR**—You do not know whether it is as high as the 80 per cent?

**Miss Barker**—I would say it would be around that mark. There are lots of little Aboriginal kids around.

**CHAIR**—Do we know whether that is because it is the indigenous people who are remaining in the region and having families; is there a problem in that young non-indigenous people are just moving out of the region, do you know?

**Miss Barker**—I am not quite sure.

**CHAIR**—That might be a better question for someone later in the day.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I believe that you have just finished a training course.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I wonder whether you could tell us something about that, in relation to your work with preschool children.

**Miss Barker**—I started in 1990. I first started at Waverley and then we had to amalgamate with Macquarie uni. I firstly started out full time, but I found it too hard, perhaps also because I was the only Aboriginal person in the classroom. I found it very hard. There was not much support with my peers—like when you go to school or whatever. But through determination I got through with blood, sweat and tears, and I finally finished last year. So it took me seven years to do.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You have been doing that part time all the way through, have you?

**Miss Barker**—Yes, and working.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is always a tough way to do it.

**Miss Barker**—Yes, I went around the long way, but I got there.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That was through Macquarie uni?

**Miss Barker**—Macquarie uni, yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—They did not have a support unit there?

**Miss Barker**—They have, but I was external so I was not there very often. I finished my last year when I was here in Brewarrina.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Congratulations.

**Ms Barker**—Thank you.

**Senator TCHEN**—Just to clarify one point: you said that you have a waiting list but that it is not a very big one.

**Miss Barker**—Yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—Can you tell me on average how many kids are on it?

**Miss Barker**—A lot of the children do not turn three until September or whatever, so it would be about eight or nine.

**Senator TCHEN**—Are you restricted in the size of your class?

**Miss Barker**—Yes, 25 per session.

**Senator TCHEN**—So you cannot take any more.

**Miss Barker**—No. It is a bit hard sometimes if you have to say no.

**Senator TCHEN**—What I mean is: are you restricted by your funding authority?

**Miss Barker**—By DOCS, yes.

**CHAIR**—Miss Barker, thank you very much for attending today.

[9.38 a.m.]

**CHAIR**—Welcome. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although we can consider any requests for all or part of evidence to be dealt with in camera, which is in private, although I would point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make an opening statement, and we will move on to questions and discussion from there.

**Miss Dufty**—Thank you very much. I read the little flier that said that I had five minutes, so I will try to stick to that. I am well noted for going over the five minutes. Brewarrina Central School caters for kindergarten to year 12 students in the Brewarrina and local area. We currently have—our population enrolment numbers do float a little bit—about 250 students, 97.5 per cent of whom are Aboriginal. That is roughly 160 in the primary section and 80-odd in the secondary section. As I said before—and you may ask some questions on them—I do have statistics. We do have a fairly transient population of kids enrolling and that is why I was a little late this morning; we had six new enrolments this morning, and I like to speak to all the parents.

We have 23 teachers. This is just some interesting data for you: in 1998, out of the 23 staff we had, 19 were new and, of that 19, 11 were beginning teachers. Last year also, of the five executive, two of us were full time and the rest were in relieving positions. So it was quite a difficult year in a lot of ways. We have difficulties with casual teachers coming into the town.

We offer a full range of subjects across the KLAs, the key learning areas, especially in the secondary area. We offer HSC subjects which we supplement through the Distance Education Centre at Dubbo and in Walgett; this is for students who want to take subjects that we are unable to offer because of limits within our timetable, and they can access them through those two facilities. Our secondary students also access TAFE through the joint secondary schools TAFE structure. That happens on one day of the week and we have plans in the future to try to expand that, depending on funding and teacher availability.

Our Aboriginal staff and our support staff: I have five school assistants, two of whom are Aboriginal people. We have two designated Aboriginal education assistants and one special education assistant who happens to be an Aboriginal person. Also, through other Aboriginal program funding, we employ another four to five casual people throughout the year; at the moment they happen to be Aboriginal people because of the Aboriginal programs' funding.

We have many focus programs, we run a country area program. We are a disadvantaged school, so we run programs through that extra funding. We have funding through IESIP and Aboriginal program funding for vocational education and careers programs. We also access Aboriginal programs' money to support our Aboriginal language program that operates in the secondary section which we use in years 7 and 8. We run programs for retention of students, literacy in middle schools; and our kinders start our early literacy program, which Frayne Barker just mentioned, which is also funded that way. At the moment we are in the middle of re-establishing an AECG, an Aboriginal education consultative group or committee which has not been functioning for the last two years; I had a meeting about that on Friday.

Another very important project on which I have some statistics is one funded again through Aboriginal programs: the Aboriginal Mobility Project. This basically tracks students moving in

and out of the school. Part of the program focuses on intensive literacy for children in year 4 and students in year 8. That project has been running since the end of term for 1998 and it has just been extended until this term. As I have said, I have some statistics on that which I can talk to you about.

We have a huge focus towards Aboriginal education in our school with 97.5 per cent of our students being Aboriginal. We have implemented the Aboriginal Education Policy, which is a government policy of New South Wales education. We are in the middle now of reviewing all of our curriculums and making sure that we have an Aboriginal focus and perspective in each of those KLAs. We are trying to consult with the local Aboriginal population to attempt to get a lot of their input into that because they have the knowledge and we do not.

Another area with our school that is of concern, and it is important, is that we are affected by our absentee rates. They can be high at times, particularly in the area of boys who are turning 14 to 15 years of age and who are at about that time ready to drop out of school. We have a home-school liaison program that runs within the school; we try to target students and their families to support their needs to have those students coming to school; we try to look at the school curriculum to change things around so that they feel more supported about coming to school. We also try to target the odd days that children have off, because they build up. One day a fortnight can soon build up into being a significant amount at the end of the semester.

To finish off, our key strengths are: we have strong support from organisations within the town; we have built a strong link with the preschool in Brewarrina; the parents are generally supportive of issues within the school; and we have—as a lot of schools do—a small, dedicated group of parents who are willing to assist with a lot of school functions and transport to school sport events and things like that. These organisations took over the control of our celebrations for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Week, which we had during the last week of school and which was a success.

The major concerns for parents at our school, like those of most parents, are that the students attend school regularly, that they wear a uniform, and that they are doing the same subjects that any child would be doing anywhere in the state. Most parents would have that concern about their full needs being catered for. They basically want the children's background to be respected, and for their children to feel happy, safe and comfortable coming to school. That is just a quick wrap-up; I am sure you have got many questions that you would like to ask me.

**CHAIR**—Can you tell me what your retention rate is?

**Miss Dufty**—I probably could not tell you in percentage terms. In the past, it has been quite poor. It depends on what aspect of retention you are looking at; for example, 15-year olds staying on to finish their school certificate. As I said, I do not have statistics and I have only been here for a year and a half, but I believe that there has been a major change in retention rates through changing some of our course structures and the design of some subjects. In the past, we would have had only two or three students in each grade, out of about 10, staying on to complete years 11 and 12. With this year's year 11, we started off with 19 students and we are down to 14, which I think is tremendous—we will keep those students until the end of year 12. It is quite exciting.

We offer Pathways in years 11 and 12, so the students can do their HSC over five years if they want to. We try to encourage the students to do it over three years, so that they do a full

year of year 11 and then do three year 12 subjects in each year, so that they can concentrate, get support and finish off their HSC year with those three subjects. This year, we advertised for mature students to come back—ones that might have been 18 and 19 and had not finished years 11 and 12—and a few of those came back. We have one woman who is a bit older than the rest of us—I will not say her age—but she has come back, too. She is one of the parents, and she is completing three subjects in year 11.

**CHAIR**—That statistic is not surprising. The one area where the indigenous education rate is higher than that of the general population is for the over-30s—the returning to school phenomenon.

**Miss Dufty**—It has a bit to do with staffing, too; having the numbers of staff that can cater for the students. We had them dropping out at the end of year 10—they did not seem to see that it was important to stay on. In this year's year 10, we will probably keep eight out of the 10 that we have.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned in your earlier statement the mobility issues. What can you tell us about the mobility of the population? One question I have, for instance, is in relation to the seasonal factors: are kids going and coming back, and what are they doing in the interim?

**Miss Dufty**—There is a program—and I do not know whether you have heard of it—funded through Aboriginal programs, called the Aboriginal Mobility Projects, so we are getting data. There are two whole documents—and someone has borrowed my copies so I had to have the one page of the specific data faxed through. For example, as of 22 March this year, when a child arrives at the school, we fill in a form and that is faxed off to a database in Bathurst. That information is then fed through to the school that the student left. They will then fax through to us a form about the student's literacy and numeracy rates and any other issues that they want us to know.

The idea behind it was that they do not have that lapse in time with their schooling. We are not taking weeks and weeks to find out whether they are in a support class, or whatever; we will get it on a one-page form. From the beginning of the year till 23 March we had 46 new enrolments at our school and we had 22 students leave. That was in a month and a half. We started on about 6 February. That is quite significant when you are talking about 250 students. That was 60-odd movements.

There is some other data. I went through our enrolments from last year. We had the human rights commission here earlier in the year doing an inquiry into education so I gathered some of the data for them. We have had 62 enrolments so far in 1999 with 22 being new kindergarten students. That was one part.

**CHAIR**—Kindergarten is, in Victorian terms, prep?

**Miss Dufty**—Yes. I looked through our enrolment book last year and, while I do not have those statistics in front of me, I remember counting. We had about 116 students enrolled during that year and out of that number, 57 left. Half can come during the year and half can leave.

**CHAIR**—Do we know where they go?

**Miss Dufty**—We have a few schools that we have twinning with. A few families go back and forth from Goodooga, for example. Surprisingly, there are not many students going back and forth from Bourke, which is interesting. More are going down to Mildura and that area and also to Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo. They would be our main areas with families going back and forth.

**CHAIR**—Is there a problem with children leaving and not enrolling elsewhere?

**Miss Dufty**—Yes, there is.

**CHAIR**—What level of problem are we talking about there?

**Miss Dufty**—I get very concerned about it at times. We have our Home School Liaison Program, of course, but we can only do things within the limit of our knowledge if we know where the students are. For example, on Friday I was chasing through with DOCS about a student that I was worried about. I knew he had gone to Sydney. They found out the address. Later today I will put a referral through for DOCS and I have actually got that student's address in Sydney. He has not enrolled at a school.

Of course, if they enrol in a private school, unless the private school rings us and lets us know—and that can sometimes happen—or if they go out of state, unless the school rings and says that they have such and such enrolled there, students can go missing. You can have them come back after three years. I have been shocked in my time when we have picked up students that have not attended school for 12 months or more. Part of the problem is that when some of our kids go to Sydney the environment is just so difficult for them. It is a huge centre and they are coming from Brewarrina to go to Sydney. They are too frightened to go to school. They might have to get on a train and two buses to go school and they just do not attend school.

The simple solution, you would say, would be to come back to Brewarrina, which they eventually do. It is a significant problem at times with students just disappearing. It is not to say that people are not following through. If a student has not attended school for three days in a row, we check with our Aboriginal staff in town here. It is a small town, so we can find out where kids are and whether they are sick, or whatever. But if they disappear out of town and you do not have a forwarding address, which sometimes can happen—

**CHAIR**—Is there a problem associated with seasonal work possibilities for the parents?

**Miss Dufty**—I have not noticed it as much here. I know Bourke notices it very much.

**CHAIR**—It is a basic question of whether the only employment available for certain people is seasonal work and whether it is not close to educational facilities. Does the school system, the terms of school, actually suit the rest of the community environment? You are suggesting not so much here but in other schools.

**Miss Dufty**—I have not noticed it a great deal here. We have some families that seem to go down to Mildura at certain times but it is a very small percentage. It might be one per cent, if that—not even that, I think. I have not noticed it as much here.

**CHAIR**—My final question is in relation to your 97.5 per cent indigenous population. Why doesn't that reflect the general community level of indigenous population?

**Miss Dufty**—Basically, if you look at our primary schoolers—and we have about 160 children—we have two non-Aboriginal children in our primary school. A great proportion of the non-Aboriginal children go to the Catholic school in town here. I suppose that is a reflection of our secondary school where, out of 85 students, we have got eight non-Aboriginal children. Families may send them away after the end of year 6 to boarding schools, or some students go down to Nyngan, I believe, or to Narromine, and board privately to go to school.

**CHAIR**—Is there a Catholic secondary college here?

**Miss Dufty**—No. I suppose that is why there are 97.5 per cent and why we have a very small non-Aboriginal population in our school: students tend to go to the Catholic school.

**CHAIR**—Do you have an understanding of why that occurs?

**Miss Dufty**—No, not really. I have been here for only a couple of years. I have talked to people about it and apparently it has not been a significant drop; it has been happening over 20 or 30 years. We have one teacher that is back working in our school that worked in the school in about 1979-80 and he said there was probably only 10 per cent to 15 per cent of non-Aboriginal children then in the school.

Certainly, having students going away for their secondary education is what many rural towns are experiencing. I have worked in a number of rural schools around the place and it tends to be that a lot of families, if they can possibly manage it, see that sending their children away for their secondary education will broaden their perspectives. Really, no, I do not have any answers for that.

**CHAIR**—I was asking Miss Barker, also, the proportion of children who are indigenous versus non-indigenous. Do you have any understanding of that—any further than you might have heard earlier? Do we have a rough idea?

**Miss Dufty**—In the town?

**CHAIR**—It appears as if it is the indigenous people in this region that are actually having children—

**Miss Dufty**—I think that is probably fairly true. If you look at it and someone, I am sure, from St Patrick's will be able to tell you their actual enrolment. I would say they might have 70 or 80 non-Aboriginal students at their school and we have 160 Aboriginal students, roughly. So I suppose it is about double, isn't it? That would be a rough way of working it out, I suppose. Obviously, there are more Aboriginal children in the town.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned that there are 19 new staff there this year out of 23.

**Miss Dufty**—Last year.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What special problems did the fact that you had 19 new staff create for you as principal?

**Miss Dufty**—It was an interesting year, you could say, because I was new as principal. One other executive had been here for two years and the rest were in a relieving capacity. We did have some support. There was a trial program funded through the Department of Education for induction of beginning teachers and the department came up with some money to allow us to send our beginning teachers to be mentored by experienced teachers across the district. They were mainly in Dubbo and Narromine and places like that. The money allowed for the teachers to go away for a couple of days and, also, for that mentor to come up to the school to work with the staff. That did help us out and supported them a lot.

The project started a week before school came back and most of those teachers took part. Of course, not all had been appointed, and it took us about four weeks to get them all so some of them missed out. We had about six at the beginning of the year and, in the week before school started, we ran various programs—a bit to do with professional behaviour and all sorts of things about the life of a teacher in the department.

They were paid as casual teachers, which was really great. I suppose it have been difficult to get people here in the holidays or when they were not being paid. So it was quite successful, and I think that helped us a lot in inducting them into the teaching profession.

But, the associated problems are that many of them have not lived in a rural area before and they are very inexperienced. Many may not have ever met an Aboriginal person before. A significant part of that project and all of our work within the school is inducting the staff at our school into Brewarrina, having local Aboriginal people speaking about the past in Brewarrina and Aboriginal history in this town, and Aboriginal culture, and implementing the Aboriginal education policy. Even a part of our school development day last Monday was down at the Aboriginal cultural museum where we went through a few units of work. It was an interesting year.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is that turnover of staff typical or was that just an unusual year?

**Miss Dufty**—It was not typical at all. It was just how it worked out. Hopefully, it will not ever happen again. There were people who had resigned or transferred and when the principal position came up there were problems filling the executive positions—and there always is in schools like ours. For example, the assistant principal position had been advertised four or five times and luckily enough, at the end of last year, we did fill it with a very talented person. That position is now filled. It is not typical.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What would normally be the turnover of staff?

**Miss Dufty**—I would say that next year we would still have a significant amount. We probably will have seven or eight teachers leave. When I said 19 new staff during the course of the year, we had teachers coming right from the beginning of the year till two weeks before the end of the year. It was an interesting year.

The other problem is that we do not have casual teachers and that is the biggest difficulty. The department has done a lot for us in helping at the moment. They have appointed a mobile person to help out and we have two other casuals that we have advertised across the state to bring out here but there are just not casual teachers here in town. I am sure the people from St Patrick's will say they have the same problem.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Staff absenteeism is a problem that requires a need for casual teachers?

**Miss Dufty**—Not absenteeism. We have got a really terrific staff in that they do not take a lot of sick days but with a lot of beginning staff and with a lot of initiatives that are happening with the new HSC and the changes to the school certificate, you naturally have to train people. There is a heck of a lot happening in the new HSC. For the next term we will have our teachers going off to various board of studies things so you need casuals in that way. Because our school is a country area program school, an isolated school, a disadvantaged school with Aboriginal programs funding coming in, a lot of that means teachers being released to do various things. Because of that you do need casuals. We have a pretty good staff for absenteeism. They look after their colleagues. They do not take too many days off.

**Senator TIERNEY**—For the special circumstances in your school, they have not appointed a supernumerary person to take care of that casual problem?

**Miss Dufty**—Just this term we have got one, but not previously.

**Senator TIERNEY**—From what you have said, I take it that the 11 beginning teachers have never met an Aboriginal person before. Have any of them had any special training in relation to Aboriginal education?

**Miss Dufty**—Only what they would have done in their course.

**Senator TIERNEY**—But did they do anything in their course?

**Miss Dufty**—Very little, I think.

**Senator TIERNEY**—They would be from a range of universities and colleges?

**Miss Dufty**—Even if you have done some Aboriginal education and training it is also very important in a town like Brewarrina that we have the local people coming in and speaking to our new teachers and staff about the Brewarrina story. You have got to make it localised. A significant part of it, too, has been letting people know about what happened on the Aboriginal mission and the various other things that have happened over the years regarding Aboriginal education and the background and the baggage that a lot of parents may be bringing with them concerning education. That has got to be localised, I believe.

**Senator TIERNEY**—With your percentage of Aboriginal children—97.5 per cent—is that typical? For example, in Walgett and Bourke would there be a similar thing?

**Miss Dufty**—No, I do not believe so. Certainly not in Bourke. Walgett primary school may be different. I would imagine that Walgett primary school would be up in the 80 to 90 per cent range and Goodooga, as well. I do not think that Bourke is as high. I would not like to quote but I think that they have about 53 per cent of Aboriginal children.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned in response to Senator Collins that with secondary a lot of the non-indigenous population go away to other schools and bigger centres. But in primary schools, compared to your primary section of the central school, what do you see as the reason

for the non-indigenous population sending their children to the Catholic school? I assume they are not all Catholics.

**Ms Dufty**—I believe, again, the Catholic school would be able to fill you in. I believe they have a quota of Catholic students. I am not really sure. There have been various things said to me at different times. Some of it is historic stuff and maybe older brothers and sisters have gone down to that school. I do not know. Maybe it is a perception of what they see our school is about. I constantly say to people, 'Do not have perceptions from what you see downtown, or what you have heard. Come in and have a look at the school; see what is happening and see the work that the teachers are doing.' I do not know for sure, but perhaps one reason is the perception of what happens at the school.

Over the years—and again I am probably saying this in the capacity of a private person and because I have lived in many country towns—I think there might be a perception sometimes that, as things have become tough for rural people moneywise, sometimes there is the misconception that a lot of Aboriginal families get heaps and heaps of money given to them. Maybe there is a bit of jealousy and misunderstanding there, and if they have another option they might send their students to another school. I really do not know, but I say that in a private capacity because I have lived and worked in a number of rural areas and have heard people in the past. As far as our school goes, I do not know.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned that the retention rates for moving through to year 12 have gone up quite dramatically.

**Ms Dufty**—Yes, that is very exciting.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Can you put that down to anything? Is there anything happening in the program?

**Ms Dufty**—In the last year and a half the staff has actively pursued that. I want people to see years 11 and 12 as a possibility for students. In the past students basically did most of their subjects through distance education where they get their package of work sent to them. It is high quality stuff, there is no doubt about it, but if you have students that do not have study skills and independent work habits and you send them a package of work and we pop them into a room and tell them to work through the work and then hand it to the teacher at the end and they might have a quick flick through it and send it off, they drop out.

We do not deny the students access to any subjects they want to take. If they want to take something from distance education they may, but we really encourage them to take the courses that we have on offer. We have a teacher in front of all of our year 11 and 12 classes now. It is through doing bits and pieces with staffing and changing around our timetable a little bit that we have been able to do it. I have to sit and have a look at next year to see how we will go as well if our numbers stay the same. We have our year 12 English students with a teacher in front of them. For the year 11 class we have encouraged Pathways. We should have actually had four students in year 12 this year but one of them has decided to go on and do the HSC this year and the other three opted to do Pathways. They are doing three subjects of their HSC and they will do another three next year. I think we are supporting them a little bit more and we are advertising that support.

**Senator TIERNEY**—When they finish year 12, what happens?

**Ms Dufty**—Because I have not been here for a great deal of time, I know, for example, our one girl in year 12 last year is at Armidale university doing a business degree, which is very exciting for our school. She did very well. I know a couple of the students from year 12 the year before and one of those I know is in Brewarrina seeking training. I think she is also trying to join the police force. One of the other girls in that year went to university. From the year before that I know that one fellow is at the bank here with a job. Because we are only talking about two or three students in the year, we have been able to track them a little bit more.

Of the ones that would have left at the end of year 10, I imagine a great many of those are either here in town unemployed, or working at the 'roo works' here. Of last year's year 10, most of them, of course, went on to year 11 and two dropped out. One is working on the CDEP and the other one is working at the 'roo works' so we had a great retention at the end of last year's year 10, which was terrific.

We do have a problem—and it is probably my biggest concern at the moment—with boys in that 14 to 15 age group and with students dropping out as soon as they turn 15. The leaving age is 14 years and nine months, but I try to kid them out of it and make them stay until they are at least 15. I tell them they cannot go. They are the ones we have tried to target in our year 7 to 10 classes by making a transition class—that is still in the development stage—where we run work education. The kids are actually doing career type courses. Ultimately, next year, hopefully with work placements, they might attend school three days a week and do two days a week in work placement. Maybe that will encourage them to stay on at school.

That is another reason why we offered our joint secondary schools-TAFE course. We have two subjects running, and they are taster courses really. We are offering a combination of fabrication welding, concrete industries and tool fabrication just to give them a taste of what is available so that they might be encouraged to go to TAFE and enrol in something else. The other course we are running is a combination of computer type subjects, with word processing, database management, spreadsheets and things like that.

**Senator TIERNEY**—If they want to go to TAFE, what are their options from here?

**Miss Dufty**—They are fairly limited. The TAFE college does everything it can with the staffing it can get. The biggest problem is getting trained staff for TAFE. The greatest advantage, I believe—this is my pie in the sky wish—would be if our school took over the TAFE college. There are a few things that need to be worked out there to do with awards—TAFE teachers work under a different award from school teachers—but maybe, through the department, we could attract more teachers to Brewarrina Central School who would have some of their workload at the school and some of their workload at TAFE. At the moment there is a facility at the TAFE here to do welding but no facility to do any building type projects. Maybe our school could be accessed to do that, because we have a woodwork room.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So you build a more credible mass to make it work a lot better.

**Miss Dufty**—Yes, I think so. Especially for our secondary school teachers, perhaps it would mean more staff. At the moment a lot of our secondary school teachers are a one-person faculty. It might mean that we have two D&T trained teachers and a computer studies trained teacher in our school. It might support them a little more.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Have you put that idea to the department?

**Miss Dufty**—I have done lots of speaking about it. Later in the month there is going to be a tour of Brewarrina, and we might be able to put those ideas through a bit more. But, no, I have not spoken formally to the department. I have done a lot of talking to a lot of people about it. I think it needs to happen.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Thank you very much.

**Senator TCHEN**—Ms Dufty, you mentioned that one of your problems is the high drop-out rate of boys in year 10. What proportion of your year 11 and 12 students are boys?

**Miss Dufty**—Actually, it is probably fifty-fifty. Out of the 14 students, there are probably seven boys and seven girls. I suppose it is just a problem we have at the moment. As I said, this is only my second year here. There is a group of about eight boys who should be at school in year 9—they are actually younger than the year 10s—and it is very difficult to get them to come to school.

**Senator TCHEN**—Is that just this year or, in your experience, has it been continuing for some time?

**Miss Dufty**—It has probably been an ongoing thing.

**Senator TCHEN**—So what happened to the girls? They must have dropped out at the same time.

**Miss Dufty**—I suppose I am looking at this year's year 9. There are many more boys in that group. I know what you are saying, but it is significant that there is a greater drop-out of boys than girls over the years. I do not know why that is. A lot of studies have focused on girls' education, and it has succeeded a lot. Now we are working on boys' education.

**Senator TCHEN**—I should probably put this question to St Patrick's School later, but I will put it to you anyway: do you know whether there are any indigenous students at the Catholic school?

**Miss Dufty**—I do not know the percentage but certainly, yes, there are.

**Senator TCHEN**—So there are not two patterns of studies in the town—one for the indigenous population and one for the non-indigenous population?

**Miss Dufty**—No. There are definitely indigenous kids at St Patrick's.

**Senator TCHEN**—Earlier on you said that you offer an Aboriginal language program in years 11 and 12?

**Miss Dufty**—No, it is actually part of our LOTE program in years 7 and 8. We offer Aboriginal studies in years 9 and 10 as an elective. We did offer Aboriginal studies in years 11 and 12, but we had no takers. We are trying again by offering it again next year, because the students who have finished year 10 this year will be encouraged to take it on.

**Senator TCHEN**—Which language do you use? I understand there are quite a number of tribal languages.

**Miss Dufty**—We teach a combination of the Murrawarri and Ngemba languages. Ngemba is the local Aboriginal area and Murrawarri is the surrounding area, so we use both languages. It has been a little difficult at times getting people to come in and help, but we have people with some knowledge of the language coming in and working with the teacher in that area, and one of our Aboriginal aides assists with that as well.

**Senator TCHEN**—In that case, are the subjects accredited by the department?

**Miss Dufty**—Yes, they are.

**Senator TCHEN**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—That concludes the questioning. Thank you very much for coming before the committee today.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.16 a.m. to 10.41 a.m.**

**EPPELSTUN, Mrs Catherine Mary, Principal, St Patrick's School****SHEARER, Mrs Noeleen, AEW, St Patrick's School**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public. Although we will consider any requests for all or part of your evidence to be given in camera, I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, and we will move to discussion and questions after that.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I am the newly appointed principal this year, and I have been seconded from St Laurence school at Forbes for the year. We have 94 students, a quarter of whom are indigenous students. With me this year I have three first-year outs from Signadou College who are on the DEEP program, which is a Forbes-Wilcannia diocesan development program. DEEP stands for the Diocesan Early Employment Program. The students are signed at the end of their fourth year and the CEO pays for their last year of HECS. They sign a three-year contract to be sent anywhere throughout the Forbes-Wilcannia diocese, which covers over half of New South Wales. I also have one full-time teacher who is five years trained. I have a part-time teacher who does my relief, I have a full-time Aboriginal education worker, who is Noeleen, and I have a teacher's assistant who works part time.

Our children travel for up to an hour to get to our school each day. The weather causes problems at times. With the rain, the children become what we call 'mudded in'. Because they just cannot travel on the dirt roads they cannot get to school, so we fax their work to them at home. Being a Catholic school and having no priest in our town does cause problems at times. Bishop Barry Collins this year has sent out three Dominican sisters in the role of parish workers, and they coordinate with me in working with the school. Because we do not have a priest we do not have mass, but we have what we call 'liturgy of the word' every Thursday, which is very similar to mass. Once a month we have liturgy of the word with communion. All the sacraments are taught at our school and, for them, we have a priest who comes from either Nyngan or Bourke to give the children their sacraments.

Our Aboriginal families are wonderful and we do not have any real problems with them. If we do have a problem, such as homework not being done or children not being at school, Noeleen has been given special time on Wednesdays to go and visit those families. But we find that the parents readily come in for tuckshop and some mums come in for reading groups, so we see them regularly during the week. Looking at our Aboriginal families, probably one or two families would miss one day a week through a sickness or something happening at home. That is all I have to say at the moment.

**CHAIR**—Mrs Shearer, do you have anything to add?

**Mrs Shearer**—No.

**CHAIR**—What is your fee structure for the school?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I do not have it here.

**CHAIR**—In general terms.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—For each child—I am just trying to think what the average is—it is probably about \$140 a term. On top of that we have a building levy because we are paying off a grant for toilets. They have the ground maintenance—we have the CDEP come in to do the ground. And we have a performance levy and a book levy, so that is added on. I think for one child for the first term it is \$175 with all those levies added on.

**CHAIR**—That is my kinder fee.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes. It is quite reasonable. If you have four children the fourth is free. For three children at the school the fees do increase, but they are quite reasonable. The parents just pay them off if they are having difficulty, or come and see me.

**CHAIR**—And for how long have you not had a priest in Brewarrina?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—At the beginning of last year he left.

**CHAIR**—And there is no prospect of one coming?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No. There are just none available.

**CHAIR**—And you do not have a visiting priest to perform services?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—The sisters baptise the children and they also do funerals. It is only for weddings that they have to get a priest in. Our parish priest, or our moderator is his title, is Father Kevin Murphy at Nyngan. We coordinate with him or we have the Bourke priest come over.

**CHAIR**—How many kilometres is that?

**Senator TIERNEY**—How far is Nyngan?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Nyngan is two hours. But the sisters are here for any needs and they coordinate with the priest.

**CHAIR**—What happens to most of the children once they get through primary school?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Being majority Catholic children they go to Stannies, Red Bend College, down to St Gregory's in Sydney, and a number of them also go to Nyngan High School.

**CHAIR**—Why do they go to the Nyngan High School rather than the high school here?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I am only here this year so I cannot really answer that. It seems to be a thing that has always been done. Their brothers and sisters have done the same.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is there a Catholic high school in Nyngan?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No.

**Senator TIERNEY**—There is just a state school?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What about Bourke?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No. There is a state school. There is not a Catholic high school.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So where is the nearest Catholic high school?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Dubbo and then Red Bend, I think it would be.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Dubbo is the closest, is it?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes, which is four hours.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Your school population, how many students do you have K-6?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—We have 94 students and 29 of those are indigenous children.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So that is about one-third. You mentioned the travel of up to an hour. What is the balance between Brewarrina and your surrounding district?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I would say about a half are out. They are not all an hour away.

**Senator TIERNEY**—A lot of them would have options of doing it by correspondence, wouldn't they?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes. And we have had some families start and found that the travelling and the weather was too much and they have gone back to the distant ed.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Back to correspondence, have they?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So up to an hour's travel; how do they manage that? How do they get here?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—The buses only go so far out and their parents have to subsidise.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So they meet them at a point?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes. Their parents bring them to the main road.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In the state school here they have got special funding or special programs and people because they are classified as a disadvantaged school. What sort of special programs and staffing do you have, for example, to cater for the fact that about one-third of your students are Aboriginal?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—We have Noleen, who is our Aboriginal aid worker. We also have the ASSPA funding that we get for the Aboriginal students.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What is that? There are a lot of acronyms in education.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Sorry. To tell you the truth, I do not know what it stands for, because I have come into it new this year, and I cannot think what it is. It stands for Aboriginal support for students and parents. There are so many different things like that that we come upon. That also comes into our school, but that is the only extra that we would get.

**Senator TIERNEY**—One of the things that the inquiry was set up to look at was the sorts of programs that were specially catering for Aboriginal children which were innovative, working well and were best practice. I suppose we are looking at good practice, as well.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—The homework centre is what has been set up especially for the Aboriginal children. Because we are a Catholic school, we do not classify them as Aboriginal and white children. We are all one school because we are a Catholic body. Our Aboriginal parents do not want the children singled out, so we always try to work as one unit.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Tell me about the homework.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—The homework centre runs twice a week on Wednesday and Thursday. It is for the Aboriginal children, but because we are a Catholic School and we are all one, it is also offered to our white children. They go and take the homework with them and their readers and they work for two hours with the homework centre.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What time of day do they do that? Is it after school?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes, it is an after school activity.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It sounds like a great idea.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—It is a wonderful thing, yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—What proportion of your students are from a Catholic family?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—We have 80 per cent Catholic and 20 per cent non-Catholic. At the moment we are sitting on our quota of non-Catholic children.

**Senator TCHEN**—The indigenous population of students in your school, are they mainly from Catholic families?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—The majority of them are, yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—Is it the same proportion, 80 per cent to 20 per cent?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No, they are just included. There is no separate thing for Aboriginal children. We are just 80 per cent and 20 per cent.

**Senator TCHEN**—What brought the indigenous families to your school? Do you have a program to recruit them?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No, not at all. Years ago it was just white children, is that correct?

**Mrs Shearer**—No, because my children went through the Catholic school. They have grown up, but prior to that my husband's family all went through there, too.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—It always has been, yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—It is a matter of choice on the part of the parents?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—You mentioned the parents' participation in the school activities and school support. There is no difference between the two groups of parents?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No, we are one body.

**CHAIR**—I am curious about the 20 per cent non-Catholic population. How would that compare to most other Catholic primary schools?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—That is what our policy is on all the schools, that we can have 20 per cent non-Catholic children and 80 per cent Catholic children.

**CHAIR**—I would have thought that that roughly compared to even some of the metropolitan Catholic schools.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I am sure it would be the same across New South Wales.

**CHAIR**—I am talking from a Victorian background.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I do not know.

**CHAIR**—The main question we are all working around—and perhaps I will take it from another avenue and you may or may not be able to help us since you have not been in that area for that long—is: why are there are so few non-indigenous students in the state system?

**Mrs Shearer**—That would be the choice of the parents that it would fall back onto. My children went to the Catholic school here until the sixth class, then they either had to go to the state school or go away. So, two boys went to Red Bend because of the religion and follow it up, as well as the agriculture part of it. That is how they go away. You have to encourage them to have the education that I have never had. It is up to the parents, really. It is the choice of the parent.

**CHAIR**—We appreciate that when you look at this issue on a child by child basis, yes, it would be easy to say that is a parental choice issue. But from our perspective we are looking at comparing, at primary school level, a school which has barely no non-indigenous students with primary schools in similar populations where there is at least a certain level. Also, we understand that historically the central school 25 years ago used to have about 50 per cent non-indigenous population.

Some of the issues seem to be demographic, at least in this region. It appears as if it is the indigenous families who are actually reproducing, if you look at how the population trends are

changing. We are interested in what other factors might apply, particularly from the perspective of the state. If there are needs that are not being addressed in the state system, then we need to look at them very seriously. Mrs Shearer, did you grow up in this region as well?

**Mrs Shearer**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—You might have some understanding. For instance, one of the questions I had about the history concerned the mission here. Was that a Catholic mission?

**Mrs Shearer**—No, it was just a mission where all Aboriginal people had to go. They were taken from the lost generations and that.

**CHAIR**—So the history of Catholic education in this region was not attached to a mission?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No.

**CHAIR**—It was an education system built up for the Catholic population?

**Senator TIERNEY**—Who ran that mission originally?

**Mrs Shearer**—Would that be the DOCS—youth and community?

**CHAIR**—As a state institution?

**Mrs Shearer**—Yes, but they never had that title then, I do not think. They had a mission manager and that was a European person who used to hand out the blankets, sugar and rations for families, and took children away, and used the young ladies at the same time.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any idea why non-indigenous families choose not to send their children to the state system?

**Mrs Shearer**—I think it has a lot to do with the fact that, when they go to the state school in Brewarrina, there is nothing at the end of the rainbow when you have finished year 12. You cannot get a job. You have to move out of town. A lot of the Aboriginal families do not like moving out of town because this is their home. They get lost in the big smoke. I have had a little bit to do with Ruythe since she has been here. She has lifted the school up a lot, too, because it was down with previous teachers.

**CHAIR**—So it was an education quality choice, as well?

**Mrs Shearer**—Yes.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes. Also, the white children may be a little bit intimidated by the number of Aboriginal children at the school. I just do not know any reasons really, being new to the area. You really need to address the parents on those issues.

**CHAIR**—One of the suggestions that has been made to us informally is that there may be in part a cultural factor, which is within the indigenous population and that is that a level of roughness is more common in terms of how problems are resolved and issues are dealt with. I presume it would be things like language, arguments in the playground and factors like that.

There seems to be a level of physical force which is seen to be higher amongst an indigenous group than a non-indigenous group. I raise that because you mentioned that some people might feel intimidated by such a large indigenous population in a state school.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—That may be one of the reasons, yes, but there are a number of issues.

**CHAIR**—Some of these things may be perception, rather than fact.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—As you said, you have almost 30 indigenous children in your school and you said that you were not really aware of problems associated with these children.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—We really do not have any problems with them, no.

**Senator TCHEN**—If I could put a question to you, Mrs Shearer—you do not have to answer—you indicated that your family, from your husband onward, have children who have gone to the Catholic school, even though a minority of indigenous families actually did that. Can you say whether there is any difficulty seen by indigenous parents generally in sending their children to the Catholic school, or any barrier to them? It does not have to be a physical barrier; it could be a barrier in their mind.

**Mrs Shearer**—No, I do not think so. This is the biggest number of Aboriginal children that we have had at the Catholic school. I think it is a lot to do with the priest who was here. He used to mix in. Some of the priests you get are cranky and older, but this one was a young man who went out to the community. Even if the police had trouble, they used to call on Father Gunn all the time. By him going out talking to people made the Aboriginal people feel more at ease to be able to follow on to send their children to the Catholic school. Some of those kids have been Catholics all their lives anyway, and the parents. A lot of Aboriginal people out there are Catholics and a lot of the people in the town are not aware of it because it went with Father Gunn. If you have a respect for someone—and a lot of Aboriginal people are shy as well—they soon come out of their shell.

We have a lot of mums coming in to do canteen and even the reading program. Before, they would not come. They would come only to the gate or speak to me, go through me to go to Cathy or whoever was in charge. But now they feel at home because they are welcome as a family. That is how we work.

**Senator TCHEN**—What about the non-indigenous parents? Do you find any resistance from them?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—No. Our P&F has a non-indigenous president; our secretary, Penny, is indigenous, and we have a mixture at all our meetings.

**Mrs Shearer**—And working days.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—Is that reflecting the attitude in the town community as well?

**Mrs Shearer**—I do not know because we have not had our Aboriginal day yet. I have a lady who has children at the state school who is coming up to do johnnycakes for us. She comes along and sits down just like one of us. And the kids respect her too.

**CHAIR**—If only 20 per cent of your population is non-Catholic and there are so few non-Catholic, non-indigenous—we really are getting into labels here—kids in the state system, where are the non-Catholic, non-indigenous primary kids going?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I presume they go to Nyngan High School.

**CHAIR**—Are you just in an area which has a very high Catholic population?

**Senator TIERNEY**—Yes. I have just worked out the figures; it is.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—It is quite a high number of Catholic—

**Senator TIERNEY**—And there is a very small number of non-Aboriginal children in the total population.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—But Nyngan High School would be—

**CHAIR**—I was talking about the primary group. We are pretty much saying that less than 20 per cent of the non-indigenous population of primary school age are non-Catholic, which is a very interesting demographic.

**Senator TIERNEY**—A high proportion of the small number of non-indigenous children are Catholic.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes, and there is no priest.

**Senator TIERNEY**—There is no priest.

**Mrs Eppelstun**—But there are three wonderful sisters.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for coming today. Before you go, I have one final question. Is there something in particular that you find is working with indigenous children that you would suggest in terms of future recommendations? You have mentioned the home study group. Is there anything else that you have not covered and might think tomorrow, 'I wish I'd said that.'

**Mrs Eppelstun**—I do not think so. Because of our situation, I do not think there is anything special; we just treat them all as one. We have made an effort to make the parents feel very welcome and to be involved in the school. But with the education of the children, there is nothing else special except the homework centre.

**CHAIR**—And you would seek to maintain that despite the fact that the impetus came from the parish priest who is no longer here?

**Mrs Eppelstun**—Yes. He did do a lot of background work.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.



[11.12 a.m.]

**BARKER, Mrs Jeanette, Manager, Northern Star Aboriginal Corporation, Community Development Employment Program**

**WILSON, Mr Bruce, Participant, Community Development Employment Program**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives from the Brewarrina Community Development Employment Program. Thank you for your attendance today. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public although we will consider any request for all or part of the evidence to be given in camera, which is in private. I point out that such evidence, however, may be subsequently made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make an opening statement about your experiences with indigenous education within this region from the CDEP perspective, and then we will deal with discussion and questions.

**Mrs Barker**—From the manager's point of view, the CDEP employs people in part-time positions. We just do labour and such things at the moment. I find that education is a bit of a barrier because they have not got the education for the skilled jobs. When they come to me, the majority of the ones who are just leaving school cannot read and write. We are trying to get a numeracy and literacy program in place for those participants to be able to read and write so they can fill in the appropriate forms and go for jobs that require skills.

**CHAIR**—Mr Wilson, do you have any comments that you wish to make?

**Mr Wilson**—Yes. I came here not really understanding what this was about. I paid scant regard to the information about it, and that was my fault and I am sorry for that. Last night when I read more fully what was expected of me and found out what the meeting was about, I just sat down quickly and wrote some notes. It is only a handwritten submission. If you like, I could read it out.

**CHAIR**—Most of the submissions before us today have been verbal, so we are quite happy for you to talk through your notes.

**Mr Wilson**—I want to say, too, that I have more or less addressed my remarks here just to the general perceived education problems with indigenous people. I have not addressed my remarks specifically to the CDE Program. Maybe Jenny could do that. Do you want me to read this now?

**CHAIR**—If you feel comfortable.

**Mr Wilson**—I have no professional qualifications and have not been closely involved by way of employment with educational training programs which involve the Aboriginal people. My submission is based on my own personal notions and understandings, which I really have not subjected to close questioning as to their validity. They are just personal feelings, what I have been told by Aboriginal people and what I have picked up over the years I have been here. Furthermore, the submission has been hastily written and thought out, so please accept it for what it is.

In writing a submission that addresses indigenous people as a whole, what I have said is general comment only and does not necessarily apply to every Aboriginal person or community. As in any ethnic group, there is a wide range of opinions and beliefs among individual people. Having said that, I believe Aboriginal people possess and exhibit many traits that are common to them. I will list some of these traits and comment on why they should or could be relevant to your inquiry. I should note here that I did get off the track when I was writing this list down, and I have only written one or two traits common to the Aboriginal people. The rest of the submission goes on to what I see as the problems and some solutions to them.

The traits are: one, strong family ties and two, attachment to the land pertaining to the Aboriginal people, that is, where they were born, which includes the natural environment of rivers and trees, et cetera. My comment on that is that, if Aboriginal people were afforded the chance to be sent to distant cities to further their education, problems of isolation and home sickness would possibly be the norm amongst those children. Now I am getting away from that and getting onto the problems. Three is that probably the majority of Aboriginal families have experienced generations of unemployment. This does little to engender faith in the schooling and education system, and training programs offer few prospects of jobs once training is completed. Four, there is a lack of innovative job creation schemes being implemented by government authorities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in these small communities.

Five, Aboriginal entrepreneurs are unable to receive financial and professional assistance from ATSIC or other bodies to set up private companies, depriving this town of great opportunities. I think that has already happened. Six, Aboriginal community work and social programs are hamstrung in their ability to expand their activities to create full-time employment. They are not full programs—similar to Work for the Dole—and there is not much incentive for people to go on them because there is not much chance of their getting full-time employment from the programs that exist.

Seven, inability of private employers to employ trainees due to the poor financial viability of their own businesses in these small towns. Some years ago, there were training programs where employers were given subsidies to keep these trainees on. I am not too sure whether that is still happening. If it is not, I think that is something that should be looked at seriously. In the schools and possibly in TAFE there is a lack of Aboriginal teachers. We have an underresourced local TAFE college with a poor selection of courses available. There should be a widening of the school curriculum and the TAFE curriculum to encourage and include activities of a more esoteric nature, and in that I include art, theatre, drama and dance.

I have some solutions here. I think the Aboriginal community needs adult education programs to improve what they can get out of the education system for their children and for themselves, and there needs to be a greater understanding of the values that they can derive from it. Some of the Aboriginal people in this community believe that there is a great need for a homemakers program to teach home and life skills for adults and children alike. There should be increased hostel accommodation for students who have to go away and there should be some way of improving family contact between the parents and the students when their children are away.

I think there should be an increased effectiveness of the AECG, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. I know they have had contact over the years with the school. They seem to be a fairly successful organisation in the cities. Whether it is a lack of funding or whatever, I do

not know, but as far as I know they do not seem to be having much input into the local schools out here.

Possibly there should be a bursary system for gifted Aboriginal students. There should be efforts made to introduce meaningful TAFE courses tailored to suit the local situation in these towns. There was a move only about 18 months or two years ago to set up national park traineeships with the local TAFE. That seemed like it was going to be a very successful thing but it never got off the ground. I do not know why. There is a need to implement something like that. They could be trained as tour guides for the local Aboriginal museum. There could be traineeships that teach them what is involved. They could be tourism operators. There could be courses in tourism, and in artefacts manufacture.

We do experience a pretty strong drop-out rate from a lot of the young children who cannot handle the normal curriculum at school. There could be some bridging course where those young people, or drop-outs as they are labelled, could be doing things like car maintenance, or something where they are using their hands.

As for number seven, I have joint ventures between ATSIC and private enterprise business people. There should be a joint venture in proactively assisting Aboriginal entrepreneurs in organisations with financial and professional help to set up many promising employment and community business enterprises that do exist in this town but have never been fully looked at. I believe that those opportunities do exist. There might be a little bit of risk attached to them, but if we are not going to take risks and put money into these ventures, this town is not going to go anywhere.

Also, community training officers were employed by ATSIC in the local Aboriginal communities. We did have a community training officer here, but I think it was just through the force of work that he got sidetracked on other issues of running the organisations. He was never really effective in putting his expertise into training people working for the Aboriginal communities and setting up training programs. I think that should be re-established with funding from ATSIC. Those are all the things I want to say.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Perhaps Mr Wilson might like to make it a written submission.

**CHAIR**—Yes, it is certainly possible for you to table that. We can look after it. If you would like to simply present it to us, we will send you back a copy of it.

**Mr Wilson**—I hope you can read my writing. If not, we could probably get it typed, possibly before you go.

**CHAIR**—We can sort that out. I am sure we have a contact number if we need to clarify any matter. Perhaps I could commence by asking Mrs Barker or Mr Wilson some of the details about the CDEP program here. How many participants do you have?

**Mrs Barker**—118.

**CHAIR**—So there are 118 people undertaking part-time work as part of the program?

**Mrs Barker**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—What are the various jobs you have people doing?

**Mrs Barker**—We have contracted lawn mowing and the school canteen. We have a contract with the local shire for street cleaning and garbage collection. Then we do whatever else we can, like repairs and maintenance.

**CHAIR**—St Patrick's mentioned one that they have in their school at the moment.

**Mrs Barker**—That is the lawns. We have about 60 participants who are integrated into full-time positions in the community—at the hospital, the village and the school—and are receiving a top up on their CDEP.

**CHAIR**—You have participants working full-time getting some sort of income supplementation under CDEP?

**Mrs Barker**—Yes, on top of the CDEP money.

**CHAIR**—Are they short-term or long-term arrangements?

**Mrs Barker**—Most of them are where it is government funded, where you are unemployed from July until June. As long as the money is coming in, they have a full-time job.

**CHAIR**—Is there a limitation on how long that subsidy can continue?

**Mrs Barker**—Until they decide to stop it, I suppose.

**Mr Wilson**—You are saying the CDEP subsidy for—

**Mrs Barker**—Yes, we are funded only as long as the CDEP is going with ATSIIC. When we fill out for our grant and we sign our letter of offer, they tell us that they cannot guarantee any further money after it runs out at the end of the year until you apply again.

**CHAIR**—If your current level of funding is maintained, you have 60 people working full time who are being paid under CDEP and get a nominal amount on top of that for the full-time job they are performing. That could be an ongoing arrangement.

**Mrs Barker**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—What sort of jobs are those people doing? You mentioned the hospital.

**Mrs Barker**—They are mainly wards men and cleaners. At the retirement village of the Homemakers, they clean and look after the old age patients.

**CHAIR**—To date you have had very limited scope to move from fairly labour-intensive, unskilled employment into anything else.

**Mrs Barker**—I have found that, since the TAP subsidy finished, CDEP thought I could not get into any training programs. Under the criteria at the end of the traineeship, you have to guarantee full-time employment. This is nil because you cannot guarantee it. You have to have a

certain number and, at the end of the day, you cannot get the traineeship if they are just going to go back on CDEP after the traineeship finishes.

**CHAIR**—So the problem with moving into more skilled occupations is that the ongoing subsidy could not continue, whereas it can continue if you maintain unskilled work. Is that it?

**Mrs Barker**—Yes, that's it.

**CHAIR**—What does that mean for the staffing budget of the hospital and the retirement village where they are essentially able to continue to use labour at a somewhat reduced cost?

**Mrs Barker**—To be able to cope and help with their funding they are seen to be participants, otherwise they would not be able to fund you with the limited amount of money that they get to run the places, especially for the old age village.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In terms of the health budget, CDEP people who work in hospitals do not show up on the health budget in terms of wages. That is all back on the CDEP budget.

**Mrs Barker**—The top up shows up.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Right.

**Mrs Barker**—My money comes together to give that person full-time employment. You have two lots of money.

**CHAIR**—Although presumably these institutions that are funded under the same criteria in areas where CDEP does not operate have to meet these budgetary pressures in their circumstances.

**Mrs Barker**—Yes, that's right.

**CHAIR**—Does it mean that the hospital and the aged care service here provide a better quality of service because they can extend their budget that much further because of CDEP?

**Mrs Barker**—It would be, because without the CDEP they would not be able to operate to the extent that they are able to operate.

**CHAIR**—Do they, for instance, provide additional staffing than does a normal hospital?

**Mrs Barker**—No, I think it is just for the rosters that are in, for the hours that it is open and whatever. You could say that they use it on their budget as cost savings.

**CHAIR**—It saves costs in some areas so presumably they can reallocate them into other areas. In a sense that is my question: are there areas where the hospital service here is perhaps better than where it might be elsewhere where CDEP does not operate?

**Senator TIERNEY**—Or perhaps balance their budget?

**CHAIR**—That's right, or balance it, or perhaps put it into better services for the indigenous population where their needs might simply not be met. That is an interesting scenario because

essentially the structuring of the program works against the ability to move the people into skilled levels.

**Mrs Barker**—With the traineeships it really is a barrier. We did a traineeship last year with horticulture. We had 20 participants in the program. There were about 18 who got their certificates at the second level. We applied again this year but we did not even get past first base because of that criteria, that at the end of the day I could not guarantee full-time employment for the horticulture people. So now they are back on CDEP doing their 10 hours.

**CHAIR**—That is what it is, 10 hours?

**Mrs Barker**—Other than ones who are placed in full-time positions.

**CHAIR**—The other almost 60 people—

**Mrs Barker**—Yes, they are placed in full-time positions.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Mr Wilson, you mentioned lack of private enterprise funds. I think you might have been alluding to perhaps a time when they did exist and they no longer exist. Could you explain that to us, particularly in the context of this area? What happened over here?

**Mr Wilson**—A few years ago it was a similar thing. Training funds were supplied through DEET for local employers to take on Aboriginal youths. They might be shop assistants or whatever. It was a wage subsidy to keep these young people on for a certain time so they could learn what had to be done in that business for employment and things like that.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I thought you might have been referring to actual initiatives for Aboriginal people setting up businesses.

**Mr Wilson**—I did mention that there is that element of it as well. I believe that is happening now at a federal level. I think they are looking at trying to create employment situations through private enterprise. I am not too sure what that covers but I think there have been approaches made to some of the bigger business houses to take Aboriginal employees on. Whether that is through a training program or a wage subsidy or whether the private employer is creating these positions, I am not too sure. So there is that side of it too.

I did mention too that, with trying to create Aboriginal employment initiatives, there is a strong need to get the expertise of either consultants or private employers. I suppose you would have to pay a consultancy, and I do not think employers would be doing it free of charge either. Historically, there has been an inability in ATSIC to come to terms with trying to create private enterprise businesses for Aboriginal people. They are not geared to it and I do not think they understand it, and most of them are public servants.

We did have an instance here of Aboriginal entrepreneurship. We had an Aboriginal chap who was a bit of a visionary. He could see that there was a need for an Aboriginal building company in this town. To be honest, we really had to bend the rules to get this building company up because ATSIC were not geared to give him any assistance. So he did set that building company up here at great personal trouble. Unfortunately, the building company is not here any more and the chap who was running it has moved away. That was a great asset to this town that we have lost.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How long ago did he set that up?

**Mr Wilson**—He started to set that up about seven years ago.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How long did it go for?

**Mr Wilson**—I think it would have gone on and off with problems for probably about three or four years. I think the structure of the building company is still there, and I do hope that possibly one day this building company can come back and carry out proper maintenance programs on the homes. The Ngemba housing company is one of the biggest housing companies in the state of New South Wales. We are experiencing problems with that housing company, but we hope we are going to get through them and that it will go on to provide homes to the town and, either through this Aboriginal building company, employ Aboriginal people to carry out maintenance on the homes. They were also building homes. There are actually homes in this town built by this building company with Aboriginal labour.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In the end, wasn't he getting the contracts from that other work?

**Mr Wilson**—I think there were great problems. I do not really know what went on, but I think it was the case that, as I said, we went through the back door in trying to set up this building company and the constraints imposed upon him to try to run this business were a bit overwhelming. It did not eventuate to what we had hoped it would.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you think the main constraints came from ATSIC?

**Mr Wilson**—Yes, I think so.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned that you thought the TAFE courses were inappropriate and that there should be more cultural courses such as art and dance and that sort of thing. What about in the skills area? Do you think it needs some sort of change in terms of what is available in work skills?

**Mr Wilson**—I do not want to cast aspersions on TAFE as it is probably difficult, but I think that things are going to take money—that is, if they are going to take inputs of CAP money to try and solve this unemployment problem and also the education problems with the schools and the Aboriginal people. I see a need for this TAFE to have an Aboriginal community liaison officer. What happens now is that they probably have a person part-time who does work there. I think there is a need for a full-time person who is committed and understands the Aboriginal people so as to be able to get out and sell the place and say, 'These are the courses we've got here.' I am not saying that all the courses are useless as they have computer, bookkeeping and typing courses and they are good. But I do think the courses could be expanded to be more realistic. I do not know if I have missed the point of the question that you were asking.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I was mainly referring to the skills area of TAFE training.

**Mr Wilson**—They do run small courses like motor maintenance and things like that periodically, which I think are quite good. The Aboriginal people like doing them. Aboriginal people are quite effective with hands-on things, like actually seeing someone do something,

picking it up very quickly and doing it themselves, as against sitting down in a classroom with the three R's and things like that.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You alluded to that when you were talking about school systems in terms of the normal state curriculum. You indicated that you thought there were problems with the teaching of traditional subjects for Aboriginal children. Would you like to expand on that?

**Mr Wilson**—I do not know a lot about what is happening at the schools. But in relation to teaching children the three R's, if I can go back to that, there need to be courses that are more Aboriginally orientated. I think there is a need for both. We have to learn to read and write—and maths and that are important—but I do think it is important that they try and bring in a curriculum that does address some of the things that Aboriginal people would be more interested in, like dance and art.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you think it would be useful if the government actually put a focus on training more indigenous teachers to be appointed to areas like Brewarrina in the north-west?

**Mr Wilson**—I do. I think that is needed for understanding and for providing role models to Aboriginal children. There have been Aboriginal teachers here at the school. I do not want to generalise too much, and maybe I am putting too much emphasis on the need for Aboriginal teachers, but the Aboriginal teachers who have been here—I know of one or two of them—do not seem to have stayed long before they go. I do not know what the reasons for that are. Whether there are other things outside the school which are causing problems, I do not know.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Are they leaving teaching or are they just going to another area to teach somewhere else?

**Mr Wilson**—I am probably being a bit tunnel-visioned here. I am probably only referring to the last Aboriginal teachers at the school. I see it as a good move to have them come here and teach but things seem to go wrong and they move away.

**Senator TIERNEY**—We have been focusing a lot on the education of young people. What about the education of Aboriginal adults and of adult education, literacy skills and other aspects? Could you tell us a little bit about that in Brewarrina?

**Mr Wilson**—There is a great need for it. Here again I do not know what is happening at the TAFE and if there are courses like that going on. Maybe I am talking about things that I do not know a real lot about. As far as I am concerned, I believe there is a great need for adult education courses in literacy and numeracy. But, as I have alluded to, I think there is a need for more basic skills in adult education. I just cannot think of some of the things that I have referred to there.

**CHAIR**—Life skills?

**Mr Wilson**—Yes. There are a lot of concepts about how our European society works that I do not think Aboriginal people really understand—the simple things like budgeting their money and nutrition. That is why the medical centre and people here have been trying to set up a homemakers program. For years they have been trying to set it up, where they will have a private residence where they will have qualified people. If there are children in trouble with the law or who have not got a home to go to—they have been kicked out of their home—there is a refuge

for them there. I see it encouraging the parents to come along to try and work out their difficulties.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your time. We will move on to the next session.

[11.47 a.m.]

**\DB\WLBFAZLDEEN, Miss Natalie Ann, Coordinator of the Brewarrina Mobile Resource Van, Brewarrina Shire Council**

**FELSCH, Mr Peter James, General Manager, Brewarrina Shire Council**

**PIPPOS, Mrs Jay, Director, Child Care, Brewarrina Shire Council**

**WILTSHIRE, Mr Anthony Mark, Youth and Community Development Officer, Brewarrina Shire Council**  
**RENEKER, Senior Sergeant Anthony Mark, Sector Supervisor, New South Wales Police Force**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. I will provide each of you with an opportunity to make a brief statement on the issues that we have been covering today. I know from earlier discussions that each of us might have various questions in a number of areas and we might move on to those after each of you—if you feel it is appropriate—has made a brief statement.

**Mr Wiltshire**—Firstly, I would like to say thank you for coming to Brewarrina to conduct this inquiry into indigenous education. There is an awful lot that is attached to education that is not specifically school orientated. One of the greatest attributable factors for a good educational outcome for any child is the ability to have a long and sustainable and happy and healthy family life that involves all the trimmings of that family life and support mechanisms. I see within the community of Brewarrina that family life is under attack in large sections of the indigenous community. Thus, the support mechanisms for the children and youth are not there to give them the esteem and the ability to see through the hard periods and whatnot.

In the areas of health and nutrition, which have been mentioned before, in some cases that is also impacting on young children and youths, on their doing well at school or even attending school at all. From the point of view of social justice or social ramifications, the attachments to education are quite strong outside the educational circles.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Maybe if I continue down that path, Ms Fazldeen, we had a few questions from some earlier discussions. We can go to those or, if you would like to make a few comments about indigenous education, we would be happy for you to do that as well.

**Miss Fazldeen**—First of all, I will tell you a bit about what the mobile does. We travel to isolated areas around Brewarrina shire and outside the shire. We do about nine playgroups and three preschool sessions and we cater for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people from birth to five years old. We actually use a four-wheel drive to set up our playgroups on properties, camps, or anything like that, as long as we get them licensed from DOCS. There are also two staff who are Aboriginal. As I say, education starts when they are first born, from nought to five years, before they go into preschool sessions, too.

**CHAIR**—I have some questions but I will come to those a bit later. Mrs Pippas, did you have a broad statement? There are also some additional questions from our discussions with the preschool earlier.

**Mrs Pippos**—The child care caters mostly for working parents. We have 22 places, for children from eight weeks to five years. Fifty per cent of those children are indigenous, with both parents working. We have an Aboriginal person on staff and she programs once a week for all children with arts and crafts, stories and various things.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Mr Felsch, do you want to add anything from the council perspective?

**Mr Felsch**—I do not believe I need to, unless you have some questions later. I can cross over some of the different functions the council has.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Sergeant Reneker?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—I am pretty positive about Brewarrina. In regard to the juvenile crime rate compared with western towns, ours is comparatively low. Those who do come to police attention are repeat offenders. For example, going through some figures this morning, for the first six months of this year, there were 14 youths who continually reoffended. I would say, for a town of this size, to have only 14 repeat offenders is pretty good. The reason for that is that it is only a small town and in recent times there has been a lot of community support. As I said, I believe that, in this town compared to other western towns I have been to and seen, things are not going too badly here. I will wait for any more questions that touch upon the issues.

**CHAIR**—What sort of crime?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Mainly property offences: break-ins, stealings and malicious damage.

**CHAIR**—And is there a break-up between indigenous and non-indigenous juveniles?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Mainly all Aboriginal young offenders. I cannot give you an exact breakdown but I would say at least 95 per cent.

**CHAIR**—That is not surprising in one sense, given the population of young people in the town.

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—I might start by moving back to some of the questions. Miss Fazldeen, in relation to the mobile group, did you mention three preschool groups?

**Miss Fazldeen**—Yes. That is right.

**CHAIR**—Where do you operate those?

**Miss Fazldeen**—We operate them at Weilmoringle, which is an Aboriginal based camp. The surrounding properties also come to the preschool. So we have non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal.

**CHAIR**—How frequently does the preschool operate?

**Miss Fazldeen**—Once a fortnight.

**CHAIR**—So you go to each of those locations for one session per fortnight?

**Miss Fazldeen**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—So that is a pretty big difference. The indigenous people have access in town for four-year-olds for five sessions a week. If they are out of town, they have one session a fortnight.

**Miss Fazldeen**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—With the playgroups, how regularly do you get back to the one location?

**Miss Fazldeen**—Once a month.

**CHAIR**—Otherwise these kids would have nothing at all.

**Miss Fazldeen**—Yes, that is right. They are isolated.

**CHAIR**—What sort of distances are we talking about travelwise?

**Miss Fazldeen**—It depends where we go. Weilmoringle only takes an hour and 10 minutes to get there, but if we go to Quambone—we also have a Quambone Preschool there—it takes two hours and 10 minutes to get there. By the time we get there we have to unload the truck and set it all up for the children to have their preschool session.

**Mr Felsch**—It is 100 kilometres for the first and 180 kilometres for the second.

**CHAIR**—Yes. Mrs Pippas, in relation to the child care, you mention that it is a 50 per cent indigenous population of the parents in your group and they are all working. What sort of fees are they paying for the child care?

**Mrs Pippas**—Our full fee is \$30 but there are only three families that pay that because they earn over \$30,000. The others all get fee relief.

**CHAIR**—It is \$30 per day.

**Mrs Pippas**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—How many of the kids are in full, long day care, five days a week, as opposed to part-time care?

**Mrs Pippas**—It would be 50 per cent.

**CHAIR**—I am curious because child care is one indicator of the nature of employment that the indigenous groups are getting access to. Would it be mostly indigenous parents who are in the part-time care?

**Mrs Pippas**—No.

**CHAIR**—Would you say, from your understanding, and I know that this is probably stretching it a bit, that you would have a clear breakdown of this in your mind, that it is fairly balanced between indigenous and non-indigenous across the board?

**Mrs Pippos**—That is right, across the board.

**CHAIR**—Mr Wiltshire, you mentioned that you felt that family life was under attack without support mechanisms in recent times here. What sort of attack? It was a fairly active phrase that you mentioned, and I was wondering if you could pinpoint what you think the attacks are?

**Mr Wiltshire**—Common to a lot of isolated, western, remote towns there are alcoholism and health problems, and associated water and sewerage problems that are being looked at at the moment by Aboriginal community development programs. There is what Bruce Wilson mentioned earlier—living skills programs or life skills, domestic skills and things like that. As Mr Wilson also mentioned, the cultural heritage of Aboriginal people and the difference between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people is quite significant. Programs that have existed in the past have moved to address some of those needs but have obviously failed because the outcomes in Brewarrina are not good outcomes for a lot of the people who are living in some of the communities around about. It is very hard to expect young children to succeed and do well in school when you have bad home environments.

**CHAIR**—The sorts of attacks you have referred to have been longstanding social problems faced by the indigenous population; they are not new issues. From what you are saying, they are having an ongoing impact on education. To what extent would you say the answer to the indigenous education problems are addressing the social problems as opposed to further attention and recommendations on just the education component?

**Mr Wiltshire**—Could you clarify that a little bit?

**CHAIR**—You could take it back to the situation that one of the concerns is that problems associated with indigenous health are one of the main factors why indigenous kids are not staying at school and are not progressing further from school into other forms of education. The question I am asking is: do you have a feel for how much we should be paying more attention to indigenous health issues as opposed to trying to structure education so it specifically addresses certain issues relevant to indigenous people?

**Mr Wiltshire**—Definitely. The health issues, the associated mental issues and mental health need to be addressed specifically as against those educational issues. The patterns that have developed in generations of people who have been dislocated and come through various tragedies such as Aboriginal people have are going to take years to mend. Currently in Brewarrina we are underresourced with mental health workers, social workers and a variety of other workers that would obviously have an impact in town and on the lives of these people. We also have been underresourced in facilities and other establishments and things that would support the Aboriginal people.

**CHAIR**—The classic dichotomy would be, for instance, and we discussed it earlier, that it is important for indigenous people to have role models. As Senator Tierney referred to earlier, there is the issue of there being no indigenous teachers. It is one thing to say, 'Well, yes, we need teachers as role models', but if indigenous kids are still suffering the health problems associated with just simply facing school attendance, that role model really is not going to have that great a difference. I gather from what you are saying that there are certain areas associated with basic community and health matters that are still not being fixed. You have mentioned mental health

and social workers. What are the main areas that impact on the indigenous community in housing, et cetera?

**Mr Wiltshire**—I believe, just from my brief time here in Brewarrina, only 10 months, and the research I have done—and I do have a small submission that I would like to present later on which outlines some of the information, reports and booklets I gathered my information from—I can make a correction. Some figures have been thrown around that the indigenous population of Brewarrina is about 50 per cent. In May 1999, council completed a draft social plan in May 1999. I have a copy here to present to you. The conservative figure of the Aboriginal population of Brewarrina is 55 per cent. The actual figure would most likely be up around 60 per cent to 70 per cent, being that there is a big transient population here. So we have to look at the number of Aboriginal people who do live in the area.

**CHAIR**—Are we talking about the town or the region?

**Mr Wiltshire**—I am talking in the town specifically, not in the whole region.

**CHAIR**—We can formally table your submission now, if you like, and we can incorporate that into our report.

**Mr Wiltshire**—I may table that.

**Mr Felsch**—Can we give that to you when the discussion is done?

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is fine. Mr Felsch, from your experience, have you additional comments to make in terms of the balance between education as opposed to social health problems faced by indigenous people in the region?

**Mr Felsch**—I certainly could not say that in an expert capacity, but I think that for those of us who do live and work in the community alcoholism is a problem that we deal with daily. I think Sergeant Reneker might have something to add to that as well. Certainly it impacts on community life. We have recently had spontaneous law and order meetings called, and things seem to come up in that and the family support structure, as Mr Wiltshire mentioned earlier, through agencies like the Department of Community Services and community health and those sorts of things. I would support what he had to say on that.

I do not know whether you got the opportunity to ask the representatives from the schools as to what impact they saw coming into the school system. They are probably in a better position to comment on the flow-on effects of the family environment than we are, but I certainly believe that they are—

**CHAIR**—No, only just briefly in terms of some of the mobility factors. Sergeant Reneker, did you have anything else to add on the drugs and alcohol issue?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—On the drugs issue, there is a problem here with cannabis. We do not have any of the heavier drugs like heroin, which is good. Alcohol is obviously a problem here. It is a daily problem we come across.

**CHAIR**—What do you do about it?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Where do you start?

**CHAIR**—What I mean is, just from the classic scenario, you pick up a drunken indigenous person off the street. What do you do with them?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—First of all we try to take them home to a responsible person if there is someone at home. If we cannot do that, we have a proclaimed place down here and we place them there. So the option is to take them home or take them to the proclaimed place, but most of the time we take them home.

**CHAIR**—Have there been any other measures developed to deal with alcoholism within the community?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Yes. In relation to the licensed premises here, there are two hotels, a club and a takeaway bottle shop. They have very severe restrictions on them as far as the sale of alcohol goes. Under section 104 of the licensing act, they cannot buy takeaway bottles of beer or any bottle of alcohol after 7 p.m. and no takeaways at all after 9 p.m. That has cut down a lot of the street antisocial behaviour at night.

**CHAIR**—Who introduced those restrictions?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—The police brought that in. I would say that was three or four years ago.

**CHAIR**—Was that through some community program? How did it come about?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—No. I think it was a police move due to the antisocial behaviour in the main street of town at one stage.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned a particular regulation.

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Yes. They call it the section 104 ordinance. I think Bourke has them as well now, and so has Walgett. I think Wilcannia has as well. The responsibility has gone back on to the licensees. In the case of the RSL club, they have become more responsible for the service of alcohol. Something else we are trialling at the moment is that if we get someone who is an offender and they are very intoxicated we ask them where they have been drinking. If they say at the hotel, then we take action against the hotel for serving alcohol to intoxicated people.

**CHAIR**—Is that working?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Yes, it seems to be. Again, the emphasis goes away from the police after the events happen to preventative measures—that is, through the licensees. It is not always going to work, but I believe that if they realise, 'Hang on a sec; we might get knocked off here if we keep serving these people', they might have second thoughts about serving people.

**CHAIR**—Do you then have problems when people are denied service?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—We have not come across that yet. Every offence is reported to us. We ask them where they have been drinking and how much they had to drink and how they felt—that type of information. If there is enough evidence there, we will take action against the licensees.

**CHAIR**—Just picking up Mr Wiltshire's earlier problems, the issue of domestic violence and the connection to alcohol would obviously have a huge implication on school attendance and other factors, as indeed would women's employment and a variety of issues. I would be interested to see how those matters are working. Have there been any other initiatives that have been put in place, for instance, by the indigenous community to deal with the alcohol problem?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Just recently, not so much the alcohol problem. There was a recognised problem here with juveniles being out late at night. The Aboriginal community formed what was known as the 'granny patrol', which consisted of a number of grandmothers with the assistance of the council. The council gave them a bus for the evening. They basically drove around town picking up children and taking them home. That was a good thing for us. Unfortunately, it has stopped at the moment, but there are some moves to get it going again. Mr Felsch might know more about that.

**CHAIR**—Why was it stopped?

**Mr Felsch**—I believe personal conflicts within the group who were providing the service to the community and also some issues with the provision of the bus. The bus was a council bus which was then in fact replaced by the Department of Corrective Services because there is a new low security detention facility being constructed south of town here in the shire. They had basically given the bus to the community as a public relations exercise and to maintain a presence. Their criteria were somewhat more restrictive than ours on what it could be used for. That brought some conflicts. So some of the users chose to step back. They did not feel that was satisfactory, but I think we will have that sorted out within the next couple of weeks.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is that the only low security facility here in the north-west?

**Mr Felsch**—Yes. It is a new initiative from the state Corrective Services for what they call the Second Chance Program. It is specifically for 18- to 24-year-old adult males—the second chance being, really, the last chance to stay out of the mainstream prison system. It is for non-violent offenders with less than 12 months to serve. It is an opportunity to keep them out of the Bathursts and the Pentridges the first time round.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So the people there have been before the court and instead of gaol or a community service order they can—

**Mr Felsch**—No. They have definitely been before a court and have received a sentence, but they are only qualified to enter that facility as long as their sentence is of less than 12 months duration.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is it like a prison farm? Or is it more secure than that?

**Mr Felsch**—No. There are no fences or barbed wire. It is a working property. They have a very heavy emphasis on literacy and numeracy and are currently developing partnerships with TAFE to deliver training on the site in those things and in rural skills and that sort of thing.

**Senator TIERNEY**—This committee at an earlier stage did conduct an inquiry into education in prison facilities. We have an ongoing interest in that issue, but I have not heard of that facility being developed.

**Mr Felsch**—It is certainly a new model. It is one that Corrective Services did not have in New South Wales. The stated objective is that, when detention is necessary, people are detained close to family connections, that they are not moved away from the family context. The family has access to them and they are not influenced by the mainstream prison system, hopefully.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Sergeant Reneker, you mentioned the emphasis on preventative approaches and the fact that you trace alcohol use back to the publican. What powers do you have apart from taking away the licence, which would be a bit drastic? Is there any gradation of power between a warning and the removal of a licence?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—It depends on the circumstances. For example, they have all been warned at least once about serving alcohol to certain people. But if we have investigated and find that a breach has been committed, they receive an on-the-spot fine. If it is more serious, they can be reported and have to appear before the court. The fines are quite heavy at the moment. I think an on-the-spot fine for having anyone drunk on the premises is \$550.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Has anyone been fined here?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Yes, they have.

**CHAIR**—You would be popular.

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—But, having said that, as I said in my short opening remarks, we do get a lot of community support and people saying, 'Good on you; do it.' We have had no real adverse comments about it. They may complain behind our backs, but not to us.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned that you had 14 repeat offenders and that 95 per cent of them are Aboriginal, which brings it back to a dozen. You would know them all quite well, I assume?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Yes, that is correct.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I do not know if you can generalise, but what do you see as the basic problem and the possible solution or way through for this dozen who are creating trouble around the town? Firstly, why do they do it? Secondly, what can be done to stop them doing it, apart from throwing them into gaol?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—That is a very good question and I wish I knew the answer to it all, but I am not the commissioner. A lot of it is mainly breaking into, say, the school canteen or the bakery to get food, which is sad. These are 13- and 14-year-old kids. They are not at school, or they attend only very occasionally. They are basically sleeping all day and walking around at night time. Being hungry, they break in. The bakery was broken into three or four times, as well as the school canteen.

**CHAIR**—Is it just hunger?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Yes, sometimes. Sometimes they might break in to houses, for example, to steal a chainsaw and swap it for two sticks of cannabis. On occasions it is for food and on occasions it is for drugs. What the answer to that is I do not know. As Tony said before, I think

it just comes back to family support. A lot of those kids do not have that family support in place until something goes wrong. Some of those kids are not getting food at home, for reasons that are not necessarily the parents' fault. I do not know what the answer is to it all.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I suppose it depends upon the severity of the offence but, when you catch various ones, apart from putting them in some sort of detention facility, what other options do you have up here?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—As you would probably be aware, an amendment to the Young Offenders Act came in last year. That is preventing these juveniles from becoming a part of the justice system. It is well-documented that people go away to a boys' home and come back as better crooks. What we are doing at the moment is youth conferencing where you get the juvenile offender, the victim, the parents and other leaders in their community and actually point out to them what happens when you break in to a house and the impact that it has on the victim and the family. We cannot judge at all whether that is working or not as it has only just come in. So I cannot make any comment at all. But, for example, on the studies that I have done, it has worked very well with the Maori population in New Zealand, apparently. I would like to think that it could work here as well.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You are right at the start of it so you cannot evaluate it?

**Snr Sgt Reneker**—Yes. We cannot evaluate any sort of output at all as to how it is working.

**Senator TIERNEY**—This inquiry will go on for a little while and, of course, there are a few months before we have to report. If you could do any sort of evaluation on it in a few months time, that would be quite useful to receive. Mr Felsch, how far away is the nearest base for the Department of Community Services?

**Mr Felsch**—The Department of Community Services has one staff person here in the community.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is that position full time?

**Mr Felsch**—I will need to qualify that. The department have one staff person here in the community. Notionally, I believe, it used to be a full-time position. They had trouble filling it, as we often do with professional positions. It was vacant for quite a while in 1998. I believe that in early 1999 they filled it with a person who was in training, which meant that they were actually available to the community on three days a week and were being trained in Bourke for two days a week. One of the problems is, and it is not only with this—I do not think it is inherent with this person in particular; I think she is quite a competent young lady for the extent of her experience—the pressures of working as a single professional without support in a community like this causes a lot of people to buckle. There has been stress leave and that sort of thing come about; therefore, a very unpredictable presence develops.

**Senator TIERNEY**—My wife works in the same field, so I can understand that. What about community health facilities? Obviously, you would not have a hospital.

**Mr Felsch**—We do have a hospital. We have a hospital that prides itself on the level of service that it delivers, even to the point where we have a fly-in specialist service from the North

Shore and some of the other Sydney hospitals. That has been a tradition in this community over 20 years. I am not an expert in that area, but I am sure the health services manager would love to speak to you about it. It prides itself on the level of professional medical services that it can actually bring into this community, as much through historical interest by medicos as anything else.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How many beds are in the hospital?

**Mr Felsch**—There are 21. Also, the community health office here in the main part of town is staffed by, I think, three or four people. We also have an Aboriginal Health Service in the community as well.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Perhaps you can tell me a little about that?

**Mr Felsch**—I am not an expert in it, just as I am not an expert about the hospital, so I really do not know the extent of the services they provide.

**Senator TIERNEY**—We can find that out later. Mr Wiltshire, you mentioned earlier other factors affecting education. Would you like to comment on the movement of Aboriginal people in terms of the effect of being in a spot for ongoing education? How much of a problem is it that people move in and out of the town for various family and other reasons?

**Mr Wiltshire**—The principal of the central school, Ruythe Dufty, spoke earlier about the movements in and out of the school. She said that even this morning she had had six enrolments. Transient populations occur everywhere, obviously, but here in Brewarrina that would be an issue with education. Overall some of the problems that Brewarrina does face are social problems, social issues and social justice issues. There are some longstanding problems that have existed here for quite some time that have yet to be addressed at any reasonable level: processes of reconciliation and understanding the differences between culture; giving back identity to the Aboriginal people; and learning as non-Aboriginal people to co-exist in a manner of unity rather than division. Addressing these issues would do an awful lot for the overall wellbeing and the educational outcomes of the town of Brewarrina.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Miss Fazldeen, you are involved with the mobile facility. I did ask this question of someone else earlier, but you are probably better placed to answer it. There are quite a number of these in different areas of the country. As regards appropriate coverage of the area, are we short of facilities here in terms of not having enough coverage, or enough visits?

**Miss Fazldeen**—The coverage problem is mainly due to funding. We have got nine playgroups and three preschool sessions; to get more of that so that we can service everyone, we need more funding.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How often do you get to a spot?

**Miss Fazldeen**—To a playgroup—once a month.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What do you think would be ideal?

**Miss Fazldeen**—Once every two weeks.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So, doubling resources would help?

**Miss Fazldeen**—Yes, they would not be missing out on as much as they are now. They have not got the opportunity to jump in the car and go to a preschool session somewhere else or anything like that.

**Senator TCHEN**—Mrs Pippas, you said that all the parents of the children in your day care centre are working?

**Mrs Pippos**—Yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—Are all the children in full-time day care?

**Mrs Pippos**—No, not full-time. Some of the parents work in the mornings or in the afternoons. We have two sessions: from 8.30 a.m. until 1 p.m., and from 1 p.m. until 5.30 p.m.

**Senator TCHEN**—Senator Tierney has already asked most of my questions. I do have one question to put to Mr Wiltshire: can you say whether it is possible to isolate particular problem areas—either geographically or socially—within the Aboriginal community?

**Mr Wiltshire**—Definitely. I would like to elaborate on that, but I would like to do it in camera.

**CHAIR**—The difficulty with that is time constraints, because we are running over-time—but there are other ways to deal with this.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Perhaps a written submission would be appropriate, which we could consider in the same way.

**CHAIR**—Yes, a written submission can remain private, as well. I should state, in terms of observers present today, that the committee process, when we are taking evidence in a venue such as this, is a formal Senate process, and we can only include interchange between those people formally appearing. However, the committee is still taking submissions, and if there is additional information that any observer wishes to get to the committee, then that can be sent to the Senate as a formal submission. I would like to thank the witnesses that have been before us in this last session. Thank you for your time; it is much appreciated.

**Committee adjourned at 12.26 p.m.**