



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

(Subcommittee)

Reference: Aspects of family services

BRISBANE

Thursday, 28 November 1996

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Members:

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Mr Hatton		Dr Southcott
Mr Kerr		Mr Tony Smith
Mr McClelland		Mr Kelvin Thomson
Mr Melham		

Matters referred to the committee:

To inquire and report on:

the range of community views on the factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown;

those categories of individuals most likely to benefit from programs aimed at preventing marriage and relationship breakdown;

the most effective strategies to address the needs of identified target groups; and

the role of governments in the provisions of these services.

WITNESSES

BREUSCH, Mrs Lynette Margaret, Joint Chair, Couples for Marriage Enrichment Australia (Queensland), PO Box 907, Kenmore, Queensland 4069	584
BREUSCH, Mr Lloyd John, Joint Chair, Couples for Marriage Enrichment Australia (Queensland), PO Box 907, Kenmore, Queensland 4069	584
CLARK, Ms Julie Margaret, Director of Counselling, Boystown National Community Projects, Unit 9/97 Castlemaine Street, Milton, Queensland 4068	669
DE'AMBROSIS, Mr Andrew Terrence, Co-Director, Anglican Family Care, 439 Ann Street, Brisbane, Queensland	562
DISNEY, Ms Helen, National Director, Relationships Australia, 15 Napier Close, Deakin, Australian Capital Territory	660
DOHERTY, Ms Deidre Anne, Domestic Violence Worker, Windana Women's Shelter, c/- Women's Legal Service, PO Box 5446, West End, Queensland 4101	633
DORMAN, Mrs Alison Frances, Co-Director, Anglican Family Care, 439 Ann Street, Brisbane, Queensland	562
EGLINGTON, Ms Pauline Joy, Relief Coordinator, Redlands Domestic Violence Service, PO Box 524, Capalaba, Queensland 4157	574
HOOKE, Ms Barbara Elizabeth, General Law Solicitor, Caxton Legal Centre Inc., 28 Heal Street, New Farm, Queensland	623
IWANOW, Mrs Janet Marie, 7 Hoad Street, Upper Mount Gravatt, Queensland 4122	676
LAWLER, Ms Merran Jane, Director/Solicitor, Caxton Legal Centre Inc., 28 Heal Street, New Farm, Queensland	623
MACDONALD, Mr Ian Sinclair, Executive Director, Relationships Australia (Qld) Inc., 67 St Pauls Terrace, Brisbane, Queensland 4000	660
MAYFIELD, Mrs Judith, Coordinator, Family Skills Training Program, Sunnybank Family Support Inc., PO Box 1103, Sunnybank Hills, Queensland 4109	606
McNULTY, Ms Amanda, Community Worker, Violence Against Non-English Background Group, c/- Women's Legal Service, PO Box 5446, West End, Queensland 4101	633
OZANNE, Mr Trevor Douglas, Committee Member, Men's Help Line Association Inc., PO Box 181, Ashgrove, Queensland 4060	594
RATHUS, Ms Zoe Scott, Legal Coordinator, Women's Legal Service, PO Box 5446, West End,	

Queensland 4101	633
ROBSON, Mr John, National Administrator, Prepare/Enrich Australia, PO Box 767, Kenmore, Queensland 4069	584
ROHAN, Mr Peter, President, Men's Help Line Association Inc., PO Box 181, Ashgrove, Queensland 4060	594
STEPHENSON, Ms Susan Ann, Director, Sunnybank Family Support Inc., PO Box 1103, Sunnybank Hills, Queensland 4109	606
TAYLOR, Ms Betty, Coordinator, Domestic Violence Service, Gold Coast, PO Box 409, Southport, Queensland	654
THOMASSON, Miss Elisabeth Dorothy, Family Skills Facilitator and Trainer, Sunnybank Family Support Inc., PO Box 1103, Sunnybank Hills, Queensland 4109	606

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
AFFAIRS
(Subcommittee)

Aspects of family services

BRISBANE

Thursday, 28 November 1996

Present

Mr Andrews (Chair)

Mrs Grace

Mr Kelvin Thomson

Mr Tony Smith

The subcommittee met at 9.09 a.m.

Mr Andrews took the chair.

DE'AMBROSIS, Mr Andrew Terrence, Co-Director, Anglican Family Care, 439 Ann Street, Brisbane, Queensland

DORMAN, Mrs Alison Frances, Co-Director, Anglican Family Care, 439 Ann Street, Brisbane, Queensland

CHAIR—This is the eighth day of public hearings for the legal and constitutional affairs committee inquiry into aspects of family support services. I am expecting two of my colleagues who are both Queenslanders to turn up at some stage. It just goes to show that the least distance you have to travel, the longer it takes to get there. Rather than wait for them, because we will get behind time I am proposing to start, but I will then have them ratify the evidence which has been given. So we will just proceed in the meantime.

We have had more than 150 submissions to the inquiry so far and there are more still coming in, so there has been quite a good response to it. I welcome you and others along to today's hearing. I should also indicate that those who are asked to come in and give evidence on any particular day do not necessarily reflect the bent of the committee in any one way. What we have tried to do as we go around the country is to cover the whole field. There may be what seems like a bias one way or another at any one particular hearing, but that is just the nature of trying to cover the field. If organisations or individuals are not invited in to give evidence at a public hearing it does not mean that their submissions are neglected or unimportant. In fact, the submissions are the primary source of information and the public hearings are more an opportunity to tease out some of the issues with a variety of people around the country. So I say that by way of background and welcome you to the hearing.

Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as the proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission dated 25 October 1996. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

Mrs Dorman—Let me just introduce our agency first and then Andrew could have some comments to make about that. Andrew and I share a directing role at Anglican Family Care. We are an agency that is approved and funded by the federal Attorney-General's Department for marriage and relationship education and counselling. Andrew coordinates the counselling section and I look after the education section.

We are funded to provide counselling and education services in the Brisbane city area only. However, we do have a branch at Cleveland, which is east of Brisbane on Moreton Bay, where counselling is conducted three days a week, and at Goodna between Ipswich and Brisbane, where there is counselling one day a week. Pre-marriage and other education courses are also conducted at Toowoomba and Warwick on the Darling Downs. Next year we will be doing some at Petrie, which is north of Brisbane, and Nerang on the Gold Coast. The cost of these extra services is carried by the agency.

Anglican Family Care was successful in gaining funding last year from the federal Attorney-General's Department for the community development project for Queensland, the purpose of which is to address access

and equity issues for people from non-English speaking backgrounds to mainstream agencies. Anglican Family Care's experience in pre-marriage education spans 20 years and, in counselling, about 10 years. Counsellor training programs are conducted at the agency and, in the past, a training course for marriage education was written jointly by AFC and Centacare and established in the TAFE system.

Mr De'Ambrosis—The points we wish to raise are basically to clarify some things that we raised in our submission under specific headings. The first one is competitive tendering. We are conscious of the fact that the Attorney-General's Department is moving to competitive tendering. Concern is raised about this particular form of tendering since this process promotes competition between welfare agencies. As well as inequity, the tendering does not allow services to be located in the areas of need. It only allows the organisation or individual who prepares the best tender to get the work or funds. The result will be that welfare sectors will become fragmented further as organisations compete for the funding dollar, rather than working in partnership.

The second point is on the preventative funding for programs in education and counselling. Limited funds are directed to preventative programs currently, and an expansion of educative and counselling programs would be valuable to address the growing social issues in the community. The third point is that the supplemental funding to existing services has not been increased since their implementation. Existing services that are currently offered have not received supplemental funding since implementation.

Anglican Family Care, for example, received funding in 1990 to deliver services. Even though the demand has increased and wages have increased, no supplemental funding has been received from the department. Workers continue to work for the same rates of pay as when the funding was introduced. This parallels the introduction of the social and community services award which has been introduced in Queensland in the last four months.

The introduction of the award through the industrial legislation has meant that workers are now acknowledged through their particular rates of pay and their work in the community sector, however governments—state and Commonwealth—have provided no financial support to agencies in the implementation of this award. Consequently, services such as Anglican Family Care are considering reductions in staff which would be the result of reduction in service delivery. We have tabled letters to this commission supporting that.

Another point is inequity across different programs. Across different Commonwealth Attorney-General programs there are inequitable arrangements, with some programs being fully funded as opposed to others that are partially funded. Fully funded programs are family skills, adolescent mediation and family therapy. On the other hand, programs such as counselling and education require a fee-for-service structure to bolster their services. Another point is that there is no funding for marketing. Agencies are not allocated funding in program budgeting to promote their services. The community is not aware of the services provided by the Attorney-General's Department. If funding was provided, advertising of services would ensure community awareness was raised.

The final point is that peak organisations are inequitable. Family Services Australia represents all organisations funded under the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, except for Centacare and

Relationships Australia. This peak organisation is poorly funded and, in a recent decision by its member organisations, decided to increase fees from members to ensure that it was able to support the necessary activities. This in turn creates further difficulties when agencies such as Anglican Family Care are experiencing cost-cutting exercises in order to respond to no increases in funding to government programs, implementation of awards such as the SACS award, inequitable funding distribution across programs, as mentioned earlier, and the continuing fragmentation of the welfare services in a competitive environment from the tender process.

CHAIR—Thank you. I would like to take up with you some of the funding issues in particular. We have had evidence from other organisations in a similar direction so far as funding is concerned. If I can attempt to summarise some of the concerns, it seems to be that, firstly, there is no understanding of the new needs based funding and what the criteria for it is and, secondly, that within the funding there does not seem to have been sufficient breakdown to allow for the additional costs associated with providing a service, as you say, such as marketing or attracting clientele to the services. Is that your experience?

Mr De'Ambrosis—It is difficult when there is no allocation for that particular area, or we are not provided with that allocation in our funding programs to be able to do marketing and it has to be generated by the agency itself.

CHAIR—Can I ask you about the geographic distribution of funding that commenced with the Justice Statement and has been continued in the latest round of funding pursuant to the last budget. What are your views about that type of allocation, where a particular locale or region is identified and then tenders sought for it?

Mrs Dorman—I think the main thing, when I have spoken to other agencies about applying for those funds, particularly in the areas outside the capital city, has been that there has not been sufficient funding allowed for travel expenses and all of the other things that are associated with being outside a major city. There has been almost a reluctance to apply for some of those by agencies who need that component to set up an agency to start with, if there is nothing already established there, and also to allow for the extra expenses associated with the remoteness, I suppose.

Mr De'Ambrosis—I was just going to raise another issue too. I think that in terms of the needs assessment, sometimes we wonder at how the needs assessment is actually established. Some of the services that we know are desperately needed in some areas are not necessarily being promoted in those areas and so we are really questioning the rationale on how needs is being adjudicated.

CHAIR—One criticism that has been made on a number of occasions now is that nobody actually knows what the needs assessment criteria are.

Mr De'Ambrosis—I think that is quite valid.

CHAIR—Right. The other point made by some organisations—and we would like your comment on it—is the balance between community organisations set up in a particular locality to promote a particular program or programs and the larger more centralised agencies such as yours or Centacare or Relationships

Australia. There have been conflicting views put to us. One view put to us is that the larger organisations have the expertise and the economies of scale to be able to provide a better service; the other is that there are advantages in having a local home-grown community based service which is stand-alone. I presume you would favour the former one, but I am interested in your comments.

Mrs Dorman—I guess it depends on how you look at it, in terms of supervision and financing when you are setting everything up from nothing in a community based organisation and balancing the quality of service of that against that of the established services that have all of that infrastructure. Obviously, because of where we are coming from, we would favour an organisation that has some credibility and some background and some financial backing from the organisation.

CHAIR—Your point about the competitive tendering process: is it a particular aspect of this tendering process that you have some disquiet about or is it having a tendering process?

Mr De'Ambrosis—I think the purpose of the tendering process really needs to be questioned. Probably we have some concern just about the process being used. What it would mean from what we have seen from experience is that the people who present the best submission are the people who are going to win that tender. That is understandable; we appreciate why that rationale may be made. But the problem with that is that it does not necessarily mean that a particular service is going to be located where it needs to be. Maybe those people were not as successful at the preparation of that tender as the one that won that tender. It does not necessarily mean to say that it is going to ensure that services are going to be delivered in the places where they are needed.

Mrs Dorman—I think it also discourages working collaboratively amongst agencies when it is known very well that they are competing for the same dollar. It discourages working together to provide an overall service by comparing notes and saying, 'We will do this and you do that' if we know that we are competing.

CHAIR—But does that go back to a problem with the needs based approach or are you saying that, when you look at the provision of services on the ground here in Brisbane for example, and then compare that to the needs based approach, it is difficult to work out how the needs based approach came to the conclusions it did? I do not want to put words in your mouth, but is that what you are suggesting?

Mr De'Ambrosis—I think it is more complex than that because it raises those same issues that Alison was referring to. What happens instead of organisations working together for a common purpose is that they become more fragmented as well, so they compete to try to place services in a particular area. Earlier you were asking which is better: to have a home-grown organisation in a particular area or a large centralised organisation providing the services. I do not think there is a simple answer for that because there are benefits with both ways.

If you go with the tendering process, the needs assessment is one particular component that needs to be considered. But there are a whole lot of factors that need to be considered too about what the tendering process means to welfare organisations, which are about looking after people, as opposed to a system that is, I suppose, very much an industrial management sort of process where you compete because you are looking at the best product being produced. This is a different thing; we are actually talking about people now.

CHAIR—Should there be something in the overall funding guidelines that encourages cooperation and integration of services where possible?

Mr De'Ambrosis—I believe so.

Mrs Dorman—Certainly in the last guidelines on marriage education it was stated that it was encouraged that collaborative submissions be put together. We did that, but it is not simple to do, especially when you are working in different areas to try to work collaboratively.

CHAIR—I take up the point about the social and community service award on which you have provided some further papers. As I understand it, there was not a state award in Queensland as far as this field was concerned. Does this apply to all workers? For example, does it apply to counsellors, to marriage educators, to mediators and to family skills training people? It covers the field? Presumably yours was one of the 148 organisations named as a respondent to the award application?

Mrs Dorman—Anglicare, our umbrella body, was.

CHAIR—The thrust of your comments about this is that this is going to add something like \$70,000 a year to—

Mrs Dorman—To maintain our services the way we are at the moment and to be able to continue those services, yes, it would add that amount.

CHAIR—Do you know whether this affects other agencies with Attorney-General's program funding?

Mrs Dorman—I know it certainly has affected Centacare. I have not spoken to Relationships Australia.

CHAIR—Presumably they are in the same boat?

Mrs Dorman—I guess so.

Mr De'Ambrosis—It has affected youth and family service, which is another Attorney-General funded program located at Logan.

CHAIR—We have not had evidence about this from any other state, so I am wondering whether Queensland is—and I use this word in its proper meaning—peculiar in this sense?

Mrs Dorman—It has already been implemented in some other states: South Australia and, I think, Western Australia. I am not sure. But it seems to be having a greater impact here because there was not a state award in place previously.

CHAIR—Without dealing with that specifically, as I understand it, what you are saying is that, in the way in which the funding is allocated, things like increased salary costs are not really taken into account in

the way that formula—to the extent that there is a formula—is derived?

Mr De'Ambrosis—In terms of award wages, you mean?

CHAIR—No, just in terms of, say, the grant you get from the Attorney-General's Department?

Mrs Dorman—For counselling there has not been any increase at all since 1990, so in fact they are going backwards because there has not even been a CPI increase. It has been the same with the education funding.

CHAIR—As I understand the way in which those funds have been allocated, is it unfair to describe it in terms of at some stage in the past an arbitrary decision being made which gave agencies a particular grant of money, and all that has really happened since then is from time to time there has been some CPI increase, or in the case of counselling, I think, there was a 20 per cent increase, wasn't there, as a result of the 1989 survey?

Mrs Dorman—That is when we received our first money, so I am not sure what happened before that.

CHAIR—So you got your first money then? But what you are saying, if I understand it, is that in the allocation of money there is not a sufficient breakdown that says, 'Well, there has been an increase in wages in the sector of X amount and that should be borne in mind in the formula for any future amounts,' or 'Your clientele was X last year but it is X plus Y this year and that is not taken into account either.' Is that what you are saying?

Mr De'Ambrosis—That is correct.

CHAIR—Again, I do not want to put words into your mouth, but are you suggesting that there ought to be some review of that formula that does take into account the reality that you are facing?

Mr De'Ambrosis—Yes, we believe so.

CHAIR—Just a couple of other things. Standards and training have been raised just about everywhere we have gone. What do you say about what we ought to be aiming at in terms of standards and training in the various subprogram areas? Is there a general proposition that you would advocate?

Mrs Dorman—Certainly the Marriage Educators Association of Australia is looking at that whole issue at the moment. As you would know, there have been national competency standards being worked on and almost finished. I think that that association is certainly looking to standardising training and possibly even looking at a national training program which is competency based. The difficulty, of course, is that for the association to do that, it is voluntarily organised at the moment, there are no funds for that, but certainly the spirit is there to want to do that. But without funding, it is very difficult to take that too far too quickly.

CHAIR—Competency standards have been developed for marriage and relationship education. I think

there is some work going on on competency standards for counselling at the present time. If we were to recommend, for example, that competency standards ought to be developed for each subprogram area, as a baseline of training and professionalism, do you think then that that could be administered by agencies themselves in such a way that you could ensure that those standards were being adopted and met?

Mrs Dorman—I think it would depend on the background and the size and the resources of the agency. I think it would be something that every agency would ideally want to move towards. I think that there would be agencies that would be frightened of that because of their lack of resources, human resources particularly, to be able to put that into place, but I think that is what we would all want to happen.

CHAIR—Can I break it down under the funded agencies and then the unfunded agencies. Would there be sufficient resources in the funded agencies to achieve that, or would this require additional resourcing?

Mrs Dorman—I think it is putting extra strain on existing staff. Certainly most of the funded agencies I know are understaffed. So I think there needs to be extra funding to take that in—if it is to be done properly, to be administered properly.

CHAIR—So, if that is what we are aiming to achieve, there is to be some pool of resources to enable it to be achieved?

Mrs Dorman—I think so, yes.

Mr De' Ambrosis—I think that what you are actually alluding to is quality assurance processes being put in place. The whole idea of placing quality assurance systems into any organisation, with no added resources or any sort of support in that particular area, is going to be fairly difficult to try to implement, because it is another huge thing to put in place. If you are talking about training and practices coming under that particular area, that is going to be a huge cost for agencies to bear.

CHAIR—I would like to go back to one thing about the award. If you do not get any further funding, what happens? If your agency is facing a \$70,000 shortfall in this financial year, what do you do?

Mrs Dorman—We will have to reduce services and cut staff.

CHAIR—And what sort of reduction in services would that involve?

Mrs Dorman—About 18 per cent is what we would be looking at, in order to continue as we are going. But we are looking at options with staff at the moment for how we might best manage that.

Mr TONY SMITH—In relation to some of your heads of factors contributing to breakdown, are you looking at subsequent breakdown—say, second and even third relationships, marriages, et cetera?

Mr De' Ambrosis—Yes.

Mr TONY SMITH—I notice there is no mention of the child support system. One of the biggest complaints I hear in my electorate office is that it impinges on subsequent relationships. Indeed, I had a discussion only two nights ago with a woman who clearly spelt out—she would have been a great witness, if we had had time to arrange it—precisely how it impacted on her relationship with her second partner. Do you see that sort of evidence in discussions that you have had with people in that situation?

Mr De' Ambrosis—Yes, we do. The only reason it may have been omitted from that particular submission is the time frame in which we had to prepare it. But, yes, we definitely would do.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you concede that there is considerable anxiety about the operation of the system and how it can impact on people in second marriages or subsequent relationships?

Mr De' Ambrosis—I would concede that the evidence that we have of people coming into the organisation and raising that issue supports the whole assertion of anxiety around the child support system.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you think it is a significant matter that ought to be looked at as part of this sort of inquiry overall? Or is it a matter that we can afford to ignore?

Mr De' Ambrosis—It is a matter that would need to be looked at. If it is one of the factors that are coming up in the counselling process, then it needs to be considered. Organisations are having to deal with that regularly.

Mr TONY SMITH—Yes. When you get complaints about that, do you basically tell people to contact the agency, or do you try and make representations? How far can you go with that sort of thing?

Mr De' Ambrosis—Can you clarify further what you are saying? If someone contacts the agency—

Mr TONY SMITH—Somebody contacts you for help and comes to see you and says that their relationship is under great stress because they cannot get support for their children from their previous relationship or that, alternatively, because the level of support is so outrageously high they cannot maintain the stepchildren of the second relationship. Do you get people asking you if there is anything that can be done about this?

Mr De' Ambrosis—Yes. Recently we had a case where a guy had rung up in relation to that very issue. As an organisation that provides counselling and education programs, we can offer that side of things and at least give some sort of emotional support to them. The discussion process went into talking about what other options he could possibly look at—whether it be legal support or support through friends or family. We more or less try to explore options with the person about the most suitable way to go, and there are not normally many other alternatives for people.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you see figures in relation to second and subsequent breakdowns which you find particularly alarming? Are they very high?

Mrs Dorman—They are certainly higher than for first marriages; yes.

Mr TONY SMITH—Is there a tendency to overlook that a bit? Maybe we are not addressing the people in that interregnum situation before they recommit themselves.

Mrs Dorman—We run a program specifically for people entering second marriages, and we run a step-family program with that. It is an educative process, I guess; but it certainly highlights the difficulties that people have in moving into that situation. We often find that people will enter counselling through that education program and try to get help or support from the beginning.

Mr De'Ambrosis—The training programs that we have in the agency definitely focus on the area of step-parenting or step-families, relationship breakdowns and the effects on families and children, because it is a fairly prominent area.

Mr TONY SMITH—Is there a greater willingness for people who have had a breakup of a marriage or a relationship to try to seek assistance before they enter it? Or does it happen during the relationship?

Mrs Dorman—There is certainly more motivation the second time around. We have a program for people who have been separated or divorced and who are recovering from that process, and the motivation to be at that, and also at a second marriage pre-marriage program, is much greater.

Mr TONY SMITH—Having said that, the figures seem to suggest that it is not working.

Mrs Dorman—Very few people are actually accessing the program at the moment. That comes back to what we were saying about promotion of and publicity for the whole field. People simply do not know it exists.

Mr TONY SMITH—Arguably, it is more catastrophic for a second marriage to break up than for a first marriage, because of the intermix of children.

Mrs Dorman—Yes. It is much more complex. For instance, we are not able to offer child-care facilities at this point in time for people coming to those programs, which is probably a great deterrent to people coming, simply because of the complex nature of their families. It is probably a great factor in people not actually accessing the service.

Mr De'Ambrosis—It also becomes more complex because of the fact that, as we indicated earlier, the funding arrangement around delivery of services is also fairly limited. If you are looking to address this, one of the issues we have raised in the submission was to have more of a preventative focus to ensure that the things that we are aware of are attended to.

CHAIR—Can I raise a point that Tony raised? Is there more that the Family Court could be doing? A lot of people have spoken to us about life stages and the particular points when interventions can occur. One of the stages where an intervention occurs is when a relationship breaks down and people go to the Family Court. We know from its statistics that 59 per cent of counselling in the Family Court is initiated on a voluntary basis and the other 41 per cent is court ordered. So, for a particular period, people are actually within the system of counselling and family support services, but then they leave it again. We also know that,

within a period of time, the majority of people enter into new relationships. As Tony was saying, the figures show that second and subsequent marriages break down at a higher rate than first marriages do.

Is there something more which can be done when people are actually dealing with the Family Court and are, for example, in receipt of counselling there? Do Family Court counsellors say to people, 'Here is some information. You may not want to look at it now, because you are going through this, but why don't you take this home with you and, in six months or 12 months time, have a look at this information? If you are thinking about getting into another relationship, which the evidence suggests that a lot of people do, you might want to do this'? Does anything like that occur?

Mrs Dorman—We certainly send out all our material to the Family Court, though probably not in the quantities that we need to because of financial constraints.

CHAIR—Do you know whether they use it?

Mrs Dorman—I do not hear of a lot of referrals coming through to my section from the Family Court.

CHAIR—Is there anything more that can be done, given that you have a point of leverage, if I can express it that way?

Mrs Dorman—Once again it is an awareness within the Family Court of the services that already exist and an encouragement to refer people to them.

CHAIR—Is there any regular contact between personnel involved in the community agencies like Anglicare and Centacare and Relationships Australia and the personnel of the Family Court?

Mr De'Ambrosis—There have been meetings held with the Family Court. That was introduced about March or April this year and it was to be every two months. Some of those meetings have been successful and well attended, some have not been. There were never any meetings held prior to that in the time since I have been involved with Anglicare or Anglican Family Care. Those meetings were convened purely for the purpose of discussing the new Family Law Act and exploring possibilities of how we could possibly work better together. There is a long way to go yet before that can be useful.

CHAIR—Thank you for coming along this morning and also for your submission, it has been most useful. Thank you very much for attending.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Tony Smith):

That this subcommittee authorises the evidence which was received prior to the formation of the subcommittee as evidence to the inquiry.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Kelvin Thomson):

That this subcommittee accept as exhibits to the inquiry a bundle of letters, the first one of which is from

Anglican Family Care to Helen Hambling of the Office of Legal Aid and Family Services within the Attorney-General's Department.

[9.47 a.m.]

EGLINGTON, Ms Pauline Joy, Relief Coordinator, Redlands Domestic Violence Service, PO Box 524, Capalaba, Queensland 4157

CHAIR—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission, No. 99. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

Ms Eglington—Yes, I would, as that was only a very brief submission. I would like to speak a little bit about our service and then about a couple of the things that we find contribute to marriage breakdown.

Our service is quite small but covers quite a large area to the south-east of Brisbane. We provide accommodation, telephone counselling, an outreach service as well as court support for women and children escaping domestic violence. We average 280 new clients a year. Women and children accessing our service comment that, in a majority of occasions when they endeavour to access services like police, social security and even magistrates courts, their experiences are minimised as domestic violence is still considered by many to be a family matter and must remain hidden.

It is of paramount importance that all levels of government acknowledge domestic exists in society, name it, and treat it as the crime that it is. Issues of power and control within the family context must be recognised as having a negative impact on these families and we feel that the federal government must take a lead role in identifying this issue.

Children accompanying mothers who access our service are often the unseen, unheard victims. Not only are these children witnesses of domestic violence perpetrated against their mother but also, in a large number of cases, they are victims of physical and emotional abuse. So, as a domestic violence service, the only relationship breakdowns that we see are those where domestic violence is a factor.

About 90 per cent of the women accessing our service will tell us that they have tried many times to make the relationship or the marriage work. They have often changed all aspects of their behaviour. They live on a shoestring budget. They change their appearance to comply with their partner's requests. They will go to counselling themselves. They will keep the children quiet in their partner's presence. They are super efficient housewives, but that is all to no avail, as there will always be something that is unacceptable to their partner. They will often leave their home and their violent partner, returning many times before making that really final tough break. Most women want a happy family environment for their children. They only want the violence to stop. The power and control aspects of domestic violence are, from our perspective, prevalent in the marriage breakdowns that we see.

Where domestic violence is not a factor in the marriage, the dynamics will be different. There will be more equality across that marriage and more equity in the relationship. When the split happens, although it will be painful and difficult, it will not be dominated by one powerful person.

So we applaud the services offering counselling and mediation for relationship breakdown in non-violent relationships, and these are very necessary services. However, from our experience, where there is domestic violence in a relationship, couple counselling and mediation cannot work. Perpetrators must be responsible for their own actions and violence. It is only after the issue of violence has been addressed that relationship issues can be considered.

Women subjected to domestic violence are generally in no position to reveal that violence perpetrated against them in marriage counselling and mediation situations for fear of further and more exacerbated violence. Mediation can put women and children gravely at risk if the domestic violence has not stopped.

We do not feel that women should be required to negotiate about their entitlement to a safe and nurturing environment for themselves and their children. Violence at home should be reflected in the formal justice system, as is any other type of crime. Mediation is certainly a viable possibility for couples in a devious situation after separation, where they are looking at arrangements for property settlement and maybe things to do with children.

Concern has been raised by some of our clients that the current service offered through the Family Court for mediation, which they consider to be quite good, could be dismantled. This raises concerns. The current mediators have been trained in domestic violence and power imbalance issues. They are aware of the development of decisions concerning their children's welfare and are bound by the Family Law Act. For women attending these sessions, the physical aspect of the building and the structure of the session is an in-built safety factor for them.

Most women in these situations have limited financial resources and have grave concerns that, should the counselling and mediation be taken away from the Family Court and attached to private practice, there would be cost attached and there would be no safety precautions in place. There is also a concern that guidelines would not be rigidly enforced to exclude inappropriate cases because of the circumstances of domestic violence.

Research does suggest that, even after counselling and attending men's programs, many abusive men cannot change. The physical abuse may lessen, but men often learn control tactics to persecute and humiliate their partners. Pre-relationship programs would be seen as going a long way to address this issue. Community education on the warning signs about the behaviour of potential perpetrators could be a good starting point for this process.

Women and children experiencing all facets of domestic violence in their lives lack self-esteem and confidence. Children who are low achievers at school have few social skills and resort to violence to settle disputes. In research carried out by Jennifer Smith, almost 67 per cent of mothers reported that they felt their children copied their partner's aggressive behaviour in some way. Child development experts will attest to the fact that children learn primarily from observing their parents and significant others. Therefore, it stands to reason that children observing violence as a way of settling disputes or gaining control of the situation will use violence.

This has serious implications for society. For children, this can lead to schoolyard bullying, excessive

fighting and violence between siblings, violence in crime and, eventually, violence in their relationships when they reach adulthood. They also learn that violence is an acceptable part of family life and that disrespect for women is okay.

From my experience, children from homes where domestic violence occurs use violence in many situations, as I have said before, and they have very few conflict resolution skills. They also learn that violence and control replaces love and care and accept it as a normal family interaction. Children must know there is a more respectful way for a family to function.

According to the Burdekin report into youth homelessness, a large proportion of young people had left home due to domestic violence in the family. So programs are needed to address this intergenerational cycle to stop violence. Studies indicate that 60 per cent of abusive men witnessed domestic violence as a child. The government has to take a lead role in implementing appropriate policies which include long-term comprehensive programs that could be introduced into the formal education system. These could include programs addressing such aspects as bullying, self-esteem, relationship education and parenting for young people. These should have a clear gender analysis and a need for equality in relationships. They should be delivered by people with expertise in the field and not added to the already overburdened teachers.

Teaching young people the benefits of practical parenting may have some long-term effect in stopping the cycle of intergenerational abuse. Women in a domestic violence situation will often be forced into low parenting practices. This comes about as women are doing a balancing act of trying to maintain peace and harmony. There is also the difficulty of putting boundaries around children's aggressive, negative behaviour when their partner is displaying the same behaviour with no consequences.

Safety of women and children is of paramount importance. Community education and programs directed to assist women and children are definitely needed. Therefore, it is imperative that the government take a leading role in designing and implementing appropriate policies in regard to violence within families and marriage. Keeping families together where violence is an issue can lead to injury and death of both women and children. So it is important that any programs aimed at preventing marriage and relationship breakdown have a clear gender analysis and a clear understanding of the power aspects of domestic violence.

CHAIR—Our focus is generally a preventative one. You have experience of dealing with women and families in circumstances where domestic violence has been in existence. Can you comment at all upon when those ex-partners had become aware that violence was an element in the make-up of their partner's background? What I am trying to get at is this: I understand the emphasis on dealing with violence after it has happened—and I am not trying to diminish that, because that is where a lot of the emphasis is placed—but can we go back a step prior to that? Are people unaware of violence in a family background before they enter into relationships—I suppose that is fair enough if it happens after they enter into relationships—before they make a commitment to each other, whether it is the commitment of living together on a long-term basis or getting married? Are people aware of some tendency to violence then, or does it sneak up on them after they have made that commitment?

Ms Eglington—Usually, from our experience, it sneaks up on them after they have made that

commitment. When they look back on a relationship, they can say, 'If I had known, I could have seen the signs, that jealousy and that possessiveness, but I just took it that he loved me and he didn't want me to be talking to someone.' But that happens only after the event when they are down the road a bit.

CHAIR—If you were giving advice about what ought to be encompassed by relationship and education programs at the pre-wedding stage, in light of your subsequent experience what sorts of things do think those programs ought to look at?

Ms Eglington—I guess I would say to young people that they really have to be aware of things like jealousy. The other thing is: if the young person's self-esteem is high and they have looked at themselves very well, they would not take that control from another person, be that a male or a female.

I guess there are little signs that happen when you are young, like that terrible jealousy of not wanting them to talk to each other. When they are going out together, there is this, 'I can only talk to this boy every day.' So it is about making young people aware that that is not a good sign. It is better to have a very balanced relationship with a large number of people.

CHAIR—So you are saying that jealousy is an early manifestation of what may—it may not necessarily—in some cases become violence in a relationship?

Ms Eglington—Yes.

CHAIR—Is there anything else?

Ms Eglington—There are probably a lot of things.

CHAIR—Jealousy is sort of one-sided. If you accept the proposition of Harville Hendrix, who says that we marry people of equal emotional immaturity, then it is something on both sides. So what is the complementary negative trade to jealousy? If you have got one partner who is a jealous person, what is it in the other partner that allows that jealousy to manifest itself? What is attractive to the other person?

Ms Eglington—I would say their low esteem. They are looking for someone to love them and to care for them, because quite often those people have not felt loved in their family of origin and have not had the attention that they have needed.

CHAIR—So over-attentiveness, which is actually jealousy, might attract one person to the other.

Ms Eglington—Yes.

CHAIR—I am not wanting to put words into your mouth, but I am trying to explore how we can deal with this at an earlier stage and, therefore, how programs that at least get couples together prior to the wedding have some component in them which gives them an opportunity to explore these sorts of issues more.

Ms Eglington—I really think that education has to go back to children, back to the younger age. Programs need to be built into the system where children learn a little bit about self-esteem; where they learn that it is okay to disagree, but it is not okay to fight where there is a big power imbalance; and where they learn how to handle that argument.

CHAIR—A lot of people have said to us—and I think some today probably will—that this has to happen in schools. There is probably not too much argument with that. Also the point has been made that, if you just do it in schools and everything else goes on at home, are you really achieving anything?

Whilst we are not entirely motivated by economically rational considerations, there is a consideration, both economic and otherwise, that the effect of spending a whole lot of money in school programs is being countered by not doing anything that involves parents. Equally, what is the point of doing all this in the school, which is supposed to have a good effect, if it is not having the effect otherwise? Presumably, earlier interventions have to involve parents as well.

Ms Eglington—Yes, I feel that you do. I think there have been some quite successful programs in South Australia that have looked at the bullying program. They have involved parents so that parents have actually come along and learnt that there is another way for them to resolve conflict as well; that it is not lashing out. I appreciate the fact that it is quite difficult to get people who do not want to be involved to be involved. But, given the opportunity that there could be a number of parents if there were programs offered connected to schools, I think they would actually access them.

CHAIR—You made reference to some research by Jennifer Smith. Do you have the reference or the citation? Can you just send it to us?

Ms Eglington—I can certainly get her research to you, yes.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—You mentioned the Burdekin report on youth homelessness. Does it say anything about marital breakdown as a cause of youth homelessness?

Ms Eglington—Yes.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Does it take a view about the impact of parents being together as opposed to parents being apart on youth homelessness?

Ms Eglington—Yes, it does and domestic violence continues even though there may not necessarily be a break. That domestic violence can continue within a relationship, within that marriage and for the length of that marriage, because they do not all separate because of domestic violence. People hang in there. Therefore sometimes the children leave because of that violence, but not necessarily because the family have split.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Yes, but the fact that the family split may be a factor in youth homelessness subsequently, might it not?

Ms Eglington—It definitely could be, yes.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—The other thing is that you refer to the current Family Court counselling and mediation programs and you are supportive of those. How would you see them as being superior to community based programs or alternative programs?

Ms Eglington—From our experience, those counsellors are very well aware of the parent control issues in domestic violence and they take them into consideration. They are aware of them and then those couples are not forced into ‘in the same room’ counselling. They can have separate rooms to look at their mediation. Whereas the concerns from women who have spoken about this have been that, if it goes away to private counsellors, are those buildings going to have those facilities?

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—So it is the sheer physical separation?

Ms Eglington—It is the sheer physical separation. It is the safety aspect of the court because women actually feel safe in the court where they know they can go to a separate room and their partner is in another one.

Mr TONY SMITH—First of all, what do you mean by domestic violence?

Ms Eglington—What do I mean by ‘domestic violence’? I mean all aspects of physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse, using children as levers against the other partner and sexual abuse.

Mr TONY SMITH—When we hear the words ‘domestic violence’, we always assume physical abuse, but as frequently happens in Queensland, because I have practised in the area considerably, when these orders are taken out the other party counteracts with an order and it just becomes an absolute farce. I am not quite sure whether you wish to comment on this, but I can quote one example. A chap came to the house at 6 o’clock in the evening to retrieve some computer gear of his and he copped a domestic violence order for that, in quite reasonable circumstances because he needed it for his work. Is there a downside or do you see an abuse of these orders?

Ms Eglington—I do not see an abuse of these orders. We do have women who do not get orders and they have clearly had intervention by police. They have clearly had abuse, maybe not in the last 12 months, but prior to that they have had severe physical abuse. At that time they were too scared to get an order. From our experience, yes we do have tit for tat orders.

We have also had other instances and there was one particular gentleman who beat up his wife and threw her out. They were on one of the bay islands. He threw her out of the house with her baby and then went over to the mainland and got himself a protection order to say that she had beaten him up. She was five foot nothing and he was about six foot six and a very big man. Then of course the police prosecutor said, ‘Well, this is a tit for tat order from her’, but of course it was not and she had bruising to prove it.

Mr TONY SMITH—Did she make a complaint of a criminal nature?

Ms Eglington—Of course, but we all know that a protection order is not a criminal offence.

Mr TONY SMITH—No. Did she make a complaint of assault to the police?

Ms Eglington—I do not think that most women will initially go and make a complaint of assault because of their very disempowered nature.

Mr TONY SMITH—I cannot understand that. If a woman can make a complaint and get a domestic violence order, why cannot she make a complaint of a criminal nature that she has been assaulted?

Ms Eglington—Because most women realise that a protection order is a civil matter. They still have some thought and care for the man and they do not want to see him put up before a criminal court.

Mr TONY SMITH—When they have been beaten up?

Ms Eglington—Yes, because of their very disempowered nature.

Mr TONY SMITH—And yet the very nature of a domestic violence order means that a man can be excluded from access to his children for a period of 12 months by an order or longer. In fact I think it is two years by such an order, which is the most empowering thing of all for a woman. Yet, if she has been beaten up to within an inch of her life, she will not go and make a complaint of an assault. I cannot understand that.

Ms Eglington—I have never had the experience where a domestic violence order has prevented the man from having access to his children.

Mr TONY SMITH—Initially it does though, does it not?

Ms Eglington—Most women who come into our shelter and our accommodation go to great lengths to try to make sure he has access to those children, even though there might be an order in place.

Mr TONY SMITH—If the order is breached, there are penal consequences for the breach. If the order specified no contact or not to approach the house, school or anything like that, that effectively means that an approach closer than the distance set would mean breach of the order, which means imprisonment for the breach.

Ms Eglington—From my experience with the women that we have, it will go to the Family Court and they will have access to those children.

Mr TONY SMITH—Ultimately, yes, but there is an interim period involved. You cannot just get to the Family Court. It takes a while.

Ms Eglington—It does take a while.

Mr TONY SMITH—What I am saying to you is: have we not got to be careful with this area? I can

tell you another story where a couple wanted to get back together, but the magistrate refused to lift the order, even though the violence amounted to a slap across the face and later it was shown that it was no more than that. They reconciled, they wanted to get back together and the magistrate refused to lift the order and that caused a problem in the relationship. In fact that caused big problems in the relationship.

Ms Eglington—You can put in a variation for anyone. I do not understand that at all, because the woman can go and put a variation into that order.

Mr TONY SMITH—The magistrate has the overall power to maintain the order. It is in his discretion.

Ms Eglington—I would also dispute the fact that if he slapped her, there was no need for a physical violence order. If you walked down the street, had a disagreement with your partner in business, they slapped you and there was a threat behind it, I would certainly take that as a very big abuse of someone's person.

Mr TONY SMITH—One thing emerged from the Burdekin report. Have you ever heard of the group Toughlove?

Ms Eglington—Yes.

Mr TONY SMITH—One of the things that emerged in a meeting that I had only the night before last with that group was that kids tell big fibs when they leave home to get the homeless child allowance. I guess all of those figures have to be viewed very carefully in light of the fact that that occurs. Do you agree?

Ms Eglington—I do not agree that children tell lies.

Mr TONY SMITH—At all?

Ms Eglington—If children tell lies, I think that there is something in their learning that they learnt to tell lies. Somewhere in their relationship with their parents, there are lies, especially if they are big lies.

Mr TONY SMITH—I should have brought these women along. They would have told you something about that, but anyway—

Ms Eglington—When children get older and they mix with a different group of people—but when they are young I certainly do not believe that they tell lies.

Mr TONY SMITH—You were saying that you would never accept that kids could go out and tell big porkies, say that they had been beaten up and all the rest of it so that they could get the homeless child allowance?

Ms Eglington—I would say that I would look at the family issues.

Mr TONY SMITH—But can you answer that specific question?

Ms Eglington—Children in that situation may make up stories to be able to get away from maybe the situation that they are in.

Mr TONY SMITH—Well, if the situation was perfectly reasonable and they were just rebelling, would you accept that that occurs, or don't you think children rebel?

Ms Eglington—Children do rebel; they certainly do rebel.

Mr TONY SMITH—So you accept that they do rebel and they do tell lies in some circumstances?

Ms Eglington—They do rebel and they do tell lies in some circumstances. I would also say that if parents were given enough parenting skills and the ability to look at relationships in a different manner, maybe those children would not rebel to the same degree, or else there are ways to work through occurrences with rebellious children.

Mr TONY SMITH—Does it thereby follow in some cases that that can contribute to the break-up of relationships? Do you accept that?

Ms Eglington—I do not accept that the children would contribute to the break-up to the relationship. I would say there was a problem with the relationship before the children became rebellious.

CHAIR—Can I thank you for your submission and also for coming along today. It is quite useful and informed us in our deliberations.

[10.16 a.m.]

ROBSON, Mr John, National Administrator, Prepare/Enrich Australia, PO Box 767, Kenmore, Queensland 4069

BREUSCH, Mr Lloyd John, Joint Chair, Couples for Marriage Enrichment Australia (Queensland), PO Box 907, Kenmore, Queensland 4069

BREUSCH, Mrs Lynette Margaret, Joint Chair, Couples for Marriage Enrichment Australia (Queensland), PO Box 907, Kenmore, Queensland 4069

CHAIR—Welcome. Is there anything you want to add about the capacity in which you appear this morning?

Mr Robson—I am the national administrator of Prepare/Enrich Australia, and it is in this capacity that I primarily appear. I have invited my colleagues, with your permission, who are associated with Couples for Marriage Enrichment Australia (CMEA), which is an organisation with which I am also involved. But my primary submission is for Prepare/Enrich Australia.

Mr Breusch—My wife, Lyn, and I are the chair couple for Marriage Enrichment Australia in the Queensland region.

CHAIR—Thank you. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament.

We are in receipt of your submission of 2 October 1996. Is there an introductory statement you would like to make?

Mr Robson—Yes, Mr Chairman. I would like to give a broad overview of that submission and then major on one or two of the particular aspects of the submission. Could I mention that the submission was made not only against the background of my current involvement as the national administrator of Prepare/Enrich but of many years involvement in the field of marriage and the family both at the remedial and at the preventive level.

For many years I was national director of the Family Life Movement of Australia and in that capacity was involved in the development of family life and marriage education programs and counselling services. I was also a foundation member of the Family Law Council, which brought me into close contact with the outworkings of both the Family Law Act and the Family Court of Australia.

In my submission I point out a number of things. One was the public perception of marriage and family issues. Another was the need for—a considered integrated family policy. I realise that the attitude to family policy has had rises and falls over the past 30 or 40 years, but I think it is a significant issue which,

whilst it has been put into the too-hard basket, really needs addressing because it is so relevant.

Also, I raise the question of the provision of resources for celebrants both religious and civil and, linked with that, was the question of the role of civil celebrants. Then I also included some observations in regard to balancing the focus, both from the point of community attitudes and government funding between pre-marital education and marriage education. It seems to me that more recently there has been a significant amount of research data which has indicated that, whilst pre-marital education is terribly important and needs supporting, we need to recognise the importance of marriage education in the neo-marital or post-wedding era. It was David Mace who said on one occasion that he believed that one of the factors contributing most significantly to marriage break-down is the existence of what he termed the 'mediocre marriage' in society.

So, equally important to the work of preparing couples for marriage is the need to help couples improve the quality of their relationship and the pursuit of excellence in marriage. That is an issue which Lyn and Lloyd as chair couple may wish to address. Then I raise the question of the wider view of marriage education. We need to try and effect some community conditioning that marriage education, including pre-marital education, begins at birth and involves a whole life process and has implications for many institutions and government departments in our society.

I did particularly want to expand on the question of resources for celebrants, both religious and civil. In sense, and maybe it is understandable as a starting point, that the bulk of government funding in the marriage education area has been directed toward financing peak bodies in their work of providing this service. I strongly support the notion of the peak bodies and the provision of resources for them. I think that peak bodies have a very significant role in terms of higher visibility in the community, of articulating standards of community education and raising community awareness of what marriage and marriage education is all about.

As well as developing a body of skills in this area, I think that we have tended to focus on the peak bodies at the expense of what I call 'other front-line troops' in the field. We are aware that 58 per cent of couples who marry in Australia marry via a religious celebrant, and the remaining 42 per cent marry via the registry office or civil celebrant. Probably to date no more than 15 per cent of couples who marry pass through one of the programs offered by the peak bodies. It seems to me that there is a major hiatus here and that there is a strategic resource which is largely undeveloped: that is the average local clergyman in his community.

I make the submission that I think there is urgent need for additional resources and support to be given to the average clergyman who reaches couples at a much earlier stage

than the structured, organised programs offered by peak bodies. The clergyman has, in many cases, an ongoing relationship with the couple and is in a position, perhaps, to offer additional services in the marriage education area. I have talked to many clergy out there in the field. Via Prepare/Enrich, we have contact with over 4,000 clergy throughout Australia who have been trained to use the Prepare/Enrich programs, and are using them. The common response is that there is a need for additional support from federal government. Firstly, I think they feel a need to be recognised. They are, in fact, premarital educators or marriage educators. It may be taken for granted that they are, but they need some sort of recognition and affirmation of the significance of their role in that area. I think that affirmation can come from a number of sources. I think it can come also from the government facilitating the provision of resources to assist them in their work of working with couples, in either the premarital or the marriage education area. These resources can take a

whole range of forms.

I think they need support from the feeling that the government believes in the sorts of things that they are doing and wants to affirm them in the role via marriage friendly legislation and all sorts of other procedures. This is a very significant body of 58 per cent of the couples who marry—that is, 63,000 couples on last year's statistics are married at the local level by an existing parish clergyman or religious celebrant.

Then again, linked with that is the impact of the other 42 per cent married by the registry office or the civil celebrant. I think this calls into question the whole area of the role and the function of the civil celebrant. I am aware that submissions have already been made to this inquiry by civil celebrant bodies, and that there is a major rethink going on here. It seems to me that what is desperately needed is some process whereby we can encourage civil celebrants to see their role as wider than just performing the ceremony to include being able to support the couple and help the couple get in touch with those resources which are going to enable them to approach marriage more realistically and with access to more resources to give them a better start in their relationship.

I think there is a need to provide training facilities for civil celebrants; a need to help civil celebrants feel a sense of accountability in their role beyond that of performing the ceremony, and certainly I think there is a need to be discriminating in the appointment of civil celebrants. I do not think it can be challenged that in earlier periods of our history the appointment of civil celebrants has been very, very ad hoc and has been made without regard to the significance of their role or what these particular people have to offer.

And so, in this whole field, the provision of resources right across the board—be it a religious celebrant or a civil celebrant—is a high priority. It seems to me that here is a largely untapped body, as I referred to, of front-line troops who can be used in our society to contribute to improving the quality of marriage as well as reducing the incidences of marriage breakdown in our society. I would be happy to provide additional suggestions in that regard if that is the wish of this committee, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—Thank you. Did you want to say something about Marriage Enrichment?

Mr Breusch—I will very briefly outline some of the activities that are supplementary to John's submission, and state, probably, some of the aims and objectives of Marriage Enrichment and what Marriage Enrichment actually undertakes. It aims to provide weekend retreats and other marriage education experiences for couples; to train and support selected couples for leadership in the marriage growth area; it aims to set up ongoing growth groups of couples with a commitment to give mutual support and aid each other in the process of ongoing marital growth; and, finally, to identify a body of couples who want to stand up and be counted that marriage can be a truly satisfying and lasting experience. Basically, that encapsulates what Marriage Enrichment intends to do through the organisation's activities.

CHAIR—Thank you. John, can I just explore a few things about Prepare/Enrich with you? For the sake of the *Hansard* record, Prepare is a premarital inventory type instrument where each member of a couple answers a series of questions or statements which are then randomised, but are then matched to each and come back in different areas such as communication skills or conflict resolution and family backgrounds and things like that which then provide the basis for a facilitator to effectively get the couples to talk to each

other about the issues that might be raised.

The members of the committee who were in Adelaide on Tuesday had the opportunity of going through the focus instrument which is a similar type of instrument to Prepare. It would be useful if you were able to provide a copy of the Prepare instrument to the committee as something we could have as an exhibit. The other thing that would be useful—and I know there have been some predictability types of studies done of Prepare in the states and some work by Helen in Sydney and by the professor at the University of Sydney, Alan Craddock—would be if you could forward those studies about it as well so we could take that in as evidence.

But could I come to your main point? Specifically you say that you have some 4,000 clergy, for example, trained as facilitators of the Prepare inventory, and obviously they can then take couples coming to them to be married through it. What would be required, do you think, in order to encourage all clergy—I will just deal with the clergy for a moment—to become trained facilitators of Prepare or Focus or some such inventory?

Mr Robson—I guess to train all clergy would require the will of all clergy and, secondly, the provision of some additional resources. Prepare/Enrich here in Australia has adopted a very vigorous regionalisation program. We conduct training days and training courses throughout many provincial centres as well as the capital cities. In that way we have tried to reach out into distant places. There comes a point where it is not financially viable from our point of view to be able to set up a training program in the far distant places where there are not enough clergy to make the program financially viable.

So I guess what would be helpful from our point of view would be the finance to enable us to move in to those distant places. Prepare/Enrich has developed and operated as a self-supporting body. It has not sought government funding; it has been able to manage its affairs but, where it comes to distant country areas, then that is where the financial viability breaks down. Additional funding to enable us to promote and conduct training courses in those areas would certainly be a factor.

CHAIR—Is there any reason you have not sought funding?

Mr Robson—I guess we have felt we have been able to manage our financial affairs, harness our resources and, up until this stage, have not felt it necessary to call on the public purse. But where it comes to looking at a total coverage, that is when it will be necessary for us to consider approaching the appropriate body for funding. In Australia today—I mentioned a figure of 4,000, that was a rough figure of clergy—altogether we have over 4,900 clergy and counsellors, and that would include some civil celebrants who have been trained to use these instruments, either at the premarital level or the marital level.

CHAIR—Do you have any statistics on how many actually regularly use them?

Mr Robson—In the year ending June 1996, there were just on 7,000 couples throughout Australia who took a Prepare inventory administered by some of these 4,000-plus clergy whom we had trained. That is for every state in Australia and by clergy of all religious affiliations. Prepare MC is the premarital resource which is for those who are marrying where there are already children involved. It may be a single mum marrying for the first time or someone marrying from a previous relationship where children are involved.

There were 950 people who took that inventory. The Enrich inventory is for marrieds or those living in an established defacto relationship. There were 990 who took that inventory during the year and these numbers are growing quite significantly.

CHAIR—If you confine that to the couples who were marrying in a church or religious setting, your 7,000 couples in a year become 7,000 out of about 63,000 doing that.

Mr Robson—Sure. About one in nine.

CHAIR—About one in nine, yes. To summarise that, what is needed is more resources for training and promotion. If we were to recommend, for example, that all clergy be trained to the level of being administrators of a pre-marriage inventory for couples who have come to them—whether the couples use it is another thing—what would be required is more funding for the training programs.

Mr Robson—More funding for the training and, in an ongoing way, more resources to supplement the local clergyman's use of Prepare and his work with the couple generally.

CHAIR—This is networking, supervision and those sorts of things?

Mr Robson—Yes, and other material resources such as videotapes on various aspects of marriage and all that sort of thing which could be made available to couples.

CHAIR—Right. Can I just ask you briefly about the civil celebrants? On the evidence we have had so far, for a variety of reasons, the reference to marriage education programs from civil celebrants is almost nil and the civil celebrants are effectively barred themselves from providing marriage education through the regulations under which they operate. It has been suggested to us that that impediment to civil celebrants being able to provide marriage education ought to be removed. Do you have any comments about that?

Mr Robson—I can understand the reason for putting that embargo on civil celebrants moving into the marriage education area. Historically that has to be viewed against the background of the way in which civil celebrants were appointed in past years. Without being unduly critical of those who have gone before, I recall very much in the early 1970s there was an absolutely indiscriminate approach to the appointment of civil celebrants, many of whom were entirely unsuitable to exercise any function beyond performing the ceremony. I think it was almost a survival response by the government to put an embargo on civil celebrants feeling they had a role to play other than performing the ceremony. But subsequent governments have reviewed the situation.

I think there is much more discrimination today in the appointment of civil celebrants. There is an urgent need to, in a sense, embark on a program of recertification or re-accreditation of civil celebrants so that the existing body can be forced to meet some sort of criteria which would sort out the whole question of their suitability to perform this function.

CHAIR—I am not necessarily suggesting that every civil celebrant be accredited. I am just asking whether or not the regulations which preclude a civil celebrant from training and being accredited as a

marriage educator should be relaxed.

Mr Robson—I think it should be relaxed and certainly made more flexible because I am aware of some civil celebrants who have got a lot of resources and background in this area, who are very sensitive to their role and very accountable, and who have done additional training to equip them in this area, but they are limited by reason of the regulations.

Mr TONY SMITH—I wanted to follow up that. Correct me if I am wrong, but am I right in thinking that when the civil celebrant package was introduced by the late Senator Murphy it was never intended that people would make a living out of marrying people, and yet it seems from evidence that we have now heard that there is an absolute industry out there. I just want your comment about that. Am I right in thinking that it was basically considered a Saturday afternoon job, to put it simply?

Mr Robson—Yes. And that civil celebrants, out of a sense of community service, would perform the function. I think your observation is correct when you indicate that it has in fact become an industry amongst some. I think this is one of the problems that has to be looked at.

Mr TONY SMITH—It seems almost that there are conflicts of duties and interest set up thereby. Do you think that perhaps in looking at the overall thrust of your submission this is something that we have got to be very careful to prevent—so that there is no industry that is looking to protect itself and basically ignoring the social responsibilities involved in this area?

Mr Robson—Yes, I would strongly endorse that.

Mr TONY SMITH—On the first page of your submission you use a very careful expression, if I might say so with respect, by saying:

. . . I sense a growing unease in the community that much Government legislation is not ‘marriage or family friendly’.

You go on to say a number of other things, including that this clusters around aspects of social security legislation, processes of the Family Court, and the community conditioning effect of other legislation. Can you just expand a little bit on that?

Mr Robson—It seems to me that the situation is exacerbated by the absence of a family policy which vets legislation and makes some assessment as to what the possible impact of legislation is on marriage, on the family and so on. Just as the environmentalists and the heritage people have lobbied to ensure that legislation does not mitigate against the conservation concepts and principles, I think there needs to be a marriage and family policy which, when set up, will vet legislation and make some assessment and some recommendations as to the extent to which this will impinge on the functioning of marriage and the family in our society.

As I mentioned earlier, I think back to the mid-1960s some American specialists in this field were brought to Australia and there were a number of consultations held, sponsored by Macquarie University in Sydney, with a view to trying to enunciate some principles in the formulation of family policy and to submit

them to the government. Some progress was made in that regard but fairly quickly it was put into the too-hard basket and there has not been a significant move.

To my knowledge, South Australia was the only state government in Australia which did set up a structure. They had attached to the Department of Community Services a group which was a task force to vet legislation. That functioned well for a number of years but, for a number of reasons, it has passed into history and no longer operates.

Mr TONY SMITH—Some groups that we have heard from would suggest that what you are saying is fairly conservative—this is not a criticism of mine—but I guess marriage is a conservative institution. I have a question now for Mr and Mrs Breusch. We are now seeing people marrying for a second and, indeed, a third time or entering relationships that are fairly complex. Do you see a very important role there? Is it terribly much more complex when it happens again after a breakdown, particularly if there are children involved, and do you see this area as highly important and significant?

Mr Breusch—I think it is very obvious that the intricacies of second and third marriages, particularly in relation to children, careers and levels of expectations, probably make those marriages even more difficult than first marriages. The many people that we are involved with in our organisation certainly add support to those suggestions. From time to time we hear first-hand personal details of difficulties which are surfacing. The opportunity for people to come together to discuss those difficulties and initiate procedures for handling them is very important. As John Robson indicated, it is again a matter of limited facilities and funding to enable this to be done on a more established basis.

Mr TONY SMITH—It is almost arguable, is it not, that in the case of a second marriage relationship it is almost more important to ensure that stays together? I do not want to evaluate it, but if there is this mix of children do you see that there are catastrophic consequences of the breakup of these second and third relationships for a wider circle of people? Do you see there being not enough emphasis from a funding point of view?

Mrs Breusch—Absolutely.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—You said in the last paragraph of your submission that marriage education begins at birth, it goes on in schools, and so on. Do you give material to schools, or have material that could be given to schools, that tries to assist in this area?

Mr Robson—As an organisation, no, although previously in Queensland I was a consultant for six years to three successive ministers for education, looking at the development of human relationships education programs in the state school system. But, as an organisation, Prepare does not have material.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Is there material about, in your experience, that would be suitable?

Mr Robson—There is a significant amount of material on the market to support existing school curricula in the human relationships area. A good deal of material has also been prepared to assist children who are involved in a marriage breakup situation to adjust to these sorts of situations. But there is not a lot

of systematic material that has really been designed to progressively help equip young people to come to terms with the intricacies and the possibilities of successful human relationships.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—One of the earlier submissions suggested there was a need for a peak authority in the area of marriage education. Do you have a view about that, about trying to bring church based and non-church based groups together?

Mr Robson—I think it depends what the function of the peak body is. If the peak body is seen as the sole authority in the field, I would question it. If the peak body is seen as a body which can help to coordinate the functions of a whole range of people who are involved in this field and provide resources, then I think there is a good case for it.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—In the area of training or qualifications for people involved in marriage education, do you have a view about what kind of training or qualifications are appropriate?

Mr Robson—I think there is a need to set acceptable criteria to ensure that those who are involved in the field can be accredited. At the same time, I would hesitate to limit marriage education to those who are accredited, because there are so many subtleties, so many nuances, that go on, and so much that people who have not had training can contribute. Just an average couple, by the good model of their own relationship, can have an impact on kids; they, in fact, are marriage educators. So, whilst I would support the notion of a facility which can offer training opportunities and accreditation experience, I would hate to see us reach a situation where marriage education is the exclusive domain of these people.

CHAIR—Can I just take up one matter on CMEA. You have state branches or state divisions. Would it be possible to provide us with—not necessarily right now—some idea of the number of couples who attend marriage enrichment programs each year around Australia? One of the difficulties we are coming across in this area is getting figures about how much is going on. If we are going to address what the role of government is, then it is fairly important to understand what is happening at present in order to ascertain what should happen. If it were possible, could you give us, through the organisation, a breakdown over maybe two or three years of the number of couples attending marriage enrichment programs or weekends and the number that are conducted? That would be some useful information to us by way of background. As I recall, CMEA does not have funding from the Attorney-General's Department. Do you know whether or not that has been sought?

Mr Breusch—In very recent times some sort of funding has been sought which has not been—

CHAIR—This is pursuant to the latest budget round of funding or the Justice Statement?

Mr Breusch—Yes.

CHAIR—And that has not been successful.

Mr Breusch—It has been obvious that the states where state funding has been provided—for example, Western Australia, where a number of people are conducting weekend retreats—have been able to

organise themselves with more resource people operating in the field. Something like almost 20 couples are operating in Western Australia in comparison with a much smaller number in Queensland. We would suggest that that is the case in Western Australia because of the funds made available by the Western Australian government.

Mr TONY SMITH—Just one other point: a lot of the evidence we have been hearing—I am trying to, I guess, encapsulate some of your submission in formulating this question—is basically on organisations dealing with consequences of breakdown, assumptions of breakdowns having occurred, domestic violence or orders for this and orders for that, how we best address this and so on. But I sometimes feel that, legislatively, that is almost reinforcement rather than addressing causation and causal links. Is that really what you are trying to say—that the emphasis seems to be at the wrong end of the tunnel, if you like?

Mr Robson—I, personally, have been concerned for a long time at the dramatic imbalance between funding that is available for the remedial work of marriage counselling—not that those funds are yet adequate—and the funds provided for marriage education. In fact, a clergyman to whom I spoke only this week about his feelings about needs in his community said, ‘I wish the government would get out of the ambulance business.’ By that he meant the emphasis being on funding for remedial work and there being limited funds available for preventative work.

Mr TONY SMITH—Mr Ian Sinclair, whom you may know, is on this committee. He uses the expression, ‘Why aren’t we learning what makes a good marriage and applying that to so many of the courses that could be used?’

CHAIR—I thank you for your submission and also for coming along to have this discussion this morning. We would appreciate it if you could provide us with that additional information in terms of our deliberations. It would be useful if you could give us the package of information.

Resolved:

That the pamphlet *Couples for Marriage Enrichment Australia—Queensland Inc.* be accepted as an exhibit and received as evidence by the inquiry.

[11.09 a.m.]

OZANNE, Mr Trevor Douglas, Committee Member, Men's Help Line Association Inc., PO Box 181, Ashgrove, Queensland 4060

ROHAN, Mr Peter, President, Men's Help Line Association Inc., PO Box 181, Ashgrove, Queensland 4060

CHAIR—I reconvene the hearing and welcome the representatives from the Men's Help Line in Ashgrove, Queensland. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself, and the giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission of 29 October 1996. Would you like to make any introductory remarks?

Mr Rohan—Yes. Thank you very much. First of all I would like to thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before the committee to submit our views. The Men's Help Line is a phone contact and referral service which is basically servicing the state of Queensland for all men in need, and that is across the board.

A little history: in the middle of 1994, a group of men came together and realised that no actual direct services were targeted towards men and men's services. There were no crisis lines, and it was very difficult to get information through the phone services, the *White Pages* or the *Yellow Pages* for any kind of service that would help men in terms of finance, counselling, finding refuges or legal advice. So a group of four or five men quickly got together a service based on a paging system, working from their homes on a totally voluntary basis. The Men's Help Line was then incorporated in May 1994. Since then, we have taken over 5,000 calls, and this has been done on a 24-hour a day basis with a roster of volunteers taking three-hour portions during the day and having an evening service between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.

Out of local interest, I am actually on roster right now, from 9 until 12. This is the pager that I use. We cannot even afford a good one. If there is a call in the next hour, this will flash, beep or vibrate—it will do what I want it to do. We have it on flash at the moment in case a call comes through. If I am out on the road, I will answer the paging service, acknowledge the call, get the number from the paging service and then call the client—either on mobile or from my office phone. So that is basically how it works.

In the evenings we work from home. On the whole, most of the calls are paid for by the members and the volunteers on roster and, from a philanthropic point of view, they do not really claim that much. Sometimes people ring from intrastate—say, Mt Isa, Cairns or Mackay—and we have to ring them back, and that comes out of our own pockets.

We are totally independent. We are not funded by any government organisation. We raise funds through membership and through events. Our patron is Steve Biddulph, who is the quite well-known author of books like *Manhood* and *Secrets of Happy Children*. Recently he donated an evening talk in a local hall on the Gold Coast. The talk was for 700 people, and it was a sell-out. It was on raising boys. It was a very

successful night, and we were able to raise a few thousand dollars that way.

Our first year of organisation cost us \$6,000, the second year cost \$12,000 and we have budgeted this year for about \$15,000 in costs, which we will all raise ourselves. As you will see from some of the literature, data and graphics that we have provided to the committee, our calls are escalating from nil, of course, in May 1994 to up to 15 calls a day. Extrapolating the increase in the calls, in August 1998 we will be getting possibly 84 calls per day. To put this in perspective, the Women's Infolink line, which is a government funded organisation that was started two years ago, started with 340 calls per month, with a funded office and 2.5 people working in that office. We are currently taking around 500 calls per month and we are totally unfunded and actually we are beginning to creak at the seams, as you can imagine.

Our point here today is not only to tell you the sort of service that we are offering to the male community, particularly in the society, but also to underline that it is not only males who ring us; 12 per cent of our calls are from women, who actually are asking about their males who are in trouble—their male partner or their family member.

We feel that the most efficient strategy to meet the needs of the target group which is under investigation by the committee, which is basically family, is that we can in fact help to ameliorate some of the problems that men are feeling within society, with their changing role and their changing needs within society. We seem to be at the coalface of receiving many calls, from men who are asking for information about men's issues, to the men who are extremely desperate, not knowing where to turn and maybe considering taking the law into their own hands.

We have found that our referral service, by taking the calls and being able to listen to them in a non-judgmental and non-critical way, and interpreting their needs, is able to defuse some of the desperation some of these men are feeling. And as such, they then go back into their families, having quietened down to some extent, feeling there is somebody listening to them, and they are able to carry on with their life in a more reasonable manner.

The role of government in terms of provision of services: we have asked for funding from various organisations and until last year it appears that 'men are not on the agenda'. It is interesting to see that, on the latest information we have, \$60 million is being paid towards women's services in the state of Queensland alone and virtually none for men's services. We are asking for minimal support, worked out at 6c per person per year in Queensland, where women are getting \$20 per person per year. So we feel this is rather inequitable.

Mr Ozanne—Just to translate that, we are asking for 3.5 paid positions to run Men's Help Line in Brisbane and the Gold Coast. When you calculate that across three million people in Queensland, we are talking 6c per person per year compared with that figure of \$60 million. We are not saying that women should not have their women's services but we are asking why it should be an all and nothing system, which is what it has been up to now; there has just been nothing.

Mr Rohan—After all, society is made up by both men and women and certainly women have been very successful in making their voice felt in the last 20, 25 years, and that is fine. We as a group are

certainly not anti-women; we are very pro-women, and in fact women use our services and we have had letters of support from Women's Infolink, Parent Line, Kids Line, various other of the services who know the work that we are doing. All we are asking for is a fair crack of the whip, I think.

CHAIR—Can I ask a few questions about the personnel involved. You set out some details about the training. Can you elaborate on the training of the volunteers?

Mr Ozanne—You can see the position we are in from that pie chart. You can see that there is quite a fair percentage of guys. We are just interested in the men's movement generally. Eight per cent consistently will come to us at times and say, 'I am interested in what you are doing in the Men's Help Line. How do I get involved? I have been through a problem of my own. I have come through it with the support of men and I really want to give something back,' and they put their names down on our list of guys interested in doing training. From that, we select guys who are appropriate for the training. We have a clinical psychologist who does the training. It started off—it is changing a little—as 12 evenings of three-hour sessions.

Mr Rohan—Thirty-six hours.

Mr Ozanne—It looks at listening skills, telephone skills generally and, when we get closer to the end, there is the mechanics of using the pager. We have a manual which has about 150 referrals for the sorts of things that come up so the guys can choose the most appropriate service to refer the callers to.

Mr Rohan—This is a manual which outlines the emergency services, the legal services, sexual and sexuality services, counsellors, men's groups and so forth. It has all the services we know of in Brisbane, Mackay, Rockhampton and Cairns so we can refer our clients on to these specialist services. So it is a referral service.

CHAIR—What proportion of clients just want someone to talk to and to be listened to? What proportion of clients are looking for something which leads to a referral?

Mr Ozanne—We have that specific information. In our pie chart we have gathered together a couple of classifications. Each member of the committee can have a copy of this in a moment. Each of those big categories get subdivided. That call that you are talking about comes in under an emotional issue—often the guy is going through some sort of emotional issue. We have one category called E₁ 'He just wants to talk about it'—whatever his issue is.

Last year, which are the figures I am quoting here, 2.4 per cent of our callers just wanted to talk about an issue. We had some of the guys write in with some of their stories. One guy sent a story in. That family had all disappeared and our guy asked him if he had some mates he could talk to about this and he said, 'It is not the sort of thing I can talk to my mates about,' whereas we are anonymous people. They can talk to us on the phone if they are prepared to take the first step.

CHAIR—If it is 2.4 per cent, the overwhelming majority of calls are where there is some specific need identified either by the caller or by you that leads to a referral.

Mr Ozanne—Yes. Just to break that down, about half the callers are coming out of relationship bust-ups. That is fairly clear in that diagram there. Of that group the biggest group have a legal issue. They ask, ‘Where do I go to get an answer to this legal issue?’

The other third of callers are falling apart emotionally. Those calls are based on something going on in a relationship. Next to that is that other big group—personal crisis. They are going through similar sorts of emotional problems, but there is no mention of a relationship involved. We would subdivide that in terms of he is feeling suicidal or he has some violence or anger issues that he needs to deal with—not directed at his wife or his partner because he is not talking about a relationship. Generally, he will have been abused—maybe he has abused somebody, maybe it is a work issue or something else.

CHAIR—There is obviously a wide range of ages, but is there a particular age group that you get more calls from? Can you break that down more?

Mr Rohan—I would say it is across the board. We are getting people who will call us who are aged from 25 up to 60. We do not know the age. You can only judge from the experience that we hear from the people on the phone, but then there are mothers who will call on behalf of sons, and wives who will call on behalf of sons who are younger, have moved interstate and they are worried about how they are going to cope, or it could be something to do with the grandchildren.

There was one particular instance where the father had separated from the mother, the two children were with the mother, but the court had decided that the children should stay with the father over Christmas. The second Christmas, the son had approached the wife and said, ‘What about the kids?’ And the wife had been very noncommittal and was not prepared to let go of the children. So then the mother of the son rang us and said, ‘What are the legal issues here? I’m crazy about my son and I am also crazy about my grandchildren.’

Mr TONY SMITH—That was in breach of an order or an agreement, was it?

Mr Rohan—That was not a breach, but the wife was being very difficult about releasing the kids for Christmas. There had been an agreement by the court, and the court had actually given a judgment that the children should be with the father during the Christmas holidays.

CHAIR—Looking forward, obviously your figures indicate an expansion of the service. How do you advertise it?

Mr Rohan—We do not advertise at all. We cannot afford to.

Mr Ozanne—We cannot afford to in terms of money, and we are not game to advertise.

CHAIR—Do you have an entry in the phone book?

Mr Rohan—Yes, we have one entry in the white pages of the Brisbane phone directory, under community services, men’s issues.

Mr Ozanne—It is actually in all the phone books. In Brisbane it is under services for men, adjacent to services for women, but in all the other regional phone books in Queensland it is under emergency services. They were desperate to find some things to put in the phone book and they picked up our name without asking us. Of course, it has got implications for us, because if we are phoning them back, calls coming from Mt Isa and Cairns we have to pay for.

It happened and we could not do anything about it, and we just accept that there is need out there. But actually that is one of our main concerns now. We are not game to advertise, because our service is going crazy, the need is doubling every eight months when we are not advertising. You may say, ‘If that was my business, if I wanted it to do better, I would be silly not to go out and advertise.’ We are not game to advertise because we are feeling shaky. We have got about 30 guys to answer the phones, but we are stretched.

Mr Rohan—We are subject to burnout and we are having to train volunteers constantly to keep up with the people who say, ‘Look, I can’t handle this anymore. I have had enough.’

CHAIR—There are other services in Queensland such as Parentline. What was the other one you mentioned?

Mr Rohan—The Kids Help Line.

CHAIR—Women’s Infolink, I think you mentioned, is funded by the state government. Is Parentline funded by the state government?

Mr Ozanne—Parentline is a pilot service. It is run by the same people as run the Kids Help Line. They saw a need for the parents.

CHAIR—The Boystown people?

Mr Ozanne—We have actually got a letter from them saying that we would strongly recommend that the local state government department make an arrangement with us, or get some sort of funding arrangement with us, because even though they set themselves up, they purposely targeted male parents, but it is still 85 per cent women who phone. The guys are very reluctant to use services and their line was, ‘When you are called Men’s Help Line, men will identify with a name like that, that is why men phone you people up.’

Mr Rohan—This letter from Parentline says:

Despite a marketing program specifically designed to reach male parents, more than 85% of callers to Parentline are women and the majority of male callers ring about divorce, custody and access issues.

In summary, he is saying that their experience over the 10 years of running Parentline has been that men find it more difficult to access general services; and that, when they do, they present with high levels of anger and grief related to broken relationships and loss of parenting roles—which is outlined by our statistics here.

The other observation from working with men on Parentline is that men’s services are generally

poorly developed, underfunded and poorly networked. This situation makes it extremely difficult to effectively refer those men who are wanting to develop a face-to-face counselling relationship. He says that there is an urgent need to look at significant gender issues involved in men accessing existing services because there really is not anything like that. This is what we provide. We actually slot into that area where men come and ring us anonymously and in confidence and they feel comfortable with that. They do not want to be ringing up a service where a woman is on the end of the line, maybe, because they may not want to talk to a woman. Maybe, it is just too emotionally bizarre for them to do that.

CHAIR—Is there a potential for a service such as yours to develop into some form of telephone counselling service? Or is its object more of an information service and you prefer to keep it there?

Mr Ozanne—It has got the potential to go that way but I think the need at the moment is just a first step for the guys. There are counselling services out there but often the guys—as I think that letter was saying—are not prepared to access those, or they do not access those, or whatever. But, if they come through us first and they can survive that without getting a kick in the guts, with their ego intact, we feel that they are then ready to go and look at some of the services that we are saying might be useful to them. We generally give them three or four referrals. We generally say, ‘This, this and this might provide something you want to do as your next steps.’

CHAIR—And I take it from your comments that you have sought funding from the Queensland government.

Mr Ozanne—We have.

CHAIR—Successfully?

Mr Ozanne—Unsuccessfully. We have that statement from the family services in the Goss government. It was one of the workers, one of the people in the department, who said, ‘Men are not on the agenda.’ More or less, she was saying, ‘You need to go and get yourselves onto the agenda.’ That was a year ago and we feel as if we have just about got onto the agenda, but it has not come through in terms of funding. There is zero money.

Mr TONY SMITH—Is there any evidence in the material you have to indicate that child support matters are matters of concern that come through?

Mr Ozanne—Again, based on last year’s statistics, we have got a classification within legal called child support agency, and 0.4 per cent—we are talking about the child support agency—

Mr TONY SMITH—Of the calls in—

Mr Ozanne—Of the total calls that we surveyed, which was 250 calls.

Mr Rohan—That is not to say that child support is not mentioned in other contexts. We are talking here about—

Mr Ozanne—We talk about the presenting issue—the guy who comes on the phone and said, ‘I want to talk about this Child Support Agency thing.’

Mr TONY SMITH—Right. That is the presenting—

Mr Ozanne—The presenting issue. To go any deeper into that is to—

Mr TONY SMITH—Okay. Are you able to say whether, in the wider scheme of things, that percentage is significant? In terms of whether they have got other problems, is that part of a wider problem that comes up from time to time?

Mr Ozanne—It is mentioned fairly often. I can recall guys talking about how difficult it is to deal with bureaucrats at times. One guy said, ‘If you think that bureaucrats are difficult, you really should try the Child Support Agency.’ He was suggesting that they are more difficult than others. But that was one person’s story.

Mr TONY SMITH—Is there any evidence to indicate the nature and extent of the grieving process that men suffer at the loss of their children in breakup, and has there been any analysis of the reaction to that and, in particular, having regard to this committee’s terms of reference, its effect on subsequent relationships?

Mr Ozanne—Maybe I could read one of the stories. One of the guys at the Gold Coast sent us a summary of a couple of his calls. The name of one of the callers is Dan. His wife left him a year ago and refused all access to their child. He recently received a court order for \$6,500 in child maintenance although he had been unemployed for six months and she had been receiving child support welfare. He seemed capable of obtaining work on a fairly high income in the mining industry but saw no point in doing so because he would have to pay 27 per cent in maintenance for a child he was not able to see. He was very depressed, he saw no point in living and we referred him to these XYZ agencies.

Mr Rohan—In this one here, from Tony, he says that his wife left him over a year ago. She has made access difficult or impossible since then. She accused him of sexually molesting their four-year-old son. He said this was totally untrue and juvenile aid workers found no evidence to support the accusation. He was acquitted in court. He was ringing now because his former wife was seeking an access counselling session and he felt so intimidated by anything to do with the courts that he wanted a male to accompany him. He was semiliterate and had great difficulty filling out forms. We referred him to the Highway Legal Service, CAPAS and men’s groups.

In the case of Michael, he says his wife left two months ago and took their two children. She has prevented access since then by being out of the house every time he arranges to go there. He is paying full maintenance. He said he has never been a violent person but feels he is being driven to it by the system. He feels lonely, isolated, and believes that nobody was interested in his side of the story until he called us. He was referred to CAPAS.

We are getting men who are being alienated by the ‘system’. It is not so much due to the legal side, although there is a lot of evidence for men being totally put off by the obstacles they have to jump over to

get anywhere, and often it is a very frustrating and expensive exercise. Also, because of our upbringing, men in Western society are not willing to ask for help when they are really hurting, they are not willing to be really vulnerable. Often the agencies that are set up do not realise that it is very difficult for a guy who is really desperate to make that first request and the first phone call. They want to do it anonymously, they want to do it confidentiality. They do not want it spread amongst their mates or their family or society generally, or to any agency sometimes.

Mr TONY SMITH—It is part of the cultural thing for men. They do not want to admit that they have to resort—

Mr Rohan—It is failure, and we are not allowed to fail.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you feel that there is a potential danger, if the government does not provide some support for what seems to be a fairly burgeoning area of need, that men could go to other relationships which could in turn break down because they have not been able to work through the grief of what has occurred?

Mr Ozanne—Or suicide in the current relationship.

Mr Rohan—The latest suicide information we have is from Pierre Baume of the Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention here in Australia. I think he is coming out with a new paper at the beginning of next year—

Mr TONY SMITH—Who was that?

Mr Rohan—Pierre Baume from Griffith University. He is with the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention and he has a paper that is coming out in the next two or three months. The latest information we have on suicide is that across the board, since 1960, men's suicide has quadrupled.

Mr Ozanne—After having been steady up to then.

Mr Rohan—That is between the ages of 16 and 24.

Mr TONY SMITH—That is since 1960. Have you got any figures for the last decade ?

Mr Rohan—We could table the report if you want.

Mr Ozanne—It is his data.

Mr Rohan—We will table that data. Do we give you a copy later on or now?

Resolved (on motion by Mr Tony Smith):

That we accept as an exhibit to the inquiry a letter from Associate Professor Pierre Baume of the Australian

Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention and an accompanying paper.

Mr Ozanne—We got onto that talking about projection. Can we table this? That is our projection of a graph of Men's Help Line, based on where we are at the moment. Our August 1996 figures were 5,000 total calls. If you look back through them, which is on your other graphs if you wanted to check, our total number of calls is doubling every eight months. So we are saying that in two years time, by August 1998, if we continue to double like that, we are going to be up to 84 calls a day for that block there. For that eight months, the average will be 84 calls a day.

So we are saying that we are going to fall over, we are going to be overwhelmed—and that is with zero advertising. People are saying, 'Why don't you advertise?' If we advertised, I think it would go crazy. The guys do not expect services for men. They are finding us out of desperation. They are searching through the community service page and still we are getting this growth.

Mr TONY SMITH—You are getting references from women's groups who obviously must take your group as being a credible one to refer things on to?

Mr Ozanne—That is right. Women's Infolink are supporting us. We have spoken to them quite a few times and they say Women's Infolink also gets call from men—or sometimes women will want to talk about their men, and we are getting those calls as well. Women's Infolink knows the need. They have been there much longer than us.

Mr Rohan—May I also add, talking about our connection and interconnection with society, that we had a letter of support from Steve Biddulph who said to Kevin Lingard—that is the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care—in support of the submission that we made:

This is just a note in support of a submission you have recently received from the Men's Help Line. I've been a patron of the Help Line almost from its inception, and believe it is a really important service which by caring for and calming down men in crisis, helps everyone—men, women, and children.

Helpline is a highly cost-effective way to guide men at risk to the services that can help them. I support it because I think it prevents all kinds of potential disasters, as well as being a very positive channel for men to care for each other.

I hope you'll treat our application favourably as a very cost-effective mental health measure.

Mr TONY SMITH—What do you attribute the doubling of the calls every eight months to, given that you are not advertising and so on? What is the cause of that?

Mr Ozanne—Part of that, if I can just go back to one of the small sections in that pie chart—you do not need to turn to that—was the professionals who phone us and say, 'We've heard about this Men's Help Line thing. What do you do?' So the professionals are starting to refer more and more people to us, because they are desperate. They are desperate for somewhere to send their people.

I had a doctor on the phone one time when I was there who said, 'I've got this guy in the surgery with me. He has been raped. He doesn't want to go to any of the gay men's services. Where can I send him?'

I don't know anywhere to send him.' So the doctor phoned us. We also get social workers and counsellors and all those sort of people phoning us, because they do not know where to send them either. We are the only one they can find in the book. I guess the word is getting out amongst that community. So our line is that the calls are going up, they will never ever really come down. There is a basic trend upwards.

Mr Rohan—The other thing, of course, is the free service. It is free and therefore people are more willing to come to us rather than go to a counsellor where they know they may have to start paying immediately they get on the line.

Mr TONY SMITH—There has been a bit of a discussion about the Family Court based counselling services. Do you have any experience of, and therefore comment to make about, the Family Court based counselling and mediation services?

Mr Ozanne—We have no experience of it.

Mr Rohan—Not personally, no.

CHAIR—There was another document you want to table with the breakdown of some statistics.

Mr Ozanne—That is right, if I can table that.

Mr Rohan—What we really wished to do at this meeting was, first of all, to show how the Men's Help Line was able to interface with other services and help society generally. What we would like, if possible, would be to have a meeting with the ministerial staff of the federal Attorney-General's office in order to give them a little more detail about what we do and see if we can get funding quickly. We really do need funding rather urgently now.

CHAIR—Have you contacted the Office of Legal Aid and Family Services in the Attorney-General's Department?

Mr Rohan—No.

CHAIR—I suggest that you make contact with the secretary of the Office of Legal Aid and Family Services. The First Assistant Secretary is Dr Margaret Browne.

Mr Ozanne—Could we mention your name and this committee?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Ozanne—We have trouble getting through some of these systems quickly and we are saying we are desperate.

Mr Rohan—What was the department again?

CHAIR—It is the Office of Legal Aid and Family Services in the Attorney-General's Department, in the Robert Garran Offices, Barton, Canberra. I would make contact with that office because that is the office which is responsible for the family services program.

Mr Rohan—Thank you very much indeed for that information.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Thomson):

That this committee accepts as exhibits the documents *Men's Help Line—projected growth* and *Analysis of 250 calls—1995*.

CHAIR—Thank you for your submission and for coming along today and discussing it with us.

[11.48 a.m.]

MAYFIELD, Mrs Judith, Coordinator, Family Skills Training Program, Sunnybank Family Support Inc., PO Box 1103, Sunnybank Hills, Queensland 4109

STEPHENSON, Ms Susan Ann, Director, Sunnybank Family Support Inc., PO Box 1103, Sunnybank Hills, Queensland 4109

THOMASSON, Miss Elisabeth Dorothy, Family Skills Facilitator and Trainer, Sunnybank Family Support Inc., PO Box 1103, Sunnybank Hills, Queensland 4109

CHAIR—Welcome, and thank you for coming along today. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission of 11 October 1996. Would you like to make some opening remarks?

Ms Stephenson—Sunnybank Family Support Inc. is a multipurpose agency. We have about 17 different programs, which range from the ambulance type to preventative, including: supported accommodation; home and community care—HACC; and fostering, counselling and family skills programs. We also have a child-care centre and a neighbourhood centre. We actually see a tremendously wide variety of consumers in the course of a year.

Over the years, one of the things that I have put my mind to is working out what the commonalities are about those consumers even though they are coming in to completely different services—what it is that causes people to access the kind of services that we have.

The most common thing I have found is that the people who come to us do not have a good informal network of support: they very frequently have changed address, they might be from interstate or from overseas or they do not have family close to them. They have not managed to form new personal ties in the community they have come into, so they do not have the resources that go with a network. When people are well embedded a dense network, often the characteristics of that dense network are that everybody in the network knows everybody else—and the denser the network is, the more supported the people feel.

The people that we are working with often have only linear relationships, and that is usually with a professional. They might have a relationship with a doctor. It is a one-to-one relationship. They do not know their next-door neighbour, the doctor does not know the next-door neighbour either; and the doctor's network does not impinge on the person who has gone to the doctor, so that that relationship has got very little density.

One of the thoughts that we have had over the years is that, as well as supplying that one-to-one professional support which the formal network can give, we need to work as well on redeveloping the informal network for people. You can have a preventative education program, but it is a much stronger program if alongside it you are paying attention to the development of those informal networks.

It takes a lot of courage to pay for preventative work. If a kid has been thrown across the room and has got broken ribs, when you remove that child from that dangerous situation and put him in a foster family, it is clear what you have done: the child is no longer in danger. If you work with the family of origin to prevent the kid being thrown across the room, you have got no statistic because you do not know the thing has happened—it has never happened. It is much harder to get the data to support that preventative work than to get data that says, 'Bring in the ambulances.'

CHAIR—Thank you for the detailed submission. I was very impressed with the detail in it, reading it on the plane this morning coming up. There has been mention of family skills programs in other submissions, but not with the focus that you have provided. In Adelaide I was asking for some more submissions about family skills from a couple of groups because we did not have a lot on that. There are a few things I would like to canvass with you in relation to family skills. Are there other family skills programs in Brisbane or is yours the only one?

Mrs Mayfield—There is one in Logan.

CHAIR—In Logan, further south.

Mrs Mayfield—Those are the only two.

CHAIR—Was yours established in the first round?

Mrs Mayfield—Yes.

CHAIR—You have been going for—

Mrs Mayfield—Since 1991.

Ms Stephenson—We originally put in the submission as part of a coalition of the urban fringe, which was agencies that formed a network that ran along the fringes of about five shires because a lot of services tend to be centralised. You will find services in central Brisbane, in central Logan and maybe in central Ipswich or even in Moreton, but along those fringe areas where the high development is happening there is a great neglect of services. We set up with the intention of not just being a centrally based agency but of going out to all of those fringe areas.

CHAIR—It seems to me, looking back, that the family skills program was, in a sense, set up as a series of pilots around the country. Whilst there has been some expansion of that, there has not been a great deal of expansion of it. Is that a fair assessment of what has happened over the last five years?

Mrs Mayfield—I think there are only about 20 programs throughout the whole of Australia. I did hear from Grafton not so long ago that they had just recently been funded; they were contacting me to see how we had actually set up our programs. So there must be some new money, but I think in the new moneys they actually specified particularly the areas that they wanted to cover.

CHAIR—Is there a commonality in the family skills programs, or have they tended to develop locally in response to local conditions according to whoever happens to be running them?

Mrs Mayfield—I think that is the way it has been. In fact, the way our program is run and structured is very different to the other organisations that I have spoken to.

CHAIR—Is there any national, or even state, meeting, workshopping, conferencing of personnel involved in family service programs?

Mrs Mayfield—No. Because Logan is not too distant from us, I tend to have some networks with the Logan program. But that is the only program that I have real connection with. Townsville phoned me not so long ago when their coordinator was passing through Brisbane and we spent a couple of hours together. But because there are so few programs, it is quite difficult to network.

CHAIR—I suppose what I am getting at, there is not a level of what I call peer review within the field at this stage?

Mrs Mayfield—No.

Miss Thomasson—I think they are called different things in different states as well, and I suppose we adapt ourselves to our clientele. Some of the programs are more educational. We have a two-pronged effect, which is educational plus the networking aspect of it. We cannot compare ourselves, I suppose, to all of the other places that call themselves family skills training programs.

CHAIR—I was not suggesting that you should be necessarily comparing yourself. It is ironic that you are there developing networking in the community but there is not much networking between the people involved in providing it.

Miss Thomasson—There is not a lot of communication at all.

Mrs Mayfield—We did some networking at the peak body. At the AGM I sort of caught up—

CHAIR—This is family services.

Mrs Mayfield—Family Services Australia, so there was a little bit of networking at their AGM—

CHAIR—So would it be desirable to have more of that?

Mrs Mayfield—I think that would be very important. In fact, what I would like to see happen really is to see networking between subprograms, so that there is some sort of conference or yearly get-together of the subprograms within the funded agencies. I think that would be really important.

Ms Stephenson—Earlier on we were trying to set up networking subcommittees on the subprograms through Family Services Australia. It was that same problem that Judy is talking about, that the distance and

the small numbers made it really very difficult. The things that we do in networking tend more to be with other community agencies rather than with this program. I think Elizabeth probably has put into the submission that part of our strategy is to work through that network of community agencies that we have. But they are likely to be neighbourhood centres or churches or preschools. They are not other family skills agencies.

CHAIR—Has there been an evaluation of the family skills program by the Attorney-General's Department?

Mrs Mayfield—There was one very early one, but not lately.

Ms Stephenson—There was a very limited evaluation, I think, during the pilot stage. I do not remember the figures, but it was very small—it would have been three or four groups that went for about eight weeks with a pre-test and a kind of post-test of attitudinal change. But I do not think that there has been an evaluation across all the programs of any kind. We have done internal evaluations of our own program, but that is just an agency evaluation.

CHAIR—Yes. Turning to the training of the facilitators, I take it therefore there are no nationally recognised competency standards or anything like this for this particular field. Do you have any observations about the desirability of that?

Mrs Mayfield—I think that it is quite important that we do put into place nationally some competencies, but I think that that has been an important issue anyway across many of those programs. But I think it is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Ms Stephenson—And I would think that those competencies are not necessarily linked to the formal qualifications from universities because while a lot of our facilitators have got those sorts of qualifications, some of them have done para-professional training which has taken them to quite a high level of skill without having to have a university degree.

CHAIR—The nature of competency standards is to recognise that learning and skills occur in settings other than formal education. That is the nature of the competency approach.

Ms Stephenson—And the competencies that I have seen developed in other areas—the youth workers and so on—are the kinds of things that I would like to see for the family educators.

CHAIR—How do you measure the outcome of the program? How do you measure the effectiveness of it?

Ms Stephenson—I did not know whether it was the big philosophical question, or the little one. Let us answer the little one.

Mrs Mayfield—We evaluate each program at the end of its eight weeks. Most of our programs run for eight weeks and at the end of that time we ask the participants to fill in an evaluation form. As well as

that formal evaluation, many people in the programs have actually exchanged telephone numbers and are now beginning to be support networks for each other. In fact, some of the programs have gone on to become support groups where the parents continue to meet, particularly at our Sunnybank Neighbourhood Centre where they actually use us as a venue for morning teas. Apart from the formal evaluation, it is those support networks which are set up where people actually make friendships—which is what Susan was referring to in those informal networks—that we aim to develop within the community.

Miss Thomasson—Our evaluation sheet and the data that I collected and analysed in the submission does say that a large percentage of our clients see gaining support networks and that sort of support through babysitting, friendships and that sort of thing, and knowing that you are not alone, are very important for them. I suppose that gauging whether they make that contact does support the effectiveness of the group as an informal method of measuring.

Ms Stephenson—I guess that is tapping into the double aim of the criteria that we are evaluating. It is not just a matter of how much better you are in yourself as a parent, but also that other kind of thing in what kinds of supports are there for you to continue in your parenting role. It is really difficult because unless you are going to be visiting people's homes and doing observation measurements beforehand and afterwards, which there is not a capacity in that program to do, you are relying on the self-report of the participants as to change. This is probably fairly valid about attitudinal change, but it is harder to know whether the behavioural changes go with the attitudinal changes.

I was involved in some studies years ago that were done through the University of Queensland on parenting programs like systematic training and effective parenting. They did pre-test of groups and did observations of families. They went back six months later to look at their perseverance and how much had been retained. It was a little bit dismal. The stuff that had been retained tended to be the cognitive. People remembered from STEP the logical consequences and things like that but had, perhaps, reframed them back towards a base line where they became punishment.

The behavioural had not persevered terribly well. So I became very concerned after that and that was why, when we were setting up these programs, we were trying to look at ways of continuance after the eight weeks so you did not just have 'walk in the door, walk out the door' and nothing else was happening. We really needed to have that ongoing sense of support, or we feared that the whole thing would be a useless exercise.

Miss Thomasson—The ideal may be to do a follow-up study to gauge how much is retained from these groups. How much can you do in eight weeks and expect to be retained if there are 30 years of conditioning in a certain way of behaviour?

Ms Stephenson—One of the positive things we have noticed is that people do tend to come back. If they have had a very good experience, they self-select—we have a huge variety of courses; we do not run just a particular program—and they will return to other programs and build on the stuff they have done before. So control of self-education is happening, which is very encouraging too.

Miss Thomasson—That is an indication of the follow-up. Their coming back is an indication that

learning is happening, because they want to build on the previous learnings.

CHAIR—So there would be a potential for some sort of longitudinal study, if somebody were interested in doing it and had the funding, of the effectiveness of these sorts of programs?

Miss Thomasson—Pre, post and follow-up. That would be the ideal way to monitor its effectiveness—in the long term anyway.

Ms Stephenson—It would need to be very carefully constructed so that it was looking at the real world. I have a concern about the initial study that was done on the eight weeks groups. One of the indicators that stick in my mind has to do with people's self-esteem as a parent, and it was tested right at the beginning of the group. It asked people to rate on a five-point Likert like scale what their self-esteem as a parent was like. The facilitator, who at that point had only just met the people, had to do that same rating exercise. At the end the group then had to self-rate again, and the facilitator would have to rate. The statistic that was produced for that said there was something like a 19 per cent increase in people's self-esteem as parents.

The problem with that indicator is that the people who come in with the highest level of self-esteem will have the least movement. If you say, 'I'm a five', you have the least possibility of moving. When you construct those measures you have to be very careful that you know what you are measuring and how to measure it.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—I might have missed this on the way through, but how is your budget structured? Where do you get money from?

Ms Stephenson—For this particular program, we get money for family skills from the Attorney-General's Department. As an agency we have investments that we get interest on. We have client charges but not for this particular program. It is a free program. We get money from state and government departments, and we get donations from service clubs.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—What is the situation with the qualifications or training of staff?

Ms Stephenson—Do you mean for this program or for—

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Both this program and—

Ms Stephenson—And in general?

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Yes.

Ms Stephenson—They vary. Twenty years ago we started as a volunteer agency, and we still have about 150 volunteers working for us. Out of that original base we had people whose life skills were the basis of their expertise. There has been a professionalisation during the last 10 years, so more than half the people on staff at the moment would have degrees, usually in social sciences, business or both. I think Judy would be able to talk more about the exact qualifications in this program.

Miss Thomasson—You can always add on the style of facilitation and how that helps the group environment. After you.

Mrs Mayfield—The way I have set up the structure of the program is that we have a number of facilitators who work for the program on just a casual basis. So they are just contracted to run a program of eight weeks duration. So they are not actually part of the staff. I have criteria for selecting people to do that work. Because I work on only a part-time basis in the program, the facilitators whom I employ are all people who have had quite a deal of experience in the whole area of counselling, family work and group facilitation. So they all do have professional qualifications and a number of years experience behind them.

We run 15 programs per term, four terms a year. We run five at the Sunnybank Neighbourhood Centre. I have just tabled a program of that neighbourhood centre's courses. We run the remaining programs in organisations throughout Brisbane, the Gold Coast and on the fringes at Logan, Beaudesert and Ipswich. So the facilitators work very much in isolation. They come in for regular debriefs, but they are working in isolation in the community. So I have chosen to work with facilitators with a deal of experience behind them.

Miss Thomasson—Just adding to that: as well as having professional qualifications, most of the facilitators have skills that empower the group. It is not a directive teacher-student role. It is more of an experiential learning approach. They have been trained in that sort of strategy to build on the strengths their clientele already have rather than tell them the right way to manage their children or tell them that they are doing this wrong so do this. It is not taking this away and trying to shove that in its place. Just relating that back to training, we all have an approach which builds on the strengths of our clientele.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—What training do the volunteers get?

Ms Stephenson—The volunteers do not run these groups. We have a management committee of volunteers. Our switch is staffed by volunteers.

Mrs Mayfield—Sunnybank Family Support runs about 15 different funded programs under its umbrella. Family skills is only one of them.

Ms Stephenson—We have volunteers who work in our child-care centre. There is a range of things they do, including visiting in nursing homes. In family skills they might help with things like advertising, answering telephones and taking bookings.

You wanted to know about the training. We have an in-house training program for the volunteers on a continual cycle. It covers things like telephone answering skills, micro-counselling skills and that kind of thing.

Miss Thomasson—All facilitators are paid.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Yes. In your submission you say:

The target population to whom the Family Skills Training Program should be offered . . . includes—

and then you make reference to locational disadvantage in terms of community infrastructure and resources. Do you think locational disadvantage is relevant to family breakdown or has an impact on that?

Ms Stephenson—I was referring to that early on when I was talking about the network breakdown. A lot of people live on the fringes of big new developments. Those developments are more than 50 per cent spec building in order to rent them. A lot of the population is quite transient. So the relationships that are formed in those estates are not very stable. Sometimes they are not bothered to be made at all. The locational disadvantage is increased by the fact that there is not much public transport out there. You cannot get to anything, which is one of the reasons why we get to them rather than asking people to come to us.

Miss Thomasson—Just to add to that: there is an advantage of having the groups on their own turf, because people feel safer. People being in a trusting environment is a better way to engage them. They may have seen someone else in the group before, and that may motivate them to stay. That is a key issue.

Ms Stephenson—One of the preschools we were working with had asked us to come to them, because the teacher had noticed that, of the parents who came to drop off their children, only some came in to talk to her and they usually were the people who knew each other. Others would stand at the door, wave goodbye and then disappear without ever speaking to other parents. The teacher was then that linkage person who made the effort to talk to those mothers and say, ‘We were thinking of getting a group together. Would you be interested?’ and they were.

One of the things that group revealed was that they were scared of their neighbours. They had perhaps moved from interstate and the neighbours were the people they thought would most likely break in and damage their property, so they would deliberately not make any contact. They felt safe to meet people through the preschool teacher, but to begin with they did not even want to give out their address. That particular group formed quite strong relationships, and by the end of it they had exchanged names and addresses. But there was a great deal of fear and isolation in that particular group. The mothers had no friends.

Miss Thomasson—That relates to the issue of accessibility. I think some people know the services are out there but, as other agencies have mentioned as well, some people do not know they are there. I think having your key people and having this on your own turf are major issues in making this easily accessible for them. They do not have to go for miles and miles on buses which do not even exist.

Ms Stephenson—Could I talk a bit more about key people. At one stage we were approached by the Croatian community, who had some trained counsellors but nowhere to do their counselling. They wanted to use our neighbourhood centre to do that, and we said, ‘Yes, certainly.’ What they found was that the Croatian community would not come to them in that setting. It was not their setting. They did have a community house of their own.

They also wanted to do some family skills training, but language was a difficulty because there were very few English speakers. We then did some training with the English speakers in the group who were willing to come into our facility to be trained. They then had to go back into their community to do things in their community. It was not something we could do.

So the whole concept of link persons and trying to develop expertise in the link persons for any community, whether it is a different language group or a different social group, I think is a tremendously important concept. When you start to talk about national accreditation for trainers, as I think a previous speaker said, you should not forget that there are always going to be important significant people who inevitably train but they may not be people with the qualifications.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—To come back, though, to that issue of community infrastructure and family breakdown, is there any evidence to suggest that there is a link between strong or weak community infrastructure and family breakdown? Your expression was that mothers have no friends in certain settings. Does that have an impact back within the family?

Miss Thomasson—If they do not have resources to disperse their emotional difficulties, it will obviously come out in their only support system, which is their family. So I suppose building up support networks is a way to disperse that. Again, it is a method of prevention. Rather than getting to a crisis level, it is prevented earlier.

Ms Stephenson—I do not have hard research about it, but I am sure it would be available. I am not certain that strong networks will necessarily prevent family breakdown or that, if they prevented it, it would always be—I am going to be really heretical here—a good thing. I lived in a community in England which had extremely strong networks. The community had been there for hundreds of years. Their children did not go outside it to find work. A man who had lived up the street for 15 years but originally came from five miles away was still considered a foreigner.

We came from Australia. It was like we were from another planet, but we were very welcome in that community. It was an extraordinary experience of support. I had a child at home, and the day we turned up the neighbours came over and said, ‘Oh, you poor darling. You’re pregnant. Would you like to come and have tea with us? Can we give you curtains for the house?’ You could not sneeze without them knowing it. I gave birth with the wall behind me that I knew they slept on the other side of and they could listen to me. It was that kind of intense experience.

No, the marriages were not breaking down but a lot of them were very violent. There was a very strong, shared ethic that you did not leave your marriage, but there was also a shared ethic that you put up with whatever you got in marriage. Often what you were putting up with was not a very good thing. So I think the task is not just to keep marriages together; it is to make sure the quality of the marriage is also good.

Yes, I do think that, in relation to strong community support, if there is a shared ethic that marriages should not break down—I mean, if it was that marriages should break down, then they would also support them breaking down. Do you understand what I mean? If the group believes something strongly, its group members will adhere to it when there is a strong network.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—In a sense I think the point I was interested in was more the point that Elisabeth made that, if a person is experiencing support from the community, that will make it easier for them to cope emotionally whereas, if they are getting no support from anywhere else in the community and

the infrastructure is very poor, that may put additional weight on the family that is not there in other cases.

Ms Stephenson—That is a really important positive thing to think about, but I really think it is important to know that sub-communities in our community which have a very strong shared network and which share a belief in the sanctity of marriage that ‘we must not break up’ do not get assistance to make their relationships better, because there are also shared values that you should not ask for help.

Miss Thomasson—I suppose the likelihood that they will turn to professional intervention will be reduced if they have a greater support network. That is what we are here for basically: trying to prevent people getting to that level where they need professional intervention.

CHAIR—I want to take up one point, and it relates to the comments you made about people fearing their neighbours, thinking that they are the ones who are going to break into their house or whatever, and therefore they experienced a sense of isolation even within the neighbourhood. Why has that occurred? What is the cause of it?

Mrs Mayfield—That was that particular area that occurred—

Ms Stephenson—It is not just that area. The neighbourhood that I live in is also one of those kinds of neighbourhoods. It started about four years ago when the estate was first built. The first six months of an estate being built is usually when the community starts to link with each other. At that stage, there was quite a strong attempt by people to do that linking. I have noticed that that has ceased. The people who did that original linking have moved on. The people who have been coming in have kept to themselves and do not want to make friends. I think we have the most expensive insurance in southern Queensland because of the crime rate, because of the break-in rate.

Miss Thomasson—The fences get higher.

Ms Stephenson—It is not just that people are scared of that big, bad person who may come in from the outside; they really do believe it to be their neighbours who are doing it.

CHAIR—So is it a self-fulfilling prophecy in a sense—

Ms Stephenson—That the fear could stop you from making—

CHAIR—There may be no clear answer to this, but why is it that we have that culture in certain neighbourhoods?

Ms Stephenson—It has something to do with mobility.

CHAIR—Mobility. Do these areas have a higher proportion of people from a non-English speaking background? Are there factors like that?

Miss Thomasson—There is a mixture. As you would know, there might be a degree of

discrimination. Certain ethnic groups would have a higher sense of community. They do stick together in certain areas of Brisbane, so there might be more links within their community. But maybe they need links with other parts of the community who have the information and can access resources. So there needs to be that communication.

Ms Stephenson—I think mobility is a character of the fringe areas. I cannot substantiate this with figures, but I think ethnic groups tend to be more towards Salisbury. It is the new areas that have a very transient population—

CHAIR—Therefore people do not, to use a sort of cliched expression, put down roots in the community and therefore—

Ms Stephenson—That is right. They have broken away from the roots that they came from, so whatever family they had is not there either. So they do not have—

Mrs Mayfield—I think it is really important that some of these programs do go to community agencies, because in the community there is still a very great fear of government departments. A couple of centres that I went to were really suspicious of which department I came from and whether, if they spoke about what was happening in their family, I would report it to Welfare and Welfare would take their kids away. In some of those outlying suburbs or the more disadvantaged suburbs there is still a great suspicion about why government is getting involved. They would not go to a government agency or a large agency.

Miss Thomasson—As long as that exists, you have got to have a way of engaging people. I suppose that is what community agencies do: they engage them on their own turf and in their own language, and make them feel comfortable and safe.

Ms Stephenson—There is also an interesting lack of information base. We have just done a two-week survey for our SAAP program for a national data collection. We have been speaking not just to people we might be housing but to all those people we cannot house. A surprising number of those people had not thought to contact the department of housing. Their first point of call had been the crisis housing hotline, I think, which then put them through to the community places. But the lack of knowledge of what was around was quite extreme.

Miss Thomasson—Can I just further a point that Mr Thomson raised in regard to the link people and how emotional support can be dispersed. I think going out to their turf is also a way of reducing the stigma associated with parent education. It is quite intimidating for a new person to go into an organisation, particularly a government organisation. So I think a key point is making it user-friendly.

Mr TONY SMITH—I have just a couple of small points. First of all, I notice you had six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Can you break that down into how many Aboriginal clients and how many Torres Strait Islander clients there were? I am just interested to know.

Mrs Mayfield—Unfortunately, our stats sheet just says ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders’, so we do not collect the data. They come under the same heading.

Miss Thomasson—They are sent a data sheet from—

Mrs Mayfield—The Attorney-General's Department as to what data they want collected, and the category is 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders'.

Mr TONY SMITH—It is about time we changed that. I am on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee, and I really am horrified at that grouping together of two totally different ethnic groups.

Can I just turn to a couple of points? First of all, it seems like the electorate of Dickson has missed out on having this sort of thing. There is a great bias for the south side of Brisbane. You have got two relatively close together—Logan and Sunnybank—and nothing on the north side, where I have a divorce rate, I think, of about 50 something per cent in my electorate.

Ms Stephenson—I guess we would have a responsibility for the north side. It is very difficult to do it with the resources that we have.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you get many people coming from the north side?

Ms Stephenson—People do come from the north side, but as our philosophy is to go to the people, we would prefer to go to the north side if we had the resources. We have done a few, such as New Farm—

Miss Thomasson—New Farm we put in the north side compared to where we are.

Mr TONY SMITH—But not, say, out Pine Rivers way?

Ms Stephenson—We do not have an objection to doing it; it is just the resources have not stretched that far. We were first funded for that fringe on the south and Logan was funded after that. I think it is possible that whoever looked at the map in Canberra did not recognise how close it was to us. It is only 15 kilometres, where in fact the rest of the state up to Cairns has got nothing.

Mr TONY SMITH—Okay. I only wanted you to comment. Don't get me wrong here. I would like to think that there are people out there with a good track record and a successful marriage behind them who could be good guest lecturers at your courses. Do you ever bring people in with practical experience?

Miss Thomasson—Who specialise?

Mr TONY SMITH—I mean it is one thing to fill people full of theory. It is another to bring in people who have got the track record and who perhaps could impart the practical first-hand knowledge of a successful relationship.

Mrs Mayfield—It is probably not the model we have used as a learning tool in the way the groups are set up. We do have a facilitator who does give some input but the groups are structured to use small group exercises, role plays, getting people to put in their own experiences and brainstorming, as a group, what strategies this couple could use to deal with this particular problem. It is very client focused on what is

happening for this group of people, so that all of our groups may be very different. Although we have the same outline and the same aim for the group, the way the group is actually run and the input from the group would very much vary from group to group as the facilitators respond to the needs of that particular group.

Miss Thomasson—The main aim of the role of the facilitator is to facilitate the sharing. We assume they are experts to some degree in something in their lives, so people can learn from each other, with the facilitator offering theory to add to their experience of sharing.

Ms Stephenson—I pick up a phrase in what you have said that reminds me of a book—I do not know whether you have read it—by Ivan Illich called *Disempowering Professionals*. I think some of the research that Elizabeth did attributed the failure of some education programs to that very thing. You have this professional who knows it all; that in itself can disempower the person who is trying to learn because they can think, ‘Oh well, I am inept.’ We do not actually try to come from that perspective. We would hope that each of our facilitators goes into that group believing what Elizabeth just said. Within that group, although you are in some sense aggregating need because they are all people who have identified they want to do something to learn more about parenting, there will also be resources. No parent is totally without resources; the next parent may have a different set of resources. It is the skill to get those out and share them that we are looking for.

Mr TONY SMITH—Yes. There was a big move a couple of years ago to provide judges with education which I chuckled about because I thought to myself well, ‘Who educates the educators?’ I mean, we all get back to that. An educator is only as good as how well educated he has been. As an old farmer once told me, you can build a fence the same way for forty years, but it does not make you good at doing it. You might be doing the wrong thing but still doing it.

Miss Thomasson—That highlights our approach—an eclectic approach. Maybe the way I handle one group is great for that group, but if I use the same approach to another group, it does not work; I have got to adapt to the needs. I might need a more directive approach with people that have very little skill, so I may have to input a bit more theory. But with people that have some skills and just want to build on them, I take a more facilitative approach. I bring out their learnings a lot more.

Mr TONY SMITH—What about people who have lost their first marriage or relationship and are looking to move into another? It is an area we seem to be ignoring—and that is no criticism of you. The educative role there seems to me to be almost doubly important.

Mrs Mayfield—One of the problems for family skills is that our focus has to be under our funding guidelines—parenting. The whole idea of assisting people to prepare for second marriages comes under the marriage education funding guidelines. It is really important, and there are quite a number of programs that are run to address that. Relationships Australia and, I think, Anglican family care may both run courses which are called rebuilding or coping with separation and divorce. Our program is positive parenting through divorce and separation. That is focussing on the needs of the child as parents separate and divorce. Our other program which addresses that is something called, ‘Step-parenting: creative or chaotic’, which actually looks at the reformed family and how parents can get it together as parents.

Mr TONY SMITH—That is in the situation once the situation is extant.

Mrs Mayfield—But I think marriage education is the area that deals with the rebuilding and giving people skills to refocus on what happened in this relationship, what do I need to do differently?

Ms Stephenson—We have put in an application for a grant to do that transitional education because, when you are doing the parenting courses, a person is a person. They are a parent, but they are also a partner or a partner in grief or whatever, and those issues impact upon them as a parent as well. We felt that a collocation of those kinds of opportunities to explore—what has been happening to me and how can I make it better for myself, my kids, my ex-partner and my new partner—would be a good idea.

We have had a men's group operating. The facilitator of that is the trainer for the people who were here before, and that started as a parenting group but has gone on to be a support group and the men do explore all of those kinds of things.

Miss Thomasson—I think what Mr Smith was saying is that there does need to be education happening as well as support. But they are not mutually exclusive, they come hand-in-hand. For example, one of the more effective ways to try to change a child's behaviour is to reinforce the positive. In these group situations you are not actually saying, 'This is wrong'; it is getting them to bring out the information and you adding to that information. So it is making them feel as if they are coming out with the information themselves, so it is educational in that respect.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you ever feel in these groups that you wished that someone had got to them before they got together?

Miss Thomasson—Yes, all the time.

Mr TONY SMITH—And hope perhaps you would not even be seeing them.

Ms Stephenson—It is the spiral curriculum that you need to know. What was the Jesuit saying—'By the time you are five you have got the man'?

CHAIR—'Give me a child of five and I will have him for life', or something like that.

Mrs Mayfield—One of the other things we are forgetting in all of this is the whole idea of the multigenerational thing. We need to look at prevention. We are going to educate parents now. That may be a fairly small step that we make but, if we can change the parents' behaviour, the next generation of parents will have more skills. We need to break some of the family patterns—the abuse, et cetera, that we have been talking about. I think it is a long-term goal which we need to set ourselves to change of some of the things which are happening in our families.

Miss Thomasson—It is about long-term prevention. These short-term courses—we do not know how much of that is retained unless we do that follow-up. This stuff has been dispersed into the community and there is a long-term prevention—

Ms Stephenson—I have not brought the data here but there have been some very good trials done on relationship education in the preschool groups—conflict resolution techniques—with the teachers being trained to help the kiddies in how to relate to each other in more fruitful ways in the sandpit. Do you know that nice little poem, ‘Everything I ever learned in life I learned in the sandpit’? I have had stories from the child-care director. One that broke my heart the other day was a little girl who came in and did something really pretty in making a Christmas card and was told, ‘Isn’t that beautiful’, and she said, ‘No, no’, and broke into tears—‘My mummy says I can’t do very good things.’ So at the age of five somebody was telling her she couldn’t do very good things.

CHAIR—Can I thank you for your submission and also for coming in and discussing it with us today? It has been quite useful.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Tony Smith):

That the Sunnybank Family Support Inc. pamphlet re family schools training be accepted as an exhibit.

Luncheon adjournment

[1.30 p.m.]

HOOK, Ms Barbara Elizabeth, General Law Solicitor, Caxton Legal Centre Inc., 28 Heal Street, New Farm, Queensland

LAWLER, Ms Merran Jane, Director/Solicitor, Caxton Legal Centre Inc., 28 Heal Street, New Farm, Queensland

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission of 14 October. Would you like to make an introductory comment?

Ms Lawler—Firstly, we appreciate the opportunity of being able to make some further comments in relation to our submission. Caxton Legal Centre is a generalist community legal centre situated in New Farm, an inner suburb of Brisbane, and we deal with more than 6,000 clients per year. Of those clients, 54 per cent constitute clients having difficulties in what are essentially termed ‘family law matters’, and the breakdown in terms of gender is about 50 per cent males and 50 per cent females.

Our submission took a very narrow focus, and that focus essentially related to the role of government in providing support services when a relationship had actually broken down. It did not specifically address the issue of government’s role in dealing with pre-relationship breakdown circumstances. This is not to say that Caxton is not in a position to comment on those particular areas because the clients that we deal with who are experiencing family law difficulties range from those who are commencing a relationship right through to those who have separated and finalised court proceedings and are still having some legal or emotional difficulties. I should add that we actually have a social work division within the centre to assist in those cases.

In relation to the issues of marriage and relationship breakdowns, we are concerned that there should not be a narrow focus on what constitutes a relationship. We feel that there is a tendency to assume that when one talks of marriage and relationships, one is talking about either recognised marriages, or de facto relationships. In our submission there are a range of relationships which the government has a responsibility to have some regulatory role in. They include the relationships of same sex couples and of household members. There is a tendency, in Caxton’s view, to concentrate solely on the mother-father-children situation without looking at the broader family definitions which, whether we like them or not, exist in our community today.

Secondly, we think that there is an imperative on government not to accept a simplistic notion that marriages break down because it is easy to get divorced. Certainly, we speak from experience when we say that that is a notion that is presented to us quite regularly, particularly by male partners in failed marriages, that it is easy to get divorced so there is no need to commit to trying to sort out a problem. We think that that is a very simplistic notion of what causes marriage breakdowns. It is not as if somebody wakes up in the morning and says, ‘It is easy to get a divorce; I’m going to separate.’

We also think that it is imperative that government not view breakdowns in either relationships or marriages as being necessarily unhealthy. Certainly, there is much to be said for a view that the level of marriages that are disintegrating at the moment indicates something unhealthy about society, but there are a range of reasons why relationships break down. For example, in relation to domestic violence, sometimes the breakdown of those relationships is actually a very healthy thing.

Finally, we believe that government has an obligation not to take a narrow focus but to look at a global view of relationships, to look at education from a very early stage, and to provide support and counselling services not just for those in a relationship or those contemplating a relationship, but from the point of having no relationship at all through to providing post-relationship counselling. In our view that is one of the primary areas where consideration has not been given to providing adequate support. We consistently deal with people who are going through their second and third marriage breakdowns and are experiencing the same problems in those breakdowns time and time again because they have never been given the opportunity to explore the reasons that their first marriages broke down.

CHAIR—You say you are funded by the legal aid office. Is counselling one of the subprograms you are funded for?

Ms Lawler—We receive funding from the state Department of Families, Community Care and Youth to run a social work component. It is only partially funded and that particular program is, in fact, subsidised by our own fundraising activities.

CHAIR—The question I am asking is: do you get Commonwealth funding?

Ms Lawler—We do get some Commonwealth funding through the community legal centres funding program.

CHAIR—Fine, I understand that now. You were making a point about people not having resolved their relationship difficulties and forming new relationships after the breakdown of a previous relationship and, in some cases, yet again after that. When there is a breakdown of a relationship, people are in contact with the family court. Their statistics indicate that something like 59 per cent of clients voluntarily seek counselling in the Family Court and the others get it ordered anyway. There is contact there with counselling, and in some cases there may well be contact with mediation, as well.

It seems to me that, possibly, there is a lost opportunity there to use that as—this may not be the best expression—a lever, if you like, or a trigger to try to provide some other services, given that the majority of people subsequent to the breakdown of a relationship form some other relationship, whether it is permanent or less permanent, or whether it is a de facto relationship or another marriage. So, do you have any comment about the proposition that perhaps that is an opportunity to do something, and, if so, what could be done at that stage, given you have actually got people within the net, if I can put it that way?

Ms Lawler—The Caxton Legal Centre maintains that there is a very important role that the Family Court counselling service plays upon the breakdown of a relationship, and that is to have the parties focus in the needs of the children, and those sorts of issues. It is not, by and large, an opportunity to explore why the

relationship broke down. In fact, in our experience, that counselling for many of our clients is valuable because they do not want to be reconciled. They do not want a counselling service that is going to look at trying to get them back together. But it is certainly a missed opportunity from the point of view of pointing these people in the direction of other services that are available to assist them in dealing with the various stages that they might be in as a result of that relationship breakdown.

CHAIR—Let us accept, for the sake of discussion, that they do not want to be reconciled and that that relationship has broken down. Do you have any ideas about how they could be pointed in another direction? Should there be, to take an example, some requirement on the Family Court to give people a package of materials, perhaps with the comment, ‘You may not want to look at this now, but in six months time it could well be useful for you?’ Alternatively, should there be some provision that six months after somebody’s matter has gone through the family court there is some mechanism by which contact can be made with them, subject to all of the provisions about confidentiality and privacy and the like? Contact could be made at a time when they are more likely to be open to some further education, or whatever. Do you have any comments about that, or any other thing that could be done then?

Ms Hook—I do. In relation to the question about the package of materials—I think I can speak on behalf of our centre and as a long practising family law solicitor—that would be a good opportunity to provide people with further information and see that the Family Court does not operate in isolation from the community. So often the Family Court is seen as a last resort and people who go there are provided with information in relation to the best interests of the children.

After they leave the Family Court they are often again isolated. They do not have any further ongoing support services and may possibly be emotionally battered by that experience because it is a draining experience for most people. That would be a good opportunity for the counselling section to then provide further information about links within the community. It could be to a range of services: personal self-esteem services, dealing with relationship breakdown, and domestic violence services and support agencies. There are various organisations.

Within the community sector we would encourage that. The community must work together to provide solutions. So yes, that is a reasonable solution. Maybe six months down the track might be too long: people may have re-engaged in conflict or re-engaged in other relationships. The best time might be when they are part of the system.

Ms Lawler—The centre’s position is very much that there should not be any imperative upon people who have, for example, been through the rigours of the Family Court system to undergo some post-relationship counselling. In many respects it is akin to a requirement that drunken drivers should have to undergo some sort of training to ensure that they will not re-offend.

Mr TONY SMITH—They do now.

Ms Lawler—They do indeed, but whether the success of that is in any way validated by the cost of running those sorts of courses is, of course, an issue, because it is very easy for people to learn what they need to learn. Do we tell people that they have to have some sort of counselling once their relationship has

broken down before they can enter another relationship? Do they have to then go to court and be able to answer questions about the dynamics of relationships and those sorts of things? People enter relationships, by and large, voluntarily. The responsibility to go to counselling is a voluntary one and not something that government should be imposing on people.

CHAIR—I am not necessarily arguing with you, but is there not an argument that people expect governments to pick up the cost—to the tune of billions of dollars a year—when relationships break down? A conservative estimate of the cost of family breakdown in Australia would probably be somewhere between \$3 and \$4 billion each year. Is there not an argument to say that if the community expects the government, or the rest of the community, to pick up the costs of that, then should there not in return be some expectation that people might participate in some programs? I am not necessarily advancing it, but is that not the counter argument?

Ms Lawler—It is a bit like punishing people for not having had a successful relationship when they have gone into it without the necessary support in the first place. In our submission we see that as the failing of the current system: people are entering into relationships without any of that education and support that should exist in the first place and from a very young age. People should be able to identify support services that are available, and identify the warning signs of problems that may arise in a relationship. So it is a bit like punishing people now and saying that it is an enormous cost for us to pick up the tab, but we are really sorry you did not have those sorts of supports in the first place.

CHAIR—Do I take it that you would therefore be more open to programs in schools, for example, which were relationship oriented and which encouraged people entering into relationships to do some form of relationship education early in the relationship rather than before they are married, if they get married, and kids come along, and all of that?

Ms Lawler—Encouragement is the operative word.

Ms Hook—We are talking about married couples but, just to reiterate, there are many other types of relationships in communities. So targeting people who come before the Family Court may not be getting out to other members of the community. If we are trying to link people in failed marriage relationships into the community sector then we would also be linking people in other types of relationships and doing that through widespread education schemes is the only way that I can see to do it.

CHAIR—Just on education, I noticed in the *American Bar Association Journal* about 18 months ago that the family law division of the ABA had developed an education program around family law which it was taking to schools. It addressed the responsibilities and the consequences of relationships that go wrong, and other issues such as the family law system, child support and all of those sorts of things. Are you aware of any similar programs here that law societies or groups have been involved in?

Ms Hook—I am not aware of any, but that comes through in our submission, where we talk about a mapping the models project. We have a large number of systems that we can draw upon. The American-Canadian systems have, I think, quite a lot to offer, when we look to providing solutions. I agree that that is an important place to look but I am not aware of any similar programs in Australia.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—You mentioned in your presentation that you felt that breakdowns were not necessarily unhealthy. At page 3 of your submission, you say that increasing breakdowns in the family unit has led to a ‘whole new poverty subculture of single parents.’ You refer there to the idea of separation prevention in relationships. We had evidence or propositions from other groups that have come before us that people who are married are healthier, live longer, have more money, their kids have fewer mental problems and so on. So, in a public policy sense, are we not entitled to think that breakdown is an unhealthy thing?

Ms Hook—That is, I think, ignoring the situation where there is violence or abuse in a family. Those statistics are certainly relevant to any consideration but we are talking about safety issues in relation to violence or abuse and that should be, I think, considered separately from other issues. In that respect, children who witness violence in the home are seriously affected and there have been many studies to show that that is the case. Health is affected, especially of women who are survivors of violence that has been perpetrated by husbands, often, and sometimes de facto partners. I think that needs to be considered as a separate issue in these cases. The submission of another one of our QAILS members, the Women’s Legal Service, will refer to that in quite some detail.

Ms Lawler—I would also take issue with the suggestion that single parent families are not healthy families. I personally find that terribly offensive, as a suggestion.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—It is not a question of suggestion, people are saying that it is a matter of evidence. You can argue whether it is a matter of fact, I am saying that we have received submissions to the effect that families based around married couples are healthier, as a matter of medical evidence.

Ms Lawler—I am perhaps taking issue with the first part of the question where you raised, by reference to our submission, the issue of the subculture of single parent families and that that is, in some way, unhealthy. In our submission, it is far healthier than the situation where people remain in relationships because it is ‘easier’ but quite often there are massive problems in those relationships, and the people, including the children, are at risk or are very unhappy. There is nothing healthy about that.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—In other words, you are saying that increasing breakdowns of family units has led to a whole new poverty subculture of single parents?

Ms Lawler—Certainly there is a poverty subculture but that is not an issue that is a direct result of the relationship breakdown. It is very much to do with the way in which we deal with relationship breakdowns and the supports that are available afterwards.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—You made reference to counselling and mediation services provided by the Family Court. We are interested in the views of groups as to how well those services are working and your views about them compared to alternative arrangements.

Ms Hook—The Family Court, in our submission, is the appropriate venue in which to run post-separation services for many reasons. Certainly, that is with issues such as quality control, and the fact that the Family Court counselling section has access to the Family Court itself, and is aware of the current policies and is very much up on the law. There are also the safety aspects and access to other services such

as registrars, judges and deputy registrars. The court has the most available links to the system. Therefore, it is best placed to deal with clients who are going through the system. They are not going to be misleading them as to where the system is going to take them.

In our view, people, especially men, are more likely to go to Family Court counselling than they are to participate in voluntary counselling outside of the system. I think that is because the Family Court is legitimised by it being a court. Services run under its roof appear to people to be better serviced and better approached. My comments also relate to the mediation service that is run by the Family Court.

Mr TONY SMITH—Just so that I understand Mr Thomson's question, do you stand by the sentence that the increasing breakdown of the family unit has led to a whole new poverty subculture of single parents?

Ms Lawler—Yes, certainly we stand by that. I think that that is an inevitable result. But to label that as some reason why the system should be reformed ignores the ultimate outcome of that. The outcome is that, whatever counselling you put into place, there are still going to be single parent families, and there will still exist a poverty subculture. It speaks something about the system that it is allowed to exist.

Mr TONY SMITH—I take it then that you eschew the increasing breakdown of the family unit.

Ms Lawler—Not at all.

Mr TONY SMITH—Let me follow that through. Are you quite happy to tolerate a whole new poverty subculture of single parents?

Ms Lawler—On the contrary. As I have just said, it speaks volumes about the system that that poverty subculture exists and will continue to exist. It is probably outside the ambit of this particular inquiry to address that particular issue but it is an issue which is a responsibility of government to address.

Mr TONY SMITH—With regard to the Family Court, is not the Family Court failing in some areas—I mean, it seems from certain evidence that is around that relationships, frequently, are not broken down entirely when they hit the Family Court. Sometimes they are but sometimes they are not. When it comes to such things now as the Family Court dealing with interim custody applications on the papers, and not hearing evidence on an interim custody basis, I would have thought the Family Court has a lot to answer for. Are you aware of that practice?

Ms Lawler—I would address my comments to what appears to me to be an increasing lack of resources to deal with the issues which are coming before the court. I would also disagree, from the community sector's point of view, that cases on relationships that reach the Family Court are not completely broken down. From our point of view and that of our clients, it takes a great deal of effort to approach the Family Court, to prepare the necessary documentation, to instruct solicitors and to seek some legal advice about accessing those resources. I would say that in the majority—almost an overwhelming majority—of cases that reach the Family Court, the relationships have broken down.

Mr TONY SMITH—I do not disagree with that. I think though that there are some that are not

totally and that is borne out by people getting back together. I have seen figures—people having been through the system and then getting back together. I am just saying that in terms of a contributing factor, if the Family Court is not addressing issues of children in a proper way on an interim custody basis—and I have never heard Alastair Nicholson complain about this aspect in particular—do you accept that that is a real problem? That is, if the court will not hear evidence on an interim custody basis because of pressure of work or whatever reasons which are advanced, they are just looking at the papers, seeing a whole heap of allegations and saying, ‘Oh well’?

Ms Hook—The Family Law Act has tried to address some issues such as resourcing by saying that all evidence in chief shall be provided by affidavit. The Family Court also has some fairly stringent rules in relation to interim custody hearings whereby they do say that, unless the welfare of the child is at risk, the custody of the child which is now residence—I refer to the new term ‘now resided’—in a specific issues order, they are not looking at altering the placement or the residence of a child unless there are specific areas of risk in relation to a child. On that basis, if we have two lots of affidavit evidence which have been prepared by legal counsel, that have been submitted to the court and in which there are no serious allegations of risk to a child, then the Family Law Act supports not hearing evidence in chief I would think.

Mr TONY SMITH—I think that begs the question because they do not hit the deck unless there are arguments that the children are at risk on an interim basis. I have a constituent who came to my office with this very problem recently and said, ‘We had evidence of the child crawling around on the floor eating scraps of food.’ Yet, the court was not interested in taking evidence. It just said, ‘Righto, status quo’. When is a child at risk?

Ms Hook—Isn’t that a problem then in relation to the Family Law Act itself and obviously something to be taken to the Chief Justice or the judge administrator in relation to those problems? Status quo is something that has been in the Family Law Act for as long as I have been practising and possibly since the inception of the Family Law Act. If that is one of the requirements, if you have a particular example, then I think that needs to be addressed. I do not see that—

Mr TONY SMITH—Would you feel far more comfortable, when allegations like that were flying around, for them to be tested on oath, than letting them go through on the papers?

Ms Hook—Having not been privy to that particular case you are talking about, I find it difficult to provide a legal opinion as to what I would feel comfortable with. I would assume that the couples had gone to counselling as part of the process. The Family Court counselling section would have been involved prior to an interim custody hearing.

Mr TONY SMITH—On the day they were sent off down to counselling—on the day the usual order is made.

Ms Hook—I think that it is not relevant to what we are here about today. There are certainly some difficult issues involved in it and we see clients with difficult issues like this all the time. But I don’t feel able to answer that.

CHAIR—What constitutes a healthy relationship?

Ms Lawler—Support, trust, honesty—the sorts of things, I suppose, that you cannot legislate for.

Ms Hook—Equality, an absence of abuse.

CHAIR—The Chief Justice of the Family Court, in discussions with us—whether on record or otherwise, but I think it was on record—conceded, in talking about the divorce rate, that in effect it was higher than the official statistics because there has been a substantial increase in cohabitation and therefore you have a breakdown of cohabitation which you have to add to the divorce rate if you want to get some sort of realistic trend and the real figures. Do you have some sense of what the breakdown of de facto relationships is? Do people tend to come to your legal service because they are in a de jure relationship and do not come in the de facto situation?

Ms Lawler—I think it is fair to say that we see a large proportion of people who are in de facto relationships and who, the relationship having broken down, are seeking some access to property settlement avenues in particular.

CHAIR—I think you mentioned 6,000 clients. I am only seeking a ballpark figure but I want to get some idea of what we are talking about.

Ms Lawler—This is very much a guess. Of the 53 per cent of clients who access us about family law issues, 25 to 30 per cent would be de facto or other relationships.

CHAIR—Just to make sure I am absolutely clear, is it 25 to 30 per cent of the 53 per cent?

Ms Lawler—Yes.

CHAIR—So you are saying that somewhere between one-quarter and one-third, in round figures, of those who are coming about family law matters could well be other than legal marriages?

Ms Hook—We do see a large number of de facto couples and same sex couples having difficulties in their relationship breakdown, be it accessing services, having trouble with their solicitors, trying to sort out property or difficulties involving children, or who are melded families that have both brought children of former marriages into their de facto relationship and are then having that break down. We do see a large number of clients.

CHAIR—Of that group of de factos, how many would be de facto same sex relationships and how many would be mixed sex?

Ms Lawler—We are probably talking about 30 per cent of that group who would be same sex couples. The remaining 70 per cent would be heterosexual couples.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your submission and also for coming in to discuss it today.

[2.05 p.m.]

DOHERTY, Ms Deidre Anne, Domestic Violence Worker, Windana Women's Shelter, c/- Women's Legal Service, PO Box 5446, West End, Queensland 4101

McNULTY, Ms Amanda, Community Worker, Violence Against Non-English Background Group, c/- Women's Legal Service, PO Box 5446, West End, Queensland 4101

RATHUS, Ms Zoe Scott, Legal Coordinator, Women's Legal Service, PO Box 5446, West End, Queensland 4101

CHAIR—Welcome and thank you for appearing before the committee today. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false and misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament.

We are in receipt of your submission of 1 November. Would you like to make some introductory comments?

Ms Rathus—I would like to supply the committee with new copies of our submission because there was an error in our original submission which makes no difference to the content, but we have corrected it. You would have to read it very carefully to see the changes.

CHAIR—May I have a resolution, Mr Smith, that we accept as evidence and authorise for publication the supplementary submission of the Women's Legal Service in Brisbane. There being no objection, it is so resolved.

Mr TONY SMITH—Should we toss the old one away?

Ms Rathus—Yes, you can. This one is identical except that it corrects the error.

CHAIR—I annotated the old one, so I will have to use that.

Ms Rathus—Right. We thought we would all make some introductory comments coming from our own particular areas of skill and background and then continue with the format which you have been using of answering questions that you may wish to raise. We are relying largely on our written submission and do not want to take up a lot of time with extra comments, but we thought that there were just a couple of things that are particularly important to point out that we have not necessarily covered in detail.

One of the things we think it is very important to look at is the diversity of relationships which exist in the Australian community. When looking at how to provide support services to families and looking at family breakdown, it is very important to ensure that the full diversity of families and relationships within the Australian community is taken into account. This includes marriages where there are children; marriages where there are no children; de facto relationships which are heterosexual couples with and without children,

and those children may be the product of that couple or there may be a number of families involved in those children. There are same sex relationships; there are extended families, particularly in the migrant community and in indigenous families; and there are all sorts of other groupings of people who share houses together who can find themselves in positions of conflict, of needing to deal with what is going on within their relationship. For anyone who is sharing space with other people in their daily lives, it is important that services are provided if there are problems within that living arrangement, because it is important that our homes for any of us are safe places to be residing.

One of the other things that we wanted to make a comment about in particular and draw out is in relation to the question of funding community agencies for providing services. The kinds of services which seem to be focused on in this inquiry are counselling and support services and mediation. One of the things that we think is most important there—and this is moving away from what may be provided at the Family Court, which we have addressed to some extent in our submission—is the need to ensure that, where governments do provide funding to community based agencies, it is very important that there be a framework in which that funding is provided and that those organisations are expected to have operating guidelines that deal with some of the most crucial issues which must be at the forefront of providing appropriate counselling and mediation services. We would say in particular it is essential that there be protocols for dealing with relationships in which there has been violence. Those protocols would relate to intake procedures, would relate to actual case management, which may involve such matters as ensuring that people do not necessarily have to be in the same room and that there is sufficient safety in place in relation to attending and leaving any service, and that there be proper accountability and monitoring processes built in to ensure that organisations are actually complying with any guidelines which may exist.

It is also important that such organisations are encouraged to be able to provide services for the diversity of the Australian community. That would mean ensuring training for counsellors and mediators both in issues of violence and in issues of cultural inclusivity and appropriate use of interpreters where that may be required in those agencies. I think that those kinds of things tend to be identified at the moment as what is expected at a government agency, but those expectations have not necessarily become so much part of an expectation in community based settings, and those things are very important.

We also just wanted to emphasise one point which I think has come up a bit in the discussions that I have been able to hear so far today, why it is that relationships break down and the issues that people then face after separation. We just want to make the point that, in our experience at the Women's Legal Service, by the time a relationship breaks down women have usually tried incredibly hard to hold that relationship together. It is our experience that it is the role that women take up within a relationship to try to hold it together.

We have a lot of women contacting us at the Women's Legal Service who are not at all yet at a point of wanting to separate but want to talk about what might happen if they did. But their main issue when you are listening to them is that what they are actually wanting to do is to find a way of keeping that relationship together. They often spend a lot of time talking to us about the steps that they have taken to try and hold it together and about the fact that they may well have separated previously and got back together, which is an issue that Mr Smith raised earlier about relationships appearing to have broken down but still getting back together. That is a very natural part of the processes that we see happening that our clients report to us. But it

is women in the relationships who actually seem to take up that responsibility of holding relationships together for as long as they can.

At the point that women leave, the usual reason that we see that they have left is the risk of danger that they have finally accepted they are living with by staying in that relationship, or alternatively a blunt realisation of the effects of what is going on in that relationship on the children. It is a fairly desperate and usually very emotionally critical time for the woman when she actually realises that she cannot stay there and she will leave.

The final point I wanted to make before handing over is that one of the things that we consider most imperative is understanding the links between the way in which the community and government must work at dealing with the issue of violence in intimate relationships, acknowledging its existence and ensuring that we have early and consistent approaches to dealing with domestic violence.

That means there is a need for liaison between community based counselling, mediation and support services, the police and the Family Court. We need to see consistent messages being given to people who are in relationships characterised by abuse so that we do not get one approach taken in one agency and a different approach taken somewhere else, so that people do not have any security of understanding of what will happen in relation to how domestic violence will be dealt with. Those are the main points that I wanted to draw out from our submission.

Ms Doherty—There are two main points that I would like to talk about from my own experience of having worked within Women’s Legal Service, working directly with women and children in shelter. Working in a service like that means that we have up to three months ongoing contact with women. My role as a domestic violence worker and an advocate is that I would be involved quite a lot within the court process, within mediation, with legal aid, with community agencies and also with agencies that are included within this agenda for services.

There are two main areas that I would like to talk about and just expand on a little bit in relation to the submission. With regard to mediation, mediation was brought about within the Family Court, and I see that as a really good service. At times I think that it has some really good outcomes. My concern was that initially within setting up that service there were very clear guidelines that it was not to be used within violent relationships. I find that continually women are refused legal aid except if undertaking mediation.

So that becomes a chronic problem where they are not able to get mediation to sort out residence or custody issues with children and are continually forced—not given any alternative—to go through those sorts of services. Initially when that service was set up, it was thought that mediation is unacceptable for violent relationships.

I am aware that there are some cases within violent relationships, or abusive relationships, where mediation is still appropriate, but I have also been involved in a number of mediations with the Family Court where it has been totally inappropriate for those particular cases to be involved. I am advocating not for all cases not to be acceptable for mediation, but certainly that when it has been advocated clearly from a number of workers involved in the case that it would be very dangerous, that there should be alternatives and that

those cases should be settled in the court.

I refer to an article by Renata Alexander, who is a solicitor at the legal aid in Victoria. I hope that we have submitted it. She says:

Effective or successful mediation requires the following:-

- (i) equal bargaining power and skills between the parties
- (ii) voluntariness and consent of the parties
- (iii) confidentiality in negotiations
- (iv) informality without rules of evidence or legalistic notions
- (v) neutrality of the mediator

In her article, she points out that in relationship breakdowns there is inequality; that, especially in cases of violence, women have been greatly disadvantaged and have lower self-esteem and less skills to deal with mediation. That certainly has been my experience. Many women will back down to get an agreement on the children and are giving over property. They would basically agree to anything to get an agreement on the children. Women's main concern, in the work that I have done, has been the basic stability, happiness and safety of their children.

There are a number of cases I have been involved with where women are giving over large amounts of property in a mediation just for the sake of having safety for their children. That comes from the inequality that exists. On the question of it being voluntary and with their consent, women often feel that they do not have a choice in agreeing to that; they feel that they have to agree because that is what they are saying and legal aid are continually saying back, 'No, you can't have any access to go to the court.' They are refused funding for that, so they feel as if they have no choice but to go through this process.

The confidentiality issue in the mediation is making violence a private matter and what does come out in the mediation service cannot be used in the court. The fact of having mediation it is also saying that two people are responsible for the violence. In the cases that I see two people are not responsible for the violence. It is usually perpetrated by one person, usually the male against the woman and the children.

Mr TONY SMITH—Does that make the male solely responsible?

Ms Doherty—For the violence?

Mr TONY SMITH—In the situation.

Ms Doherty—No, it does not make the male responsible for the whole situation. But, in my experience, I would go as far as saying that 95 per cent of the women I see in shelter do not want their relationships to break up. What they want is for their partner to end the violence and because the violence has not ended they have no choice but to end the relationship.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you speak to the men about it?

Ms Doherty—I speak to quite a number of men and I have also—

Mr TONY SMITH—As many as the women?

Ms Doherty—I have also been involved in working with men who are violent. I have counselled men as part of my job.

Mr TONY SMITH—But, of the women you speak to, do you speak to all of the partners of those women?

Ms Doherty—I speak to quite a lot.

Mr TONY SMITH—So there is a bias towards the women's point of view in terms of the number of women you see. I am not saying your bias, but there is a bias in the sense that you see more women than men in the relationships.

Ms Doherty—I obviously would see more women than men because my role is in working in women's shelter which is a protective service. It is a service that provides safety.

CHAIR—I would like to query something before you go on, because I am not entirely following the thrust. In the old submission, under the heading on Family Court mediation, in the second paragraph it says:

From our knowledge of the procedures and processes used by mediation services generally, we believe that the Family Court Mediation Service is one of the most professionally run services. Its mediators are trained in domestic violence and power imbalances and their intake procedures and other processes reflect this training.

Can you tell me how that lines up with what you were just saying? I thought you were just saying the contrary to that?

Ms Doherty—I am saying that in a lot of cases I believe that to be true and I have seen that process being able to be used very effectively in dealing with some family break-up issues. What I am also saying is that, from the point of being a domestic violence worker, there are instances where that does not work and it creates very large inequalities within the mediation circles.

CHAIR—I am still not clear on this. One of the things that has come through, not so much from what you were saying but from evidence on other occasions before the committee, has been to the effect that—actually, I thought I heard you suggesting something similar—one of the circumstances in which mediation is not appropriate is where violence is an issue in the relationship. What I am trying to work out is the suggestion here where it says that its mediators are trained in domestic violence and power imbalances and that their intake procedures and other processes reflect this training. This, and what you have just said, seems to be suggesting that there may be some instances where violence is an aspect of the relationship where mediation can still be appropriate.

Ms Rathus—I will answer that. The submission was written by staff at the Women's Legal Service, in consultation, so it is a bit difficult to ask either Deidre or Mandy to specifically speak to this submission.

CHAIR—I am not having a go at anyone. I am just trying to find out what this actually meant.

Ms Rathus—No, I know. What we are talking about in the written submission here is that the way the Family Court has gone about training its mediators is in recognising domestic violence, and its intake procedures generally exclude cases where there has been violence, and that is a fairly clear rule of what is supposed to happen at the Family Court.

But what Deidre is alluding to, and one of the actual practical problems starting to happen—particularly in Queensland—in the way that our legal aid office has been run, is that it is so difficult now for people to get legal aid at all. Our legal aid office in Queensland has had these early intervention conferences as part of its decision making process. They are very similar to mediation at the Family Court—it is basically mediation except that it is not voluntary.

These processes have been in place for a long time. It means that, although in practice there is an understanding of the very serious concerns of trying to mediate in cases where there has been violence, because people simply cannot get legal aid there are situations now where people are going to mediation, where, if one could implement—strictly speaking—the guidelines, those cases would be excluded. Workers are starting to find that there is some small percentage of cases where there has been some violence but where mediation at least provides a solution for those people. Although it may not be a perfect solution, it does provide a solution.

But there are cases in which it is completely unacceptable. One of the difficulties is, because the reality is that people are being forced down this path anyway, how does one identify those cases? I think Deidre's point is that workers in refuges actually become very acutely attuned to the issues and they can pick—or at least endeavour to—those cases where it would really be very dangerous and unacceptable. But they are not being encouraged to participate in that threshold decision making.

So there is this push that actually means that some of those guidelines are starting to become a bit grey in terms of how they are implemented but there are no strategies in place for how we deal with this. People are simply just not being able to resolve their matters at all.

Ms McNulty—Some women that I have spoken to personally have indicated to me that they are aware that if they disclose the domestic violence in the relationship they will be excluded from mediation services at the Family Court. Because that is the best of the limited options that are available to them for resolving residence and special issues orders and disputes, they will go into the mediation session and not disclose that there has been domestic violence and that is really making a farce of the whole process.

There is a huge gap and those women are being forced into this situation because that gap is not being met by adequate alternative services.

CHAIR—I understand that. I just did not follow.

Ms Doherty—I would like to submit a copy of that paper, if it is all right to send it in.

CHAIR—Can we photocopy it now and that will save you sending it in, then we can take it into evidence—perhaps the front page for publication so we have got the reference.

Ms Doherty—I would also like to briefly talk about services for children within the community. As a shelter worker we have numerous children, as you would imagine, within my shelter and also within other shelters in Queensland. Although we would like an extension on all services that are available to all families, there is a great hole within children's services. We have children who have severe effects of having lived in violent relationships and who have physical and emotional damage. There are very few services that are available to children. We could wait weeks or up to months for children who are showing severe responses to what has been happening for them. That is a large one. Maybe I could go back to that when Mandy has finished.

Ms McNulty—I wanted to talk specifically about the additional issues faced by women from non-English speaking backgrounds. In terms of domestic violence, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that there is a huge under-reporting of domestic violence amongst women from non-English speaking backgrounds, for a whole lot of reasons. It is true of women who are married to people from their country of origin, as well as it is true of women who are married to Australian men.

A lot of it has to do with language barriers and the failure of the justice system, the police and community services to use interpreters. To give you a recent example of that: I am aware that a woman recently sought advice from a service and was told by the administrator, who was not a professional person in that organisation—she was answering the phones—'No, you can't have an interpreter. Don't you know that, in this day and age, you can complain as much and as often as you like and no-one is going to hear you.' That is particularly in response to the recent debate on racism and comments by Pauline Hanson.

So there is huge under-reporting. For many people from non-English speaking backgrounds, the cultural mores actually militate against them leaving their marriage, regardless of how bad it is, regardless of how intolerable the violence might be. There is evidence also of a higher than average rate of domestic homicide involving women from non-English speaking backgrounds. We accept the hypothesis that the factors militating against women leaving the relationship are part of a major cause for the higher rate of domestic homicide. I guess the reason I am raising that point is that I fear, while I support initiatives to prevent relationship breakdown and to support marriages where it is appropriate for them to continue, I fear that those initiatives might be at the expense of services to women who need safety, protection and information about leaving their relationships. That is why I am raising it.

These women have a lack of access to services already. There are very few services specific to the needs of non-English speaking background women. The sort of thing I would like to see happen with the move of services into the community is that there be the development of protocols, that it be insisted upon that there be cross-cultural training so that mediators, conciliators and counsellors are very much aware of the kind of cultural issues that are at play and avoiding some of the cultural stereotypes that have been written about a great deal over the last 20 years. For instance, in some cultures there is the stereotype that violence is more acceptable and that, therefore, women do not deserve the same level of protection as Australian women do with our cultural mores.

Also, there is the matter of interpreters which has been written about again a great deal. It is well known that even people who have quite proficient levels of English skill, if it is a second language, at times of stress and crisis that skill will be diminished and that capacity to be able to communicate effectively in English will diminish.

It is also vital that all workers in community agencies who are handling these kinds of issues have very thorough training in domestic violence so that they are able to identify some of the signs of the power imbalances that manifest themselves where there has been domestic violence. A lot of women from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly those whose migration status is not settled, will not reveal domestic violence because one of the strategies that their male partners use is to threaten them with deportation. A lot of the women have not been alerted to the fact that there are now domestic violence provisions contained within the migration regulations. That can have a very serious impact on the choices that they make.

In terms of prevention, one of the things that I would be suggesting is training for workers in community organisations. I would also suggest that information about women's legal rights, including information about the domestic violence provisions of the immigration regulations, be given to women on arrival, if not before they come to Australia. The counsellors also need to be able to address those kinds of things if they become aware that they might be an issue. It is important that counsellors are able to say to women, 'There are provisions within the migration regulations and you need to seek advice about those.' So, it is important for all workers to have some training about those rules, as well.

Ms Doherty—I would like to go back to the services for children and your agenda that there are some preventative situations. I think that it is accepted that violence within relationships has a high level of being intergenerational. One of the preventative measures that can happen is for some appropriate education within the school system. I have been involved doing talks with young people in high schools and TAFE about a lot of those relationship issues. One of the problems that has evolved for me in doing that is that at times I have numbers of children in different classes who come back saying, 'This is what happens at home. The police come and nothing happens. Dad is being violent and these things happen and nothing happens about it.' They are coming from a perspective of believing that violence is okay and there is actually nothing you can do about it.

If that sort of program were instituted in schools there certainly would need to be some integration of services so there is a consistent response to what is happening with the violence in the home. That is where the problem goes back to. Nothing can change for the next generation of children unless there is a response to the violence that happens within their homes now. That is definitely a situation that does exist. The responses across the board of all agencies within the police system and the courts are not consistent. Also, we need an integrated approach to the services that were available to young people. In doing that sort of education for young people, when that situation did happen, I found that there are very few services available to help young people or children to deal with the issues of what was happening in their lives. Incest for children, sexual abuse and violence in the lives of young children are a reality. If we ever hope to have families being able to stay together in the future generations, they must be able to deal with the situations of what is happening right now within their family.

CHAIR—You say in your submission that:

One of the solutions often proffered to reduce marriage breakdown is early couples counselling. Whilst this may be effective for non-domestic violence relationships it can be destructive where there is domestic violence.

You are not suggesting that if there is domestic violence, counselling can have no effect, are you?

Ms Rathus—No. What we are saying is that domestic violence can manifest itself at all times in relationships. People certainly enter into marriages even after there has been abuse during the courting part of the relationship. I guess that what our concern is—and you will see the recommendation at the end—is to ensure that people who work in early couples counselling are trained in and understand the dynamics of domestic violence and do not have wrong expectations. For example, they should not have expectations that, if they see a couple early in the relationship and the woman reports that there has been abuse, there is going to be a kind of natural answer to that which is that she is going to say, ‘And I am now not going to go ahead with this relationship’. There may be a decision to go ahead with that relationship. The counsellor then has to be aware and trained in how best to assist that couple to proceed down a safe and abuse-free path, which may well involve trying to encourage the man to go and attend a counselling course for violent men. It may be that couples counselling may not in itself be the solution to ascertaining early in a potential relationship that there has been violence. I guess it is a question of leaving it under that umbrella of couples counselling. It is our experience that separate counselling and quite different approaches can be required for how you provide support and change behaviours of men and women who may be interested in either entering into or continuing a relationship.

CHAIR—When you were talking about earlier couples counselling, were you talking about—can I just talk about marriages now, I am not excluding others but for the sake of discussion it might be easier—pre-marriage, pre-wedding, post-wedding or both?

Ms Rathus—It may be either.

CHAIR—The trouble is when couples go along to the sort of marriage education program or the marriage and relationship education programs that there are now, they are all in love and starry-eyed and looking at life through rose-coloured glasses. The chances of ascertaining the propensity to violence is probably fairly remote because they are in love with each other. As one of the witnesses said today, there might be some over-attentiveness which in retrospect you can see as being some element of jealousy which in turn, if circumstances arise, later on may well lead to violence. Picking that up three months prior to a wedding when they are all in love and falling all over each other and naturally being over-attentive to each other is extremely difficult.

Ms McNulty—I think that our culture actually encourages women to believe that jealousy and possessiveness are positive traits and something to be enjoyed; and that is problematic, as well.

CHAIR—Could I put the contention I put earlier when this was raised? If you believe the psychological theories of someone like Harville Hendrix, who says that people—again, I will use the context

of marriage, but you can take it more broadly than that—who marry each other are of equal immaturity, then if jealousy is an immaturity in one partner what is the immaturity in the other partner? Are there other factors that could be identified at an earlier stage?

Ms Doherty—In reference to what we talked about earlier with regard to education in young people, one of the problems I faced in doing those programs with young people in the schools was that violence did exist within their homes and that it was acceptable. Their belief was that the police came but did not do anything about it, so therefore it must be okay and it must be right. Therefore, those young women and the young men who were also affected by violence—and there was a large response of young women and young men within the classroom; they were mixed classes in all the instances that I did that training—responded that it was okay. So the problem starts back there within the intergenerational violence that exists, because nothing is done about the violence; and they see that through their whole childhood.

There are no counselling services available generally for young people or young children, and that is very ineffectively dealt with. Within shelters, we have child support workers, and there are very limited services. Most children that we see do not get to counselling, because there is none available. Only the most affected cases get to counselling, because of the lack of services. If only those young people had, as children or within their teenage years, had an opportunity to deal with the issues of that violence and to see it as unacceptable and to see that all the services involved, including the courts and the police, had an across-the-board response that violence was unacceptable.

That has happened, to a large part, within our community. The Brisbane City Council took up that approach this year. We have a lot of advertising about violence being unacceptable, but there are still many taboos on things that do not get talked about, and that includes incest, which exists in large proportion in violent families. We see lots of children who come from violent families and are also victims of incest. That is something that is not put up and talked about openly: families are not safe places.

Yet these young people are then going into relationships with beliefs and ideas of what is or is not okay within families. We cannot expect that, in the future, they will go into relationships and know what is okay and what is equality, and how to have happy, healthy relationships. Those relationships then end up being violent ones. We are here talking about how to prevent the breakup of relationships, and that goes right back to the beginning: there must be services for the young children and the young people we are seeing now. The women that we see in shelter very often come as survivors of incest, violence within their own families, and rape. There are many women in violent situations now who come from that situation.

CHAIR—I understand that; but, if the only solution is dealing with people after they have been through a crisis—which is what I hear you describing—isn't there a whole range of other people out there whom we are not doing anything about? Don't we have to tackle the problem more broadly? If the problem is as you describe—and I am not questioning that—isn't the logic of the position such that you have to tackle it much more broadly than simply waiting for the crisis to occur and then picking up the pieces?

Ms Doherty—That is what I am saying. There are no services.

CHAIR—What I am saying is that it seemed to me that what you were saying is—

Ms Doherty—For children—there are no services for young people.

CHAIR—But does it not have to be educational? We cannot counsel every child.

Ms Doherty—But it cannot be just educational. I have talked about educational programs within schools with young people and at TAFE. The problem that I face there is that young people say, ‘Yes, but this is what happens at home’. There are no services to help the particular young people who we clearly identify as needing assistance. There are also no services for us to access to help the children we identify and see within the shelter, to ensure that we are not facing the same problem in another 10 years time.

CHAIR—I will try to summarise what I understand you to be saying. Are you saying that there should be broader educational services aimed at the children in the population, but where those services identify particular problems within families, there need to be other services to which they can be referred?

Ms Doherty—Yes. There is a great lack of those services. There are few services available and even the most critical cases in the shelter have to wait weeks and months to get appointments, and the amount of time available is very limited for those children.

Ms Rathus—I would like to take up a couple of things that you said earlier. You talked about over-attentiveness—or whatever the phrase was—being one of the things that we identify in relationships where there is domestic violence. The characteristics of that are jealousy and possessiveness which may well, early in the relationship, have appeared to be something rather cute and nice and quite flattering to the female partner.

I do not know that there is an answer to the question of what it is about the female partner. I think we all like flattery—I do not mean women only, I mean all human beings—and she is probably also doing things for him which he enjoys. I do not know whether you necessarily have to find the connection between a man who indicates jealousy and a particular type of woman who is going to be attracted to that. We all enjoy flattery and she probably gives him back things, and these are just normal patterns within relationships. I think the issue is that the result sometimes, particularly of male jealousy, is extreme violence later in the relationship and that is why it is important to identify. It is not an issue of worrying about whether there is something about her which is attracted to this jealousy, but an issue of looking at the fact that jealousy is actually a warning sign. We must look at ways of identifying it and of educating and encouraging that couple to investigate what this really is about, and to look at education in terms of equality within that relationship.

CHAIR—All I was asking was: were there other signs there apart from over-attentiveness or jealousy that could be picked up? I was not saying that it was only one-sided; I was considering both. The suggestion made by the marriage educators earlier was that a lack of self-esteem was often the corollary or the other side of the over-attentiveness and, therefore, that was something which could be detected early in the relationship.

Ms Rathus—It may not be, though, because, if there is a lack of self-esteem early, that can be annihilated over the period of time of the relationship. I think it is safer to look for the jealousy than to look for lack of self-esteem in terms of how that will progress. You talked about people in early counselling being in love and starry-eyed and so on. Love and violence are not separate events. Love and violence can live and

work together. Even when women have been subjected to severe abuse, it does not mean that they stop loving their partner. The fact that people are in love at the beginning of a relationship does not mean that there may not already be violence or the fact that violence starts to characterise a relationship does not mean that love leaves it. It is very important when understanding these issues not to separate them or assume they are mutually exclusive. They can exist together.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Mandy made a comment that there are women who go to Family Court counselling and do not disclose that there has been domestic violence. Doesn't that to some extent cut across one of the central things in this submission, that is, that counselling is a bad idea in domestic violence circumstances?

Ms Rathus—We do not say that counselling is a bad idea.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—I thought you were suggesting that it was—

Ms Rathus—Are you talking about mediation or counselling?

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—To say that it was potentially dangerous for the partners to continue—

Ms Rathus—I am sorry, is your question about mediation or counselling?

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—What you are saying in your submission is that—

Ms Rathus—This is about mediation, isn't it?

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—You say on page 3:

Experience has also shown that couples counselling has failed where there is a history of domestic violence.

Ms Rathus—Couples counselling. There are a number of different themes. There are rules that relate to mediation. I think Mandy was talking about mediation generally—not just at the Family Court but also in other kinds of services that provide mediation. Then there are issues about counselling couples together, which is one of our criticisms, particularly when it is counselling in relation to trying to sort out problems for future arrangements, say, for children when a marriage has broken down and insisting that couples get counselled together to sort that out within the Family Court context.

Ms McNulty—The point I was going to make was that, when we are talking about the funding of services to perform mediation in cases of marriage breakdown or resolving marriage disputes, if there are no alternatives offered—which seems to be the way we are heading because Legal Aid will not fund people for other options of resolving those kinds of disputes—people who are subject to violence are forced into this situation, because having an unsatisfactory mediation is by far better than sitting down with a violent partner and getting your head beaten in while you are trying to work out where the children are going to live. Just having another person present in the room might inhibit the worst aspects of that violence. It is certainly far from ideal, but women are choosing it because it is the best option they have.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—There were a couple of comments made to the effect that many women who contact you do not want the relationship to break up at the time they contact you but want to hold it together. In those circumstances, what service does the legal service provide? What is it that you are able to do to assist them?

Ms Rathus—We will refer them to the agencies that do exist. We will talk to them about their particular circumstances. It may be that in some of those situations counselling for couples is appropriate and we refer them to agencies that do couples counselling. If one of the things that is happening is that the woman is dealing with violence within the relationship but still wants to stay in the relationship, we may provide her with referrals to agencies which can assist her to understand what is happening in her relationship. We will provide her with referrals for agencies that her partner may choose to access. We will then talk to her about the kinds of strategies that might be interesting for her to engage in to assess how the relationship can continue safely and to encourage her to look at ways in which she should do that.

So in the end, if a woman is saying she wants a relationship to continue but she also considers that at that moment she is at severe risk of physical injury to herself and her children—perhaps she is reporting that in the previous week she has been hospitalised by him—then you engage in providing dual information. It will show how it is okay for her to prioritise personal safety and safety for the children. But in doing that, it does not mean that the only option is to bring the relationship to a permanent end. You talk to her about the kinds of services and agencies that may be available, which they may have to access separately in that kind of situation. But it may be that that relationship can still continue. So it is a delicate balancing act. Those are extremely difficult calls to deal with, but ones that we deal with quite frequently. But there are not enough services to be offering, of course. That is one of the problems.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—The submission says on page 5:

Unlike community counsellors, court counsellors are mandated to consider "the best interests of the child".

What would you say community counsellors are mandated to do? What would you see their first priority as being?

Ms Rathus—They are not mandated to do anything at the moment. Family Court counselling happens within a statutory situation which is occurring, usually, with the couple involved in some kind of litigation. We would be saying that with counsellors in the community those same issues should be part of the protocols and frameworks which develop and which should be in place before services receive funding: best interests of children, safety, welfare, and recognition of the possibility and extent of violence. That promotes best interests of children, of course.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—Yes, and Mandy was talking about domestic violence against women of non-English speaking backgrounds. Do you have a view about that compared with the level of domestic violence against women of English speaking background?

Ms McNulty—I do not think that there is enough data to be able to make any real authoritative comment on that. Domestic violence crosses all of those cultural boundaries, age, and income. There is no

evidence to suggest that it is worse in migrant communities than anywhere else. What is worse is that the women who are victims in those situations do not have access to services for a whole range of reasons, not just language, but a whole range of reasons.

Ms Doherty—But language is a barrier.

Ms McNulty—Language is a major factor.

Ms Doherty—We are faced with the situation of women who speak little or no English and we cannot gain any access to any support workers who speak their language. That is a great difficulty in working with women.

Ms McNulty—I work at a service that uses interpreters a great deal and we have just had advice from the telephone interpreter service that they are having to cut back on the provision of service for financial reasons. That is quite frightening.

Mr TONY SMITH—Is family violence defined under the Family Law Act? I have not looked at the act lately.

Ms Rathus—There is a definition of it now in the new part that deals with children. In the definition section at the beginning of that part there is now a definition of family violence which is fairly broad. I do not have it with me so I am not going to try and—but there is a definition contained in the act.

Mr TONY SMITH—We will look it up.

Ms Rathus—One of the difficulties is that it does not actually quite fit with any of the definitions in any of the state based domestic violence legislation, so we now probably have about eight definitions of domestic or family violence throughout Australia.

Mr TONY SMITH—That is a huge problem because some of the definitions are a violation of the English language because they talk about violence which is not violence.

Ms Rathus—You and I may disagree on that.

Mr TONY SMITH—If you look sideways at someone that is not violence, and yet people can get domestic violence orders for blinking sideways.

Ms McNulty—No, I have never seen that.

Ms Doherty—I have never seen one for—

Ms Rathus—That has not been our experience.

Mr TONY SMITH—It has certainly been mine.

Ms Doherty—I have actually been involved in probably more than 1,000 protection orders and I have never been able to get one on those grounds.

Mr TONY SMITH—You get them at the drop of a hat.

Ms Rathus—Two things are very important: one is that I do not think domestic violence orders are part of the purview specifically of this inquiry, but it is very important to make the point that it can be quite difficult to obtain a protection order. We actually see women who have been quite severely injured in situations where there is nothing for them to gain by telling us about the extent of those injuries and we have seen them refused protection orders.

Mr TONY SMITH—By whom?

Ms Rathus—By magistrates, of course.

Mr TONY SMITH—That is just wrong in law.

Ms Rathus—Of course it's wrong in law.

Mr TONY SMITH—If they don't take it further that is a problem with the system but in law, that is clearly domestic violence and a criminal offence, as you well know.

Ms Rathus—Yes. My point is that the system doesn't work perfectly and that domestic violence orders are not easily accessible, that there are circumstances where they should be given, but they are not. I think it would be unfortunate to go along that line further today because it is not actually what this inquiry is aimed at.

Mr TONY SMITH—It is marginally relevant if orders are meted out, as they were in one case of which I am aware, and you would be aware of the case too.

Ms Rathus—Mr Smith, it would be extremely inappropriate for us to discuss in this forum a case in which we were both professionally involved. I refuse to, and so should you. Point blank, I do not want—

Mr TONY SMITH—In that particular case an order was made.

Ms Rathus—Mr Smith, I really object to this. We were both professionally involved in this case and there are a number of issues here which may or may not have been said in the court. I do not think it is appropriate for this to be in *Hansard*. I think it is extremely inappropriate to raise a case in which we were professionally involved. Mr Chairman, I ask you to—

Mr TONY SMITH—I will move to another subject. We keep expanding the services but is the

problem being solved?

Ms McNulty—Women are safer. Even if the problem isn't being solved there are more avenues for women to achieve safety. That has been one of the priorities of the service provision to date. There is a lot more that could be done.

Ms Doherty—In the last 15 years we have moved a long way towards stopping domestic violence being a private issue, a secret within families, and that those things are now out in the open and better able to be dealt with. Women enjoy a higher level of safety in that we can provide shelters where services are available and where people are able to deal with the violence and gain some help, not that the violence is stopped. The fact that we are sitting here talking about what we can do for our next generation to enhance their lives and provide more stable relationships in the future is a very positive thing.

Mr TONY SMITH—How many Aboriginal women access the service? Do you have a percentage?

Ms Doherty—I don't have a percentage on that.

Ms Rathus—Are you talking about the refuge or the Women's Legal Service?

Mr TONY SMITH—The Women's Legal Service.

Ms Rathus—We could provide you with that figure. We know that it is a bit loose in the sense that a lot of our advice is given by telephone and we don't always keep that statistic. It is a statistic that we try to keep since there is a significant proportion of Aboriginal women who do access our service. However, we also are very aware of the fact that indigenous women prefer to go to services which are specifically established for them where they have the comfort of knowing that their cultural issues will definitely be understood. It takes a long time for an agency to establish that trust in the indigenous community unless there are indigenous workers there.

You would be aware of the fact that under the justice statement, money has been allocated for legal services for indigenous women. The Women's Legal Service is directly involved in establishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal and Advocacy Service. It will operate independently but under our umbrella. That service will be specifically providing services for indigenous women but the funding will be for two workers only. So the inability of the service to provide for the needs of that community is clear even before it gets off the ground. That is going to be very difficult.

Mr TONY SMITH—In terms of relationships with Aboriginal women, and perhaps Torres Strait Islander women separately, it is clear that they don't access these systems as much as other women do.

Ms Doherty—That would be true within our services, as well. We do have women who are referred to our shelter but who would also ask very often to be referred specifically to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women's shelter where they can have their cultural needs met.

Ms McNulty—I think that harks back to one of the points I raised, too, about the need for cross-cultural training to be provided for workers in community organisations. Whether we like to acknowledge it or not, we do live in a racist society and all of us have been subjected to racism in our upbringing and in our education. As much as we try to eradicate it from our lives, we are all prone to cultural stereotyping. That is what turns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women off mainstream services and makes it difficult for non-English speaking background women to access those services and feel comfortable about using them.

Ms Doherty—Actually, within our shelter we have two Aboriginal women and we regularly have Aboriginal women come to our shelter. Some still choose to go to the Aboriginal women's shelter. Within this period now of the race debate, we have had no Aboriginal women coming to our shelter at all. From speaking with Aboriginal women, I believe that that has a lot to do with the race debate that has gone on. They are wanting to use white services even less.

Mr TONY SMITH—On page 3 you state:

Currently, there are very few services directed at enabling women and children to recover from the violence and experience more respectful ways of interacting as a family. If we are to break the cycle, it is essential that resources be allocated towards providing more services for women and children.

I just do not understand, 'if we are to break the cycle'.

Ms Doherty—The generational cycle. What I have talked about is that what exists within families and with young people and children is that they grow to accept that violence, abuse and incest are a normal part of family life. When they have tried to talk about it, or tried to seek help when they have seen police or court intervention, that has not solved the problem so they accept it as okay. There is very little education that exists for young people around those issues. Then the intergenerational problem of violence exists into the next generation within their own relationships, as adults.

Mr TONY SMITH—On that same page you say:

The success of men's groups which are designed to change men's behaviour, has been extremely limited in changing the behaviour of violent men—even when they want to change.

Can you elaborate on that?

Ms Rathus—The issue around this is that the attempts that have been made in various places, including Brisbane—but there are other places in Australia that have probably done more in establishing men's groups—is that it is extremely difficult to actually effect changes in the behaviour of men who have been violent within relationships, even though those men may be desirous of change. The evaluations which have been done on what gets called 'perpetrator programs' have indicated the incredible difficulty of this.

This does not mean that there are no successes at all. I think that someone was speaking earlier today about the work being done in families and about how you can see attitudinal change happening in the programs as they are occurring. But, to actually do an evaluation six months later and see the extent to which that has translated into behaviour change in the home, is quite different. The experience of the evaluations

which have been done on perpetrator programs is that the success rates are still fairly limited. There may be a shift in the kind of behaviour which the men exhibit, but there is not an actual elimination of violence. It may change from overt physical violence into other kinds of verbal and social violence. A man who used to be physically violent but who is now not able to perpetrate physical violence will still engage in extreme verbal abuse and social isolation. So the woman's ability to participate in society as one would hope is still actually limited by her partner, even though she may not be at the same risk of physical danger. For other men who have been through violent men's programs, there may be no change at all in their behaviour. So there has been very limited success established so far for perpetrator programs, from the evaluations which have been done to date.

CHAIR—That means being a little pessimistic about what you can effect, doesn't it, if that is the case?

Ms Doherty—In some perpetrator programs that I have looked at, the research has shown that there is often a belief that you cannot go back into the same relationship and that there needs to be a total separation for one to two years for the perpetrator to then work on his violent behaviour. Often, it is not successful for the man to integrate back into that same relationship, because the dynamic of violence that has already existed means that the woman has fear. But there could be some success, if the motivation were high enough to change that behaviour, with that person then moving on into a new relationship and trying to instigate those new skills. That can be a positive thing.

Ms McNulty—You can negate the pessimism by looking at the potential for changing behaviour at the childhood level and educating children as to what is and what is not acceptable in relationships, so that hopefully those children grow up with a different set of beliefs and a different set of behaviours in their relationships. Even if we cannot change things for this generation, we can for the next.

CHAIR—I understand that.

Ms Doherty—Already, within in this generation, we have had young people grow up with different values. I myself have a lot of teenage children and they grow up having me as a mother; and obviously, with my beliefs, that does assist them to change. Domestic violence is not something that was ever talked about in my young years, but it is an issue that is now very publicly talked about, and therefore they have the opportunity to talk about it a lot more. Putting that with education programs and services that are available to children and young people creates, as Mandy says, a lot more hope for the next generation.

CHAIR—Thank you for your submission and for coming in this afternoon. Thank you very much for the discussion.

[3.10 p.m.]

TAYLOR, Ms Betty, Coordinator, Domestic Violence Service, Gold Coast, PO Box 409, Southport, Queensland

CHAIR—I have a motion from Mrs Grace to authorise submissions from the Men’s Rights Agency Pty Ltd and the exhibit thereto, conference papers from *Challenging the legal system’s response to domestic violence*, and a paper on mediation by Renata Alexander. There being no objection, it is so resolved.

I welcome the witness. Do you have anything to say to the committee about the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Taylor—I am also the chairperson of the Queensland Domestic Violence Council, which is a ministerial advisory body to the state Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care.

CHAIR—Thank you. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission to the committee. Would you like to make a statement?

Ms Taylor—Yes, I would. Given your comments about keeping it short, I will certainly try to do that. A lot of what I am speaking to has probably been said by previous witnesses.

Firstly, I will say a bit about the domestic violence service on the Gold Coast. It is a community based service that receives funding from the Queensland state government under the domestic violence initiative program. It runs counselling programs, and groups for women, children and men who perpetrate domestic violence. We run a court support and advocacy service from the court house. We do community education and training. That, together with the work that I do on the Queensland Domestic Violence Council, prompts me to have a lot of concerns about inquiries into families. We must put domestic violence in there. It is a very significant factor in the breakdown of the family.

I have brought with me some research that draws together quite a lot of significant research on separation, divorce and wife abuse. It is research that has been done with divorced women, and 70 per cent were indicating that abuse was one of the key factors in the breakdown of those relationships.

Even though it has been said, it needs to be reiterated that we need to look for definitions of family that recognise the diversity of family forms and Australian culture, and that recognise that while violence is violence, it does impact differently in different cultures. With domestic violence within Aboriginal families the dynamics are certainly different in terms of how Aboriginal families describe not so much domestic violence as family violence. Certainly, there are increased risks to Aboriginal women.

I would just like to reiterate, through this inquiry, the seriousness of what we are talking about. We are not talking about arguments in families that get out of hand. It is a sad day when I come here and say that on

the Gold Coast where I come from three women have been murdered in the past eight weeks. Within all those situations, there were children in those families, and in two of those three murders children actually witnessed the murder. I suppose that is the end of a spectrum that we do not like to look at, but we have got to start looking at what is going on in relationships and within families well before they get to that.

At the time of breakdown when relationships get into the Family Court arena and there is a lot of argument over who has custody and access and how properties are divided, it can be seen that violence is somehow manifesting itself as a result of those disputes. It is not. Violence is present in a relationship long before that relationship is ever going to break down. I would hazard a guess and say that many relationships are probably doomed before they begin because of the societal conditions that prevail and the traits that are present within the characteristics of violent men.

I think something needs to be said about dating violence again. Dating violence, in my experience, certainly is a precursor to domestic violence. We have developed programs that we have implemented into secondary schools, but often those programs are implemented through HRE programs and do not become part of core curriculum. So, therefore, it can be very much a negotiating on an individual school basis whether those programs get implemented, or whether the principal thinks they are a good idea. If we are teaching children about subjects of a scientific nature, I think that we have also got to be investing in our young people some skills about relationships.

When we are talking about family, one of the earlier witnesses talked about children within the family. The domestic violence taskforce in Queensland in 1988 found that in 88 per cent of domestic violence incidents, children were present in the home and 68 per cent of those children had actually directly been abused themselves. I do not think that we can forget the fact that domestic violence also impacts on the unborn, that domestic violence does not decrease when women are pregnant. It actually increases. Various research that has been done through the Royal Brisbane Hospital actually stacks that up.

Mr Thomson was talking about the health and wellbeing of people being better within the family. There are two pieces of research that I would put forward: one is research that was done by the psychiatric department of Queensland University that showed that one in five women presenting at Royal Brisbane Hospital had a history of domestic violence. The other is research by Wallerstein and Kelly that showed that it is actually the health and wellbeing of men that decreases after separation where there has been domestic violence. The mental health and physical wellbeing of women actually increases, not decreases, following separation. So, it is different for men and women.

It is only in recent times that we have got domestic violence onto the public agenda. In Queensland, it is only since 1989 really that we have come out and had legislation and have funding programs. The community attitude survey that was done by the Office of Status of Women in 1987 showed one in six Australians saying that under some circumstances violence against a female partner was justified. The report they released last year showed that that now has gone to one in 12, so that is proving that community education is working. But I do not think that one in 12 is something that enables us to sit on our laurels and say, 'That is an acceptable standard that we have reached.' We have to have some renewed commitments to that.

CHAIR—Thank you. Is that an article which you are referring to?

Ms Taylor—Yes.

CHAIR—Could we get it copied now? That will save you sending it to us and then we can take it into evidence. I have to say that I am perplexed about domestic violence. Is there more domestic violence now, or is it a fact that it has always been there and we are just more aware of it now?

Ms Taylor—I think domestic violence is probably as old as couples having relationships together. I think now there is certainly increased reporting. I think there is a heightened awareness of it and I think the message is getting out for women that they do not have to put up with an abusive partner, that there are other options. I still have concerns that there is a high tolerance within the community. In regard to the three deaths that I spoke about earlier, if the three women murdered had been in the public arena, I wonder whether there would have been a larger outcry. I think we still have an incredible tolerance and acceptance about what happens in the privacy of people's home not being community or government or public concern, and I believe it is.

CHAIR—I am not trying to downplay the significance of it. I am just trying to understand whether we are dealing with something which is a recent phenomena, which is on the increase or whether we are dealing with something which is a long-term phenomena, which we are now becoming more aware of—because that does shape, to some extent, our response to it.

Ms Taylor—Whilst I have been sitting here, the shifting roles have not been mentioned—the shifting gender awareness, the breaking down of stereotyping. Before that, it was really clear what was expected of women in the home, and that was to be dominated and to be subservient, and violence was used to keep women in that position. There is documentation going back hundreds of years. Louisa Lawson, Henry Lawson's mother, wrote in 1888 that in a hundred years time no-one would ever believe that such a situation existed where men abused woman. We have passed that hundred years and we have got to ask: what has changed? I think what has changed is that there is greater awareness, there are police responses, there are legal sanctions, there are women's shelters. So we have got that increased reporting, but it does not necessarily mean that there is a decrease in the amount of violence occurring.

CHAIR—Can I also ask you about your reference to dating violence: is there any research into that; are there any studies that you could point to?

Ms Taylor—There has been a lot of overseas research and there has not been a lot in Australia. One piece of research was only released last week from Brisbane, showing that one in four young people believe some sort of violence in a relationship is acceptable, that under some conditions it is okay and that includes sexual violence. If a guy spends money on them, gives them a good time, and they do not come across, then it is okay to use violence.

CHAIR—Can you give us the reference to that—I do not necessarily now?

Ms Taylor—Yes, I am happy to send that in to you. I also have a significant piece of Canadian

research that has been done among high schools across Canada.

CHAIR—If you could provide us with that reference as well, that would be useful.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—We were talking about the HRE programs. While we were moving around the country, I have been talking about what I knew what was happening in Queensland. They are not compulsory in the high schools, is that right?

Ms Taylor—No, that is what I was saying. If they became part of core curriculum, I think there would be a greater chance of them being a success.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—They tell me that the HRE programs are more on biological make-up. They know all about having babies and that type of thing, but people are not being taught how to control anger in conflict resolution and how to have relationships that are not violent, for example. Is that right? It is mainly on the biological side of things—that sort of sex education.

Ms Taylor—The HRE programs can be fairly open and really that depends a lot on the principal of the schools. We have been able to negotiate to get our program into some of the Gold Coast high schools. It is not an across-the-board position.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—It sounds a bit ad hoc really.

Ms Taylor—It is; it is very ad hoc.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Would you like to see it become available within the school in the curriculum—become a core subject, as we call them here in Queensland? It has been mentioned that it should come in as low as year 1 in some of our submissions.

Ms Taylor—Probably from year 1 you hope you can start teaching children about communication skills, about conflict resolution—how you resolve conflict—and those things. I think they are really important and I would strongly advocate those measures. But I think in the senior schools and years 11 and 12, there has to be something on relationships specifically as well. Those other components probably influence how they go into a relationship, but they also need something on relationship dynamics.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Changing the subject a wee bit, your submission suggests that the Family Court counselling services should be expanded.

Ms Taylor—Yes.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—We have flagged possible changes to the provision of services by the Family Court. One suggestion is that the services be given to community based organisations. What are your thoughts on this? Would you like to make some comment?

Ms Taylor—I think it was mentioned earlier that men would probably access Family Court counselling

because it is under that umbrella of what they would deem to be seen as an organisation that they may be co-opted into doing it. But the problem, I guess, with it sitting within the Family Court in its current form is that when people enter into Family Court counselling they have obviously got to a very adversarial position within their relationship. I think if there is a change of focus—whether it sit within the Family Court counselling section, as we know it, or whether there is greater funding into community agencies—earlier intervention perhaps could be one of the focuses. Picking up what was addressed earlier, another should be the needs of children. I spent time in South Africa last year and the role of the child advocate was certainly a lot more pronounced and stronger than what we have here.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Along that theme but changing direction slightly, what is your opinion or what comment would you like to make on the idea of perhaps making counselling for violent men—having anger control and things like that taught—mandatory at that stage in the court?

Ms Taylor—I suppose I would like to answer that in two ways. One is that there is probably a misconception that violent men need anger management; often they can control their anger really well. It is more about all the dynamics that cause it—the power and control issues, the gender stereotyping beliefs they have and the belief they have that they have got a right to use violence.

There is probably not a lot of hard-core evidence about perpetrator programs—how they work, whether they work best voluntary or mandated. There are places such as Duluth in the United States and Hamilton in New Zealand that have a whole of community response. Their counselling programs for men are court mandated and they have very strong legal sanctions for non-compliance. The monitoring of men's attendance in those programs is very much tied into, I guess, the legal system. Their programs are much longer than ours. They go for between 26 weeks and nine months, so they are quite long programs. Often they are mandated into those programs because they have appeared in court on breaches of domestic violence orders or whatever.

Currently, in Queensland, if men appear in court for breach of a domestic violence order, most often they end up getting community services. They would only get a custodial sentence if they are a severe repeat offender.

I would have to say that, to me, putting men into some type of educative program where they are going to be exposed to some new ideas about relationships—a window of opportunity for behavioural change—would have to be better than having them out cleaning up footpaths or mowing lawns.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your submission and also for the further discussion. As I said earlier, the whole theme of the afternoon has been around the topic so I did not want to cut you short. It has been useful.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Andrews):

That this committee accept into evidence the article *Separation, divorce and woman abuse*.

[3.40 p.m.]

DISNEY, Ms Helen, National Director, Relationships Australia, 15 Napier Close, Deakin, Australian Capital Territory

MACDONALD, Mr Ian Sinclair, Executive Director, Relationships Australia (Qld) Inc., 67 St Pauls Terrace, Brisbane, Queensland 4000

CHAIR—Thank you for coming along. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of the submission from Relationships Australia (Qld) Inc., and we also have the submission from the national office of Relationships Australia. Would you like to begin with a statement?

Mr Macdonald—Thank you, Mr Chairman. Our submission, as you say, is intended to augment the submission lodged by our national office. We support the points put to the inquiry in that submission.

Our concern was particularly to bring to the attention of the inquiry the enormous challenges that we face in attempting to provide a range of family support services across the vast geographic distances of Queensland. We have branches in Cairns; Townsville; Mackay; Rockhampton, with a venue at Yeppoon; Bundaberg, with a venue at Hervey Bay; Toowoomba; and seven branches and venues around metropolitan Brisbane. For couples who live more than 100 kilometres from one of our branches, we provide a 008 distance counselling service by telephone which offers structured counselling by appointment to couples on exactly the same basis as face-to-face counselling in the metropolitan area.

We do not receive federal funding for family support services in two of the three largest population growth areas in Australia—the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. Across the remainder of the state, Relationships Australia is attempting to maintain uniformly high standards of professional practice in all our branches. This means providing the same levels of training and professional support to counsellors in Mackay as our staff in the Brisbane metropolitan area receive. It also means giving the same assurance to our clients in Cairns in terms of the quality of our service as we do to our Brisbane clients.

It also means that our resources are spread extremely thinly. Some of our regional services are underresourced, highly vulnerable, inadequately housed or understaffed. We hold very real concerns about the safety of both staff and clients in some instances, particularly when dealing with volatile matters around domestic violence. We believe that the inquiry needs to take the reality of the regional situation into account and to recommend adequate provision for regional Australia.

The other major thrust that our submission contains is on the need for some big picture emphasis on relationship building in the community. We believe that too much of the emphasis of the family services program has been in providing services to people who are on the point of separation or who have already separated.

In Queensland we receive a grant of \$17,000 for marriage education to stretch across the whole of Queensland—an enormous task. We would certainly like to see much more of the government's investment in relationship education programs and early intervention programs which are designed to prevent family conflict and marital breakdown.

Broadly, we believe that the family services program should be sponsoring a paradigm shift in public thinking about relationships and the need to build and maintain better relationships in the Australian community. We see the need to create an environment which is receptive to the kinds of messages that we would want to convey—messages such as the fact that good relationships do not just happen; that it takes more than two young people being in lust to make a lifetime partnership; that investing in your relationship is at least as important as investing in your home; that one of the best ways of achieving physical and mental health is much closer than the local gym—that is, living within a loving relationship; that it is a mature response to difficulty to seek help—whether that is with your motor vehicle or with your marriage; that almost any couple can learn the skills which will improve the quality of their relationship; and that you can learn from the breakdown of one relationship the lessons you need to know for a future relationship.

It is those big picture issues that we believe need to be stressed and which need to be marketed to the many people who do not presently use the family services programs that are provided. As a community, we have seen the need for this approach with skin cancer awareness, the 'Life. Be in it' campaign and alcohol awareness. We would contend that this issue is at least as important as any one of those. We have made our own modest attempts in our recent 'Talk before you walk' campaign. I am happy to make those posters available to you. I think you are aware that the Relationships Australia organisation in Western Australia has mounted its 'Build better relationships' campaign. We would like to see such a campaign conducted on a national basis. As we said in our introduction to our submission, we believe that much relationship conflict and much family breakdown is both preventable and unnecessary. We believe that such a campaign would be a vital investment in Australia's families.

CHAIR—Can I take up a few issues? You mentioned funding issues particularly in relation to regional and the more remote areas. It seems to me, historically at least, that funding was some sort of arbitrary decision that was made by someone in the Attorney-General's department. For a long time it was incremented by the CPI increase now and again and, in the case of counselling, I think it was given a boost after the 1989 review of counselling, but that was just a proportional increase. It is not unfair to describe that as a fairly arbitrary way of deciding who got what for what; therefore, it does not take into account the sorts of issues that you are describing. There has been some evidence that the later rounds of funding, pursuant to the Justice Statement and now pursuant to the latest federal budget, do attempt to take into account some of those issues: overheads, supervision and staffing costs—those sorts of things. I am always mindful of Disraeli's famous dictum, 'It is easier to be critical than correct.' What should be put in place in terms of funding formula that would improve on what we have got now, and picking up your comments about regional localities?

Ms Disney—I do not think that we could produce a ready-made formula for you, but I do think a formula approach is one way. It would be perfectly easy to build into that some notion of increased costs for regional areas. One of the ways in which funding of community organisations is tending to go these days is a unit cost approach. The only problem is that that unit costing has to be done properly and all the overheads

taken into account. I know that Legal Aid and Family Services are beginning to look at this. I imagine, with the changes foreshadowed by the Attorney-General, that the issue may be looked at in this context too. I think there are funding formulas. You may know that in fields like aged care and so on they have incredibly complicated formulas. I am not sure whether they actually take into account regional differences, but it would not be difficult to build them in if that was your intent.

Mr Macdonald—Certainly, we would argue strongly that distance factors should be taken into account. We were in Hervey Bay yesterday where our two part-time counsellors are working out of a very crowded neighbourhood centre. We have to provide supervision from Bundaberg, which is 1½ hours away. We have a staff member going down each week to provide supervision. In terms of training, we will be bringing two of their counsellors down to Brisbane next week to undertake one of our training courses. It is those kinds of things that do need to be taken into account if we want quality services in the regional areas.

CHAIR—Do you understand the needs based criteria in the latest funding?

Ms Disney—To a certain extent, yes. I have seen some of the formulas, being on the Family Services Council. They did share them with us.

CHAIR—The criticism that has come fairly uniformly from those that have appeared before us is that nobody else seems to know what they are.

Ms Disney—I am not quite sure what the issue is. The document is available to people and it shows how it is calculated. I think what people are mostly protesting about is that they do not know which regions are the ones that have been identified. I am not sure that governments can always indicate that in advance. In other programs, again if I quote aged care, they certainly were indicating a year or two in advance—as did the Justice Statement—where the money would be available in the outyears. As far as I am aware, we have the formulas available and have circulated them.

Mr Macdonald—Again it would be my contention that the current formula does not appear to take rapid population growth into account. It does appear to maintain past inequities.

Ms Disney—Could I just make a comment on that counselling funding, if I may? You are right about the last new funding being, as I understand it, soon after 1989. I have only been with Relationships Australia two years, but that is my understanding. We are quite concerned that it is the only program in the family services program which has not had increased funding. Given that counselling is a very important prevention mode—it is not treatment or after the fact; it is very important in the prevention of difficulties in relationships—and if the focus of this inquiry is on prevention, then funding for counselling is an issue that we would suggest would bear looking at.

I have had the advantage of seeing the transcript of the session when we appeared before. I apologise again for not being able to appear. I was very interested in your questions on whether we could identify statistics in the category of reconciliation and conciliation. We would argue that we would like to provide them in three categories. One is the group of people who do want to work on the quality of their relationship and who are not looking at separation at all. So it is not reconciliation in that sense. The majority of people

come in wishing to work on issues, difficulties, problems—enhancement of their relationship. Because of the preponderance of that group of people in the clients that we are seeing, we do believe that, for preventive purposes, more funding for counselling is needed.

If I could just draw an analogy. In the health area we would not argue that health promotion campaigns on breast cancer are sufficient on their own. You still need the doctors to whom you go for individual assessment and individual treatment. We would argue that the same is true in our area. Relationship education is absolutely crucial and we are very committed to that. Ian has spoken about that. We are very proud of the ‘Build better relationships’ program. But you also need our equivalent of the GP—the counsellor—who sees the individuals and helps them understand how the generalised information and skills that they may have learnt are relevant in this case.

It is known from research that even highly skilled people can find it very difficult to use their own skills when they themselves are vulnerable. So even counsellors need a counsellor. Given those perspectives on counselling—it is preventive and it is what personalises information and assists people in a personalised way—it is one of the most urgent areas for attention for funding.

CHAIR—I cannot remember the exact question I asked, but—

Ms Disney—It was a very good point.

CHAIR—Yes, certainly. If you can break it down further, that would be fine.

Ms Disney—I would be happy to.

CHAIR—What you say here is not news to us. It has been said by others. Our many attempts to encourage civil celebrants to refer couples have met with little success. What do we do about it?

Mr Macdonald—We wrote to 130 celebrants in south-east Queensland a couple of months ago. We received four responses. We were inviting them into an information session so that they could acquaint themselves with a range of services that we provide for family support. Only four responded.

We may need to re-examine the selection criteria for marriage celebrants. I think we should be taking some care to select people who have some skills and knowledge in the area and who are aware of the range of community services. I suppose I have something of a personal axe to grind about this, in that I was both a religious and a civil celebrant in New Zealand before I came to Australia. When I applied to become a civil celebrant in Australia, I was declined on the basis of my occupation as a marriage counsellor. Somehow, some conflict of interest was perceived. I would have thought that having people with experience in the area and working with people at that vital stage in their life was something that we should be looking for in people who become marriage celebrants.

CHAIR—That is something that has been raised with us. I think we will have some further examination of it. Equally, it seems to me, why can’t civil celebrants, subject to suitable training, expertise and competency, also be marriage educators? If a religious celebrant can be a marriage educator, which they

quite clearly can, I fail to see the logic today—there may have been some logic in 1975—as to why that distinction needs to be maintained.

I did not realise you came from New Zealand. You cover your accent very well. Can you tell me something about the New Zealand experience?

Mr Macdonald—I do not have any up-to-date information, but I think they are also struck with the fact that, because religious celebrants are more committed to pre-marriage education, a lot more people who are already motivated are seeking admission to those courses. The pity of the pre-marriage education courses that have been surveyed in Australia is that they tend to be attracting people who are already well motivated. In some sense, it is preaching to the converted. That is no reason why they should not be encouraged—I believe they ought to be—but we need to be creative in the way we seek to look at those couples who are not at this point inclined, and I think that, again, goes back to public awareness.

CHAIR—You mention that the agency's training programs are currently being rewritten in competency terms. Suggestions have been made to us that for all subprogram areas there ought to be national competency standards. Whether you are working for Relationships Australia in Queensland, for Cope in Adelaide, for Centacare in Perth or somewhere else, some national standards are applicable. Do you have any comments about that?

Ms Disney—It is certainly our position that that would be valuable. I personally believe that there would be a core of competencies common to all the subprograms. So you would have a core set of competencies and then some very specific ones perhaps for each of the subprograms. I also believe that the subprograms get in the way of integrating. I know you have talked about that a lot, so I was not going to raise that again today. I think we would agree that national competency standards are an important way to go.

Mr Macdonald—I think it is part of the quality assurance we ought to be able to give our clients.

CHAIR—One final question from me: you mention working with Griffith University on a project to develop strategies for providing distance education. Are you able to give us some more details about that—either now or send them to us?

Mr Macdonald—Yes. Some of that information is still in the process of publication. I have Professor Kim Halford's permission to speak to it. At this stage, I cannot provide the published documents. He is in the process of replicating work by Dr Howard Markman in the United States, which has found that there are ways of predicting those couples who are going to have marital difficulties by assessing the quality of their interactions. I think this is extremely important work. We await its publication with a great deal of interest.

CHAIR—As an aside, you may be interested to know that there is a report of a presentation by Howard Markman to some conference in London or elsewhere in England recently which was the subject of a somewhat incredulous editorial in *The Times* about whether you can do anything to help relationships basically.

Ms Disney—It is an interesting issue. I think, as we were saying in our submission, one of the problems is that what people are comfortable with is a very personal thing. I do not know, because I have not

seen this research, but I could imagine that we might all assess a relationship as being likely to find difficulties and it may have quite a lot of conflict but neither partner actually wishes to leave. And I do not mean that in any pejorative way they are inadequate; they are quite happy and there is not a violent conflict. One of the things that is so difficult about relationships is that what people are happy with is a very personal issue.

Mr Macdonald—I would also want to take a more optimistic view than Zoe Rathus earlier this afternoon. All that she said is absolutely correct, that the outcomes from working with perpetrators of domestic violence are not encouraging. But nor are the outcomes of working with people with alcoholism, with drug abuse, with gambling addictions. There are a whole range of areas where we still believe it is our social responsibility to provide services, even though the rate of outcome is modest. I think, as these programs become defined, and I have worked in a men's perpetrator program for a number of years, there are reasons for genuine hope and encouragement.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Following on from that then, have you a comment to make on the idea of making it mandatory for these men to go to classes or go to courses once they have got to that court stage?

Mr Macdonald—I am also interested in the work that Betty Taylor spoke about in Duluth and in Hamilton in New Zealand where that approach is being taken within the context of a whole of community approach so that the magistrates, the police, the probation officers, the counselling services, the women's refuges are all working together within a comprehensive framework, one plank of which is mandatory referral into a men's program. It is resource intensive, it is difficult work requiring a high degree of expertise but, within that context, the outcomes, I think, are encouraging.

Ms Disney—I think that also one of the issues in all of this work is pointed to by your term of reference about the target groups. There are, within a set of the population on any one issue, different categories, different differential groups. On this issue of violence, for example, there are those who have got to the stage of being in the courts. But, as I think Beth Sedden may have pointed out in Canberra, we actually see people in our counselling much earlier than that, and mandatory issues, I do not think, are quite so relevant there.

One of the things that we need to get much better at is taking the set of people who are, say, perpetrators of violence or the range of people who are getting into difficulty in their marriages or the group of people who are separating, and recognising the subgroups within these sets, and that they need different responses. There is a continuum, I think, from the extreme to the rather more marginal or simple situations, and they require very different approaches. That is what we need to get much better at—differential responses to different groups.

There has been a lot of talk about the different life stages and support through these, and that is certainly a strong theme in our submission. But I wondered also whether the committee had noticed our reference to some occupational groups that are more at risk of relationship difficulty. I believe that, for example, the trucking industry did try to do something about supporting truckies because they are known to have a higher risk of relationship difficulties. I think there is room for some industry bodies to work very

creatively with organisations such as ourselves and the other counselling and relationship education-type organisations to do very innovative educational and supportive things for their employees, knowing that their occupations are at risk.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—It has been suggested we use the unions. That is something that the unions could do, and then people would see they were getting something for their union dollar too. On a different tack, as you know, there are three peak bodies of which you are one. There has been a suggestion that this is a fairly cumbersome way of funding. Do you have any comment to make on this? Would you like to see a change in that structure or are you happy with that structure?

Ms Disney—I think it works. I think that in each case what is happening is that the money that each body gets is then augmented by membership fees from their members, and that that is quite a productive way of doing it. To be frank, if you were starting out today you perhaps would not create three. But two of the organisations have been in existence prior to government funding, and one of them, Centacare, has many activities other than the Attorney-General's funded programs.

Given the fact that we do happen to have those three bodies—and I believe they are all fulfilling a really important role, in particular, Family Services Australia, which is in its very early days and has a lot to do to establish itself still—that that will be playing an important role representing the smaller bodies. It has some very large members but it also has some very small members. Given that we all work very closely together, I think the public is getting value for money that way. But, as I say, I am not sure that one would design it that way if you were starting from scratch.

CHAIR—I suspect there will be another occasion when we might want to hear from Relationships Australia. We will be going to Perth next year, and I know there is the Building Better Relationships program which is conducted there that we would like to have a look at. I suspect, Helen, that there will be other issues that arise that we will go back to you, Centacare and Family Services Australia about as we get on.

The way in which the inquiry has been conducted to date was to try to get in as many public hearings as we could before Christmas so that at least we got the issue moving, otherwise we would find ourselves at the end of February or March without having made much of a start on it. That was the reason to try to push through as much as possible. There is no particular end point, although we do not want to string it out forever. I suspect next year, when we have a bit of time to reflect on what we have got in, we will be asking some further questions. There are some that have arisen in various public hearings anyway.

Ms Disney—The other thing we have been very pleased to be part of is the visits to agencies, and I gather you had some in Adelaide on Tuesday. We are also part of the Family Services Council process of looking for some regional places which Rose, the executive officer, has made some suggestions for us to look at and get back to her. So that will be coming soon from the council.

There was some talk before about education and core curriculum and so on in schools. I believe that relationships are all on one continuum and that you need a 'whole of school' program so that in fact the relationships being demonstrated in schools need to have the right values as well so that it is not just in the curriculum but in the life of the school and in the workplace, et cetera.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—The school environment is one of the opportunities to practise what you are learning within the school curriculum. I see a big advantage there. But, yes, it has been interesting listening to what people have to say about the education side of it.

Ms Disney—It is very important.

Mr Macdonald—Could I also submit a copy of the annual report of Relationships Australia in Queensland, and also information about the range of relationship education programs that are operating in the agency.

CHAIR—I accept in evidence the 47th annual report of Relationships Australia, Queensland, and information about the range of relationship education courses offered by Relationships Australia, Queensland, and the poster, 'Talk before you walk'. Thank you for your submission, and for your attendance and discussion today.

[4.13 p.m.]

CLARK, Ms Julie Margaret, Director of Counselling, Boystown National Community Projects, Unit 9/97 Castlemaine Street, Milton, Queensland 4068

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of the submission from Kids Help Line dated 14 October. Would you like to make a statement in relation to it?

Ms Clark—Yes, indeed I would like to contextualise Kids Help Line and what we were seeking to do. We had a wish to represent the voice of young people with whom we had contact to the tune of about 30,000 attempted calls to the service every week. We are a national telephone counselling service. We operate as a single site service from Milton in Queensland and it is a free call, a 1800 number, that young people can make from all over Australia.

While we take up to 30,000 calls a week, we answer only one in three of those calls, because of the demand for the service. We record non-identifying information about those calls and we have particular operational principles which we maintain about anonymity and confidentiality, counsellors respecting all calls that come to the line, callers being able to choose the gender of the counsellor that they speak to, callers being able to talk to the same counsellor about an issue over time and callers being able to give feedback about the quality of service that they receive.

We only provide a telephone counselling service, but we identify that for young people the telephone is accessible familiar and very confidential. They can choose to give whatever information they want on the telephone. The bulk of our calls come from children aged 10 to 15, although we do receive calls from children aged to five to 18 years of age. That is the catchment we are looking at.

The bulk of the calls that we have at Kids Help Line are about relationships and the views of young people about peer relationships, family relationships and relationships with partners. It comprises about 37 per cent of the calls that we take to the service. So we have an unique window of primarily the views of children about the quality of relationships that they experience, both in families and in their school and social contexts.

I was interested and very supportive of the comments made by the people who spoke prior, the comments about a whole of school approach or a whole of community approach to developing relationship issues. We certainly find that young people have great difficulty knowing how and who to access to gain assistance for the issues that they are trying to deal with. Certainly, the indications through school guidance that they are moving more towards looking at school based issues and resisting the need to deal with a whole range of other issues is in fact of concern to us.

I was also interested in the comment about workplace issues and changes, because that is where we would identify the need to look at some structural change in the availability of parents to parent kids,

particularly in that 10 to 14 year old age group where I think people wrongly assume that young people are ready and able to be independent. I think there is a high need for those young people to have parents available to them to talk about and think through a whole range of considerations, ethical issues and decision making. I was interested in those comments.

CHAIR—How many people do you employ?

Ms Clark—Currently we employ 72 counsellors and seven supervisors. We have recently been advised that we will be in receipt of Commonwealth government funding to the tune of about \$1 million a year for the next three years which will enable us to employ additional counsellors. We are still negotiating what the service agreement will be in relation to that funding.

CHAIR—That was a special grant, was it not, as I recall?

Ms Clark—It was indeed, yes.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Through Family Services?

Ms Clark—Yes.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Are these all paid or volunteers?

Ms Clark—They are all paid staff which differentiates this service from other telephone counselling services. That and the fact that it is a single site service and we allow callers to call back and talk to the same counsellor. That is not a common practice in telephone counselling services.

CHAIR—Do the 72 counsellors work on some rotational basis?

Ms Clark—Yes. They work a minimum of 12 hours a week. That is because to be available to callers and for children to be able to talk to the same counsellor they need to be there often enough for that to happen. So they are there a minimum of 12 hours a week and a maximum of 24. They are all casual employees.

CHAIR—And is the help line open 24 hours a day?

Ms Clark—It is open 24 hours a day, yes.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—On your statistics I find it rather interesting that overall the percentage of relationship counselling is very similar in all states. There is not a big variety—it is all around 35 to 40 per cent. So every state is basically about the same.

Ms Clark—That is right. It has remained remarkably consistent over the five years of operation. We actually started in Queensland in 1991. In relation to the proportion of children in Queensland, the rate of call is slightly higher. But we do find—and have consistently found—that there is a great consistency across the

states. This is in fact true in Canada and in England where similar telephone counselling services are running. Relationships are of primary importance to young people. Similarly with our parent line service, which is only a Queensland state based service, relationships are the significant issue for parents as well.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—It is significantly higher than any of the other areas. It is three times most of the other areas and I thought it was rather interesting that across all the states it is approximately the same percentage.

Ms Clark—Yes, it is remarkable.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—And then going down to sex-related counselling, it is a similar sort of thing. It is a lower percentage but it is very even across all states.

Ms Clark—Yes, it is consistent across states.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—I do not know what it proves.

Ms Clark—We in fact do have research and advocacy officers and we will be developing that with some of the federal money that has been provided. We will be able to draw a clearer picture about what some of the data means. We have the capacity to do some of that now and that will improve.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Having children as young as five and getting to the telephone and making comment is rather extraordinary.

Ms Clark—Yes, I think that does concern some people and some parents in particular. I think that is the smaller number of callers and sometimes that is assisted by parents who are looking for somebody for that child to talk to about a particular issue. Obviously, children are limited by the capacity to engage in a telephone conversation at five, but it is certainly true that we have children as young as five contact us periodically.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—How do you go about finding out the children's needs, age and the state they live in? Obviously you need that for these statistics and things like that. Is that discussed in the early stage of the conversation or does that just come out as you are talking to the children?

Ms Clark—It is very much secondary to the counselling that happens in the call and about 50 per cent of children do not give us particular non-identifying information. That is usually gathered in the course of the call, rather than children being questioned to meet our data requirements. It is very much secondary to the needs of the child at that time.

CHAIR—You commented about the availability of parents for 10- to 15-year-olds. Is that a reflection on the fact that these days most parents are both in the work force?

Ms Clark—We think it is a reflection both of the fact that parents are in the work force and misconceptions about the age at which children are in fact independent. Parents perhaps miscue some of the

signs of young people distancing themselves from parents as, 'Well, I need to let them do their own thing and make their own decisions.' In fact, young people, we believe, need to have the opportunity to talk through things that they are trying to make decisions about with an adult or with people who have perhaps more life experience than themselves. That is also the experience of some research done by the Carnegie Council who released a report on adolescent development in 1995. It was a long-term study about American adolescents and the findings were in fact very similar to the view that we had formed from the data we had collected at Kids Helpline.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—One other thing that has come through in talks with different groups is that with young people, 14 seems to be the magic age. If they are going to go berserk or off the rails it seems to be in that 13- to 15-year age group. Do you find that with what you are doing?

Ms Clark—We are certainly finding that the bulk of our callers come within that age group. They are having particular difficulties with relationships, with sexuality and with dealing with a whole range of normal life stage issues. For the 10- to 14-year-old group, the male and female callers differ in the types of problems they present with. For male callers aged 10 to 14 the primary concerns are family relationships, sexual activity, bullying, peer relationships, physical abuse, their own development and whether that is normal and okay, partner relationships and drug use. For female callers they are family relationships, peer relationships, development, partner relationships, pregnancy, sexual activity, bullying and physical abuse. There are significant gender differences between the sorts of issues that young people present with. There are significant gender differences among young people presenting and seeking help.

There has been some interesting research done in the States in relation to this that matches again our experience of 30 to 35 per cent of our callers being male and 65 per cent of our callers being female. It seems that young men are having much greater difficulty articulating the concerns that they have in negotiating relationships at anything more than a fairly superficial level. They tend to make the large number of what we call soft calls or abusive calls to the service and young women conversely tend to be the larger number of regular callers or callers that are stuck in having difficulty in resolving issues particularly things influenced by histories of sexual abuse.

CHAIR—What do you mean by a soft call?

Ms Clark—A soft call to the service is where young people might ring and chat or joke or basically pass the time without identifying any particular problem. Sometimes they are made by young people who are home alone who do not have adult contact. We did an interesting piece of research looking at self-care issues for young people who were home alone and one of the interesting things about that was that all children—100 per cent of children under 10—indicated that they preferred not to be left home alone. The issue for us in that was that for many parents there was not a choice or the choices were very limited. Their assessment about the need of child care for kids in that 10- to 14-year age group was difficult to make. The choices about appropriate alternatives were very difficult as well.

CHAIR—If there is such a major difference gender wise by the age of, say, 14 then any educational program that is going to be useful so far as males are concerned would have to start a lot earlier.

Ms Clark—It probably needs to be in late primary school. Certainly some of the data from the United States is saying that there are entrenched patterns of help seeking behaviour by late primary school and young people very clearly have socialised messages about who asks for help and who does not and how you go about doing that.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Do you find that your female callers are what I would call the ‘repeat callers’? That is to say, they find a counsellor and call back several times. Do you find it is more the female that does that?

Ms Clark—It is more the females that are regular callers. It is always a difficult issue with telephone counselling services. We had a look at a number of our repeat callers and the interesting feature for us was that 90 per cent of those repeat callers had histories of sexual abuse. So the impact of significant prolonged experience of abuse is very powerful and provides ongoing difficulty for young people in negotiating current and future relationships.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Have you got any way of referring on those young people to groups or organisations that they can have actual eye-to-eye contact with?

Ms Clark—We certainly do. We also provide a counselling service, not an advice and referral service; so we have the capacity to work with a young person while they maintain anonymity and confidentiality. We refer about 12 per cent of callers to Kids Help Line to a range of services. We have a very comprehensive national referral database that allows us in any state of Australia to identify referral options for young people. We certainly do refer those who we think need direct service delivery, if those young people indicate an interest or a need to do that.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Do you get much in the mental health area? I notice it is not a very high percentage.

Ms Clark—It is not, and that may be a reflection. All the issues that are identified on the call code categories could in fact relate to mental health. I guess it is the way that we have collected the data that may make it look as if it is a small issue for us. We have currently a project with Queensland Mental Health, where we have a worker looking at mental health issues at the service and developing a module for ongoing training for staff in relation to mental health issues with young people, particularly associated with Parentline. All the call category issues relate to mental health issues for young people.

CHAIR—What training do the counsellors receive?

Ms Clark—Counsellors take part in a one-week telephone counselling skills training course that is VETEC accredited. Then they are required to complete 30 hours of content or issue based training. They are then required to be monitored on the telephones for 250 hours prior to the completion of a probationary period, at which time we assess their capacity to stay with us on an ongoing basis.

CHAIR—When you say ‘monitored’, are they constantly monitored for 250 hours?

Ms Clark—They are not constantly monitored. We have the capacity to do tape analysis of calls, to directly hear the call that is occurring, and to debrief counsellors. We have a supervision structure which allows us to have supervisors available for 16 of the 24 hours, and they can immediately debrief a call if there is a particularly difficult call; for example, a suicide or sexual assault call or a call needing statutory intervention. We also have a system of personal supervision that will focus more specifically on professional development issues. There are two tiers of supervision, and very close performance management within the organisation.

CHAIR—There was only one other thing that I had to ask about. Do I take it that 20,000 attempted calls are unsuccessful every week?

Ms Clark—That is right. The rate of access is about one in three, so 20,000 callers—

CHAIR—So either they try again or they give up.

Ms Clark—They try again or give up.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Will that improve with this money that is going through from Family Services?

Ms Clark—That is part of the purpose for the money; and we will certainly be employing additional staff to do that.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—You will increase your capacity?

Ms Clark—We will increase our response capacity. The interesting thing about the service is that it is a service that young people promote amongst themselves. They actually refer their friends to the service to make contact with counsellors, and we have not had to do a lot of marketing to maintain the call rate over the five years of operation.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—That was going to be one of my questions: how do the young people find out about you?

Ms Clark—Initially, when the service was established, there was a vigorous marketing campaign. We have not marketed in Australia at all for the last two years, with the exception of New South Wales, where we have just finished a targeted marketing strategy; but it has basically been by word of mouth.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Why did you pick New South Wales—haven't you done it before?

Ms Clark—It was the last state to come on board to the service. By proportion of young people in the population its call rate was low, and we had the opportunity to use that as a test case of how well the marketing strategy we were identifying was going to work.

CHAIR—Thank you for your submission, and also for coming in this afternoon, we appreciate that.

Ms Clark—Could I submit these documents?

CHAIR—Yes.

Resolved:

That the committee accept as an exhibit the package of materials entitled ‘Kids help line’.

[4.33 p.m.]

IWANOW, Mrs Janet Marie, 7 Hoad Street, Upper Mount Gravatt, Queensland 4122

CHAIR—Welcome, Mrs Iwanow. In what capacity are you appearing before the committee?

Mrs Iwanow—As a private citizen.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission of 14 October 1996. Would you like to make a statement to it?

Mrs Iwanow—Before I commence, I advise the committee that although I am appearing today as a private citizen I am a marriage celebrant. I work for Sunnybank Family Neighbourhood Centre doing family skills training, and I am also a pre-marriage educator.

My interest in the standing committee is due to the fact that I have an overall interest in many of the areas that you are interested in. In writing to you I had very short notice about what was going on, so I am here mainly as someone who is seeing all those areas. I have some suggestions as to how some of those areas could be changed and improved. I probably have more questions than answers, having worked in this area for quite a few years. I am hoping that you will ask me questions; that would be my preference.

CHAIR—Could I clarify one thing? As I understood from other evidence that we have had, people were discouraged from being a civil celebrant and a marriage educator or marriage counsellor. In fact, I think the previous evidence from Mr Macdonald was that he was refused registration as a civil celebrant because he was a marriage counsellor. How did you slip through the net?

Mrs Iwanow—I have no idea. I was asked to apply and I applied. I was asked to become a JP about eight or 10 years ago, and at the same time I was approached and asked whether I would like to be a civil celebrant—it would have been my local member who approached me. I have no idea how I passed through the net, maybe it was because I was working for a welfare organisation, I am not really sure. I know one of my other friends, who also worked for Relationships Australia, was also refused.

CHAIR—Given that you might be in a unique position as far as this is concerned, are there any reasons why civil celebrants with appropriate training should not be marriage and relationships educators?

Mrs Iwanow—I think it is a perfect situation. The only problem I can see with it is that sometimes people may feel intimidated by the fact that I would offering pre-marriage education. If people express interest I give them the option of doing some pre-marriage with me. I give them the brochures with all the accredited organisations and I say, 'If you are not comfortable with me I can recommend this organisation.' That is the only problem, that people may feel compromised.

CHAIR—One possible objection that what was raised was that there could be some potential conflict of interest involved. Do you have any comment about that?

Mrs Iwanow—It is hard to say because I worked in pre-marriage for a lot of years and it is a love of mine. I would like people to do pre-marriage. I do not mind whether they do it with me or someone else. I suppose it is just something that I am very interested in. Certainly, I do not pressure people and I think I am pretty sensitive. Would you be interested in seeing what I do give to them?

CHAIR—Yes, certainly.

Mrs Iwanow—As far as I know this is not necessarily academically sound but I chose it because I thought it might be a way of getting people interested in pre-marriage from a secular point of view. I was going to have some copies made but I did not know how many were on the committee.

CHAIR—We can have that done.

Mrs Iwanow—All right. I got this one off the Internet. I felt that would be a reasonably non-threatening way of having couples assess their relationship. I have just started doing it in the last month. I give them a letter to say I am pleased that they have chosen me as their celebrant and that I have enclosed a questionnaire from the Internet that they may be interested in doing. I say that I will not be asking them about how they went with it but if they feel their relationship does not have the amount of compatibility that they thought it would I am happy to do some education with them, or refer them. That is my input. I am not into sales, I am not high pressure. I do not care where they do it but I would like them to do it.

CHAIR—What response have you had?

Mrs Iwanow—We have only sent out three. It is a quiet time for celebrants at this time of the year and I have not had a second visit from those three. So I do not know, it is very early days.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Prior to using this particular program, what did you do?

Mrs Iwanow—I simply gave the people the two brochures, one on pre-marriage education and the other one on marriage counselling and obligations of marriage, the legal and social obligations. I gave that to them and I would just say something like, ‘I consider marriage education very important, the government considers it important, and I would like you to consider doing some pre-marriage.’

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Have you any idea how many of the people that you have gone through and married have actually done pre-marriage courses?

Mrs Iwanow—Very few. It is a personal opinion but talk to people who are married and they think pre-marriage is a great idea. However, talk to people who have not been married and they do not want to know about it. It has not got good press.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—To follow that through, if you talk to people who are married they think

pre-marriage is a good idea. Do they think family skills counselling is a good idea?

Mrs Iwanow—Yes, they think it is a good idea.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Do they do it?

Mrs Iwanow—I have been working at Sunnybank all of this year and I suppose my largest group has been 18 and my smallest group has been six. Some areas seem to have a greater response rate. There is an area in Brisbane called Crestmead, down towards Woodridge, which is thought of as a lower socioeconomic area. There was a tremendous response in Crestmead. East Brisbane has had a very high response rate. But, mostly, people are very impressed with family skills training. They consider it pretty essential.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—That is interesting.

CHAIR—You say that maybe the government could make pre-marriage education compulsory. Do you want to comment further on that?

Mrs Iwanow—It is very controversial, isn't it? It is difficult because I suppose it is all with hindsight that pre-marriage is a good idea. Sometimes things can only be implemented with legislation—I think I used the example of seat belts where, now, if you talk to people about seat belts they would not be without them. While I have problems with government coming into bedrooms, I suppose my thought is that it would be a good idea to legislate or, as you have suggested, maybe have a voucher system whereby couples can do their pre-marriage.

CHAIR—That ties up with the other suggestion about increasing the notification period. There are two aspects of that. One is the maximum notification period which is currently six months, and there have been a number of suggestions that that could be increased to, say, 12 months or so. That, in itself, does not seem to have too many downsides because it is only a maximum, but you are suggesting that maybe the minimum could be increased from one month to six months. In terms of the couples whose weddings you have officiated at, how many of them would be marrying in less than six months?

Mrs Iwanow—I suppose it would be a quarter. I have been taking bookings this week for weddings in 1998. It seems to me, in the short period that I have been a celebrant, that people seem to be setting their wedding date further down the track. I am not exactly sure why that is happening. Some people who present may have been living together for a long time and they have just decided they want to be married; there is no real problem—they just want to be married as quickly as they can. Sometimes we have the issue of overseas brides. Sometimes they want the period cut short—they want that notification shortened. I am sorry, I have forgotten the question.

CHAIR—The question is: should we increase the minimum period from one month to three months?

Mrs Iwanow—Yes, I think so.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Then you run into that problem where couples have been cohabiting for two, three or five years and, for any number of reasons, they say, ‘Hang on, we are going to get married’—perhaps they are going on an overseas trip, or having a baby or they just decide it is a good idea at the time. But that would delay that decision by six months, wouldn’t it?

Mrs Iwanow—Yes, it certainly would. On the other hand, if they are going overseas they can apply for that shortened time anyway. If they can produce airline tickets, they can get the period shortened. So I do not think you should take away the possibility of having the period shortened. But I just think if we are serious about getting people interested in pre-marriage, we cannot spring it on them, saying, for example, ‘You have two weeks to do it in.’ They need to know. I should be able to say, ‘Here you are, you have come to me to fill out the paperwork, here’s the information on pre-marriage, here’s your little questionnaire. Go away and think about it.’ They then have six months.

If you try to book into an organisation like Centacare within that six months, you might not get in. I worked there until June this year and they are extremely busy. We could not keep up the work really with the amount of people coming through, so for them to get in under six months is very difficult. We have to look at ways of getting the message through to these couples further out from the actual marriage.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Yes, pre-engagement or whatever.

Mrs Iwanow—That is one of the suggestions why they said it has been suggested that we take it out to 12 months for the maximum. Six months prior to the wedding there is all the hype of the wedding, and fitting in pre-marriage classes can be quite difficult, whereas in the six months prior to that things are not quite so hectic and there is more chance of them—

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—That is right.

Mrs Iwanow—And people in the marriage education area are saying—I suppose you have had people talking on pre-marriage this morning—that it is important for people to assess their relationship before they get into the hype of preparing for the wedding. In my experience, once people are committed with the reception place, the dress and whatever they do not even give any thought to maybe postponing the engagement or calling it off.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Once they have the dress—

Mrs Iwanow—They are into the romance of it all and the excitement.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Yes.

Mrs Iwanow—It is that time in your life where everything is very romantic and rosy and the last thing couples want to look at is whether their relationship will stand the reality test.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—They are very good arguments for your case.

CHAIR—I am sorry, I missed a bit of that, and if you have already answered this do not worry because I can read the transcript but if, for example, the minimum period were to be three months, would that affect many couples who get married in less than three months?

Mrs Iwanow—No, I do not think so and, as I was saying, there is still that provision whereby you can apply for shortening of notice. People who decide to go overseas or people who want to marry their bride before she goes back to Thailand or whatever can apply for shortening of time.

CHAIR—Michael Jackson seemed to do it in three days, but that is probably a good ad for extending it by the look of it!

Mrs Iwanow—Exactly. We know it was all set up beforehand now, don't we?

CHAIR—If it actually happened.

Mrs Iwanow—I will find out.

CHAIR—One civil marriage celebrant argued that we should not have a notification period at all because if you extend it couples would fly to New Zealand to get married. That would not be a very—

Mrs Iwanow—They whinge at spending \$90 on pre-marriage education. I do not think they are about to extend themselves to a flight to New Zealand, really.

CHAIR—No. It sounded very desperate to me.

Mrs Iwanow—It would be the exception. I suppose if they are that desperate, good luck to them.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—The other thing that you talk about, which I thought was rather interesting, was your relationship education in schools and your comment that the educators are too old—people like me—and they should be people two generations down.

Mrs Iwanow—I think so. I think that there is this myth that we can put an old head on young shoulders and I guess as parents too we like to think we can hand that wisdom to our children so they will not have to go through all the suffering of experimenting with life. If relationship education is done with younger people they can maybe handle things that are more topical to the person now, like peer pressure, teenage pregnancy and the issue of suicide.

I just sense that it would be more real for them if they had some of their peers—TV personalities or whatever—talking to them. A lot of things that teenagers are subjected to now have all been telescoped. At about 14 they could have had a long-term relationship; they could be pregnant; they could have left school. If someone like me were to go in and talk to them about relationship education, maybe a lot of things that I would want to tell them are not relevant to them.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Also, you are just mum giving us another lecture in another form.

Mrs Iwanow—Yes. Just another mum—just another matron.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—I just thought that was a very interesting comment, although I have to say I know some wonderful educators in my age group. There are exceptions in every case.

Mrs Iwanow—Yes, wonderful—but relevant? I do not know.

CHAIR—I thank you very much for your submission and for coming in this afternoon. We did have some documents to accept as exhibits.

Mrs Iwanow—I write articles for *Queensland Bride* and things like that and I always include something on pre-marriage, somehow or other.

Resolved:

That the committee accepts as exhibits the article ‘Marriage education’ and the document ‘Pre-marriage percentage compatibility rating test’.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elizabeth Grace):

That the committee authorises the publication of the evidence received today.

Subcommittee adjourned at 4.51 p.m.