



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

(Subcommittee)

Reference: Indigenous employment

FRIDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2005

BEGA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTERNET

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

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

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Friday, 2 December 2005

Members: Mr Wakelin (*Chair*), Dr Lawrence (*Deputy Chair*), Ms Annette Ellis, Mr Garrett, Mr Robb, Mr Slipper, Mr Snowdon, Dr Southcott, Mr Tuckey and Mrs Vale

Members in attendance: Mr Wakelin and Mrs Vale

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Positive factors and examples amongst Indigenous communities and individuals, which have improved employment outcomes in both the public and private sectors; and

1. recommend to the government ways this can inform future policy development; and
2. assess what significant factors have contributed to those positive outcomes identified, including what contribution practical reconciliation* has made.

*The Committee has defined 'practical reconciliation' in this context to include all government services.

WITNESSES

ALDRIDGE, Mr Leslie George, Pathways to Employment Leader, Wallaga Lake Community Development Employment Program Aboriginal Corporation.....	25
ALLEN, Mr Anthony John, Mayor, Bega Valley Shire Council	1
BARCHAM, Mr Richard James, Manager and Board’s Delegate, Wallaga Lake Community Development Employment Program Aboriginal Corporation.....	25
BLACKER, Mrs Kerist Ann, Bega High School	20
BOYNE, Mrs Kathleen, Service Manager, Mission Australia Employment Initiatives	1, 39
BRIGGS, Mr Haiden Morris, Employee, Bermagui Plumbing Drainage and Gasfitting	32
CATTANACH, Mr Rob, Human Resources Manager, Bega Valley Shire Council	12, 39
COSGRAVE, Mr Michael Thomas, Proprietor, Bermagui Plumbing Drainage and Gasfitting.....	32
DIXON, Mr Kevin, Bega Parks Mowing Team Member, Bega Valley Shire Council.....	12
FARRAM, Mr Tait Wilder, Trainee Environmental Health Officer, Bega Valley Shire Council	12
GOWARD, Mr Ian, Bega Parks Mowing Team Member, Bega Valley Shire Council.....	12
HOSKINS, Mr William (Chris), Private capacity.....	37
KELLY, Ms Yuin, Caretaker, Trainee, Tour Guide and Retail, Umbarra Cultural Centre.....	39
NAIRN, Hon. Gary, Federal Member for Eden-Monaro	1
THOMAS, Miss Rebecca, Trainee Administration Assistant, Bega High School	20
VOYSEY, Mr Neville, Employment Consultant, Mission Australia Employment Initiatives	1
WARDLE, Mrs Justine, Employment Consultant, Mission Australia Employment Initiatives.....	1

Subcommittee met at 10.11 am**ALLEN, Mr Anthony John, Mayor, Bega Valley Shire Council****NAIRN, Hon. Gary, Federal Member for Eden-Monaro****BOYNE, Mrs Kathleen, Service Manager, Mission Australia Employment Initiatives****VOYSEY, Mr Neville, Employment Consultant, Mission Australia Employment Initiatives****WARDLE, Mrs Justine, Employment Consultant, Mission Australia Employment Initiatives**

CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)—I declare open this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in its inquiry into Indigenous employment. The inquiry is generally about positive outcomes and best practice around Australia for employment. We have already done an interview with the ABC here this morning and I know the local member has as well. I welcome Mayor Tony Allen and the representatives of Mission Australia Employment Initiatives. I welcome and acknowledge, Ian Duff, Margaret Dixon, Lorraine Naylor, Ewan and Kelly. Without further ado, I invite Gary Nairn to make an opening statement. Gary is a chair of committees and is now Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, so he is well aware of these processes.

Mr Nairn—I am Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister but I am really here as the federal member for Eden-Monaro. I first of all want to welcome the committee here to Bega and say that it is excellent that the committee is getting out to the various regions. I think often when the parliament looks at Indigenous issues there is a tendency to head for Western Australia, the Northern Territory, South Australia and maybe Far North Queensland and not see too much beyond that. That is probably slightly critical.

CHAIR—No, that is true.

Mr Nairn—There really are different sorts of issues in many other parts of Australia. I think we have some pretty good success stories as well, which is why Mission Australia Employment Initiatives provided a submission to your inquiry. In many respects it is great that you were not able to take evidence from them up in Canberra at the time, which I know you felt bad about. However, as a result, you have been able to come down here and probably talk to a lot more people than you would have been able to in Canberra and get it more from horse's mouth, so to speak.

CHAIR—It created an opportunity for us.

Mr Nairn—Absolutely. So that is very good. As I said, there are some very good success stories, which you will hear about this morning. In a general sense, the local governments within my electorate have been very good at addressing the issue of low employment in our Indigenous population. Bega Valley Shire Council—and Mayor Tony Allen is here today—have been excellent in looking at how they can help overcome that issue. You will hear more about that today as well. The state member for Bega, Andrew Constance, unfortunately could not be here

this morning—state parliament has been sitting in Sydney and he is still there—but Ian Duff from his office has come along to listen to the evidence this morning. I welcome the committee here today. I am sure the evidence that you take this morning will be very useful in your deliberations.

CHAIR—Gary, thank you for that. We have thrown an extra agenda item on your itinerary as well—so thank you for the effort that you have made this morning.

Mr Nairn—Unfortunately, I will have to leave at about 11 o'clock. I was able to reorganise things to at least get here for part of the hearing.

CHAIR—We are glad you could. We welcome your time with us. Tony, would you like to say a couple of words?

Mayor Allen—Thank you, Mr Chairman. I welcome the committee to the Bega area. We are delighted to have you here. I understand from Kathy that she had been to Canberra a couple of times but unfortunately you were not able to meet with her.

CHAIR—I am a bit bashful!

Mayor Allen—We are absolutely delighted to have you here, and I am sure all the people here are delighted that you have come to Bega. As the Hon. Danna Vale said a minute ago, we believe it is paradise. We have a big responsibility in trying to maintain that, but we do it to the best of our abilities. The council is very supportive of the Indigenous community in our region and are supportive of employment wherever availability occurs. It is an issue for the valley. We have 2,000 or so Indigenous people in the valley—a big proportion of our population. I think this inquiry will be very beneficial to those people and to the community at large, and we wish you well with your deliberations.

As Mr Nairn said, it is good that you come to places like this, rather than just go to the obvious places such as the Northern Territory. This region has a long history of Indigenous population. My family actually employed the Thomas family and other Indigenous people on our farms in the early days. We have played football with them and have mixed socially with them over the years. My next door neighbour is a member of the Thomas family. It is a very integrated community in this region—and one that we are very proud of. We wish you well with your deliberations and welcome you to the valley.

CHAIR—Thank you. That is very much appreciated. Did you want to say something, Danna?

Mrs VALE—I think it is interesting that you both made a comment about coming here to what is essentially—in comparison to remote areas—almost a built-up area of some significance and yet there are very real challenges for our Indigenous population in areas like this. The education facilities are accessible, but whether they can actually be utilised to the best advantage is a real question, and looking into what we can do in those areas to encourage that participation has to also be a very significant focus of this committee. Thank you for your submission, Mayor, and I thank Mission Australia for their submission, which actually brought us here. I had no idea that there were 2,000 Indigenous members of your community. That was quite a surprise.

Mr Nairn—And that is out of a population of about 32,000.

Mrs VALE—It is a very important segment of the population.

CHAIR—You remind of the dilemma that this committee quite often has. You would be well aware of this, Tony, and Gary would be well aware of it. Indigenous people are spread throughout the country, but it is the Indigenous population in the remote areas in the states that you mention who are getting a lot of the media attention. Urban and rural and regional Australia do not come under those categories in the same way but, while the issues are slightly different, there are still issues. So whilst the way we ended up here was a bit fortuitous, we are delighted to be here and to be in this part of Australia. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Mr Nairn—No. I think you now need to talk to the people here and hear the stories and take the evidence. I think that is the job to do now.

CHAIR—Yes. Gentleman, thank you very much. With that in mind, I invite the representatives of Mission Australia to come forward. I invite you to give any other information about the capacity in which you appear today. I remind you that these are formal proceedings of the parliament and that they are to be treated with that same regard.

Mrs Boyne—I am the services manager at Mission Australia in Bega. We opened our doors in February 2000, so the site has been here for almost six years.

Mr Voysey—I am a sales consultant with Mission Australia. I have been with Mission for two years. Previously, I was with the federal government for 27 years.

CHAIR—That is longer than I have been with them!

Mrs Wardle—I have been with Mission for the last 5½ years. I am an employment consultant with Mission.

CHAIR—Would someone like to make a brief opening statement or add to your submission? Thank you for the submission. I understand there are some additions or variations to it.

Mrs Boyne—Thank you. We will basically summarise the proposal that we sent and highlight key points. We will present three key strengths which we believe have been our strengths in successfully placing Indigenous job seekers in employment. Those three key strengths are: one, the local staff here have a combined experience of over 50 years in the Bega Valley Shire with employers in recruitment and training; two, some staff have a background of working with Indigenous communities in training and employment and one of us has been involved in this field for over 17 years; and, three, some of our working values at Mission Australia focus on advocacy, integrity and commitment. We work very closely to those values. We work at the heart of employment. Those three strengths, we believe, lay the foundation for the key ingredient, which is trust, with our job seekers and employers. We believe we have exceptional job-matching skills when matching our clients into employment, and because of the years of experience we have the intuition to identify the issues and challenges that may occur.

Commitment is really important in finding solutions, and the solutions need to be met with respect and sensitivity in regard to the cultural differences. Throughout the process of successful employment for Indigenous people, it is really important that we coach, mentor and support our Indigenous job seekers before, during and after placements. We organise meetings and information sessions between all stakeholders, through a consultative process, and discuss the concerns, tasks and guidelines before an Indigenous job seeker commences employment. So there is a lot of work that goes on beforehand. That may occur over three, four, five or six months before we place someone into a position. We have formed various partnerships with organisations to create and sustain employment. One very successful partnership is with the Community Development Employment Program, CDEP. Together, we work closely with the employer and Indigenous job seekers to enable successful employment for them. Some of the industries and employers in which we have been successful with Indigenous employment are the local Bega Valley Shire Council, retail, child care, primary and high schools and the building trade.

Some of the key recommendations we want to present to the committee are to have long-term strategic training in employment for Indigenous job seekers, perhaps even looking at five years; to develop educational and cross-cultural awareness programs for employers; and to have a really strong media marketing strategy at a national level to create awareness. There are traditional employer mindsets out there. We really believe that there has been a change, and we are very proud of Bega Valley Shire for the Indigenous employment that does occur. But we believe that on a national level some sort of media marketing campaign could encourage Indigenous employment and perhaps create a real paradigm shift in those traditional mindsets. Perhaps there could be additional financial support for employers. We suggest the encouragement of active participation, with youth leaders, role models and elders being involved in the act of job seeking and the retention of people in the workplace. While we can place people into employment, it is really important that that becomes sustainable. That is where the support needs to come in, and that support has to happen daily. It could almost be for 24 hours a day.

Mrs VALE—From Mission Australia?

Mrs Boyne—Yes. We are sometimes here at eight o'clock at night talking with clients. It is really important that we are there to support them and have an open door. They know that if they have a problem, an issue or something that needs to be resolved at any time it needs to be resolved quickly; it is not something that can just wait. So we need to be available and we need to listen and work through those issues.

Mrs VALE—So it is very much like stewardship? So you are really in a stewardship role when you actually have that kind of accessibility.

Mrs Boyne—Yes. We will drive our clients to work. We do whatever we need to do. Whatever we have to do we will do, because that commitment has to be there to make it work. The key is trust. The trust factor must be there. If the trust is not there it is not going to work. That trust then facilitates relationships. Being able to really listen and understand where the Indigenous job seeker's strengths and interests are is important. It is important that we listen and then try to match accordingly to the appropriate organisation. It may need to be a structured organisation or a less structured organisation, depending on the needs of the job seeker. We do look at a strategic plan when we approach employers. Take the Bega Valley Shire Council, for

example. They had an ageing work force and they were looking at traineeships so we said, 'Let's look at pretraineeships'—so there is that strategic planning. So I think it is about respect, commitment, working from the heart and having those relationships.

CHAIR—Neville or Justine, do you want to say a couple of words?

Mr Voysey—Yes, Chair. In the two years I have been here I have established a working relationship with CDEP. There has been a commitment on my part to look at the Indigenous employment situation and to really help people sustain some work requirements and let them know that we are always here. We go out together to talk to employers. You establish that right from the start so they know who they are going to see and what support is going to be there. The regular meetings are the most important things, especially when you initially place an Indigenous person with an organisation. You have constant group meetings with the Indigenous person plus the managers and team leaders, so everyone knows what is happening, the communication is there and the Indigenous person feels comfortable to be able to talk.

Mrs Wardle—I am a person who is there for people to listen to. I provide a listening role most of the time for my clients; that is basically what I feel I do. People can tell me most of what is going on and about any issues that they have, and I am a bit of a sounding board. I try to work from there and resolve issues.

CHAIR—Kathleen, there are a lot of issues there and, regrettably, we do not have enough time to go through every one of them in the depth that we would like to. I will go to a couple of them. Taking your earlier submission, I want to try to link together the opportunities and employer expectations. Can I ask you—and I think this touches on what Neville said as well in terms of everyone knowing where they are coming from—about how you have developed those employer expectations in a way which has led to the success that you are having. How long has it been happening and what has the general response been like? Was there some resistance? Did it take a while to develop? Take all of that sort of stuff and let us talk a little bit about that.

Mrs Boyne—It does take time. We opened the doors in February 2000, and it takes time for job seekers to feel comfortable coming here. It is also important for us to go to them. For example, we have gone up to the CDEP and registered people up there if that was where they felt comfortable registering with us. It is important for us to be patient and to know the right time to do it. I think it involves a lot of intuition, based on past experience—on knowing when and where and how.

Then it involves planting seeds with employers. Unfortunately we do not have a lot of Indigenous job seekers in retail. We actually placed the first Indigenous retail salesperson into a business about three years ago. That person started doing a certificate 2 in retail operations, went to certificate 3, and now she is an assistant manager in a business in Queanbeyan. She is a young 20-year-old girl. That took about a year. I planted that seed with the employer, and just nibbled away, and then about 12 months later the employer said, 'I am thinking about that person you have been talking about.' I thought, 'Yes!' It took us 12 months, but we got there.

Mrs VALE—What kind of preparation was required for that young person to be job-ready; for that employer to say, 'Yes, you have got the job'?

Mrs Boyne—That is where Justine and the employment consultants come in, because they train the job seekers in interviewing skills, presentation, call canvassing. They also train them in work ethics. There is a difference between our cultures in regard to our work ethics.

CHAIR—That was going to be part of my next question. I think you have more or less answered it, but I might as well put it in and you can link it with the cross-cultural issues. Over to you.

Mrs Boyne—That is a challenge because, for Indigenous people, their families are really important. It should be the same for non-Indigenous people—our families are really important to us. It can be quite difficult to get that balance between work and family. It is for all people. But I think it is even more difficult for Indigenous people to try and balance family and employment.

Mrs VALE—I think we have a way of compartmentalising that on a different level; I think it is just viewed differently. But you are right. It is not compartmentalised, I think, as much.

Mrs Boyne—Yes. And you might say that for non-Indigenous people it is a different line. So that creates conflict.

CHAIR—Media marketing is something that we have not really come across before in this context. Can we talk about that? I think it is really important because I think what you are saying there is that we have to change or challenge perceptions; that is what I heard. I think that is quite exciting.

Mrs Boyne—There has been national marketing for mature-age job seekers, for apprenticeships and traineeships, and there has been national marketing for other disadvantaged groups, but there has never been an awareness created about the importance of Indigenous employment. There are major barriers, and this is something that we need to improve on for all of us.

CHAIR—Can we talk about the barriers? You have touched on them, but—

Mrs Boyne—Would you like me to expand on that?

CHAIR—Yes, go to the barriers.

Mrs Boyne—Particularly down here, in the Bega Valley shire, transport is an issue. We do not have public transport that can get people to work and home again. If you do not have a licence and a car, how are you going to get to work? Transport is a huge issue. If someone loses their licence it becomes a barrier. We have had a lot of difficulty trying to get just a to-and-from-work licence. With a lot of positions, particularly with government organisations, it is an essential criterion to have a licence, and that can be a major issue. The person can be really keen to work and, gee, if they can get to work, they will work. But they cannot get there. That is a big issue. Then there are the issues to do with family and the cultural differences there. There is a potential conflict in that family could sometimes be more of a priority than going to work. How does that get resolved?

CHAIR—That is a big one; it is a huge one!

Mrs Boyne—That is a big one.

CHAIR—Can we talk a little about that? We need to bring it out a little bit, I think, without getting unduly controversial. We need to talk about that. Let us talk about some of the strategies that you have been able to develop that have helped. Can we talk a little bit about that?

Mrs Boyne—I think that comes down to communication. That comes down to our support for the employer as well as for the employee. It is not easy if employers have not been involved with Indigenous people. They are trying. They might not have had cross-cultural awareness training. That is something else that is really important. That may happen at the Bega Valley Shire Council, but I do not think it happens in small businesses.

CHAIR—How big a barrier would you say that is to the opportunity and the employer perception?

Mrs Boyne—I am the one who has been in this 17 years, and I think it is a big barrier.

CHAIR—Almost the biggest?

Mrs Boyne—The Indigenous people here will probably be able to say better than I will. I think it is a very big one. I think there is a very traditional mindset that Indigenous people are not as capable or are not going to front to work. There is this fear, and I think the fear is just because of ignorance and because of not knowing, not understanding, not having an awareness—

Mrs VALE—This is where your national strategy of cross-cultural awareness, even if it is in commercials or stories, comes in.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. These are some of the things that take a little bit of courage, and you have shown that. You have taken it just a little bit further, not to be critical but to explain where our difficulties are. Be assured that we do run into this regularly. I will not name the communities, but around Australia it is not an uncommon employer approach. It is not a criticism; it is just a fact. There are issues on both sides of the equation.

Mrs Boyne—It is both ways. In work it is a partnership.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mrs Boyne—It is an employer-employee partnership. It cannot be all one way; it has to be two ways. That is where we need to come in. We almost come in as mediators and negotiators. We influence a situation with integrity. We do not manipulate; we influence with integrity.

CHAIR—Excellent. That is the skill. That is the professionalism that your organisation brings.

Mrs Boyne—It does bring that professionalism.

CHAIR—Neville, can I go to CDEP. A criticism around Australia has been that it has to be on the pathway to somewhere, not a destination in itself. You have probably heard that.

Mr Voysey—Yes.

CHAIR—It is a significant criticism, because people tend to end up parked there et cetera. The government is looking to a whole lot of options for the way we might address that. Can you talk about the way I have presented it to you? It has to be more than a destination; it has to be going somewhere, which I think is what you talked about.

Mr Voysey—With Richard, who is the coordinator, we work closely in going to organisations as a partnership and we talk to them about what the possibilities are. Richard has a new person. Les Aldridge is with pathways to employment. We sit down and lay the cards on the table. We say it as it is and we try to present a common front to get people into employment. The CDEP also helps them stay in employment, because they also act as we do—that is, as a mentor and as a support mechanism for them. Through that connection we try to place two or more in a position. Then the Indigenous people feel comfortable; they have someone else they can communicate with and they are not isolated. That is a good start. You work from that. Then that success leads to other people going through the CDEP. They see other people out there in the community council. Outdoor activities are good because they are in the local environment. The local people see so-and-so out there working and they recognise that and say, ‘That’s good.’ The Aboriginal people will look at that. We try to look at it not only from the employment side but also from the education side.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. We need to move on. Could you comment on the government program and on the government’s approach in terms of where we are going and how we are going with it. If you had a priority, where would you take CDEP and what are you finding out about the current policy that may assist with what you are trying to do?

Mr Voysey—From a CDEP point of view, if they had some other funding that they could tap into to provide additional training for some of the people to help them be a little more job ready in terms of their skill factors, then they would be more employable and CDEP would be fulfilling its function to the community more.

Mrs VALE—Kathleen, you play the part of a mediator. How is that initiated? Does that come from the employer or the employee? Do you just get a telephone call and then go out to the worksite or the office? I want to know about the basic mechanisms of that accessibility.

Mrs Boyne—I think it happens in all ways. The Indigenous employee can come here and drop in at any time of the day and just say, ‘Hey, can I just talk with you about something?’ That can happen any time of the day. I was here the other night till eight o’clock with one of our Indigenous employees who had some concerns in the work place. The employer or the employee could ring up, or it could be us thinking, ‘I was just talking to so-and-so and something does not sound right’, so we contact the employer and say: ‘How’s it going? Are there any problems?’ I think it is all of us taking responsibility and all of us knowing. I think it involves trust. We do a lot of premeetings before we actually place the job seeker, and if that is appropriate, then we set those guidelines. We have given our business cards to the employees and the employers and said, ‘Ring us any time.’ I do not mind if somebody rings me at 11 o’clock at night to say that they may not be sure about the next day because they may not be able to get to work. People know that they can talk to us at any time.

Mrs VALE—You used a word twice today which you do not often hear in government circles—that is, the word ‘intuition’. All of you must have real heart for the job to actually be able to respond in that way. Would you be able to identify the key motivators that are present across the board in your trainees that make for a successful placement?

Mrs Boyne—Which has motivated them to be successful?

Mrs VALE—Yes. Can you identify a key motivator?

Mrs Boyne—First of all, it is having a job. It is being able to go to work, being part of a team and a community, being independent, getting those wages every week and having that money that they did not have before so that they can buy for the family and provide for the family.

Mrs VALE—Is there anything that you think the government could do besides your national strategy of cross-cultural awareness, which I think is a really good idea? I have learnt so much by being on this committee and working with the chair, and I think that should not be the case for an Australian of my age. Everybody should have that understanding. If you had your druthers, Kathleen, what would you like to see the government do? That is a big ask, isn't it?

Mrs Boyne—Gee, I have a long list.

Mrs VALE—We can always prioritise and work through a list.

Mrs Boyne—I think we need more time. In the Job Network, our task is to place people into jobs. When you are working with people, whether they are long-term unemployed or people from a different culture, we need time to work through issues and to work through those work ethics. The job seekers need time to work with them, so that they are job ready. They may not be job ready, but they can be placed into a job and they are expected to perform. I believe we do not get enough time to work with the job seekers, particularly Indigenous job seekers and long-term unemployed job seekers.

Mrs VALE—Are there too many time hurdles within the program that you have to get across?

Mrs Boyne—One of our key performance indicators is how quickly we get somebody into a job. There is not that financial support. We have job search training, which is a three-week program to get people job ready. Getting someone job ready in three weeks from a different culture or after 10 or 20 years of unemployment is really difficult.

Mrs VALE—You know one of the reasons that government departments or government programs put on a time frame like that is that it is an indicator. Is there any other mechanism for an indication of progress, if you like, that you could suggest that we could use instead of a time limit or a time hurdle, which is really what it is, isn't it?

Mrs Boyne—It is. At the moment we look at the placement and we look at wage subsidies, as well, which helps like a training time frame for the employer. Those wage subsidies assist the employer to feel that they can put more time into training and helping to get the job seeker, then the employee, more job ready. That has been valuable, but there needs to be more financial support of that. Other support could include perhaps mentors in the workplace and literacy and

numeracy support for people in the workplace. If all of that support network was set up with resources, which is mainly people, time and money, it would be more successful.

CHAIR—In relation to mentoring, you talked about incentives for elders and the buddy system—and that is all part of that—do you have a mechanism for how you might do that?

Mrs Boyne—Like the buddy system?

CHAIR—And the incentives for elders. How would you do that?

Mrs Boyne—By that we mean more encouragement for elders and youth leaders and for people to get more involved.

CHAIR—It is more of an encouragement rather than financial help?

Mrs Boyne—Yes. In fact, I think sometimes that encouragement is more sustainable than money.

CHAIR—Absolutely, I agree.

Mrs Boyne—I think that sometimes money reward is short term. It is not the heart. All of this is about heart, if we really want to make it sustainable.

Mrs VALE—I just want to go back to those time constraints, Kathleen. You said that you actually have to have somebody job ready in three weeks. You have obviously found that some candidates are not job ready after three weeks. How do you sustain that person within your program until you believe they are job ready? What is normally the average time that you have found, if that is not too specific?

Mrs Boyne—The government sort of sets guidelines on how often we are meant to meet with our job seekers. We tend to do it a lot more than we are required to do because we feel that is what we have to do to get job seekers job ready.

Mrs VALE—Do you actually meet that three-week qualification? With the way you manage your program here, do you make that three weeks?

Mrs Boyne—No. There is the problem with transport and some people, particularly Indigenous people, are not comfortable coming into a training room. It is not their style of learning to sit in a room to do something like this. So it is on-the-job training. That is why we try to do wage subsidies, which gives them on-the-job training. It is practical, relevant and more real. Instead of looking now at training in a course, we approach the employer and say, ‘If we support you financially, can we do this on-the-job training for six months?’ We try to go for six months because three months is just not long enough.

Mrs VALE—I am interested in that because in remote Australia we also heard about that particular issue, about training on the job. It is more relevant. Indeed, there are even many non-Indigenous people who do value and grow better in their expertise by doing it on the job.

Mrs Boyne—Yes, and that is what we found. Rather than doing a training program, we will approach an employer—the right employer—and try to do the six-month program on the job.

Mr Voysey—I think their self-esteem is built quickly through that program, by doing.

Mrs VALE—Yes. I understand.

Mrs Wardle—And also, support issues become more prevalent when they are actually on the job.

Mrs VALE—Yes. And they are usually working with somebody or showing them what to do, so there is a human interaction there.

CHAIR—We have gone well over the time allocated, so I thank you and invite you to sum up, if you would like to, with those things which are most immediate. What would you change tomorrow if you could? If you had one wave of the magic wand, what would it be? There is always a list of things we want to do and we are all working towards them. In your summing up you might think about what would be one or two of the key issues. You have already said them, but you might like to restate them.

Mrs Boyne—More time with our Indigenous job seekers, to prepare them and for the government to acknowledge that we do need that time to support the Indigenous job seekers before we actually place them. We would spend more time with them.

Mrs VALE—What would you say, in your experience, would be a good optimum time?

Mrs Boyne—It is such an individual situation, and probably the Indigenous people could say that better. With our clients we say, ‘What do you need?’ It is really based on what their needs are. But we definitely need a lot longer than three weeks of training. If the government could make it flexible so that we do an individual plan with each job seeker; and they do say we have to that, but it needs to be realistic. So we need to give that time and receive the financial support to be able to give that time.

Mr Voysey—I agree with what Kathleen was saying. There is that support program, and there needs to be some way of having an ongoing support program for Indigenous people, even past 26 weeks or whatever time frame they feel is necessary for them to keep them going.

Mrs Wardle—And I think that support program needs to go further than the individual. You need to look at the family situation and not have it as an isolated sort of picture, so that the family comes into the support structure as well, because that is where a lot of the issues come from.

CHAIR—Yes. We touched on how difficult that can be and the skill and the challenge there. Thank you very much for making the point. We appreciate your hospitality, your patience and your tolerance.

[10.53 am]

CATTANACH, Mr Rob, Human Resources Manager, Bega Valley Shire Council

DIXON, Mr Kevin, Bega Parks Mowing Team Member, Bega Valley Shire Council

FARRAM, Mr Tait Wilder, Trainee Environmental Health Officer, Bega Valley Shire Council

GOWARD, Mr Ian, Bega Parks Mowing Team Member, Bega Valley Shire Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Rob, were you going to say a few words and give us a rundown on how it has been going.

Mr Cattanach—The council signed, back in 2001, a memorandum of understanding with the local regional land councils. Amongst many other things, part of the agreement was that council would employ Aboriginal people in its work force in the same proportion as they were represented in the community, which equated to about 5½ positions. The first thing we did was appoint an Aboriginal community development officer. That person, basically, then provided mentoring support to five trainees that we employed in the library and tourism area and also in the field area and the environmental health office. That position was really critical for the success of the program. We tried a couple of years earlier and failed dismally.

In 2004 we had discussions with Mission employment about a program that was running. Following lengthy discussions with Mission employment and the Wallaga Lake CDEP we actually engaged six people on a six-month wage subsidy appointment. They were in a variety of teams out in the field, from road construction through to local paving in the urban areas. That program was very successful, and Kevin remains with us as part of that. One of the other people who did the program has recently been permanently appointed to a job in Merimbula with the council.

A lot of the success behind the program is attributed to the partnership we have with Wallaga Lake CDEP and Mission employment, and the support that is provided by those organisations. Again, we found the community development officer position critical to the success. The council has won a number of national and state awards for its Aboriginal employment program. Again, although council has been the recipient of that, it has really been the partnership that has created the opportunity.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Who is going next?

Mr Goward—I just want to get the point across that, when we have people come from the CDEP or Mission, we get a lot of issues with licences and different things. In my job instead of being the team leader—to Kevin, James and the people we have had—I try to be more than that. I try to just be the friend, a person to come to, so that they have got someone to come to rather than Mission and rather than CDEP, so that they can get across their problems. As Kathy Boyne said, a lot of the problems are with the licences and trying to get to work. What I try to do is—

and I did this as soon as Kevin came onto the job, as soon as we met and shook hands—start a relationship of friendship and trust. I try and get that across all the time, because it makes it a lot better. It can be very daunting to a person to come in—especially to the Bega Valley Shire; it is so big—and be thrown into a team where the focus is on getting the job done but not on the actual real person.

I try and get the conflicts out. There may be family problems. There could be a lot more problems. What I try and do is work on that and get a base going so that I can help out. Getting to work of a morning can be a problem, so we pick the person up in the ute. We always talk about different things that are happening or that are going to happen in the job, so that the employee knows, too, what is going on. It works out really well. You become good friends and you do not act as a boss. You are a good friend in the job, so you become a team. You do not have a boss over people. We are all doing the same thing. It works a lot better. We try to set common goals. There may be problems coming up. We do the mowing in five towns. It is a massive area that we have got to cover. Knowing the problems that come with some people that we employ, we can get through that. We can still get our work done. Also, we can help out. We are not just there to get the job done and crack the whip. I would rather be there to help the whole deal out and to see the program go through and get others to come through in the same way.

Kevin is now up to the stage where he can help other Indigenous people because he knows the way we work and how the council perceives the way we want that person to work. He knows the deal now and it becomes much easier for me if we get someone else coming through. So Kevin can help out that way. Also, what Kevin has brought to me is the relationship between the two cultures. I was very naive at first. Sitting down with Kevin and talking through the whole deal has put me into a picture where I can see the different issues a lot clearer. So it makes it much better for me and other people who come and work for me. Instead of being the team leader, you can be the mentor and help out with all the problems. Also Kevin, on our side, helps out with problems with other employees. It has been working really well.

Our goal—and I do not think it is too high—is permanent employment. Working with Rob and Mission, our goal, down the track, is for Kevin to be working full-time on the scheme within the parks and garden section or to be ready to step up to the next level, wherever he may go, within council. But it is a long-term journey and it does not happen overnight. The help of the whole team—I mean everyone here today who is working for it—makes my job a lot easier and helps Kevin to get that permanent position.

CHAIR—How many people are involved in the scheme?

Mr Goward—On my side of it, only two work the mowers—me, the team leader, and another full-time employee. Then we have casual staff. We have been working with CDEP for 18 months. We have had some people come through and it has been going well. We have been able to put them onto the next stage, as Rob said, at Merimbula. We now have a person down in Merimbula in full-time employment. It is really good.

CHAIR—Thanks, Ian. Kevin, would you like to say something?

Mr Dixon—Yes. Mission employment—Kathleen, Justine and Neville—helped me get into this program with the shire. As I said, I have been here for just on two years. Working for the shire, it is compulsory to have a drivers licence, but I have not got one. I lost my licence and I do not get it back until January next year. So they have kept me going for all that time. Maybe things will change after I get my licence back. I was going downhill before Mission got me off my butt and made me do something.

CHAIR—So you are feeling a lot better about it now that you are having a crack at it?

Mr Dixon—Yes. I feel better health wise.

CHAIR—Regarding licences—it is none of my business; it is a matter for the New South Wales courts—how much flexibility do the courts have in employment related cases?

Mr Goward—They used to be pretty reasonable, but now there is no flexibility. If it is a drink related offence you do not get any leeway at all. But we have to give them a chance to work.

CHAIR—I have lost my licence too, so it is all right. I have got it back again, though. But that is another story and we won't go there!

Mr Goward—There is nothing worse than when you want to work and you have everything going for you but you cannot get to the job. We take that in consideration. We have to have boundaries in the Bega Valley Shire but, if you have a good employee, especially in the Bega area, you can pick them up. It is only 10 minutes out of the way. So there is nothing wrong with doing that.

CHAIR—That is the great thing about a community like this.

Mr Goward—You have a bit of leeway there yourself. During the day, if there is a driving issue, we can get around it. We can find ways to get around it and we make it work. You are there together and you have to get the job done. We make it a team issue all the time. There is no boss, just a team and we work it out between us all the time. It works well that way. If you have someone who is cracking the whip, it will not work; it cannot work. You have to be sensitive to your surroundings and the person you are working with. It works both ways.

CHAIR—Kevin, do you have a couple of other things, anything at all—that it is good for other people to come through and have a go at it and that type of thing, opportunities out there?

Mr Dixon—Yes, it would be very nice to see a few more Kooris employed with the shire.

Mr Farram—I will talk about where I have been, what I am doing now and where I hope to go. I finished year 12 in 1999—I was born and bred in Bega. I went on to do some volunteer work through the National Parks and Wildlife Service and then I went to Greencorps in Port Macquarie to do a six-month environmental program. After that, I had the opportunity to go to California for a month and do some volunteer environmental work over there. When I came back from that I was able to score a job with the council, in 2002, where I did administration for 16 months. I went to TAFE there and they trained me on computer skills and stuff like that. A job then became available in the Environmental Health and Building Section, and I have been there

ever since. I do water sampling and beach sampling. I used to do the STP sampling and on-site sewage management inspections. I do electrical test and tagging for the office now. I am currently in the youth council for the shire, trying to promote the youth here and get stuff happening for us. I had the opportunity of going to the National Indigenous Environmental Health Conference in Terrigal, and that was pretty good. Hopefully, there will be one in Cairns this year, which I would also like to go to. It was there that I heard about Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, where I am currently going. I am doing a three-year degree in environmental health and getting high distinctions, which is good. They have campuses in Alice Springs, Darwin, Cairns and Broome, so I get to travel and see a bit of the country and study with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Mrs VALE—And you will be in demand when you get that qualification, too.

Mr Farram—That is right. This year, on behalf of Batchelor I went to the National Student Leadership Forum on Faith and Values. You might have attended; I do not know.

Mrs VALE—You came to Parliament House, did you?

Mr Farram—Yes, I spent three days there. There were about 300 uni students.

Mrs VALE—I am just wondering whether that is why I think I know your face.

Mr Farram—Probably. I was the only guy not in a suit.

Mrs VALE—You stand out in a crowd, Tait.

Mr Farram—Yes, that is me. I have lost my licence twice, so I am in that boat too. I wrote off a council car, but they have been lenient enough to keep me on.

Mrs VALE—They still like you, do they?

CHAIR—To hang in there, as you have, what were a couple of things that helped, do you reckon?

Mr Farram—The encouragement and friends. I love going to work every day; it is great.

CHAIR—That is fantastic.

Mr Farram—The work of looking after the environment is good. I have always been keen to do that. I was doing sport and rec but there were no jobs there.

CHAIR—It is pretty important to keep it going.

Mr Farram—It is good. One day, I would like to take on an Aboriginal trainee myself and train them in what I am doing.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. I do not have any specific questions, but that is a great story and you are obviously making it work.

Mrs VALE—I have a question of Kevin. Kevin, are you on a part-time employment basis, at this stage?

Mr Dixon—It is a program that runs for 13 weeks, but they keep extending it.

Mrs VALE—Do you attend work on a daily basis for a couple of hours or is it a couple of days a week?

Mr Dixon—No, it is for the full week.

Mrs VALE—So it is full time but for only 13 weeks—and then rolled over?

Mr Dixon—Yes, and they will extend the program after the 13 weeks finishes, so this has been going on for nearly two years now.

Mrs VALE—I understand. I also had a question to ask of Ian. You spoke about the Aboriginal community development officer. I believe you had tried some programs some years ago and that did not work?

Mr Goward—We did.

Mrs VALE—Did you have an Aboriginal community development officer in those times? You said that this person, or this role, is vital.

Mr Goward—No, mainly Kathy Boyne. She used to come to our work and teach us skills—for example, communication skills and listening skills; that type of thing. That is when we really started to get this thing happening. Those skills came out on their own. That was really good for me. It is good to go back to Kathy and say, ‘This is what is happening,’ and talk. It is the same with CDEP. You can get things out like that. You can set yourself up and know where you are going; when you get the people on the job you can find out. It is good.

Mrs VALE—And this idea of Kathy’s, about having a national strategy, if you like, of cross-cultural awareness—

Mr Goward—That is right; it is very important.

Mrs VALE—The message I am getting from you is how valuable it has been to Bega Valley Shire Council. This is obviously a fantastically successful program which you have got going.

Mr Goward—The barrier is there and, unless you are aware of it, it does not get better—it gets worse; it goes behind. So you have to be aware—

Mrs VALE—And we really do commit so many offences, don’t we, by ignorance?

Mr Goward—We do; by ignorance. That is exactly right. And people get offended—

Mrs VALE—And there is no offence intended—

Mr Goward—No, there is no offence intended, but it happens that way because of the cultures, and the forefathers' forefathers, down the line. If you are aware of that and can jump over that hurdle, and then get the person beside you to jump over it and become one, you are on your way. Once you do that, it becomes easy. Things are not hard.

Mrs VALE—The understanding has been important for Kevin, and Kevin's family too. Do you have a family with you, Kevin? Do you have a wife and children?

Mr Dixon—I have got my two boys with me.

Mrs VALE—You have got your two boys with you.

Mr Dixon—I actually went to Queensland to pick them up. That was after I straightened myself out with this work with the shire and so on.

Mrs VALE—Kevin, do you find that you are a role model for your boys? Are they big enough to want to be doing what dad is doing?

Mr Dixon—Yes. I let them know every day: 'You've got to work when you get older, you know. You can't sit around doing nothing!'

Mrs VALE—How old are they, Kevin?

Mr Dixon—They are four and 10.

Mrs VALE—They are littlies yet. But you must feel really great about your job and your role here with the council.

Mr Dixon—Yes, it feels good.

Mrs VALE—Tait, you said that you actually got to year 12. So you completed your high school education?

Mr Farram—Just.

Mrs VALE—Well, I left school at 14, so you are smarter than I am already! What was your motivation to stay at school until year 12? That is a pretty big milestone; it is a big success, to start with.

Mr Farram—My mum, I think. She was the driving force behind that.

Mrs VALE—Good on her.

Mr Farram—She was behind me getting out in the work force, too, because I would just party all the time.

Mrs VALE—You can still party. You just learn to compartmentalise your life. Ask Ian—he knows how to party, don't you, Ian?

Mr Goward—You have got to manage it.

Mrs VALE—Yes, you have got to manage it. You compartmentalise your life into work time, party time and family time. Well, that is lovely. It is really good. I just wanted to know that, because that is a very important milestone, the fact that you managed to get to that level of education.

Mr Goward—As with Kevin with his kids, that is where it is good for me; that is what you get back out of it. You have got it. You have got something back. It has not all been for nothing. It is really good. It works.

CHAIR—It is a great encouragement to you; you feel—

Mrs VALE—Actually, I reckon Ian would make a great Aboriginal community development officer himself, he is so enthusiastic!

Mr Goward—We will talk about the money later!

CHAIR—We need to wrap up now. Before we do, I would like to know if there is a bit of bureaucracy that bothers you? There would be something that the government does that would annoy the hell out of you. Can you give us a clue about something that should be done a bit better, from our side? Is there a form that you hate, or is there something that just drives you batty?

Mr Cattanach—Yes. When we originally got funding under the Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program for the community development officer, it was the acquittals that bothered me. They were very time consuming. It was just a procedural thing that had to happen.

CHAIR—Was it different to, say, other acquittals? You would manage a lot of programs. Was it different or more demanding than others?

Mr Cattanach—It was more demanding.

Mrs VALE—Did it involve more detail?

Mr Cattanach—Yes.

Mrs VALE—We have got these bureaucrats in Canberra; we want to give them something to do!

Mr Cattanach—That is right. It would be good if that could be changed.

Mrs VALE—Okay; good point.

CHAIR—We have to get them to do something more constructive.

Mrs VALE—Yes, I know.

Mr Goward—Out in the field, it is funding. With the CDEP, when the time is ready to change over and you are trying to go for the next 13 or 26 weeks, you might ask, ‘Can we go through?’ They will be working at it, but it will sometimes depend on funding. It might not work this way. That is when you hope it goes through so we can get it through and keep it going. It is a shame that money has to rule those sorts of things, with all the work that has been done behind the scenes. If they just cut it—

CHAIR—The other thing I thought was that, when something is working well, you should be able to have some trust—we were talking about trust earlier—to say: ‘It’s going well. These people are getting it right. Let’s get on with it.’ We need longer term staff, and this justification every 13 weeks—

Mr Goward—That is right.

Mrs VALE—Without wanting to do in our wonderful colleague Gary Nairn, I know that if you did have a problem like that you would have a very ready ear to hear you in Gary.

Mr Goward—We have thought about that too—

Mrs VALE—That is what he is there for. That is why you have a federal member of parliament on your doorstep. He is your man in the government.

CHAIR—All I can do is thank you for what you do.

Mrs VALE—It is a great example.

CHAIR—Good luck. If there is anything else that comes up, do not hesitate to let us know. There might be something afterwards that you would like to drop in.

[11.17 am]

BLACKER, Mrs Kerist Ann, Bega High School

THOMAS, Miss Rebecca, Trainee Administration Assistant, Bega High School

CHAIR—Welcome. We thought we had lost you for a while, but you are back. It is great to have you with us. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Miss Thomas—I am a trainee administration assistant.

Mrs Blacker—I am here on behalf of Mrs Jillian Turlas, who is the Principal of Bega High, and she sends her apologies because of a critical incident at school.

CHAIR—We are sorry to hear about that, but we are delighted that you could make it. I need to say that these are proceedings of the parliament, and they need to be treated with that regard. I invite one or both of you to say a couple of words about what you do and how you see it.

Mrs Blacker—Bec is training with us through Mission employment. She has come to the high school for 12 months and is basically going to learn how all our administration works at the high school. That includes office work, print shop area, library—anything that involves working as one of the administrative staff.

CHAIR—How is it going, Rebecca?

Miss Thomas—It is going good. The other day I found out I can do legal studies with my traineeship and pass year 12—do my HSC—through the school too.

CHAIR—How long have you been there? You have probably mentioned that, but how long have you been going?

Miss Thomas—It will be a month next Wednesday.

CHAIR—That is great. You heard the previous speakers, did you?

Mrs Blacker—No.

CHAIR—You are time efficient. I will ask a couple of questions about the value of education and the value of this program. Let us talk about how you found the education system. What year were you able to attain? How did it lead to where you are now?

Miss Thomas—I did year 11 at Lumen Christi Catholic College at Pambula Beach. I got sick of school so I thought I would come out and find a traineeship so I would not be bored.

CHAIR—You have got a lot of friends all around Australia with that same approach: school does not quite suit and you would like to get into something and have a go.

Miss Thomas—Yes.

Mrs VALE—We all eventually have to go back there though, Rebecca. I was 35 when it dawned on me.

CHAIR—You didn't hear what Mrs Vale said earlier, I suppose.

Miss Thomas—No.

Mrs VALE—I actually left school at 14, Rebecca, probably for the same reason as you. I did an exam in those days called the Intermediate. That will probably give Kerist some idea of how old I am. That was a long time ago and all that has changed in New South Wales. That is the wonderful thing about education in Australia: it is always there no matter how old you are. It took me 14 years to get my qualifications and my four sons told everybody, 'That's because Mum was a slow learner.' The opportunities available are wonderful—and good on you! I think it is fascinating that you say you are looking at legal studies.

Miss Thomas—Yes.

Mrs VALE—That is really good.

Miss Thomas—It would be to be in legal aid or something.

Mrs VALE—That is fantastic. That will all work in with your administrative training.

Mrs Blacker—Yes, that is what they have done now. She has got a timetable and she starts next week.

Mrs VALE—That is great.

Mrs Blacker—It gives her something that she wanted to do although she did not want to do the rest of the schoolwork. It gives her that insight, which is really great in that respect, because we have been trying to push that area.

CHAIR—Is there a program? If so, what program is it?

Mrs Blacker—I do not actually know that there is a program. I think it is just a case of being there and learning as you go.

CHAIR—With some schools it is initiated, and that is more important.

Mrs Blacker—I assume the school or Jill did it with Mission Employment to start it.

Mrs VALE—Is this legal studies course actually with TAFE?

Mrs Blacker—No. She will be doing it through us. We actually have legal studies at the high school.

Mrs VALE—I see, so she can actually be locked into that.

Mrs Blacker—Yes. Because she did it before she finished at Lumen Christi, she will actually carry on her year 12 studies in that branch only. She will not do the others. She has to come down and work even harder than with us.

Mrs VALE—But, Rebecca, it is different, isn't it, when you are interested in something and you can see its relevance to your employment and you can see how it fits in?

Miss Thomas—Yes.

Mrs VALE—That is really good.

CHAIR—Do you live in Bega?

Miss Thomas—No, I live in Pambula.

CHAIR—I do not know my geography very well. How difficult is it for you to get to school?

Miss Thomas—It is not difficult at all.

CHAIR—How long?

Miss Thomas—It is about a half-hour drive.

CHAIR—Do you drive?

Miss Thomas—No. My aunty or a family member does.

Mrs VALE—So you have a family member that drives you to school and back again daily?

Mrs Blacker—Yes, Becky does; she works in Bega too.

Mrs VALE—That is fantastic.

CHAIR—Yes, that works in pretty well.

Mrs VALE—This transport problem is really an issue, isn't it? It is coming up all the time.

CHAIR—Yes. Kerist, what is your role?

Mrs Blacker—I am actually a school administrative officer.

CHAIR—But you are closely linked to Rebecca's endeavours?

Mrs Blacker—Yes. She seemed to have got pushed into my area.

CHAIR—So it is mentor, supervisor and whatever else. Is it going along well?

Mrs Blacker—Yes.

CHAIR—I do not have anything else to ask. It is entirely up to you now. You might have a view which says we would like to see the government do this or that or we would like to see something else done.

Mrs Blacker—I think Becky is good for Bega High in the respect that she is there, the kids are there and the kids can see her. Mark Rose is another of the Indigenous ones up there, being the counsellor for the kids. He and Becky have made a complete difference, in my eyes only.

CHAIR—I am glad you said that because I think—

Mrs Blacker—Yes, they have both got a very positive attitude, whereas it has not always been that way at the school before. The kids can relate to Becky. I have seen some of the ones—they might be only a year younger than her—come up and talk to her, and they can see her doing something. So I think that is very positive.

CHAIR—Money cannot buy that.

Mrs Blacker—No.

Mrs VALE—We had a witness—he was an Indigenous man and obviously a leader in employment; I cannot remember his name—in Kalgoorlie. He was most articulate, and he said, ‘We don’t want money, we don’t want welfare; we want opportunity.’ He was a real driver of real energy. He was making that opportunity for his people.

Mrs Blacker—I think, too, having Bec and Mark there as—

Mrs VALE—Getting an opportunity for them.

Mrs Blacker—The kids can see that and they think, ‘I don’t have to now go down the street. I can go to class because Bec will be at school or Mark will be there to talk to.’ So they do not take off or do other things, as they have been doing.

Mrs VALE—Do you have many young people who are part of the school population?

Mrs Blacker—We have about 40 Indigenous students at the moment. That figure goes up and drops down.

Mrs VALE—How do you see yourself as a role model, Rebecca?

Miss Thomas—It is good to see them at school and attending every day.

Mrs Blacker—We have an absentee sheet every day, and she goes through and marks them off if they are not there. I would hate to be one of those when she gets hold of them.

CHAIR—That is great. You would carry out that quite easily with no trouble at all. The gentleman who Mrs Vale was referring to is Daniel Tucker. He actually runs his own mining company. As you know, Western Australia is big in mining and he is running his own mining company. He had a very clear view: opportunity, nothing else—‘Just give me the opportunity.’

Mrs VALE—He was a very formidable man.

CHAIR—We were delighted about that. I do not have any more questions. The floor is yours. Is there anything you particularly want to say?

Miss Thomas—Out of this traineeship, I received a letter the other day in the mail. I have been approved to be a casual admin relief assistant. I am happy about that.

Mrs VALE—That is great.

CHAIR—Another step and just delighted?

Miss Thomas—Yes.

Mrs VALE—You should keep these letters in a resume, Rebecca.

Miss Thomas—Okay.

CHAIR—We are delighted for you.

Mrs VALE—Congratulations.

CHAIR—Congratulations and regards to the principal. We are sorry that she could not be with us.

Mrs Blacker—I will pass that on.

[11.27 am]

ALDRIDGE, Mr Leslie George, Pathways to Employment Leader, Wallaga Lake Community Development Employment Program Aboriginal Corporation

BARCHAM, Mr Richard James, Manager and Board's Delegate, Wallaga Lake Community Development Employment Program Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement as to where you are at and how it is going.

Mr Aldridge—A couple of years ago I had separated from my wife and I lived in the Tanja Beach area for 10 months or so. A job came up with the council, which was mentioned earlier, with six employees. Kath from the mission got me on to that and I worked for them for six months and then this other position came up. It was a pilot program so, again, through the mission I applied and was successful. I live at home, I have three kids of my own and I am a single parent.

Mr Barcham—I wish to make a brief comment. Keri Blacker may not be aware, but Jill would know, that both Mark Rose and Rebecca are also part of the CDEP, so those two placements were organised in the tripartite arrangements.

CHAIR—Thank you for that.

Mr Barcham—Keri would not be aware of that.

CHAIR—Where is CDEP at at the moment?

Mr Barcham—I have four things to tell you about CDEP. You have already heard today the key role that CDEP is playing in Indigenous employment in our area. That key role is based on three principal things. We provide a real workplace—so we are an employer—I report to an Indigenous board and we are incorporated under the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act, which is about to undergo some major changes.

CHAIR—It is.

Mr Barcham—That is okay; we can live with those changes. We are a representative Indigenous organisation. We have on our board people from Eden, Wallaga Lake, up the coast, and also from Bega. As far as I am aware we are the only Indigenous organisation that can represent the whole area. It is a very key part of what we do. The members of our board are also members of the CDEP, so they are not just people from roundabout. It is a requirement of our constitution that members of the board must be involved in the program. So they have a very strong commitment to what they are doing. The quality of the board is without a doubt a key ingredient in the success of the CDEP.

CHAIR—That is encouraging.

Mr Barcham—We provide a real workplace. It is not just training; it is experience. We have lots of people who have been trained to the hilt but have not been able to crack the job that gives them the experience. We do our best to provide a well-structured workplace where people can gain experience and where we can link training directly to specific activities in the workplace. We have sought to provide more on-the-job training in a structured way. That has proved quite difficult, and that is a point we might like to touch on later. So the first thing is a real workplace. The second thing is horses for courses. We are able to provide a very flexible response that can be tailored to the individual people on our program.

From within the CDEP, we run a range of activities that include the running of a firewood operation, where we work closely with home and community care and other organisations to provide low-income earners and Indigenous people with services including garden maintenance. We keep everybody warm during the winter by getting them firewood. We are involved in contracting. We have become an accredited contractor with Bega Valley Shire Council. That has been a big step for us in terms of people being able to comprehend the OH&S requirements of being an accredited contractor and what is needed when you are on a job doing that kind of thing. We incubate small business. We have recently taken over the operations of a failed company. They failed because they could not manage the administrative aspects of a business. There were some staff changes, people came and went, they lost their business mentor and, slowly but surely, it decayed.

They did, however, establish an excellent reputation for their work. We have been able to rebuild that reputation and their reliability by providing them with the administrative services that they needed. We registered the trading name Koori Rivercare Contractors. That group of people have been successful in securing major contracts for rehabilitation work up on the Snowy River. We have just tendered for a 12-month maintenance contract at Yowaka, which is down the coast a little bit further. I was very impressed: the guy that I work most closely with on that put together the quote for the one-year maintenance contract. It is the first time he has done it. He came in and showed it to me and it was terrific. He had done a really good job.

We are also able to act as a labour-hire company. We have people who are working directly with the Bega Valley sewerage project on a direct labour-hire arrangement. We are able to provide basic work experience where people can be on CDEP and just go and do a couple of days a week with an employer to get a feel for it. If it is not working out, they can come back. It just gives people the opportunity to feel out what it is like to be in a real job knowing that they have a fallback position. The other aspect of that is that that fallback position that CDEP provides also gives people the opportunity to obtain casual work without penalty. So if you are on Newstart, for example, and you have a casual job, you suffer a penalty. On CDEP you do not. So we are able to manage people's wages, with their permission and their involvement, in such a way that it is possible to obtain casual work, which is often a gateway for further employment. When that casual work dries up, they can come back to CDEP and be involved in the other activities.

CHAIR—It can lead to legitimate top-up.

Mr Barcham—Yes.

Mrs VALE—You are providing a safety net in real terms.

Mr Barcham—Yes. The other thing—and this is the key aspect that you have heard about so far this morning—is our very important relationship with Mission Australia and the way in which we work with Mission Australia to provide employment placement in mainstream positions. The 13-week and 26-week business is certainly something that we want to look at as well. It is a problem. So it is horses for courses. We are able to take people on, assess them, assess their willingness to work, assess their commitment and have a look at their background and what problems they have in terms of fines, state debt recovery and drivers licence. We have time to spend with those people to really understand their needs and to provide a tailored approach that is receptive to the needs of Indigenous people.

The third thing is the time. CDEP has the capacity to support people for a longer period of time. It used to be, as you alluded to earlier, that CDEP was kind of a dead end. You got there and you stayed on CDEP. Under our current contract with DEWR, we now have two years in which to work with each of our people. Our experience suggests that that is not a bad time frame. We have that time, and we find that that pathway to employment may not be a straight line. It may be that someone will get so far up and then drop back down a couple of rungs. We start again, we wind them up and for every three steps forward, there might be one or two steps back. All of those things take time. It is about developing the trust, developing the relationships and working with people with integrity and clarity. That is what is required when you work with Indigenous people, as well as the ability to respect their own personal situation and be able to work with that on a personal basis.

The other thing in terms of the time and the development of the pathway to employment has four key ingredients. The first is prevocational preparation. Kathleen has alluded to the limited amount of time that is available for prevocational preparation.

CHAIR—This has reminded me: you were talking about that two years ago.

Mr Barcham—The on-the-job experience and the prevocational preparation are one of the important roles that CDEP plays in providing a real workplace. You have to fill in your time sheet every morning. You have to show up. You have to be part of a team. You have to work together. You have to gain skills. You have to have respect for your supervisor. You work in a real work environment. It provides people with a good context in which to develop those prevocational skills.

The second ingredient is one-on-one remedial. This is an area where there is a complete gap at the moment. We would be engaging in more on-the-job traineeships with people in placements and people on CDEP if we could provide those people with one-on-one remedial support. We find that someone will commence a traineeship, someone who we think has all of the skills to walk through a certificate II or a certificate III level traineeship. Suddenly, we will find that they have a gap. Perhaps they did not even finish primary school. Most of our people have not got past year 9. Partly it has to do with the way in which traineeship and competency based training are structured. I do not think we need to go there today, but that one-on-one remedial is an essential component that is missing. We have a guy up at Wallaga Lake who has the capacity, the skills and the knowledge to walk through a certificate III in conservation and land management. When the workbooks are put in front in him, he freezes up. He needs one-on-one support a couple of hours a week to assist him through that. The way in which we are proposing to deliver

that support at the moment is through an organisation called Indigenous Community Volunteers. We will be putting a project to ICV for one-on-one remedial tuition.

Mrs VALE—Are there any classes for Indigenous adult literacy?

Mr Barcham—We have applied for the Workplace English Language and Literacy program, or WELL, and we hope to run it next year. Again, we picked a program because it operates in the workplace. A tutor from TAFE comes to work in our workplace. We consider that to be a key ingredient.

Mrs VALE—Absolutely—not that alien classroom environment.

Mr Barcham—Putting people in classrooms just will not happen.

Mrs VALE—I understand.

Mr Barcham—The final thing I want to mention is that all of these terrific services and successful programs are delivered at an absolutely bargain basement price. We do all this on \$230,000 a year. Our own activities from CDEP that earn income—which they do—contribute one-third of our operational costs. So we are matching the Commonwealth contribution—apart from wages; but those people would be on Newstart or some other allowance anyway, so we do not count wages—nearly on a dollar-for-dollar basis. So it is a bargain basement program. That said, we deliver this program out of appalling conditions. I work out of a little shoebox. Sometimes we have five people working out of that tiny office. All of our equipment is ageing. All of our trucks are pre-1998. I think there is a serious question about the sustainability of the whole program. CDEP is a new program for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations—having taken that program over from ATSIC—and I think DEWR is still exploring and coming to terms with what CDEP actually does. They are up against it because they are so different. The success of CDEPs is in their flexibility and their ability to service differently in different circumstances. A remote area CDEP is a completely different kettle of fish from our CDEP, which operates in an active employment market.

Mrs VALE—Have you been able to access in Bega one of the Indigenous coordination centres which are supposed to be set up across the nation? It is supposed to be about getting grassroots information back to government about what kinds of resources and needs you have.

CHAIR—You would be aware of the ICCs.

Mr Barcham—Yes. We are fortunate in having a good manager at the Queanbeyan ICC, Helen Board, for whom I have the greatest respect. Our solutions broker, who works through the ICC as well, in close cooperation with DEWR, is also a very professional person—and a Torres Strait Islander, which also helps. That position has started only very recently, so we have been through quite a long hiatus, which has created some problems for our organisation. At the moment, the ICC's time seems to be largely preoccupied with trying to figure out how to rebuild a consultative mechanism. Whilst the ATSIC regional councils may not have been wonderful, they were nevertheless a group which government could access and have dialogue with. The Queanbeyan ICC has been putting an enormous amount of energy into community consultation up and down the coast, trying to figure out how to re-establish a consultative network of some

description. I think Helen's own view would be that she is not able to access enough information about what is actually happening on the ground.

CHAIR—That is a very good statement of your understanding of what is occurring.

Mrs VALE—Your closest ICC is Queanbeyan, is it?

Mr Barcham—Yes.

Mrs VALE—It is not here in Bega?

Mr Barcham—No.

CHAIR—That is normal for Australia geographically. I represent the Pitjantjatjara land. Their closest one is at Port Augusta, so about 1,000 kilometres away. Can I firstly thank you for a very comprehensive presentation. Unfortunately, we are very short of time. What I would like, with just the one question to both of you, is for you to prioritise the most immediate issues. It is all there in *Hansard*, we will go back through that and it really does give us a lot of food for thought. I think you dealt with the issue about how it is a living and alive city and it is on a journey—it is not stalled. If you had a magic wand to wave over the priorities, what would be the one or two things that you would like to see dealt with in the immediate future over the next three to 12 months?

Mr Aldridge—More media marketing for Kooris. I think the Kooris will be put in the mainstream eventually. We have to be prepared for the mainstream. We cannot be thrown in. We will drown if we are not fully prepared and trained.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Barcham—I can put this very simply: money.

CHAIR—But let us just go a little bit further. How much money? I have heard about the equivalent and I understand that and the resources. As I understand the policy position, it is that there will be no less expenditure than what has been expended. We were talking about what we call 'shared responsibility agreements' and that type of thing. You might even think about trying to see how an SRA applies in your situation and whether it does. If it is money, give me a priority, a clue—

Mr Barcham—Sure. I can be very clear about that.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Barcham—Historically, under ATSIC, CDEP became responsible for funding supervision. So we operate in three areas—Eden, Bega and Wallaga Lake—and we have a works yard at each one of those areas. So we operate three works yards 160 kilometres apart. We are very reliant on the Indigenous supervisors that operate each of those works yards. Each of those areas operates with a degree of autonomy. I am not the boss; I am the coordinator. I keep the whole show on the road, but I rely on our Indigenous supervisors and leading hands to make sure

that things are happening on a day-to-day basis and that whomever needs to know what is going on does know.

When DEWR took over the program, there was a requirement put into the terms and conditions that we pay award rates. We believe that that is completely appropriate and have no problem with it. However, the funding which is provided to us for employment funds two days, 15 hours a week, at \$13.68 an hour—\$205 all up. We must generate the income to meet any costs that we bear over and above that. Our most significant wages cost is the cost of supervision, because if we have, say, 17 people working on the crews in Bega, our supervisor works five days a week. The supervisor at Eden works five days a week. That means that we are funding from our own efforts all of the costs of three days plus whatever is required to bring that \$13.68 up to an award rate. We also employ truck drivers and fork-lift operators. Those people also receive award wages. They are paid from our own resources. If we were a Work for the Dole program, the cost of supervision would be funded by the Commonwealth. We are currently in a position where the costs of supervision are such that our organisation may not be sustainable. It is that serious.

CHAIR—That is a very valuable comment, and we will undertake to research that and deal with it. We will go through it with the department. We are indebted to you both. We really appreciate your good quality evidence. Unfortunately, we need to move on. I would love to have gone a little further, but time is going to beat us today.

Mr Barcham—Beyond the job training, staff is a key area to have another look at. How that works and how we integrate with the state training system is a key area.

CHAIR—Yes. Any final quick grab?

Mr Barcham—I want to hammer this because I actually asked Mr Nairn's advice, and he said, 'Feel free to raise this with the committee.' Given that we are in a parliamentary situation, I have not hesitation about doing so. I took over this organisation 18 months ago. At that time it was going to be defunded by DEWR. They said, 'No, we don't want to keep this going.' There had been a failure of administration. We have since corrected all of that and are producing successful best practice outcomes for Indigenous people in our area. We have strong partnerships with other organisations, including Mission Australia. We are building a strong partnership with the local business enterprise centre, and we want to build their expertise in supporting Indigenous small business, which we think is very important as well.

There have been costs associated with rebuilding and repairing this organisation. We are staring down the problem of those costs at the moment. We have managed to convince our solutions broker of the worth of our program. We have managed to convince our DEWR regional manager of the worth of our program. We are meeting all our key performance indicators at present. However, the regional manager and the solutions broker now have to convince the minister's delegate at DEWR of what action needs to be taken with respect to our organisation. We have a well-developed strategic plan for what needs to happen next. We need time to implement that plan. As a consequence of our current financial position, we may not have time to implement that program. Any means or advice you are able to provide for how we could continue to sustain our organisation would be most welcome.

CHAIR—Richard, that was very well put. Thank you very much. I am limited in my capacity, but certainly we will do all that we can. I will discuss it with Mr Nairn as well. I would love to have talked about the incubators, as I think that is a vital part of the future, but today does not allow that. Gentlemen, thank you very much.

[11.53 am]

BRIGGS, Mr Haiden Morris, Employee, Bermagui Plumbing Drainage and Gasfitting

COSGRAVE, Mr Michael Thomas, Proprietor, Bermagui Plumbing Drainage and Gasfitting

CHAIR—Welcome, gentlemen. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Cosgrave—I am a licensed plumber, drainer and gas fitter. I operate a small business: Bermagui Plumbing Drainage and Gasfitting.

Mr Briggs—I have been working with Michael for the last three months as a plumber's assistant.

Mr Cosgrave—I will give a bit of a brief background of myself. I was an indentured apprentice. I started in 1971. Over those years I have gained vast experience in all aspects of the work. Back in those days as an indentured apprentice, it was almost a marriage to your employer, but that is all a thing of the past. Today's world is a far cry from the time when I was an apprentice. I have trained several apprentices who have successfully completed their trade courses. These men are now independent operators. One is a practising plumber and the other has continued on to become an accountant.

The plumber is a multiskilled person who may be called upon to do any number of jobs. It is an essential service, which we can all appreciate. The skill of plumbing covers a vast array of work. We do welding, brazing of metals, plastics and other compounds. It covers airconditioning, steam mechanical services, drainage, sewer, stormwater, gas, fire services and waste water, so it is a big field. I got involved with the local community some 20 years ago when I first arrived in Bermagui. We did a lot of work in the Wallaga Lake village at that time and then I moved on for a while out of Bermagui.

About a year ago the council requested that I come and help out up at the village because they no longer wished to maintain the village—it was the community's problem. That is how I came along. After quite a while of doing the odd bit of work up there, we had a bit of an upgrade with a department for housing and health. When this work was mooted, I had been working previously with local labour supplied to me. I insisted I did not bring labour out to the village, that I should use the local labour source that was there. That worked well for a while. Working closely with Mission and Richard, from the CDEP, I discussed my intention—I have always had this idea—to try and get a Koori, or as many as possible, into the skill of plumbing to hopefully complete their training so they then could go out into the workplace. They could train other Kooris. They could go out to other communities. It is an essential service which basically every community needs. It would be a highly valued skill if we could get through the whole process. It is not easy; somebody related to me that it is a bit like nailing jelly to the wall, and it is because it is a completely different playing field. Everybody has to be positive because we hit a lot of negativity. A lot of people I talk to tell me I am wasting my time, that the whole thing is a waste

of time, and that the Kooris cannot do it, that they somehow lack the ability. I do not believe that.

I will just wrap up with a couple more points I wanted to make. It has been difficult for me because I have had to change my whole operation as well, but it is something I have welcomed and embraced. I believe that we can do what we are doing. I believe in the talents and abilities of these men. I also believe in their intent. As I put it to Richard in the beginning, it is a three-part play. We need the trainer, we need the trainee and we need the work, the opportunity. We have been going along for three months now, and we are at a crossroad where we need to consider where we go from here. I would like to think that we could get some formal TAFE training and get Haiden and Mervyn apprenticed into the school of plumbing. We need to formalise all of this.

We have the standard troubles of transport, because neither Haiden nor Mervyn has a licence or a vehicle. Therefore, my day starts with the drive out to Wallaga Lake to collect them, and I drop them off. I supply lunch. These are things you have to go with. It is different and does not make it easy. In fact I myself am struggling but I am just so positive, forever the optimist. I will go with these men until I run out of breath, but it is up to them.

CHAIR—That is fantastic, Michael. But it is like nailing jelly to the wall and mustering cats. That is your personal commitment and, as you said, you believe in them. This is a difficult question. What are one or two things that would be most likely to make it slightly less difficult from your perspective and for your potential apprenticeships?

Mr Cosgrave—One of the biggest problems for me is getting the work, because I have to go and tender for the work. You go through the whole process and you do not even get a phone call back. You can do that time and time again. The job you win is the job you made the mistake on, so you are losing from the word go because it is the job you should not have won. I am struggling to keep the work flow up to them because, as a single operator, a one-man band—I had a bad experience with a previous apprentice and, at that time, I swore off them. It was my involvement back with the community and with the men themselves, not just Haiden and Mervyn but all the other men who worked with me—you could see what a good feeling they had just being there and doing something.

CHAIR—Yes, it makes a difference.

Mr Cosgrave—If I had a steady work flow coming in that I did not have to work so hard to find, if I were salaried or something like that, it would be a different world for me. But, as an independent contractor, trying to keep the lights on, the phone going and petrol in the truck is my day-to-day battle, as with every other small business operator. I have lost a lot of opportunities because I have not been able to run them down, mainly because I just do not have the resources and things like that. But, in saying that, that should not stop us in time. It should be a profitable business. It has always been tough in Bermagui, and the more that people move to the coast the tougher it gets in a trade like mine, a service industry. There are now four or five plumbers advertising in the one newspaper where once there was one.

I have been thinking about work creation jobs and putting things in place. I have a couple of things in place for next year, but which are yet unresolved. I would really like to see us put the

men into TAFE, and we need to talk with TAFE about how we would go about it. This is one thing that Richard and Mission Australia are talking about it: how we can customise the school of plumbing training and whether we get an annexe down here, because there is no annexe and no school of plumbing on this part of the coast. The nearest school of plumbing is in either Goulburn or Wollongong, and that is for first-year plumbing skills. But, again, there is a fair bit of money in setting up a decent workshop for men to be trained in. I was once a trainee TAFE teacher many years ago, but I moved back into the trade after a short time.

CHAIR—I am getting a picture of how tough it is. Your commitment is very strong. Haiden, can you comment? How important is this to you? How do you see it? Is it going all right?

Mr Briggs—I enjoy plumbing. I would not mind getting an apprenticeship out of it. But all aspects of media are another hobby of mine. Plumbing and media are things to fall back on. It is no worries. It is more like a daytime job. Media is my hobby.

Mrs VALE—Michael, do you employ Haiden and Mervyn or have they come to you under the CDEP?

Mr Cosgrave—I am a host employer. It is a combination of CDEP two days a week and Mission the other two days a week. We have a four-day week—up to 35 hours.

Mrs VALE—What you are looking for is a system whereby the men that you have—Haiden and Mervyn—could get an apprenticeship by working with you. Is that the idea?

Mr Cosgrave—Yes.

Mrs VALE—They are doing a traineeship course now—is that right?

Mr Cosgrave—As an introduction, yes. They are down as plumbers assistants, because it was too late in the year to start the apprenticeship, and we needed to go through a trial period anyway.

Mrs VALE—It is part of the tech program in New South Wales, isn't it, that there have to be so many attendance days at an appropriate place? Does that have to be done weekly or is it possible to do it in blocks?

Mr Cosgrave—It is a block release program where they go to Wollongong or Goulburn for a week. That has been a hurdle for us, but they are things that we have to consider. It is up to the men, the funding at CDEP and Mission. The other apprenticeship programs and all of the assistance are now going through Mission. I am not claiming any of the government assistance, because I am a host employer. I pay superannuation and GST on their wages at this point.

Mrs VALE—As a host employer, are there any resources at all that come your way from the government?

Mr Cosgrave—Not that I have been able to track down, no.

Mrs VALE—So the government is really looking at people with skills in a trade, like you have, and the goodness of your heart to do it. You do not get any reimbursement in any way?

Mr Cosgrave—I do have an application form somewhere to put in for assistance for some administration costs, but that has not gone through yet. I was waiting until the end. We are at the point now where the men have just come off the first three-month contract, so that has to be renegotiated for next week.

Mrs VALE—So it is a three-month period of time that you are doing, is it, Haiden?

Mr Briggs—Yes.

Mr Cosgrave—Like I said earlier, we are at the crossroads and need to make the decisions with Mission Australia, CDEP, Haiden and Mervyn as to next year.

Mrs VALE—Would you like to see a system whereby the government, through an organisation like Mission Australia, employed people like you or gave you some remuneration so that you could be there to provide on-the-job training for the trade?

Mr Cosgrave—That is important, because it is not easy to get these skills or impart them to someone else. Hands-on experience is in a lot of cases the only way they are ever going to learn.

Mrs VALE—It is. I was wondering whether Haiden would like to go to a classroom.

Mr Briggs—I am used to it. I have done high school, and straight after high school I went to tertiary level.

Mrs VALE—Have you? You are better educated than I am. You would be right, but some might not have that ability.

Mr Cosgrave—Exactly.

Mrs VALE—To be able to do on-the-job training and have someone like you in any trade, especially as a plumber, bricklayer or carpenter—

Mr Cosgrave—That is right. I know other tradespeople who are getting to about my age and are getting near the end of their working careers at 50—

Mrs VALE—Watch it, Michael. You are on dangerous territory!

Mr Cosgrave—In bricklaying and things like that, a lot of people start to slow down physically, but they have all the skills and talents and no outlet for them.

CHAIR—They are just getting the hang of it!

Mr Cosgrave—Yes—just getting a second wind!

Mrs VALE—This is where you would like to impart something.

Mr Briggs—These are people who could be picked up and trained as trainers. There needs to be an opportunity for old tradespeople to somehow teach.

Mrs VALE—‘Maturing tradespeople’, perhaps. What is your motivation, Michael?

Mr Cosgrave—When I was a teacher, there was a sign on the door that said: ‘Them that can, do; them that can’t, teach.’ That is when I left.

CHAIR—That is a very ungenerous comment.

Mr Cosgrave—I am in the dark as to how we can do it. There are invisible barriers and there are physical barriers. There is still racism out there on the streets. It can affect my work. I do not know. Is that why the phone doesn’t ring? I do not know; I cannot say. I have lost a lot of work and I do not know why; it is just that the phones are quiet. I am not saying that is it. But they are the things that I have to manoeuvre around so that I can provide a place of employment. That is hard. That is why I went back to being a single operator, because it was too hard. I am reaching that too-hard point again. I was looking at whether there was even a work stream from government workers, with tendering and getting work, and going through builders. Now I am not doing builders; I am doing government departments, and you get a three- or four-month delay in an operation in something you are doing—

Mrs VALE—It completely mucks up your accounting.

Mr Cosgrave—You have to cool your heels for four months. I cannot do that. I have to run out and find something else to do until that other job comes on tap. If there was a work stream, an opportunity—even with manufacturing, with a big contract somewhere—we could set up a workshop and get the men to manufacture components like prefabbing work for multistorey units. That can happen. They are the types of things that may work. But, as a day-to-day telephone emergency plumber, it is difficult to get through the first two years. Then they have the skills and they can go anywhere. Because they have those skills, they are in demand.

CHAIR—It is difficult. I am from small business, so I understand what you are saying. I am not going to be able to provide the solution for you in the next little while, unfortunately. I need to draw these proceedings to a conclusion. Gentlemen, is there anything that you would like to add at the end to conclude?

Mr Cosgrave—Congratulations and thank you for coming down here and listening to everybody. Well done to Mission Australia for getting you here, and compliments to Richard of the CDEP. He puts in a power of work. Haiden and I would love to see you in a year’s time and go through this first year with you.

CHAIR—All the best to you.

Mrs VALE—Can I make one comment, Michael? Those who do, do; those who have a heart, teach.

[12.14 pm]

HOSKINS, Mr William (Chris), Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement? If you could keep your contribution to within a couple of minutes that would be good, and then we will go from there.

Mr Hoskins—I come from Wallaga Lake and am now living in Bega. I have got a couple of kids and a partner. I started off on the CDEP. I was on there for about three years and basically just mowed lawns and chopped wood. I did not see a lot at all in that. One day they had a meeting over at Umbarra, which is just across the lake. They said: ‘We’ve got some employment coming up. All you have to do is go and ask them and sign up.’ So I hopped straight up and walked over to them and said, ‘Look, mate, I need a job.’ I started there and built one big community hall and Umbarra cultural centre, which is very well known. After completing the two halls, I then applied to become a tour guide. I was a tour guide for about four years, which was really good. I got to meet a lot of international people and spread our culture. It was very good.

After that I met my partner, moved to Bega, got back on CDEP for a while and did not do much. Kathleen Boyne worked up at Umbarra with me, and as soon as I found out she was down here, I walked into Mission employment and we got talking. She knew how committed I was, coming from Wallaga Lake and working up there. She helped me to get in with the RTA. We built all of Yellow Pinch, down the new highway, and all that sort of stuff. That was pretty good. That was as a casual—it was pretty hard to become a full-time RTA worker at that time. After that I came back to Mission employment to these guys, and they got me into another job with Caddey, Searl and Jarman, which is a private enterprise, a surveyors company. I have been there for two years full time and going strong. That is about it.

Mrs VALE—What do you do there, Chris?

Mr Hoskins—I am a surveyor’s field hand. We do subdivisions and—

Mrs VALE—That is surveying.

CHAIR—That is a great story of perseverance, and now you are settled and well under way. Congratulations.

Mrs VALE—Is there any training involved in that, Chris? Do you have to do any tech courses or any training at all?

Mr Hoskins—No, you just go. I just went and applied for the job. They asked me when I could start and I said, ‘Straightaway.’

Mrs VALE—Are you picking up anything about surveying by doing the job?

Mr Hoskins—They have got me on a theodolite every now and again.

CHAIR—You know what Mr Nairn’s previous profession was, I suppose.

Mr Hoskins—Yes. Mike Collins told me, actually.

CHAIR—That is great. Thanks for that. It is much appreciated.

Mrs VALE—Good on you. Thanks for coming and talking to us.

[12.19 pm]

CATTANACH, Mr Rob, Human Resources Manager, Bega Valley Shire Council

BOYNE, Mrs Kathleen, Service Manager, Mission Australia Employment Initiatives

KELLY, Ms Yuin, Caretaker, Trainee, Tour Guide and Retail, Umbarra Cultural Centre

CHAIR—Welcome. You have seen the drill—away you go.

Ms Kelly—I am originally from Wallaga Lake. I just wanted to say thank you for attending and taking time to come here and hear the stories of my people and of those who are well and truly behind us.

I will mention Mission Australia. Kathleen Boyne has been a part of Umbarra and our community for over 10 years, maybe closer to 20. Today she is still here. I would like to extend my thanks to Kathleen Boyne and Mission Australia for their support for so long and for still being here, and also to Richard from the CDEP. Without the two it would be a lot harder for me. I have been on the CDEP for many years and I have taken on a lot of traineeships through Mission Australia and the CDEP. They are like buffers. They are the ones that we can reach out to and grab the hands of just to help us along with the steps we need to take.

CHAIR—What is happening at the moment?

Ms Kelly—I am a CDEP participant. I do two days with the CDEP.

CHAIR—What have you done this week, for example?

Ms Kelly—I am a trainee coordinator for the community technology centre at Wallaga Lake. I am on a two-year traineeship.

CHAIR—Where is Wallaga Lake?

Ms Kelly—It is 65 kilometres north of Bega. It is a beautiful place. I hope you come and visit.

CHAIR—It is a beautiful part of the world.

Ms Kelly—I am a tour guide and I do tours at Umbarra. I hope you can all come and visit one day. We will remember you. I just wanted to say thank you. I am happy and doing well with Mission Australia and the CDEP.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mr Cattanach—I just wanted to see if you wanted a copy of a CD we did at a presentation recently in Sydney on the Aboriginal employment program on the problems and the positives.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Boyne—We would just like to say thank you very much for coming down here. What you are doing is very important. I was talking with Gary Nairn earlier and he was saying that this evidence then goes forward and it could, down the track, become an act of parliament or go into legislation. It is really important that you are doing what you are doing because you are talking with people at the grassroots level and hearing how it really is. We are really grateful that you are doing this for all of us because, at the end of the day, you are trying to help us by doing what you are doing. So we appreciate you coming down and being on a committee in your role and taking the time to do that. Thank you.

CHAIR—It has been a great pleasure for us. Mrs Vale and I have thoroughly enjoyed our time. It is a beautiful part of the world. We are just delighted to be with you. I will conclude by giving you an idea of what we will do. This becomes part of the total body of evidence that we are taking around Australia. As Mrs Vale said, our last public hearing, except for evidence in Canberra, was at Kalgoorlie a little while ago. I have probably left somebody out but that diversity is the reason I am mentioning Kalgoorlie.

We have already set the structure of the report for the committee to consider. We have 10 members. We are down to two today. Mr Snowdon had a sick family member, but we nearly had three. The secretariat staff will start to write the report in February with general discussion with us. We would hope to have a report by April-May next year and into the parliament before the end of the winter parliamentary sittings. That is when it would go forward. It becomes part of the parliament and goes to the responsible minister for the government to consider. That is about it. About the end of next year we would start to see what impact it can have on the parliament.

Mrs Boyne—What may come out of it.

CHAIR—That is right. Ladies and gentlemen, once again, thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Vale**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Subcommittee adjourned at 12.25 pm