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SENATE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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

WEDNESDAY, 14 APRIL 2010

CAIRNS

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SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON

REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Wednesday, 14 April 2010

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

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Boyce, Crossin, Furner, Moore, Scullion and Siewert

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

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

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

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

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Committee met at 8.33 am

SOVENYHAZI, Ms Tammy, Registrar, Family Responsibilities Commission

CHAIR (Senator Scullion)—The Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities is holding this meeting as part of its inquiry into regional and remote Indigenous communities. On behalf of this committee I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay our respect to the elders, past and present.

Before the committee begins I want to make it clear to all participants that the meeting is being recorded. Transcripts of the recorded meeting will be produced and the transcript may be made public. Participants recorded at and transcribed from this meeting are protected by parliamentary privilege. Any act that disadvantages you as a result of the evidence given to this committee is treated as a breach of privilege. However, I also remind you that giving false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute a contempt of the Senate. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. If you would like to make an opening statement I will then pass over to the committee members for questions.

Ms Sovenyhazi—Good morning. Firstly I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to the elders, both past and present. I would also like to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the four communities in which we operate on a daily basis, Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. I bring with me greetings from the local commissioners of our four communities and from Commissioner Glasgow. He also asked me to pass on his apologies for not being able to attend in person. He is currently sitting in Aurukun on circuit.

We have been operating for a period of 21 months, a little over a year and a half. It has been a very interesting and challenging year and a half for the commission. We are the first of our kind in the world; we certainly know of nothing that has operated which is of our kind. Probably the most rewarding aspect of what we do is work with the community members on the ground and with our local commissioners, who are local elders or respected people who have been appointed by the Governor in Council of the state of Queensland. Those commissioners are critical to the success of the commission and they are the people who make the work that we do very valuable and very rewarding.

CHAIR—One of the areas that the committee has been very concerned with is the very high level of nonattendance throughout the age groups throughout the school year. I notice one of the responsibilities of the Family Responsibilities Commission is a reporting system that comes from the schools. After a period of, I think, three days, any notification within that area is a compulsory notification to you. First of all could you tell me about the levels of compliance from the school. That is something else the schools have to do, and they are all pretty stressed. How are they coping with that and what actually happens? What is the trickle of response from that? What are the levels and tiers of reaction?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Under the act we have four notifying agencies, and one of those is the schools in the four communities. The way it works is that when a child has failed to attend school for either three full or part days of a school term we are notified by the school. Effectively

what we get is a spreadsheet of data from the department of education that advises us of the children who have not attended school in that time frame.

We have had some fairly pleasing results from the commencement of our time, but the FRC certainly does not take credit for that. That is definitely in the hands of the department of education and the school attendance case managers, who work with the children and the families. To give you some very broad statistics, we had a starting point for the attendance rate in Aurukun of 37.9 per cent at the end of term 2 2008, and to the end of 31 December 2009 it was sitting at 61.6 per cent. So there has been an increase of 23.7 per cent in Aurukun, which is extremely pleasing. Regarding the other schools, Hope Vale and Coen have always had very good attendance. We need to remember that Coen is a very, very small school of only 47 students, so where one or two students, or even four or five students, might be away for a particular term and not meeting the obligations the reductions in the statistics might be alarming but, if you take into consideration the size of the school, it is not actually as bad as it might seem. Hope Vale, for argument's sake, had a starting point of 87.6 per cent in 2008 and is currently sitting at 84.1 per cent, so there has been a slight reduction of 3.5 per cent. Mossman Gorge had a starting point of 60.9 per cent and is currently sitting at 79.5 per cent, which is again a very pleasing increase. Coen, which is currently sitting at 90.4 per cent, had a starting point of 96.8 per cent. Again there has been a slight reduction, but given the small size of the school I do not think it is as alarming as it sounds.

Effectively what happens is that we get the school attendance notice for the children. We certainly did not start this way but we have ended up, given experience and time, taking the school attendance notifications to the communities and sitting down and meeting with our local commissioners, who advise us, based on their local knowledge of the families and the schools, as to how significant the issues with a particular child or a particular family are. In addition to that, we work with the school and the attendance case managers, who also give us local intelligence on the school.

The critical part of the school attendance is the work that the attendance case managers do. They will sit in the school in the morning, find out what children have not attended school, based on the roll, and then immediately go to the houses of those families and either get the children to school or find out why the children have not attended school. An enormous amount of work happens on the ground every single day to try and get these children to school. As I mentioned earlier, I think the increases to date are very, very pleasing. There is still quite a long way to go but I think, given the time that we have had, that the school, the attendance case managers and the commission should be fairly proud of where we have gotten to so far.

CHAIR—That 30 per cent increase clearly comes from a demographic that quite possibly has not been attending for perhaps a number of years. So a 30 per cent increase in those sorts of students is going to put a huge weight on the education system. If they go straight into other classes and they have not been to school for a couple of years, they will be disruptive, not because of bad behaviour but simply because they are not as academically skilled. Are you working with the department of education to ensure that gap in funding or human resources is filled? Is there any special curriculum development? What is happening in that area, or are you just getting them to school?

Ms Sovenyhazi—I guess our mandate under that act is to get the children to school and to change the behaviour of parents so that they do get their children to school. We certainly do work closely with the education department. The content of our conferences are privileged and confidential. We seek permission from the parents to discuss any particular concerns that they have with the principal or the teachers of the school. Issues of behaviour, bullying and teasing are reasons that come up quite often. As you mentioned, you sometimes have children who have not been to school regularly or every day for quite significant periods of time. It is a huge challenge for the education system to then provide the support that the schools need to have these children back in school. As I mentioned though, our mandate is to get them to school and then talk to the education department about what our experiences are in dealing with the families. Then it is for the education department to put the resources into the schools. We do not have a direct link or a direct mandate to do that, but we certainly explain to the education department, where we can, what issues are being highlighted in the conferences.

CHAIR—You talked about the percentages and the increase. On the process, you have now had several breaches. What actually happens next?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Where the commissioners decide in conjunction with the school principal and the attendance case managers that this family needs some form of intervention, we will issue a notice to attend conference to the family. It can be just to the parents—providing that they are welfare recipients and they live in the community of course, because that is our jurisdiction—but given the complexity of the family arrangements in the communities we work in, you may have two or three families living in the one house. If we have two separate lots of parents, we will bring the whole lot in together. If we receive a school attendance notice for a child of one family and a child of another family but they are living together, we will bring both sets of parents in. Quite often, some of what we hear back, particularly from the fathers, is that the mother or the carer of the child is receiving the family payments for the child so they do not believe it is their responsibility to get the children to school. Of course, we do not agree with that and we will bring that person in and explain the fact that, if they are a carer of the child or a biological parent of the child, they have a responsibility whether they are getting the payments or not. So we bring in whoever the appropriate people are—parents, carers and other people living in the house.

The commissioners are quite firm and frank with the attendees at the conferences and they explain to them that for the children to have any sort of future life they need to get the education and, if they do not get the children to school, they are not going to get the education. In Aurukun in particular, most of our conferences are held in Wik, which is of huge benefit to the community members because most of them do not have English as a first language. The commissioners will converse with them in Wik and then translate for Commissioner Glasgow and a decision will be made. Effectively they ask the parents: ‘Why is it that you are not getting your children to school? Is there a valid reason? Is there not a valid reason?’ Some of the reasons we might hear are that in Aurukun in particular they might live several kilometres from the school and, particularly in the wet season, it is difficult to get a child to school if they are having to walk that far. That might be one of the reasons. The commissioners will turn around and explain that: ‘It might seem like a valid reason but it is not good enough and you need to get your children to school. The options that you have are to work very closely with the attendance case manager and they will help you through all the challenges that you have. If you fail to comply with what you are asking you to do, we will conditionally income manage your welfare payments.’ We use welfare quarantining as a last resort. We certainly do not use it as a first line of attack.

Most of the parents will give their best and try. Some of the parents we see come back time and time again and it is just a matter of constantly working with them and finding out what the issues are that are preventing the children from going to school. We might find out that the parents have a drug or alcohol issue or someone else in the house does, so it might mean a referral for that particular person off to the Wellbeing Centre to deal with those issues because it is affecting the ability of the parents to get the child to school. We make referrals to whatever services seem appropriate in the circumstances. We will try and get the parent to enter into an agreement and, if they agree to do those things that the commissioners have said, that is great and we will get them to sign an agreement. If they do not, the commissioners may make an order and then they will institute a decision. From there we monitor the parents' compliance with the case plan over the 12-month period. We will often bring them back in for a review where we might be receiving information back from the community support services saying that they are not complying or they are not attending. We will either ask them to show cause if it seems to be a serious breach or alternatively, if it just seems like they need just a little bit more assistance or a little bit more reassurance, then we will just bring them back in for a case review.

Senator CROSSIN—Thanks for your evidence and for being here today, Ms Sovenyhazi. My question to you is: what is the obligation on the education department to interact with what the family commission is doing? For example, with the incident you gave us about people living a couple of kilometres away, is there a bus supplied by the school that someone can then use to drive out and pick those kids up?

Ms Sovenyhazi—No. This is where it gets a little bit tricky I guess. The broader welfare reform trial is based on people meeting their personal responsibilities and their obligations. It could be argued that it is parents' responsibility regardless to get their child to school. It could also be argued that, given the complexity and the geographics of the particular community, perhaps it should be a community issue to have a bus. In Aurukun at one point in time, the Community Justice Group had a bus operating and then for some reason, which I am not quite sure of, it stopped operating quite some time ago now. So whether it is the council's responsibility to then do that—

Senator CROSSIN—Why is it not? I taught in a remote community school for five years and the mutual obligation was also on the education department. That is just one example. Another example is that a couple of weeks ago I was out bush in the Territory and the principal there had a store of new shoes and thongs which the education department and he have supplied. Quite often in the morning he goes around, knocks on the door and asks: 'Where is Johnny? He is not at school.' It turns out he cannot come to school today because he does not have any shoes or he does not have a clean T-shirt. So the school, or in that instance the principal, says, 'Jump in the car; I have got some shoes for you.' The mutual obligation also comes from the education department. Is that not the way this is structured?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Not necessarily, or certainly not in the ideals of the welfare reform. We have had this conversation with the education department around the possibility of providing a bus. In Hope Vale there is a bus operating that goes from Hope Vale into Cooktown school. That is operated by the justice group and the council. So they have taken on that responsibility. In regard to Aurukun, our particular concern is of course the wet season. If children come to school and they are wet because they have walked, they are sent home because they cannot sit in an air conditioned classroom wet all day.

Senator CROSSIN—So why doesn't the school have a supply of second-hand clothes that they can give the kids to change into?

Ms Sovenyhazi—I cannot answer that. I guess it is potentially a matter of resourcing. In saying that, you have got a number of teachers in those schools who are extremely committed to the children and providing the education. I guess the question is to what extent are they expected to go or need to go to ensure that the kids get to school. That is something that I cannot answer. I do believe that many years ago the school in Aurukun did operate a bus. I understand that it came down to having to employ a bus driver and budgetary issues effectively.

Senator CROSSIN—So does each school you interact with have an Aboriginal community liaison officer or an Aboriginal attendance officer employed by the education department to work with you?

Ms Sovenyhazi—No, not that I am aware of. We do have in place attendance case managers. They are employed by the Cape York Partnerships as part of the broader welfare reform trial.

Senator CROSSIN—So what is the obligation of the department of education in this commission and its objectives?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Their obligation is to report to us where children are not attending school. Certainly under the provisions of our act their mandate is simply to report.

Senator CROSSIN—That is all they have to do? So they do not have to supply support staff for you or provide alternative or different resources for you to work with?

Ms Sovenyhazi—No.

Senator CROSSIN—Does each school have a school council operating?

Ms Sovenyhazi—A school council?

Senator CROSSIN—Like a parent and friends association or school council?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Each has had them operating at some point in time. Cooktown for argument's sake does have one. The issue they have is getting parents to continually attend. It is not something that has operated well in the past.

Senator CROSSIN—Are you telling us there is no proactive methods of actually getting parents to engage with the school?

Ms Sovenyhazi—They try. They certainly do try, but I guess this is where it comes back to the parental responsibility of being engaged in their children's education and having that relationship with the schools. That is where it falls down. In Mossman Gorge for argument's sake the children go to the Mossman town state school, which has a very active P&C. It seems to be easier for the parents to be involved. I do not know why that is, but it seems to be easier and it is fairly active.

Senator CROSSIN—Is there anybody in Queensland looking at why the parental involvement in that school is working and is successful? I am assuming the attendance of children at that school is high as a result of that.

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes. Not that I am aware of. I am not sure if Education are looking at that. The commission are not specifically looking at that. That is outside our mandate. I could not tell you if Education are looking at that.

Senator CROSSIN—I always subscribe to this theory. In Indigenous health we have an extensive program educating parents about the benefit of health outcomes and it is a continuous education program. Is there any such program happening in the education sector in the schools you work with? For example, do parents get invited into the classrooms to understand how children read, why they go to school 200 days a year or any of those sorts of things?

Ms Sovenyhazi—They do, certainly as part of our work with the particular families. If a family brings up bullying, teasing or behavioural problems as an issue, we will work with the school and seek permission for the parent to go into the classroom and sit with their child. That seems to have had benefit with the children behaving themselves a little more and also the parents getting an understanding of how the school environment within the classroom works. I understand there are a significant number of teacher aides who are local Indigenous community members who have been taken through the learning process to become teacher aides. That helps particularly in Aurukun where most of the children speak Wik yet are taught in English.

Senator CROSSIN—Is Aurukun a bilingual school?

Ms Sovenyhazi—No. It is taught in English, and that is a very big challenge.

Senator CROSSIN—Who actually employs the Family Responsibilities Commission? Is it set up as a statutory body in its own right?

Ms Sovenyhazi—We are an independent statutory authority. We are under the umbrella of Minister Desley Boyle under the Department of Communities, although we are an independent statutory authority.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have monthly meetings with education department representatives, for example?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes. For the broader Cape York welfare reform we have an education steering committee that discusses all the issues that have been highlighted by us, the teachers or whomever it might be. I also meet at my level with the regional director of the department of education. We also have a family responsibilities board which is made up of Dr Harmer, the secretary of FaHCSIA; Ken Smith, the Director-General of the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet; and Noel Pearson. That board meets quarterly. We write a quarterly report for them highlighting all the issues.

Senator CROSSIN—Is Centrelink involved in monthly meetings?

Ms Sovenyhazi—At our level when we are talking about our specific income managed clients. Again at the Cairns regional level we meet regularly to talk about how those particular clients are going and what life might be for them after the income management order itself expires, which usually goes for 12 months. And of course we have ad hoc meetings as we need.

Senator CROSSIN—When you raise in meetings with the education department that you believe it would be really useful if a bus were funded to get the kids to school, what is the response you get?

Ms Sovenyhazi—To date the response has been that it is not within their budgetary allowances to do that. They would have to engage a bus driver which then has blue card issues, workplace health and safety issues and everything else that goes with that. That is the response we have received.

Senator CROSSIN—That is a reason not to do it; not a reason to do it though, isn't it, if you want to improve the attendance of children at school? Where families have been income managed is the attendance improving or has it not made a difference?

Ms Sovenyhazi—We have not done any studies directly relating to income managed parents and their children attending school. We have not drilled down that far as yet. Certainly with our income managed clients, regardless of what has actually brought them to the commission in the first place—it could be any one of the four notification types—there seems to be a general acceptance of the income management regime. We currently have 98 people on income management and we have made a total of 206 orders up until 31 December. Some of those 98 people currently on orders are asking to remain on income management once their 12-month order ceases to exist. We do not actually think that is a good thing. The commission's attitude to that is that within that 12-month time frame people should be learning through the family income management regime as well as with Centrelink's assistance how to manage their funds better.

Because people are seeing the benefit of income management in the sense that they have got savings, they have bought whitegoods and household furniture, the kids have clothes and there is food in the house as they need it, people are getting comfortable with it. It is good in the sense that it is working to the degree that people are saving money and getting clothes for their kids and food but the commission in general does not think it is valuable for people to constantly stay on income management, because they are not learning.

Senator CROSSIN—You do not have any statistics that could tell us that the attendance at school of children of parents who have been income managed has improved during that time?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Not specifically, no.

Senator CROSSIN—So you do not exactly know if there is a direct positive outcome between the two?

Ms Sovenyhazi—We could do it. It is just not something that we have done.

Senator ADAMS—I find it very strange to think that you have that program going—and income management obviously is a big part of your area—and there is no evaluation or follow-up of that issue. You are trying to get kids to school and you are doing all of the briefings, consultation and everything to achieve something yet you are not taking any statistics. Surely your local area people who are working there must be able to feed back to you something that you could use as a benchmark at least.

Ms Sovenyhazi—There are two reasons. One is we are being independently evaluated by KPMG. We expect the first implementation review to be made public at the end of May, so in a month's time. Secondly, because of the intensity of what we do we have not had time to step back and look at the statistics. We have sat nearly 1,700 conferences to date in a period of 18 months. We are in the communities from Tuesday to Thursday every single week and visiting the communities fortnightly except for Coen, where we sit monthly. It is not that we do not have the statistics—we do have the statistics; we just have not drilled down that far to see whether the attendance of this specific cohort of children has increased. FaHCSIA have done a number of reviews of our files and statistics as well. I am sure they have the information. It is just not something we have specifically concentrated on at this point in time because we are being independently evaluated.

Senator ADAMS—Are KMPG looking at this issue? Surely they are, at least as far as evaluation. Then you would have to supply those statistics to them.

Ms Sovenyhazi—We have supplied them with all the statistics that they have asked for. They have come in to have a look at our files and drilled down on particular files. It is not a specific stat where we say the attendance of Child A at this point in time was 60 per cent and now is 90 per cent. We have not actually done that. We have provided all the statistics that were requested.

CHAIR—The parties who are doing the auditing will provide that?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes.

Senator Adams—Another question on your voluntary income management: are you getting many people wanting to come onto that scheme?

Ms Sovenyhazi—We have a lot of inquiries. To date we have about six people who have requested voluntary income management. We most recently had an issue that has been resolved by the Commonwealth, in which people on aged and carers pensions are probably the most at risk due to what is commonly called 'humbugging' by the bureaucrats. Indigenous people do not like the word 'humbugging', so we try as best we can not to use it, but effectively it is where a family member or somebody else puts upon them to provide money. Some of that is a cultural obligation for the family members to do that. In saying that, it is taking the money away from that particular person. Our main concern is elderly people who are living in homes where children, grandchildren or whatever come in to try to get their money from them, so we worked with the Commonwealth—FaHCSIA in particular—and the amendments to the Social Security Administration Act will receive royal assent some time in April. That will allow voluntary or even conditional income management of aged and carers pensions. Previously, the Commonwealth government brought across the regime that works in Western Australia. That has been applied to Queensland until such time as the legislation receives royal assent in April.

We worked quite closely with the Commonwealth on that. We have also worked very closely with Centrelink. Centrelink now wants, once the legislation is changed, to see aged care homes and those sorts of places to see whether people are interested in the voluntary income management. Once the legislation is amended, if people come in to us we can put them on a voluntary agreement, but until such time as that we cannot. We have to refer them off to Centrelink. When that happens we will certainly do that. That is our biggest concern.

Some people are a little bit worried about it in the sense that they do not want their family members to know that they have voluntarily sought their income to be managed. That being the case, we advise our clients or people interested, 'If you wish to say that the commission has made this order, you can say that.' That will protect them from any sort of retaliation from their own family members. In saying that, we probably have quit small numbers at the moment—around six or seven people—on voluntary income management.

Senator SIEWERT—A couple of weeks ago I was at the ACOS conference and was there when the commission reported. I found the information that was presented really useful and fascinating. One of the things that struck me was the effort that goes into case management that how income management is the last resort. There is an awful lot of effort that goes into case management: talking to people, giving them options et cetera. The thing there is that it is resource intensive. Could you tell us what the funding base of the commission is? Do you have an estimate of the funding for each case that you deal with?

Ms Sovenyhazi—We currently have on board a principle case manager as well as a position that we call a business support officer. Those two people are the two who do specifically the direct case management with the community support services. From the services that we refer we get monthly progress reports. That is very challenging in that that in itself is a huge resource for the community support service to undertake, so we have encountered challenges in that respect. We have worked constantly with the service providers, as you know from that conference.

So we have the two particular positions. We have just recently received approval for funding for another business support officer. We have not commenced yet, but what we intend to do is allocate two communities to each of those business support officers. They will spend quite a significant amount of time in the communities, working specifically with the clients. The challenge that we have is that a community support service may say to us that the client has failed to attend or that they are not engaging. Not so much now but earlier on we would then bring the client back in and say: 'You're not attending. We have to show cause. We do not want to income manage you, but why is it that you're not engaging or not complying?' The client might have turned around and said, 'I showed up on this particular day and the doors were closed, and then I came back the next day and they told me that they had too many clients today and to come back tomorrow.' Human nature being what it is, people eventually stop coming. That was a significant issue for us, so we will now have these two particular people and the case manager as well spending significant amounts of time in the communities, working with both the clients and the community support services.

We receive a lot of our local intelligence from the local commissioners. Obviously, the advice they give us is invaluable, but we also speak directly to the schools, to the councillors, and to the local Indigenous workers as well to see what their opinions of the people are. Under our act we

are allowed to use hearsay evidence as opposed to strict evidence. We collate all that together, and it is hugely resourceful. As I said, at the moment I have to full-time staff. I will have three. I also have two support administrative staff to back up the work that they need to do.

Senator SIEWERT—And what is the funding for the commission?

Ms Sovenyhazi—It is $12.9 million over the 3½ years.

Senator SIEWERT—What is the population base that you cover? How many people have you worked with to date?

Ms Sovenyhazi—The population base is approximately 3,000 across the four communities. We currently have a caseload of 517 clients.

Senator SIEWERT—Of those, 98 are income managed?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes. Some of those case managed clients might be on case plans but be currently incarcerated, so while we are not working directly with that person, because they are in prison, we still have to maintain the case management, check with the prisons, deal with them when they come out and work with the police because they will meet them at the airport. You know what I mean. Regardless of whether the person is in the community, out of the community or in prison, it still takes the same level of case management.

Senator SIEWERT—You said you were adding more people to the resource base. In other words, to be successful—and we are still not sure of education outcomes and things—the point is that it takes a lot of resources to get the positive outcomes.

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes, it does. I have 15 staff. We have a local coordinator based in each of the four communities and I am about to engage three administrative staff—one each in Aurukun, Hope Vale and Coen—to support those local coordinators. My Coen local coordinator position is vacant at the moment because staff have moved on to other things. Operating the offices remotely is hugely challenging in itself. It was in our mindset that by this stage we would have started to see a drop in the notifications that we received from the trigger agencies. That has not happened as of yet. Our biggest concern is that the 3 ½ years that we have to operate is certainly not long enough to see any real change in these communities. We have a lot of positives: talking to particular clients on the ground, you can see how their lives have changed. Most of that is qualitative; it is very difficult to put a statistic on that. But we still have a hell of a long way to go, and we now only have a little over a year and a half to operate. Our concern is that we are not going to meet the objectives of the act by 1 January.

Senator SIEWERT—You have said you work closely with the education department and the aim is to get kids into school, but obviously part of that is giving parenting support. In WA we have family support projects that are aimed at helping parents. Are you getting access to additional resources from other services for those sorts of support services as well

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes. In Aurukun specifically, there is a parenting program already underway and we have used that with relation to failure-to-thrive babies, the families of which we have been working with child safety in the clinics. At the beginning of this year or late last year, we

had six babies who were quite critical, so we worked very closely with health, the parenting program and child safety services on that. In the other three communities they are due to commence the parenting programs—the PPP program—on 1 May. So obviously once that program starts operating we will start referring parents. That seems to be one of the critical issues to us: parents not only getting the kids to schools but being taught the—

Senator SIEWERT—All the stuff that goes with it.

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I will finish now; I am getting the eye. It sounds as if you are only just starting to get some of those services on board.

Ms Sovenyhazi—Yes, correct.

Senator SIEWERT—That also relates to the fact that you only have 18 months.

Ms Sovenyhazi—It is the time factor.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator FURNER—Do you face the issue, then, of getting people off family income management beyond the 12 months? What sorts of initiatives or resources are you providing those families with in educating them about means of budgeting and the sorts of things to make sure they are able to do that?

Ms Sovenyhazi—What we normally do when we put them on a conditional income management order is to also make a referral to the Family Income Management services. The intent there is that the person is income managed for the 12-month period but within that 12 months they work with FIM—Family Income Management—to learn budgeting skills, to put a budget together. FIM actually help them with Centrelink—Centrepay arrangements and all those sorts of things—and they teach them how to do internet banking and how to budget for next week's food, clothing and all that sort of stuff. That is what we do: we refer them to Family Income Management. It is an expectation of ours that they will comply with that referral and then learn how to budget. As I have said, what we are finding is that people are very comfortable on the conditional income management and not necessarily wanting to come off it.

Senator FURNER—Out of the four communities that you cover, how many are dry or are they all dry?

Ms Sovenyhazi—Aurukun is the only dry community at the moment. It is not a dry community per se, it is simply that the Three Rivers Tavern shut down in November 2008. At that point in time you were only able to consume alcohol within the confines of that particular tavern. Since the changes to the licensing arrangements and since the tavern has been shut down the community is effectively dry.

Coen is not a dry community. In fact it has a hotel, because it is a town; it is not a discrete Indigenous community. Both Mossman Gorge and Hope Vale have alcohol management plans in place.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. There may be further questions from the committee and they will be provided to you through the secretariat on notice. If there are vital pieces of information you think you have omitted which you have an opportunity to provide to us we would be delighted to receive them through the secretariat. Thank you very much for your evidence today.

Ms Sovenyhazi—I would just like to tell you: I did provide our annual report, our latest quarterly report as well as a report with the updated statistics. So if any questions come out of that please feel free to contact me.

CHAIR—We only received them this morning, so I suspect there will be.

Ms Sovenyhazi—I will give you time to read them.

[9.13 am]

MALTHOUSE, Ms Debra, Chief Executive Officer, Wuchopperen Health Service Ltd

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

Ms Malthouse—Wuchopperen Health Service is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation based in Cairns. We have been in operation since 1981 in terms of service delivery. Our client base includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the Cairns region down as far as Innisfail and up as far as Mossman Gorge, and we do some outreach work out as far as Croydon, Dimbulah and Chilligoe.

We provide a comprehensive healthcare service in relation to primary health care as well as social and emotional wellbeing services to families dealing with social and emotional problems which most mainstream organisations call mental health. We tend not to use that term because it has implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to being a bad thing as opposed to the fact that sometimes their issues are around dealing with past history, government polices and things to make their lives today a little bit better. So we tend not to use the term ‘mental health’, although I understand that some of the things you guys are looking at are around mental health. If I tend to use ‘emotional wellbeing’ and ‘social health’ that is what I am referring to, and I appreciate your accepting that from my point of view.

I do not have a statement as such other than that, so I am happy to leave it at that if that is okay with you.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I just go to an area that we probably have not explored in this committee—or maybe we have: antenatal and postnatal provision for women? Do you cover the Cape?

Ms Malthouse—No, we do not do the Cape.

Senator CROSSIN—Just the Cairns area?

Ms Malthouse—The Cairns district. We have a site location in Cairns and one in Atherton. Atherton looks at the tablelands and the rural area, and we in Cairns look after this area. We actually do not go to the Cape.

Senator MOORE—Do you still have a relationship with Mt Isa?

Ms Malthouse—Not any more, no.

Senator MOORE—You have ceased that?

Ms Malthouse—Yes. They have their own service now.

Senator MOORE—That is fantastic.

Senator CROSSIN—So your service is more for urban Indigenous?

Ms Malthouse—And rural in the sense that we do Atherton and the tablelands.

Senator CROSSIN—I was going to ask about remote birthing services, but you would not do that sort of thing?

Ms Malthouse—We do not do anything with that, no. The only time we might have any relationship with women having babies, prenatal and postnatal, is if they actually relocate to Cairns to have their babies. They do sometimes come to Cairns to stay at Mookai Rosie Bi-Bayan, which is the Aboriginal organisation that provides accommodation and support. If they come there they often use our services, seeing our doctors and our nurses.

Senator CROSSIN—Okay. What sort of provision for drug and alcohol rehabilitation is there in this area that your people can access?

Ms Malthouse—We provide a substance misuse program through our social and emotional wellbeing programs. They are by way of counselling and support for individuals and families who have substance misuse problems. We also do some work under the mental health rural and remote program which is funded by OATSIH in the upper tablelands area, out to Croydon and Chillagoe.

Senator CROSSIN—The Queensland government have a fairly good proactive drug and alcohol rehabilitation support service, do they?

Ms Malthouse—We do work with the ATODS. Our substances program actually works with the ATODS workers in Cairns. At the moment we are also working closely with the Gold Coast Drug Council, which has the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rehabilitation service here in Cairns. The previous one actually closed down and the Commonwealth government funded the Gold Coast Drug Council for it. We are working with them to establish links with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community because they are a mainstream organisation which is based on the Gold Coast.

Senator CROSSIN—Thank you. I should probably let Senator Adams ask more questions than me because she has the health background.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you for your brief opening statement. For dialysis care, do you have anything to do with any of the remote people that have to come to Cairns to have their treatment?

Ms Malthouse—No. We do have some clients in the upper tablelands who need to get dialysis, but generally our support is transport. We do not usually do the Cape, but if we have a client in the Atherton Tablelands area who needs to go to the Atherton hospital for dialysis

treatment they can organise for us to have our bus pick them up, take them and take them home. Sometimes that is the issue: the transport and getting to the hospitals for the dialysis treatment.

Senator ADAMS—Just on dialysis—it is just the Cairns Base Hospital, is it? Is that where they go, or is there another?

Ms Malthouse—Atherton as well.

Senator ADAMS—Atherton too. And what about for Innisfail and down that way? Do they have a unit?

Ms Malthouse—I do not know. They have an Aboriginal medical service in Innisfail that looks after that area—that is Mamu Health Services.

Senator ADAMS—As far as immunisation programs go—you do all that sort of primary health care?

Ms Malthouse—We provide that through our site in Cairns at Moignard Street and also through our clinic in Atherton.

Senator ADAMS—And what is the take-up with that? Is it fairly successful?

Ms Malthouse—Generally it has been successful. We have difficulty around workforce recruitment, particularly when we have to recruit allied health workers and general practitioners. The difficulty is keeping them because of the amount of money they can get when they are out in private practice.

So we have four FTEs in terms of doctors but only three are permanent, and the rest work part time; they work two days a week. Three fill one position and work two days a week each and, at the other times, they work in their private practice. Our ability to provide the dollars to keep them is quite low, because, while we are commensurate with hourly rates for Queensland Health, we cannot offer the additional packages they can get from Queensland Health and the amount of money they can make in private practice. So in terms of having the doctors on the board, we have the RNs who are endorsed to do immunisation, but we still need to have the doctors available so they can support the RNs and our health workers, and that makes it difficult. We were trying to do some of the work that we need to do around primary health care, particularly comprehensive stuff.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have anything to do with school health?

Ms Malthouse—In Atherton, in particular—Atherton is a smaller community—our clinic runs five days a week. We have one doctor and three health workers and an RN. What they do on a three-monthly basis is to negotiate with the schools, to go and do what they call school screening. Our eye health coordinator goes with them, and our hearing health coordinator from Cairns visits, and they do a whole heap of screening around that. Just recently we have done most of the year 9s at Atherton High School and our hearing health program goes to all the schools when they are invited. So the relationship between the schools, our hearing health and

our eye health coordinators is quite good, and they can link with the schools and organise with the schools about when they need to do some programs around screening the children.

Senator ADAMS—With regard to hearing health, could you give us any idea of the percentage of children who have a hearing disability or a problem?

Ms Malthouse—No, I am sorry. I have been in this job only three months so I do not have all the information that I could provide to you. I quickly tried to pick up some information last night that you might be asking about but, no, I cannot give you that information.

Senator ADAMS—Do you have anything to do with the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme?

Ms Malthouse—No.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it possible for us to ask you some questions and, as long as it does not make too much time, provide us with some feedback?

Ms Malthouse—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I am interested in the hearing health issues around the level of ON in the year 9s you are testing. What is the percentage of hearing problems you are picking up?

Ms Malthouse—I cannot answer that question but I am happy to provide that information to you later, if that is okay.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be great. Another committee with many common members is carrying out an inquiry into hearing health. It is an area in which we are all getting very interested and passionate. Could you tell us where you get your funding from and how much, if it is possible to get that?

Ms Malthouse—We have an annual budget of around $8 million. Approximately $6 million of that comes from the Commonwealth through OATSIH and the other $2 million comes from the state government, primarily the Department of Communities and some from Queensland Health.

Senator SIEWERT—You have touched on my next question. Is the $6 billion that you get from the Commonwealth in one lot or, as we have discovered in many other health services, are there multiple fundings?

Ms Malthouse—Yes, it is multiple funding. OATSIH might have a budget of around $4 million or $5 million and then they would provide different funding based on the program areas. While they have what they call a global budget—so they will say, ‘This is your budget of $4 million; you can tell us how you are going to use it’—throughout the process when new initiatives come up they generally add to it and then that either goes into part of the global budget or goes specifically to a program. If it is actually a budget initiative then it is often linked to that program, so it is a separate bucket of money because of the way they have to report against it.

Senator SIEWERT—How many budget grants would you be responsible for now or get funding under?

Ms Malthouse—We get funding from the Department of Health and Ageing through OATSIH, and we get funding through the Department of Communities and Queensland Health—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, I am getting to the projects.

Ms Malthouse—but within those organisations there are projects underneath that.

Senator SIEWERT—I am linking it back to the overburden report, for example, which shows that some organisations can have up to 42 different projects that they are implementing.

Ms Malthouse—OATSIH is not as difficult as the Department of Communities because the department generally has a service agreement for each of the programs, so we might have half-a-dozen programs that have half-a-dozen service agreements that relate to that and then different performance indicators. At this point it is at state level. The Commonwealth, through OATSIH, is not as difficult because, if they do additionally give us dollars and it is about a government initiative, it is generally something that we can actually deal with. More often than not it links back to the overall service agreement anyway whereas the state is a little bit different because there is a different service agreement every time they give us money.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. The issue that you were talking about with Senator Adams of not being able to pay your GPs the same amount in terms of packages, how often do you lose doctors or turn over staff?

Ms Malthouse—We have two doctors who have been with us for a number of years but they are overseas trained doctors which also limits us because they have to be supervised. They are not actually qualified to work on their own. They have been with us for almost five years but they need to be supervised by a doctor, so we have to have a doctor who is qualified and who has the requirements to supervise them. While we have those two doctors there we need to find the other person. The problem is that because the other doctors who are qualified also work in private practice we have to do our roster in a way that they are actually there all the time so that there is someone there to supervise the two doctors who are there permanently. When they are not supervised, they are not meant to be seeing clients. That causes difficulty for us. Most of doctors have been with us for a couple of years. The problem is that the ones who have been there permanently who previously worked full time have reduced it to two days, three days or 2½ days because they work in private practice.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you have many allied health professionals in the service as well?

Ms Malthouse—No, we have probably about four. While 75 per cent of our workers are Indigenous, the majority of our workers are Aboriginal and Torres Strait health workers.

Senator SIEWERT—That leads me to my next question which you are touching on which is how many of your workers are Indigenous?

Ms Malthouse—It is 75 per cent. We have a staff of 130 across both of our sites in Atherton and Cairns and 75 per cent of them are Indigenous.

Senator SIEWERT—That is great. Do you have a target for that? You obviously have an active program of ensuring Indigenous workers.

Ms Malthouse—Ideally for us it would be 100 per cent but, unfortunately, if you look at the doctors, the allied health workers that we do have and our RNs, none of them are Indigenous.

Senator SIEWERT—That leads me to the issue around training and support for Indigenous trained health professionals.

Ms Malthouse—We work closely with the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical services in Queensland which is QAIHC—the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council—and they provide a lot of support around training and development. One of the things that are happening in relation to Aboriginal health workers is the need for them to be fully qualified by 2012 to actually enable them to have jobs in AMSs.

Senator SIEWERT—This is the new training.

Ms Malthouse—Yes, so QAIHC works closely with us to ensure that the health workers that we do have are qualified. By 2012 they will need to have minimum qualifications to have a job as a health worker in an Aboriginal medical service.

Senator SIEWERT—We have had concerns raised with us about the changes and some organisations are concerned about some workers not being able to receive the training in time for 2012.

Ms Malthouse—Most of our health workers are already qualified. We have probably only two or three that do not have the qualifications that they require.

Senator MOORE—Ms Malthouse, Wuchopperen are regular visitors to our various committees, talking about health. I know you have been there a limited time, but this is your chance to say what you would like to be able to do in the future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in this region, where your organisation has been working for such a long time. If you could have everything that you wanted to provide services in this area, what would you like to be able to do with the health service?

Ms Malthouse—One of the things for us is that we want to be able to provide to our clients a comprehensive primary healthcare service. Unfortunately, we are not able to because the type of approach we would like to take would be a team approach, where we would use a GP, an RN and a health worker to work with the client throughout their journey in receiving health services. Unfortunately, because we are limited with the staffing that we have, we have issues around that. The staffing relates primarily to being able to recruit RNs and GPs because of the fact that they can get better money working outside of AMSs. One of the things I have heard since I have been there is from the doctors, who say that working in an AMS is different from working in private practice because you have clients who have really comprehensive needs and a lot of complex health needs. So, while the organisation might think that the money we are paying them is

commensurate with what Queensland Health can pay, they have to work a lot harder and be a lot more up to date on things to work with the family or with the client to meet their health needs.

The other thing that is an issue for us is our ability to house all the staff that we have. When we moved to the site that we are at at the moment, in 1997, we only had 30 staff. We now have 130. We have not been able to secure the funding to have the premises that we require to deliver the services from. Our ideal would be to provide our services from one base. At the moment we have to rent across the town to provide different programs. In order to look at providing a service to our clients holistically, our preference would be to do it from a base where everything could be provided to the client, rather than having to come to Moignard Street for some parts of it and go to another location for other parts and yet another location for other parts. From an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health perspective, we want to be able to work with our clients and their families comprehensively and more holistically. We try to do that. We have our clinical and non-clinical services and what we call our social health programs and our physical health programs, but, unfortunately, because we are not able to co-locate we cannot have the seamless service delivery that we require and we do not have the staffing numbers that we need to actually be able to do it as comprehensively as we would like to.

Senator MOORE—So it is infrastructure that you really need.

Ms Malthouse—At the moment, primarily it is infrastructure. We just do not have the capacity.

Senator MOORE—With the training that JCU is now providing for a range of services, do you have the opportunity to offer workplace placements for people?

Ms Malthouse—Yes. We do that, yes. We get requests for that. We work with universities and medical students. We have one at the moment who is an Aboriginal man. He is in his fifth year.

Senator MOORE—Where is he from?

Ms Malthouse—He comes from JCU. We have just recently, for three weeks, had a medical student from the University of New South Wales. We also have relationships with the dental unit out at JCU. Two of our past dental trainees are now going through dental school. They are Aboriginal young people, a male and female, who are now doing their first year of dental at JCU.

Senator MOORE—Which is all part of the building and training. I am interested to know whether you have any comments about the incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome in this part of the world.

Ms Malthouse—We run the Australian Nurse-Family Partnership that is funded through the Department of Health and Ageing. It is a relatively new program. While it is a nurse led program, we also have what we call family partnership workers. They are Indigenous workers who partner the nurses in working with the young mothers or first-time mothers that the program works with. That program follows the mother and child for two years. I think it is from when they are four months pregnant to the time when the child is two years old. They work with the parents, the family and the extended family to give the child the best chance at life and to help

the family deal with when they are new parents. The FAS stuff for us comes up occasionally. We do see a number of children who have had those issues, but I cannot tell you exactly what that might be for us. I know that our Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program is a key component at this point. It has been in operation for around 18 months.

Senator MOORE—And it is feeding information to national data?

Ms Malthouse—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Thank you.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, thank you very much, Ms Malthouse. Senator Siewert has already indicated that we will give you some questions on notice. They will be provided through the secretariat. If you have other issues or further information to supply to the committee, or any corrections you may want to make, you can also do that through the secretariat.

Ms Malthouse—Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence today.

Proceedings suspended from 9.35 am to 9.40 am

BABACAN, Professor Hurriyet, Foundation Director, Cairns Institute, James Cook University

BAINBRIDGE, Dr Roxanne Gwendalyn, Senior Research Officer, Cairns Institute, James Cook University

BROWN, Ms Catherine Anne, Research Assistant, Cairns Institute, James Cook University

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

Prof. Babacan—Thank you for the opportunity to address the Senate committee today. We are coming impromptu, so we did not bring all of our information for you. I would like to briefly talk about the Cairns Institute, its establishment and its relevance to the work of your committee and then hand over to my colleagues to talk about some of the work they are doing. We did have one more person to present who had direct evidence around some of the issues that impact on the deliberations of this committee but unfortunately he was unable to be here at the last minute.

First of all, I would like to give a bit of background about the Cairns Institute. It is only three months old. It is one of the social science initiatives of the James Cook University. It was established to bring together all the social science research of the university. The research has been happening for a significant period of time but with no coordinating mechanism across the university. So the institute was established to pull together the key areas of our work across 20 disciplines and all faculties in relation to people's research. Its mission is to enhance quality of life in the tropics. Half of the world's population and 80 per cent of the biodiversity is in the tropics and therefore our focus is particularly on the top half of Australia and then our immediate neighbours. We have a series of projects that we are engaging in, which we are calling signature projects, which are a wellbeing index for Northern Queensland, indicators around regional economic disadvantage and a cultural atlas of our languages. For example, one of our researchers has been researching an Indigenous language here since the 1960s and he is now really sad to say that the language is no longer spoken.

We are positioned to be able to deliver outcomes around providing an evidence base for policy, decision making and enhancing capacity of communities. We have a commitment to social justice. We will be getting a new building, thanks to the federal government's investment of $20 million. The Prime Minister was here in December. That will also house a number of Indigenous non-government organisations, such as the Torres Strait.

I just want to provide a little bit of the context in which we are presenting this information. In terms of the key areas of work, we have a number of professors whose specialities are around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. Our university is one of the few universities where the vice-chancellor has an adviser on Indigenous affairs. Gracelyn Smallwood is our vice-chancellor's adviser. We are also one of the few universities that have Indigenous staff at senior levels. We have a number of professors and associate professors who are Indigenous. They have

been involved with some of the projects that both Roxanne and Cath been working on—people like Yvonne Cadet-James.

We have criminologists, for example, working with Indigenous communities in juvenile justice and other justice situations. We have Professor Komla Tsey, who has been working on health and health outcomes, and we have had Professor Bob Stevenson, who is working on environmental impacts but also education systems. We would have been better prepared had we been presenting and I would have brought those professors along to talk to you as well. We were catching up with Senator Moore and Senator Furner, so we are just an impromptu team.

Most of Roxanna and Cath's work is in relation to work that Professor Komla Tsey and Professor Yvonne Cadet-James have been doing around health and empowerment and the impact of community based approaches. Empowerment based approaches are important. We are working with a number of communities, including Yarrabah, and we are looking at different models because top-down models often do not work. Some of our work has even been picked up in places like PNG. The department of community services in PNG will be visiting again in May to look at some of the work that my colleagues are doing.

I am going to stop there. I am happy to answer any questions. We are new institute, so we are trying to put the nuts and bolts of the organisation together, but you will hear from us a lot more. Our focus is on the top half of Australia. I will hand over to Roxanne and Cath.

Dr Bainbridge—I would just like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this region and ancestors past and present for allowing us to be meeting on this land today. I would like to give a bit of background into the work that we have been doing. Professor Komla Tsey has been leading a research team at James Cook, and previously through UQ, for the past decade. He has been using an empowerment education tool to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to strengthen capacity individually, across communities and across organisations. To do this he has been using the family wellbeing program. It is a social and emotional wellbeing program. It actually came originally from Adelaide. It was developed by Aboriginal people down there—some elders who were part of the stolen generation or were directly affected by the stolen generation. It came from a strengths based approach and thinking: 'We have been successful. We have made it through. What were the things that helped us make it through and flourish in life?' So they developed a program on social and emotional wellbeing.

This program is being delivered across Australia at many sites by the Empowerment Research Program, from up in the cape down to Adelaide and Melbourne and as far away as Ghana—Professor Komla Tsey is from Ghana—and recently through to PNG. We have got ongoing negotiations with PNG on bringing that program into their university. It operates at varying levels. There is a community level program. It has also been adapted to a block postgraduate subject that people do at university. It is in the TAFE system. It has been adapted for school children and organisations. Apunipima built its organisation using it and making it the core business of the organisation. Gurriny Yealamucka at Yarrabah was also built around the same framework of coming from a position of empowerment.

What I would like to talk about today are the most recent occurrences and a couple of the newer projects that we are working on. What has come out of family wellbeing program delivery is a lot of change in Aboriginal communities. A lot of capacity building has happened. A lot of

people who we have employed in the past have gone on to further education. So it has been a very successful program and has established connections between social and emotional wellbeing and the social determinants of health.

I thought I would talk about the most recent project we have been involved in. As you would know, on 1 July last year CDEP was closed down in communities that were deemed rural. Yarrabah was one of those communities. We have done a lot of work with Yarrabah over the last few years. While it is actually not that far in distance from Cairns, the transport situation makes it not very accessible. Most of the people do not have vehicles, so it is in the same situation as many of the Aboriginal communities you would have visited in the last few days. What happened there with the closure of CDEP was that many of the people then had nothing to do and nowhere to go, so there were issues such as boredom which lead to crime et cetera.

But what was significant when this event happened was that the Mayor, Percy Neal, came to JCU with the intent of developing a memorandum of understanding with us to help in the transitioning process. A couple of groups were formed. One group was supported to develop a social and emotional community action plan. The other group focused on engagement into education. I am more involved with the engagement into education program. A colleague Simon Cotton is the principal. He was going to present here but he was unable to come. That is unfortunate, because he has the on-the-ground details of all of that.

What is important is what we are trying to do. We have used participatory action research. We have established certain boundaries around what we want to do down there—and when I say ‘we’ I am not speaking about the community stakeholders. What has come out of that is engagement into education. There have been a number of programs Simon has been leading down there that are struggling for funding to keep them going, and because of that lack of funding they are not evaluated, so it becomes that cycle of needing them to be evaluated to get ongoing funding. That is a huge issue.

There are a lot of hands-on programs for the children who are disengaged. That seems to be working—they have turned kids around. Everybody wants a bike down there so they started building bikes et cetera, and those kids go to school three days a week after the two days in the hands-on workshops. To go to the hands-on workshops, they have to go to school the other three days, so that is promoting engagement into education.

For the purposes of the project that we are thinking about, we are not targeting discrete initiatives. Rather, we are taking a whole community approach to engagement into education and building a community of learners. I am currently putting in a fellowship application to the ARC around that project. I have highlighted the issue of principals trying to attract funding for all these projects. The issues that are so entrenched it is just not a simple solution and it is not a bandaid solution. So it is about using the tools of Professor Komla Tsey and introducing social and emotional learning in particular to the schools and the teachers. A lot of issues are around engagement. It is also about school belonging, so it is about creating a real culture in the whole community of belonging and ownership in the school.

I would like Cath to elaborate on the work of the family wellbeing program. Cath is a facilitator and has been for some time. She worked in a number of communities across a number of different projects, targeting a lot of different issues and being very successful in doing that.

Ms Brown—And Cath's not very experienced at speaking before a Senate committee and is a little bit nervous as well! I am going to try to articulate what I do a lot of to facilitate this very important empowerment program called Family Wellbeing. As Roxanne said, the program was developed by Indigenous people for Indigenous people and delivered by Indigenous people. I am a facilitator and we have a number of other facilitators who we have trained up on this in Yarrabah and areas up in the gulf such as Hope Vale, Kowanyama and Dalby.

Senator MOORE—Dalby is not up there; it is down in the south.

Ms Brown—Yes. It is in south-east Queensland. We have a big cohort of facilitators. However, people do this as part of their other jobs, so it is very hard to get facilitators. We need two facilitators for the program and sometimes it is difficult to find the facilitators to come together and take it to whoever is asking for it.

Last year a national suicide program that we were working on for three years ended. Two of the objectives of that program were men's groups and Family Wellbeing. I do not know whether you are familiar with *Building bridges*. Some of you might be. Our work has been written up in that report. Communities took on board the Family Wellbeing Program as an intervention tool to start advocating for different issues that people were passionate about. One of the issues that came up in Hope Vale was schooling. Delivering Family Wellbeing to the men's group and then having the men's group involved in getting children to school and talking to families about the importance of schooling was something that was successful in Hope Vale.

Another area where we have used Family Wellbeing—and there is 10 years of research that has gone into our work in using this program—is a primary school program incorporated into the new basics curriculum a few years ago. That was developed and implemented up in the cape in Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale. That was very successful also. We have evaluations of the work that we have done.

Another area where we are using Family Wellbeing is in diversionary programs. The men's group coordinator up in Kowanyama was running a diversionary program for men on domestic violence orders and taking them through the program. Some men reported that they were helped so much by doing Family Wellbeing that it had actually kept them out of prison. Others reconciled their relationships with their spouses. Some people in Yarrabah were using the diversionary program to reconcile their relationships with their children. They were able to get their kids back and become a family again. Some of our team work at the University of Queensland and they are currently working on a program to deliver Family Wellbeing in Lotus Glen to the Indigenous prisoners before they are released. They will be evaluating and writing up their findings on that.

The program has a range of uses. As a facilitator of the program one of the things that I have got out of it and that I have heard other people say is that it should be part of policy. If it was part of policy then it would have more focus and people could have greater access to it. At the moment, as a university research unit, we can only do what we can with our small team. We would like to take it to everyone but we cannot. So it goes to those who can afford to have us come and deliver the program.

What else can I say? Our funding comes from various sources and we have just put in a major application with NHMRC to continue some of the work with men's groups and women's groups. The communities that we focus on are Yarrabah, Hope Vale and Kowanyama. They are part of that application for funding next year. I have recently completed a project in the lower gulf area with the communities of Mornington Island, Normanton and Doomadgee with RFDS. The project was about capacity-building for staff in those areas. So far it is showing some promising results.

Prof. Babacan—If the committee is interested we could certainly get you copies of our research. In terms of some of the projects—I am trying to pull together a summary of the issues—we see problems with access to education pathways; mainstream schooling not accommodating the learning needs of Indigenous students. We see that English language is a problem; students do not speak appropriately. Approaching education systems requires working with parents and communities and addressing issues of identity. It is not just about what is in the curriculum; it is broader than that. It requires addressing a whole range of disadvantage around mental illness. Juvenile justice, substance abuse and domestic violence are big issues.

We see that mix of issues and some of our researchers have undertaken research into those. Pathways and connections are also important issues here, especially in remote communities. There is not the connectivity, the follow up. Whether you are running a counselling program or an education program, the connections to the next level or the empowering process just do not exist.

Poverty is an important issue that keeps emerging. There is a Northern Territory cooperative research centre that focuses on Indigenous livelihoods. There is a big debate about the nature of Indigenous knowledge and protected conservation environments and to what extent cultural assets are natural assets and to what extent Indigenous communities have the right to the land. That is around the poverty issue. That becomes significantly important.

I guess the point is that these projects are trying to break the cycle. These projects need to continue and become systematic, as Cathy is saying. We find three things, and Simon was talking about these. Firstly, finding the resources to do this work. From most governments it is one-year or two-year funding and these projects take 10 or 20 years to deliver the outcomes for empowerment or changing educational outcomes or developing pathways. So that is one thing. Most of us in academia, down at the NGO level or at the school level, are spending a lot of our time trying to chase money to do the empowerment work. All of my staff are on casual contracts, so how do you get this kind of output if you have casual staff?

Secondly, the evidence base for our work. There is a lot of money that gets poured in and out. For organisations such as ours—and I have been doing similar work at another university prior to this; so I have been around for a long time—it is really hard to have an evidence base to our decision making and actions: government actions, policy and community action. We do not have the evidence base. Programs such as these, where they have documented what they are doing, are really rare. Particularly around the remote communities it is even rarer that they have an evidence base.

Thirdly, we lose capacity. Each time there is a change of programs or project we lose the expertise, the infrastructure and the staff. So it becomes really problematic to sustain and build

on the existing work. I think the capacity for us to address remote and rural Aboriginal and Islander disadvantage needs addressing. The evidence is there about the nature of the disadvantage but we are not really putting enough work into how to break the cycle and what works. It needs to be engaged work. The evidence base needs to be not just an academic exercise; it needs to engage the community, the partnerships. Unless you have the infrastructure for that—when you are losing the key staff and you are losing the capacity to do this work—it becomes very difficult.

CHAIR—There is something you might take on notice just generally. What you have said is very valuable but in regard to some of the programs you talked about, the Family Wellbeing program, you mentioned that there is a wide range of places they have been located. I wonder if we could have those locations and any critical or comparative work that has been done on it and some peer assessment. You talked about the scientific and evidence base. I am not sure if comparisons have been done with other programs that have other fundamentals, which is very useful in a pragmatic sense. The secretary will provide you with some specific questions on notice in that regard.

Dr Bainbridge, I understand you are responsible for the engagement into education. I wonder if you could expand on how you transition from the two days workshop, from no engagement to two days out of the five days engaging in a workshop. Is there some sort of a transition process from that to the five days at school? More information around that will be useful.

Dr Bainbridge—Around the transitioning stage, starting from the hands-on workshop. This program has not been going for very long so it is really about offering the children literacy skills in doing the project. Essentially they are under contract, if you like, to go to school on the other three days. For me it is not a deep engagement in learning but it seems to be working. At least it is getting the kids to school.

CHAIR—So really it is leveraging.

Dr Bainbridge—Yes. A point from which you can move on.

CHAIR—As Senator Crossin mentioned before, we have five hours at 200 days, a thousand hours a year, about what it takes for standard education. Any process that says that 400 hours will be somehow missing, very important no doubt in terms of engaging, and I guess the program has not been going for long, but I would have some further thoughts about ensuring—

Dr Bainbridge—That is a school program, that is not actually our work. On the Family Wellbeing program, it is a bandaid solution but it is an empowerment program. It gives people the capacity to be able to grasp other opportunities in life. You do not know what you do not know. People have not got the relationships. Some people in Yarrabah have never left in their life. They have not even come over the hill. They do not know what that is like to make outside connections. They do not make connections with the school, and that is even within their own community. Family Wellbeing facilitates that process and gives them a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. They are the fundamentals of life. You can throw all the money, all the policies, all the programs—they cannot grasp those programs without that first. I think that is the significance of the Family Wellbeing program. It is not an all-time solution for everything but it is more than just a program. People who have done the program have taken that on board and

live their lives according to it. It becomes an ethics of morality and care for humanity rather than just existing in your own little isolated group. Many Aboriginal people do not have an understanding of their position in the world. They do not know what caused them to be in the environment they are currently in. It is a facilitating tool; it is not a solution to everything, but it is a facilitating tool for other programs that come along. It has been used for school engagement actually quite successfully.

CHAIR—We look forward to looking at that in more detail.

Prof. Babacan—It sits with other initiatives that the community and the schools are undertaking. For example, in Yarrabah, of the 500 students, 100 need to go on to year 11 and 12 outside of Yarrabah. The principal, if he were here, would tell you that those kids are afraid to get on a bus and go to Gordonvale. Gordonvale is a 40-minute bus ride. It is like another world. So these sorts of programs have those lead-on effects. Of course, the school and the community and other programs are trying to get the students to go on to year 11 and year 12, but without this kind of connector those students are not going to get out to Gordonvale and to other places.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator CROSSIN—Thank you very much for that. I am really interested in having a look at your research, particularly about the interaction between the activities of the school and the engagement of parents. Have provided some of your research to the Family Responsibilities Commission?

Prof. Babacan—No.

Senator CROSSIN—That might be very useful, because we had them here this morning and they gave us an example of the work they are doing in a particular community where families live just a couple of kilometres away from school and kids are not coming to school in the wet season because it is too wet and they do not have any transport. The education department does not provide a bus to get them there. My question, of course, to them was: 'Where is the mutual obligation will on behalf of the department of education in meeting the needs of trying to get these children to school?' I would really be interested in your research, and I am wondering if your centre has actually looked at the effectiveness of the Family Responsibilities Commission and its interaction with some of the social outcomes that you are also trying to research and work on.

Prof. Babacan—You have just put a piece of research on our agenda. Thank you.

Senator CROSSIN—Have a look at this morning's transcript, because it is one mechanism, I think, of dealing with issues. I am assuming, though, that there are also people getting a salary in that community whose kids do not go to school. This seems to be targeted at welfare recipients. My view—I probably should not put this on *Hansard*—is that there are some big gaps in what they are trying to achieve. As an ex-educationalist, the No. 1 goal of the 21 goals of the Aboriginal education program simply says that none of this will work unless you can engage parents, and the first goal for Aboriginal education, a national goal, is to increase the participation of Indigenous parents in schooling.

I could not see from their evidence this morning that that is being encouraged or is a priority. I might have it wrong here, but I did not get the feeling that that was high on the agenda to make happen—as well as getting kids to school, as well as managing income for people. There seemed to be a gap. It seems like your research provides a mechanism to change policy. I think you are right, what you said, Ms Brown. Maybe it is a question you can answer for me. I know the institute is only three months old. Actually it is a question I asked of an Indigenous researcher at the Menzies School of Health Research just a couple of weeks ago: how do you take, and how difficult is it to take, your research and convince people it has to become policy and integrated with what we are trying to achieve?

Ms Brown—If enough people are saying it—and I am talking about Indigenous people telling us this; our own mob are saying: 'This should be policy. We want this to be policy.' If enough people are saying it then the message is not getting through—we are not telling the right people or people are not listening.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you offer your health and wellbeing course anywhere in the Territory, or has anyone approached you about doing it?

Ms Brown—Not so much in the Territory. We have an expression of interest with Mitwatj Health Centre in Nhulunbuy. In the Territory the family wellbeing course is delivered by Batchelor institute. It is a VET course. Unfortunately, the VET system does not value it.

Dr Bainbridge—It is very labour intensive. That is the nature of the problem—there is not quick fix. But it has been used in Alice Springs.

Ms Brown—Yes, in the town camps through Batchelor institute.

Senator CROSSIN—Okay. I have not heard much of it.

Ms Brown—No, not many people have. It was developed in Adelaide 10 years ago.

Dr Bainbridge—The research team has published prolifically. In fact, Professor Komla Tsey is currently at the Oxford roundtable. He has been invited there three years in a row now. So his ideas and ways of working are highly valued—more so outside Australia, it seems, than inside Australia.

Senator CROSSIN—That's unusual!

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry to interrupt, but I wonder whether you could send us a couple of the references. That would be really appreciated.

Dr Bainbridge—Sure.

Ms Brown—We have heaps.

Senator SIEWERT—Heaps of references would be good, too! If you can tell us where to find them, we can get them.

Prof. Babacan—In terms of the research, it is not that researchers have not made attempts to talk to ministers or to public servants. Initiatives often come and we hear it with the announcement; we do not always get to hear it at the time of development of a particular policy or program. Then when we go in with the research it is too late, because they are already on a path. Recently Roxanne was in Canberra. So it is sometimes very difficult to get into the policy cycle and get the voices of the community heard in that. Hopefully, we are going to be a bit more of a conduit.

Senator CROSSIN—And Yvonne Cadet-James is part of your team, is she?

Prof. Babacan—Yes, she is one of our senior research fellows.

Senator CROSSIN—Tell her I said hello.

Prof. Babacan—I will.

Senator CROSSIN—She is an ex-lecturer at NT university.

Prof. Babacan—We have a school of Indigenous studies. Many of our researchers are from there.

Senator ADAMS—With your research have you looked at any issues to do with hearing health in young children?

Dr Bainbridge—No, we have not.

Ms Brown—No, but Dr Damien Howard in the Northern Territory—do you know him, Trish?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes.

Ms Brown—He has been looking at family wellbeing as a program to use with the work that he is doing. I do not know that he has taken it any further. I am not sure where it has gone from there, but he is certainly interested in the program.

Prof. Babacan—We have a school of medicine, and in that is a centre called the Anton Breinl Centre. They do a significant amount of health research relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As far as I know they have not done any work on hearing, but they may in the future.

Senator ADAMS—We have another committee. We have been looking at that and trying to bring it into this committee, because if a child cannot hear then their future is very marked. That is the evidence as we move around these communities, such as the Deadly Ears program. We were speaking to them in Bamaga yesterday and hearing evidence on the issues and the numbers of children that are affected with that. That might be something you could follow up with your health team, because it is certainly coming out in our evidence. We were also at Napranum, just outside Weipa, the day before yesterday, and they had a very good parents and learning program. I am just wondering whether you have had anything to do with that one.

Ms Brown—No, but Mark and Clare mentioned it this morning.

Dr Bainbridge—Gurriny are fundamentally a social health institution. They have developed a number of projects. They set a number of different health priorities. Some of those are for babies and different age groups in mental health. They have done 'Babies and Books', so they are talking to parents. Family wellbeing is used as a parenting tool as well.

Senator ADAMS—This all fits with the program you are talking about. With that connection with the parents and the child starting to learn to read, as with all of your projects, early intervention has to be the key.

Dr Bainbridge—Yes, it is, and that has been acknowledged many times and has come out of the research. But we do not have the capacity to do all that research.

Senator ADAMS—Have you got people on the ground in these communities?

Ms Brown—As community researchers—but they are not employed in that capacity. Sometimes we can employ them—when we have got projects and when we have got funding. But they are not just sitting around waiting for us to ring them. Some of them have got other jobs.

Dr Bainbridge—We do have partnerships, relationships.

Senator ADAMS—These are the people on the ground. I have a nursing background and I am a very practical person. I get so annoyed when I go from state to state and everyone is reinventing the wheel instead of getting out there and talking to the people on the ground who have projects going. In Western Australia, where I come from, we have something called Smart Start, which is exactly this program but with another name. I really think that, for research, those people who are out there doing the work are the ones from whom you are going to get the depth to evaluate what you are coming up with and add on to it. As I sit here and observe and listen, especially to the research people, I think you are missing out on so much—because it is all there.

Dr Bainbridge—We literally do not have the capacity to do it. This year I have done nothing but sit at my desk and write grant applications. In terms of building partnerships, Komla is a genius. I would say that there has not been a single case where he has initiated research. It has been coming from places like RFDS. It has been coming from the partnerships; they come to us. With the closure of CDEP it was Yarrabah Council who came to us, it was Gurriny who came to us. We do not need to seek research. We have got more research than we know what to do with, but we cannot keep up because we just do not have the capacity or the funding to be able to do it.

Senator ADAMS—Going back to the closure of the CDEP in Yarrabah, what action have you taken to try and improve that situation? What can take its place? How can that work? What can happen with these people?

Dr Bainbridge—As far as we have been involved, it has been with the Yarrabah Council. They know they have the capacity as well. I think we have started with the social and emotional community action plan. They recognise the issues that are rife in the community. That is almost complete; it will be completed in the next few months. Again, there is a very limited amount of

funding for us to do any work and most of our work is in fact done in kind; we just do it because we do. There just is not the funding or the capacity to be able to do it.

Prof. Babacan—The institute is new and our economics professor is not even on board. I do not have my business development manager on board and I do not have my community engagement officer on board—we are that new. But we are in the process of recruiting staff. Part of the issues around employment is about investment in community. The regional economy is very depressed at the moment. Cairns and surrounding areas have a high level of unemployment. Given that kind of environment, it becomes even more difficult to address economic and employment issues for disadvantaged communities.

One of the things we are trying to do is to work with the chambers of commerce. I have gone and spoken to the chambers of commerce. I have to spoken to council, and I have spoken to an organisation called Advance Cairns, which is the regional development arm for this whole area. On 22 April I am off to Townsville Enterprise, which is 200 business leaders of that area. Part of addressing that kind of big disadvantage around employment outcomes, income outcomes, requires a whole-of-community, local government, industry, federal, state government—I have been talking to the state government—approach. Often universities are very marginal partners in this, but we are trying to develop a bit of a conduit. Our motto is 'Engaged research', which means that we try to engage with partners. There is not a day that somebody from the community does not knock on my door with a range of issues, not just Indigenous. Yesterday I was talking to Worklink around mental health and disability in Indigenous communities. This is a local job network that has a big brief. They were talking about how we could work together and how we could do a partnership. We are trying to forge those sorts of practical connections but it requires a different level of intervention, some with a specific community level of empowerment but also some with bigger picture issues, and those bigger picture issues are not easy to address. With regard to a hearing in a chamber of commerce around issues of Indigenous employment, the stigma walks in before you do. Often what you say can get dismissed, even with an evidence base. Therefore, we try to operate at different levels and in a strategic way, and I see it as early days for us. We are only a baby.

Senator FURNER—My question was on this subject. We have been to Weipa and Bamaga over the last couple of days, and that is one of the prime issues that have arisen out of the evidence about employment. Yesterday things like the cost of living in Bamaga were raised. The CDEP was raised there, as well, as an issue. What are the opportunities that exist, in your opinions, of the development of empowering those communities to do things other than, say, mining and those sorts of things? Currently we are resource rich, but we cannot continue to look at that as an only solution and opportunity. What are the opportunities that exist for employment in some of these communities? For example, I went to a Tjapukai performance up the road here many years ago. Are there similar initiatives you can think of in Aboriginal and Islander communities that can be similar examples?

Prof. Babacan—We will have to get responses to that.

Ms Brown—I think tourism must have come up for you while you were up there—

Senator FURNER—No.

Ms Brown—This morning Simon mentioned tourism being an untapped resource for Yarrabah. It is not that far away; people can drive there. If there were better transport facilities, people could get on a bus and go there. Having said that, I will come back to family wellbeing. We did a research project with the Bindal Sharks football club, which incorporated family wellbeing into the Stepers program, which is a program for employment. Komla Tsey ran family wellbeing for those people at Bindal Sharks. The evidence has been very favourable since he has done that. What has come up time and time again after people have done family wellbeing is that they get new jobs, because they find they have the ability to say, I don't like this job anymore,' or 'I want to do something else,' or 'I don't have to do this job.' People are more empowered to either move on or find something else. That is just another comment about family wellbeing in employment.

Prof. Babacan—The whole region relies on three major industries for employment: agriculture tourism and mining. When there is a decline, when there is a global financial crisis, the whole thing goes belly up. Agriculture has been declining and people are looking at whether we can diversify the agricultural base. Mareeba had a small and run-down TAFE. The state government, the community cabinet, were up here about three weeks ago. They are investing some $8 million into an agricultural college to look at growing alternative crops in this area and developing the skills to develop marketing niches—sometimes the crops can be grown, but marketing involves a whole set of skills. So I think there are some opportunities for Aboriginal people to tap into that. They are often overlooked. I am meeting with the head of the new agricultural college on Friday just to see how we can connect up with them. So there are some issues that are beginning to emerge.

Secondly, James Cook University is well known for its tourism research. We have been engaged in the traditional experiences of tourism in this region: the Great Barrier Reef and the rainforest. Professor Bob Stephens, who lectures in sustainable education, has just joined us. He is an Australian and was in the education department for many years. He has lived in America and he is one of the world authorities on environmental education. TAFE ran an Indigenous ranger program, it was certificate III or IV, but they no longer run it. It was a really good model which, I understand, has been picked up in both Western Australia and the Northern Territory. TAFE initiated that some 20 years ago. Again, we should look at whether there are some niche training and education opportunities that will lead to employment outcomes for Aboriginal communities. If we are going to connect tourism to cultural tourism, because I think there is a strong niche there, people will be able to earn a livelihood from it.

The other area that is beginning to emerge as an industry is the creative arts. Often Indigenous art comes up because it is visible in Kuranda and everywhere around this area. So is there some different way in which the creative arts could be developed as a business base for communities? At the moment, it is often the middlemen who get a lot of the benefit. So how do we develop an industry base that will tap into the creative arts element to create employment? Advance Cairns has done a feasibility study for a film studio here, similar to the one on the Gold Coast. In that, Indigenous creative arts feature strongly.

So there are two things, and again there is going to be huge regional planning. We do not have a regional development plan for this area, and employment is an important part of a regional development plan, as well as infrastructure, roads and population growth. All of these things impact on traditional communities. In that sense, the regional development plan is coming. The

Prime Minister asked whether we had a regional development plan. That is taking place, and the university and the institute will be involved in that. I think there are two ways to go. One is service industries. We can value add in service industries—health, because we have an ageing population, and hospitality. There is a big employment base waiting to be tapped. I moved to Cairns three months ago and it has taken me two months just to get a door put in the house. So services and trades are crying out for people, but it is about the connection and pathways for the community to get employment in a trade role. So that is one thing.

The other thing is that we are a beginning to start some work around small business and small-scale entrepreneurship—not big scale but small scale. We are looking at the opportunities there. It might be bush foods or another home based or small community based industry. Again, that has not been given a lot of attention in this area and I think it deserves a look in because it might provide some opportunities. Also, in Townsville we have a huge Defence base and the hospitals are big employers. So I think there are two big sectors there that might be able to provide an employment base but at the moment are not. So that is some of my thinking.

There has been some research done by our business faculty. Natalie Stockel has done a lot of work around economic livelihoods up in Kuranda, around Townsville and in the cape. But she is only one researcher. This is an area where our economics professor comes on board. We are also trying to do economic profiles of the region, but that work has not yet begun. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment will be a key part of that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much to the representatives from the Cairns Institute. It has been very interesting. There may be some further questions on notice to clarify things we have already discussed, and they will come to you through the secretariat. Having seen the context and breadth of our discussion, there may be papers and information that you think are useful to the committee. I would be very grateful if you could get in touch with the secretariat and pass those on. Thank you very much for your evidence today.

[10.37 am]

BOWERS, Dr Jennifer, Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Queensland

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

Dr Bowers—I would like to thank you for the opportunity to talk a bit more about what we do and how we do it. Since we made our submission, we have undertaken a range of new initiatives which I think provide some more ideas about how we approach mental health in Indigenous communities not only in Queensland but across Australia. Although our centre is a little one, we are into our fourth year of operations. We have learnt a lot in that time about how we work with people in rural and remote communities generally and also Indigenous communities. Our centre is not entirely research based; we have a very applied approach to how we work with communities because people really want to see something—and often with research it is a matter of trying to collect information without actually doing something within the community.

In summary, our role is to look at consultation and engagement: how do we work with that community? We clearly do not have links because we are a small organisation. However, what we do have is a terrific participant base and a terrific network. Of course, the previous group of witnesses are part of our network, so we can call on them as part of our consultation and engagement process, as part of an intervention process, if that is identified by the community, if that is what they want. Finally, how do we measure and evaluate what we do and how do we make that sustainable? These are our key issues about what we do and how we do it.

We take a whole person, whole community approach. We try to strengthen individuals. However, we also try to build collective resilience within a community. We do not actually deliver a service. What we do have unique expertise in is looking at how we can best use our partnerships to make things work on the ground. For example, we might be offered a grant by somebody—and it is generally a government department that wants to do something. So we have the inevitable project cycle. How do we work with the community to do something that is worth while? That has to be embedded within the community or else, at the end of the day, it is not sustainable. So we specialise in trying to work out how to consult. To do that we engage people on the ground in that community. It might be one of the people trained in the family wellbeing processes, but it might be somebody else; it might be somebody within the education system. It depends on what is identified by that community as a priority. If youth suicide is an issue, we would be talking to somebody specifically about that. It is really a matter of trying to understand what is required, what are the issues in that community and what we will do about it.

We have got some more recent examples than those in our submission, and I am happy to elaborate if you have questions. First of all, we have a program called ‘Pathways to Resilience’ which has been funded by the department of communities in Queensland. That project has gone to several communities in Queensland with high suicide rates. The first part of that project was

to talk with the communities and try and understand what the issues were and then try and get them to help us decide what they would like to do about it, where the stress points were, where the flashpoints were—and often they are around youth or school children—and what information they need. For example, in St George we were able to build on the NAIDOC Week celebrations that engaged youth, so we got young people in that community involved. That has turned out to be the most fabulous response in St George. They have actually formed a pathways to resilience group and put our logo on it. We were just the broker for that, but they realised something worth while was happening there. In Mount Isa, where there was a range of issues, there was some documentation about services and how that could be disseminated in a user-friendly way. So a whole lot more has gone on—and these are just quick snapshots of what has gone on. On Mornington Island they have been able to work with young people to build a song around issues that are affecting them. They wrote it, recorded it and then launched it. So now the whole community has a song about it. It is about education and raising awareness in a particular group. It is really about trying to do something that the community wants that is really different, and we are really working in the realm of promotion and prevention.

One of the other projects that has emerged independently that we have been able to incorporate and extend—and I mentioned that one of the issue is sustainability—is what we initially called ‘Creative Recovery’. That targeted people in Lockhart River who had a mental illness or were at risk of getting one. There is a level of stigma with ‘recovery’ because it assumes you have a problem.

What we have been able to do, through the pathways to resilience initiatives—and there is some level of competition, as you might gather, between communities—is to commence a similar initiative in Aurukun. We are in the process of negotiating that for Mornington Island and Doomadgee. This is creative recovery, using art initially. What we did in Aurukun was identify that the young children had nothing to do over the school holidays. So the local shop donated the paint and local artists donated their time and they have painted a mural on the shop wall, which previously had graffiti on it. It is fabulous. There is a photo of it in that newsletter. Now the girls have decided that they would like to do that. There is another, bigger wall on the side of the shop, and that is in the planning.

So there are a range of initiatives where there is an ability for us to transfer resources and opportunities that we see that are community driven and involve them but also send a message. They are some of the examples of what we have been able to do in the last few months that have expanded on the sorts of ideas in the papers that we have written about in our submission. We have applied them. We have extended the education initiative and the creative component of that. We have also been fairly creative in applying to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for an Innovation Fund grant to see if we can sustain and extend the art initiatives, which is not just about people drawing; it is about community engagement. It is looking at other forms of art, like weaving ghost nets and all sorts of other things, where there is an opportunity to build an enterprise and a livelihood. What we would like to do and what we have applied to do is get somebody to do a scoping exercise on the opportunity to make that an enterprise in the cape. That is just another example.

Finally, what we are really trying to do is share our information. At the end of the day we write reports for the people who have funded us. I have brought some examples of our suicide prevention projects. We give those to our funders so that there are opportunities not only to share

our knowledge but for us to extend it and learn from other people. We really do not want to work in isolation in Queensland. We really do not want to be seen as parochial. We want to learn from what is happening in like situations in the Northern Territory, in Western Australia and in other parts of the world. There is absolutely no point in duplicating things. We really want to understand what is happening out there and try and do it. I have been approached by many people all over Australia, and indeed other parts of the world, so that we can share what we are doing. It is not just about the activities we are doing; it is about how we do it. It is about how we are structured. We are a tiny, little organisation but with a large reach. So we are agile, we are small and we are able to employ the right people—like JCU, like our other participants who have niche expertise in a range of areas—once that has been identified by communities. That model is really responsive to community needs and individual requirements. So it is a combination of what we do and how we do it.

Senator SIEWERT—They all sound really exciting projects. I am interested in a number of areas. First off, I want to know about your funding base and how you get your funding. What is your core funding and how reliable is that? Then I want to hear about the different projects and how many projects you coordinate.

Dr Bowers—First of all, our core funding, $500,000, comes from Queensland Health. Around $150,000 a year comes from OATSIH.

Senator SIEWERT—What sort of funding cycle is there for those two bits of funding?

Dr Bowers—The one from OATSIH, at this stage, is recurrent, based on reporting requirements. The funding from Queensland Health for the first three years—which has now completed—was based on an agreement. It is not based on anything other than us negotiating on annual basis now.

Senator SIEWERT—So it was three years and now it is gone to annual?

Dr Bowers—Yes. We now negotiate it on an annual basis. We have not been led to believe it is jeopardy or anything like that. In fact, I believe that because we are independent we actually provide a lot of good news and good opportunities for doing things that traditionally government departments would struggle to do. We do not carry baggage into communities and we employ or work with the right people.

We also take a small amount for auspicing fees, which helps us sustain ourselves on top of that. For example, universities now take 35 to 40 per cent for administration. The rationale for setting the centre up is that we do not need such a large amount, so we take a lesser amount but we do actually take some administrative fees just to keep us going.

Senator SIEWERT—From the projects?

Dr Bowers—Yes, from the projects themselves. So they are our three sources of funding.

Senator SIEWERT—So the core funding enables you to run—

Dr Bowers—A small office.

Senator SIEWERT—And staff?

Dr Bowers—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Do the staff run projects outside projects that you apply for funding for?

Dr Bowers—No. It comes under the umbrella of the centre.

Senator SIEWERT—How many projects would you be running at any one time?

Dr Bowers—It varies. We would have projects that are being completed or being written up. Then we would have projects running at any one time. At the moment, we have got one running in rural and remote Queensland called Me and My Community, which is building leadership and resilience in identified rural communities affected by drought and other pressures. We have got the Pathways to Resilience, which I mentioned, and an extension of Building Bridges, which is the major project that family wellbeing was involved with. That is now running in Dalby and St George. I am just trying to think of all of them. We have also got Creative Recovery. So we would probably have around five or six major projects with other things rolling off that.

On top of that, we then have our other core business like our conference in September. Part of our role is to disseminate and share information through what we call our master networking. We really pride ourselves on being transparent, open and engaging with people and trying to understand who would like to work with us. More and more we are just trying to collect people with expertise because in Cairns it is really quite difficult to recruit people who have got knowledge and are able to work in these different environments. Mostly they want full-time jobs but we can only give them jobs as and when things come up. So we only have a very small core staff.

Senator SIEWERT—I do want to go there but I will just park that issue for a minute because I want to finish the funding issue. It sounds like you have funding for projects from a variety of sources. Is that correct?

Dr Bowers—Yes. We are really quite creative about what we look for. Up until this year, we had really only tendered for one before that. For most of them we have been approached by Commonwealth and state departments like the Department of Communities, Queensland Health and DoHA to do work. So we do something, publish it and they say: 'What would you like to do? To extend that, how would you do? We have got another $250,000 to do X,Y or Z.' We will negotiate that. I really quite like that idea because part of our strategy is influencing the agenda and setting the agenda rather than being told by government, 'This is our policy and this is what we want to do.' We want to influence policy by doing what we are doing and I think that is a good way.

Senator SIEWERT—Tell me how you do that. So many times you do not see any learning from projects. You were here when we were talking to the previous witness about how we use evidence based planning and policy development. How do you do that? How do you capture your learning? How do you document it and how do you get it through to policy makers?

Dr Bowers—My background has been running mental health services for South Australia and I have worked for DoHA in Canberra for many, many years—I go back into the eighties. What I understand are Commonwealth processes. So we have really made a huge effort to not only report on time but to publish quality documents with meaningful outcomes so that we can then make conclusions about whether this is worthwhile, what we can do and what we can learn from this.

For example, the family wellbeing process was being rolled out not only in the Cape by the previous group but in Dalby. Dalby was problematic because it is a mixed community, it has an Indigenous population as well as a large white population. It took a long time for the engagement, the trust and the acceptance process to happen. We have somebody there and we did not want to lose them. We know it takes a long time, so when the second opportunity came along and they came back to me within a week, mind you, of publishing these documents and said, 'We've got some more resources', I jumped on it. We did not want to lose this good work with the family wellbeing and all of the connections that have been made. We thought: how can we extend it? We negotiated what is the next phase which we have shortened to Building Bridges 2. That is now in Dalby and St George because the same Aboriginal medical service services St George as well. Now we are looking at the differences between services.

As much as we might be looking at the gaps in health between Indigenous people and mainstream Australia, we are also now looking at what gaps in services there might be in these two rural communities. That is being done by a consultative process and we will equally write that up at the end of the day with an independent small evaluation. What is emerging from it again is that expectations will be built about the interventions. What needs to be done to reduce those gaps? How is it that we can improve that? That is what this next stage will come up with. Hopefully, we will find that the same department and the same group of people might be able to help us to find some resources to meet those expectations.

Senator SIEWERT—When you are working on a program in a community, obviously, each community is different.

Dr Bowers—That is exactly right.

Senator SIEWERT—You take a program, you have the philosophy and the approach and then you tailor that to meet each community's needs, so it is not one size fits all?

Dr Bowers—That is exactly right. I have made a really useful slide that I use in every presentation that outlines the differences between communities. Every community that you will go to will say, 'We're unique and we're different.' You can acknowledge that they are because they have different cultural mixes, different sizes, different degrees of remoteness, different industries with different problems and there are more factors without mentioning environment or anything else. But there are common factors. The common factors are that they are all connected to country in some way. Indigenous people are connected, as are farmers in a different way, as are miners in a different way. They are related in some way to the country they are working on but, more than that, they are all coping with change. All of the rural and remote communities are including Indigenous communities—most of the Indigenous ones are growing, a lot of the other ones are declining for various reasons, so we have continuous change. We have different industries happening, we have people leaving communities and services leaving communities

because they unable to recruit, so we have change. Our role is really about building resilience within communities to cope with change and how we sustain that. When it comes down to it and you look at the GDP of Australia, a high proportion of it, over 50 per cent, is dependent on agriculture and mining. In a sense we really need to value not only Indigenous communities but all people who work in rural and remote Australia because our productivity into the future is going to be dependent on it. Indigenous communities are equally important in that process.

Senator SIEWERT—I have two more questions. One is that you said you do not deliver clinical services. Do you work with clinicians where you need to?

Dr Bowers—Absolutely. Queensland Health is a participant in the centre. RFDS is a participant in the centre and there is so much interest coming from other areas. We are in the process of looking to see whether there might be an opportunity to broaden our brief. In some projects we have people in New South Wales wanting to participate. We have somebody in the wheat belt in Western Australia wanting to participate in some of our initiatives. I think we might be seen to be a bit parochial with Queensland in our name and we are not picking up national tenders.

Senator SIEWERT—Ignore the Queenslanders!

Dr Bowers—We really think we need to share what we do, and so in some of the initiatives we have we are trying to work with other like-minded organisations. We are trying to also reduce the stigma. The problem is that when we go into a rural or remote community Indigenous people use euphemisms for mental health, as do farmers and miners. So we do not actually try to go there. We try to use other language and relate to them within their own language and in ways that are acceptable to them.

Senator SIEWERT—The other issue that I said I was going to park earlier was staff. Wherever we go in Australia we encounter issues around staffing and the ability to get staff in this sector but also particularly where you have to work in rural and remote areas.

Dr Bowers—We need somebody with strategic vision. We have a different requirement because we really need people who can write—write reports, write tenders and do project management. This is not a clinical role. This is a role that can take on a strategic view of issues which are often very sensitive. We need clever writing. It needs a level of maturity. It is really quite challenging. We need different language for different initiatives. If we are writing for government tenders or government reports, that language needs to be different to when we are presenting to or working with a community. We need to change our language. But we also need to be clever and understand and interpret the language of people living in rural and remote conditions and environments and translate that into another language so that when we are talking to people like you we have credibility. We know what is happening out there. We know what the issues are. But we need to represent that in the most appropriate and articulate way we can.

Senator ADAMS—I was wondering about the remote area mental health service. Do you work with closely with them?

Dr Bowers—Of course we do. In fact, in the process of setting the centre up there was a three-year lead time and there were a lot of consultations. That involved not only a range of the

organisations who are now participants in the centre but people from here, like the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Professor Ernest Hunter and a range of people who are clinicians working in the area. They saw that there was a need to do something more creatively and more innovatively around the sorts of things that we are doing. Probably in health terms we do really sit at the promotion and prevention end of things. Most of our work goes into that end, where most clinicians do not have time to go. They are so few and far between that they do not have the luxury of being able to do something like we can do. That is why we really do include them. It is because this is an opportunity to do something different and innovative that they can do that takes away, in some ways, the stresses of having to cope with such demands on their clinical time.

Senator ADAMS—Do you get a lot of feedback from their people on the ground?

Dr Bowers—They are included in the whole process—absolutely, yes.

Senator ADAMS—I am just a little bit curious about something. The people who were giving evidence before you said it was really a little confusing because there were a lot of things going on that because of their funding arrangements they were not able to tap into.

Dr Bowers—I think that is the beauty of our structure.

Senator ADAMS—You are pulling it altogether.

Dr Bowers—We pull it together. One of the psychiatrists is actually a key part of the creative recovery enterprise process because that is a particular interest. She is out in the communities. She knows what is going on. We go out together, because I do not have any credibility if I do not know what is going on either. So we actually go and encourage support and work with people out there as these initiatives are being developed.

Senator MOORE—I just want to talk about one area which has always been a bane for me. You actually referred to it briefly at the beginning of your presentation—the competitive nature. I am interested in your role in that. You said a lot of people came to you. But this area, amongst others, is bedevilled by competitive tendering. We heard from the previous witness about professional people spending ridiculous amounts of their time having to apply for different things and write submissions. Do you have any view on that? I know you are coordinating and seeing what is happening across rural and remote areas. Is there any way we can do this better?

Dr Bowers—That is a fabulous question. I agree. What we have tried to do is open it up so we engage the best of our participants or likeminded organisations. We are now not only including people out of Queensland but have found other people with other expertise who are actively coming to us. A lot of our activity is a one-way street. We are tiny. We cannot service all these people, write the tenders and then think we are going to share all the scarce resources. The issue is trying to be open and transparent so that we can then get the best people to be part of that tender. But the universities are competitive. We are in that environment, but what we are trying to do is say, ‘Okay, we can include you, you and you.’

I would have to say that quite a lot of my work with projects in the past has been to mend or broker relationships between competing organisations. That is an absolute waste of time and

emotional energy. We could find a solution for doing things more cleverly and sharing them between states more actively. We have learned a lot from what we have done in Queensland, but I am also learning and travelling to other places to see how it is that we can share what we do. We can set the scene. I think we can only set an example. We have to tender and compete with other people who are saying they are experts. It might go to Sydney or Melbourne universities, whereas we are on the ground, know what is happening and frequently hear of those sorts of things happening. There is a level of frustration around that when we think that we are ideally placed, because we do have what I think is a good reputation amongst the communities that we work in and we could happily expand that and share that a little bit more broadly.

Senator MOORE—I am interested in whether there is any process that can be brokered between governments giving out and calling for tenders and organisations such as yours, which are wider. I do not think we enter a single community where there is not tension around an absolutely essential service, which is looking at what everyone needs and who won the tender. That is everywhere we go.

Dr Bowers—Absolutely—and I hear about it every day. You probably only need to talk about the wellbeing centres to hear all of it.

Senator MOORE—We have heard that.

Dr Bowers—I am sure you have. That is a good example. I think that to start to do that there has to be some probity around it; therefore, selective tendering does help. The other thing is to bring people together and say: ‘How do you work together? How do we combine all of your collective expertise to do something like this?’ But that requires quite a lot of knowledge from people who might be based in Canberra or who might not know who is ideally placed, so there is that issue. There is also preferential treatment. There is an opportunity to influence and have a say in how we do that. I try to speak to ministers and people in senior positions in Canberra about what we do and how we do it and to provide advice, but when you are in Cairns it is a huge effort. Many a time I will go to Canberra with meetings lined up and only end up with one of five.

Senator MOORE—They will all drop out.

Dr Bowers—They will all drop out. That is a huge commitment on the part of our centre, but I think it is important that we communicate and have an understanding where policy is being made, how to interpret that policy and how to influence the making of that policy. I like to think that we are doing that in a very practical way. That takes time, though. That is a level of frustration—how do we influence what is happening? Fortunately, one of my meetings was successful and Minister Snowdon is coming to our office next week. We will have a chance to have a dialogue with him for him to better understand what we do, because our role perfectly fits his portfolio.

Senator MOORE—It is it. If you added the word Indigenous to it, you shadow his portfolio. What is the difference between preferential treatment and selective tendering? It is a genuine question; I am not sure.

Dr Bowers—Preferential has a value added to it, whereas selective does not.

Senator MOORE—That is true. It is a big issue so I just wanted to get something. I know you work in that cooperative space.

Dr Bowers—I think we do but on the other hand we are a tiny organisation; we are not like university. We do not have processes—

Senator MOORE—Dr Bowers, we got the message about your tiny organisation. You have been very good. We know you are small.

Dr Bowers—That is a benefit in some ways because we are agile.

Senator MOORE—And you are regionally based, which I think is very useful. We will keep talking, so that is fine.

Dr Bowers—Terrific.

CHAIR—Dr Bowers, thank you very much for the evidence you have provided today. As you have seen from the nature of the questions, it is likely that there may be further questions which will be provided to you on notice through the secretariat. If you have any other information which you think may be of value, it would be very useful for you to provide that to the committee. I noted in your opening remarks that you said the submission you provided is now outdated—that is, since 2008, clearly. In the context of the original submission, you may like to provide the committee with an update on some of the areas which you think need to be refreshed in regard to your research over the last couple of years. That would be most appreciated.

Dr Bowers—Thank you.

[11.10 am]

LALIBERTE, Dr Arlene, Postdoctoral Fellow/Team Leader, North Queensland Health Equities Promotion Unit, University of Queensland

WARGENT, Ms Rachael, Research Officer, North Queensland Health Equities Promotion Unit, University of Queensland

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. I invite you to make some opening remarks or statements, at the conclusion of which I will ask the committee to go to questions.

Ms Wargent—We are a small research office with the University of Queensland based in Cairns. Our focus of work is on empowerment research with social and emotional well-being and mental health issues in North Queensland. The majority of our work has been focused in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regional Cairns and on Cape York.

Dr Laliberte—We work according to an ecological model, looking at the social determinants of how social and emotional well-being encompasses adverse behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse, and at risk behaviour such as crimes and stuff like that. We have different projects in improving the health system and the journey of care, as well as a through-care project in the prison up at Lotus Glen at Mareeba. Those are the major recurrent projects we are working on.

Ms Wargent—The other major works we have been working on over the past five to six years are protocols and guidelines for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers or mental health social and emotional well-being issues with people in remote communities in North Queensland. We have developed a guide on how to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers, carers and their families within the primary setting, the communities. We have been working on that for the last five to six years. We have developed a set of tools and guides around the patient journey from when they come to the primary health clinic in their community through to tertiary, secondary level care—if they are evacuated to that care—and back to the community again. That is one of the focus points that we wanted to talk to you about today.

We have been working on that for the last five to six years. We have developed a set of tools and guides around the patient journey from the primary health clinic within their community through to tertiary, secondary level care—if they are evacuated to that care—and back to the community again. That is one of the focus points that we wanted to talk to you about today.

Dr Laliberte—We also work in collaboration with other organisations such as Queensland Health and the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health. The project that brought me here was actually the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. We are looking at using empowerment to prevent suicide and, specifically, the meaning of suicide within Aboriginal communities to get a better understanding of how the people on the ground view the problem, as opposed to just imposing in communities suicide prevention programs that have little chance of success because

they are not tailored to the risk factors, the beliefs and the perspectives of the people they wish to serve. Those are a few of our current and past works, and we have all this information with us.

CHAIR—You could table that information. We much appreciate that; thank you very much.

Senator ADAMS—That was a very interesting presentation. There are probably going to be lots of questions. Ms Wargent, could you give us an outline of the remote communities that you are involved with?

Ms Wargent—At the moment we are involved with Hope Vale; we are doing some work with Pormpuraaw, up in Far North Queensland; we have done a lot of work with Yarrabah community, which is not so remote; and we are working with Kowanyama. Those are the most current ones.

Senator ADAMS—We have just visited Weipa and Bamaga—I was just wondering if those communities had been included. Coming to the issue of suicide, do you have a bereavement guide for the communities to use after someone has unfortunately committed suicide? Do you deal with that as well?

Dr Laliberte—In the beginning of the NSPS, we were invited, due to our expertise, to assist the community response team in Yarrabah, where there had been a series of suicides. The community responded very well—according to the specific guidelines—based on their experience. We have not developed a guide per se, but we do have tools that address that issue, particularly in the protocols. That could easily be pulled together based on the Yarrabah experience. There are a few mentions of it in the report of the NSPS project as well. So, when we say that we work in collaboration, we do bring expertise to different communities on different areas, but we also learn a lot from the community members. If they have that experience, we just act as a facilitator—we just take a back seat and let them lead.

Ms Wargent—Senator, earlier you asked about Weipa and Bamaga. With our collaboration with Queensland Health, we are not that visible as yet. We have been working with the director of mental health and ATODS, Alanah O'Brien, who is leading some of our work for a pilot site, with protocols, in Hope Vale, with the long-term aim for it to go further than that specific community—to reach out to Pormpuraaw, Bamaga, Lockhart, Aurukun and as many other remote communities as possible.

Dr Laliberte—We also do a lot of evaluation work as well. A few of the projects that we have evaluated were involved in those communities, so we were able to get an overview of the issues there. Also, the Family Wellbeing Program guides a lot of the research that we do because it is an empowerment program, and we work from the principle that not only our actions but how we undertake them should be empowering. That has been delivered to Normanton, and we are looking at Doomadgee at the moment as well. So we have been in contact with those lower gulf regions.

Senator FURNER—Have you been working around foetal alcohol spectrum disorder at all, up on the cape?

Dr Laliberte—Not specifically, but we are trying to get funding for a project using the empowerment program Family Wellbeing to support the transition of young female Aboriginal people between the ages of 10 and 13 so they are supported in that developmental phase so that foetal alcohol syndrome and early pregnancy does not become a reality for them.

Senator FURNER—From your experience in the cape, what is your opinion on that particular disease?

Dr Laliberte—I think there are a lot of problems that are not necessarily apparent that could be linked to foetal alcohol syndrome or drug use—

Senator BOYCE—What sort of problems?

Dr Laliberte—All of the risk behaviour—impulsivity, acting before you think—

Senator BOYCE—The sort of thing that could be misdiagnosed as ADHD.

Dr Laliberte—Perhaps, yes.

Senator FURNER—So what needs to be done in this particular area?

Dr Laliberte—I think it is really about empowerment, early intervention, and guiding and supporting the communities and the people of the communities to help them to make better choices.

Senator FURNER—Should those communities become dry, in your opinion, based on that being a major problem?

Dr Laliberte—That is a very difficult question, obviously, because there is a lot of anecdotal evidence of communities that become dry having other problems like sly grogging and marijuana use, and there is some anecdotal evidence around hospitalisation data and the rising rates of, for example, psychosis. A lot of speculation is around the effects of marijuana use. That is what we are seeing in the hospitalisation data. So there is that data, but the rest is speculation.

Senator BOYCE—I just wanted to ask you about the journey of women having babies through primary care et cetera. It would seem that in Far North Queensland primarily people come to Cairns four weeks before their baby is due. Can you tell us what your research has shown, if anything, in that area and what might happen next.

Ms Wargent—Specifically, we have not done any research around the maternal child health area. I am from Cairns; I was brought up in Cairns. I am on the local Aboriginal medical service, the Wuchopperen Health Service, board of directors and my family has been heavily involved in Mookai Rosie Bi-Bayan, the hostel for Aboriginal women who come to Cairns early to have their babies. From my experience, yes, you are right—we are really seeing women come only when they are due to have their babies or when they are unwell during their pregnancy. As far as I am aware, that process has been working really well. Mookai has been a providing that service in Cairns for a number of years now—I think it is going on 20 years. Unfortunately, we have not been focused on the research area; we have been specifically focused on social and emotional

wellbeing and mental health for people who have chronic, recurring mental illnesses. So, unfortunately, I cannot comment on that.

Senator BOYCE—It would seem to me that having to leave your family behind for a month or so might affect your social and emotional wellbeing.

Ms Wargent—Yes, absolutely.

Senator MOORE—I have two questions. One is about how people work together in the fields. We saw people from James Cook earlier. The work they are doing on family wellbeing seems, when you hear about it, to be extremely similar to some of the work you are doing. I would just like on record to have something about how people work together when you have a number of skilled professionals from universities working in community. The second question—you can answer these all in one go—how are the protocols that you have developed now being used? Are they now a standard tool for everyone who traipses in and out of community? We all know the stories about that. You finally have something that has taken you so much work. How are they being used?

Ms Wargent—I was really pleased to hear that JCU were here earlier. We are transitioning from the University of Queensland across to JCU at the moment with that particular team. We have actually been collaborating over the last 12 to 15 years with SIAS, the School of Indigenous Australian Studies, at James Cook University. Because of that close network and because we have been connecting with communities, we have been able to secure some community based researchers within the communities in, for example, Yarrabah and Hope Vale. With that network ongoing for that period of time, it has been working really well. We have participated in the family wellbeing program together—JCU, us at UQ and community members on the ground—and that has strengthened our relationship working together and continuing to collaborate.

Dr Laliberte—To add to what Rachael has mentioned, the empowerment research program has been ongoing for the past 10 or 12 years now between UQ and the JCU team. We are continuing, hopefully, to grow that network. As was mentioned earlier, the family wellbeing program gives a set of principles and we all work from those principles. That guides our work and the way we collaborate. We have, for example, community members who become seconded to local community organisations such as Gurriny. I guess we are actually employing them, but through the local organisation, so that is strengthening those partnerships as well.

Ms Wargent—In terms of implementation of the protocols, we currently have a minimal budget to do that, but we have set up an implementation steering committee, which is being chaired by Queensland Health, in collaboration with us and community. We are at the early stages of that. We are planning a pilot site in Hope Vale and we have been contacted more recently by another community about perhaps piloting it there as well, with two different models, one being driven by Queensland Health and the other being driven by community, so from the ground up as opposed to—

Senator MOORE—Do they meet?

Dr Laliberte—That is what we are hoping.

Ms Wargent—Absolutely. Because we have got this committee and because of our collaboration and the way that we communicate and stay in touch with each other, we are planning to ensure that that meeting, that coming together, does happen.

Dr Laliberte—And the implementation is actually being guided by work that was done with Yarrabah Gurriny medical health service. That is a community led medical health service and our primary clinic. We have trained the social and emotional wellbeing team with the protocols. We have the training manual and, from that, we are doing up an implementation guide which will inform the steering committee. The pilot is really to refine all of those tools before we roll it out in the cape. But that is the plan, Queensland Health's plan.

Senator MOORE—The protocols are hopefully going to be able to be adapted to any community, so you have got the core principles and how you do it.

Dr Laliberte—Yes.

Senator MOORE—It still strikes me as difficult—and I will talk with you later and Health—because they actually funded the project, they are the people who go into the communities most for health issues and they have not said, 'We are doing it.' Am I missing something there?

Ms Wargent—Yes. The protocols were driven initially through an NHMRC grant through AIMHI, the Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative, and then Queensland Health did come along later and ask us to develop some guidelines. So, yes, they have funded this process to the point where we have this document. We are now at the point where we are trying to get it implemented. Queensland Health are really supporting that. I guess the challenge now is how we get in and how we get the primary healthcare teams on board and support it as well.

Senator MOORE—Who are employed by Queensland Health mainly?

Ms Wargent—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What is the time frame? Do you have any idea? If you have not, that is fine.

Dr Laliberte—That is always difficult because, yes, Queensland Health are there now but there is also the transition to community control that is mainly led by Apunipima, and we are meeting with them as well. So we work in collaboration and in partnership with the different organisations and people who are responsible to try and get everyone on that same page and not impose, so that is about the time that it takes.

Senator BOYCE—You mentioned earlier some research on the topic of suicide and the implications or the way it was dealt with in Indigenous communities. Would you give us some more information on that research.

Dr Laliberte—I visited four different communities: Yarrabah, Hope Vale, Kowanyama and Dalby in southern Queensland, which gave a different perspective geographically with its proximity to urban centres. The thing that struck me the most in the research component that I was responsible for was the risk factors for suicide. If I asked someone, 'What is suicide?' they

would respond in three different ways. They would respond in terms of risk factors, they would respond in terms of impact and they would respond in terms of the definition. The definition was the standard one—when someone wants to kill themselves. With risk factors there was a lot of anger, grief, humiliation, stigma, sadness, depression—

Senator BOYCE—Was this within the family?

Dr Laliberte—In the community, because then they would go on to explain that they are tight-knit communities and when something happens to one person it impacts on everyone, at different levels but it still impacts on most people. There is a lot of guilt as well—a lot of what we could qualify as difficult grieving processes that take much more time and compound other grief that has not yet been dealt with because of the time and things that keep happening.

In terms of the consequences, the same list of risk factors would come up again. When we think about suicide in Aboriginal communities, clusters are a big factor, but then in sheds light—'If this is why we commit suicide and this is how we feel after a suicide, it's not surprising that there is that domino effect.' So there is a lot of compounded, unresolved grief.

But interviews did not stop there and there was a lot of feedback around ways forward, most of which involved empowerment and taking responsibility but having the opportunities that come with that responsibility. It was seen that progress would come not through the imposition of restrictive measures but from the ground up, empowerment and building on strengths. It was about finding the strengths and building on them—individual, family and community strengths.

Senator BOYCE—Some of those issues go to general views around stigma and mental health anyway.

Dr Laliberte—Absolutely.

Senator BOYCE—Is there any potential for adapting mainstream policies on promotion and prevention of stigmatisation in communities?

Dr Laliberte—I do not know if this will answer your question, but we work a lot along the lines of two-way understanding. For example, in mental health diagnoses it is not about saying, 'You're schizophrenic,' or, 'This is what you suffer from;' it is about listening to their perspective because within mental health—and suicide is a part of the question of social and emotional wellbeing—there is the holistic view that you can separate emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing. Listening to their perspective and, yes, adapting the model that you are working from—not forcing people to fit into your model but building your model around what you are hearing from them—is what I would recommend. Was that your question?

Senator BOYCE—Yes, thank you.

Senator MOORE—We met a couple of times with the Dr Edward Koch Foundation, and I know they have lots of experience on the ground. Have you worked with them? Also, on the discussion around protocols, have organisations like those been part of the development and the commitment to use them in future?

Dr Laliberte—I think there have been some discussions in the past, maybe not particularly on the protocols but for the Family Wellbeing program.

Senator MOORE—Yes, I know they use that.

Ms Wargent—In terms of working directly with the Dr Edward Coe Foundation, we have not had the opportunity and I suppose we have not connected with them more recently.

CHAIR—I think it is tremendous that we have actually produced a guide for government people, in fact anyone visiting communities and doing business with the communities. I know it has been sponsored and Queensland Health's intimate involvement in it and no doubt ownership has been discussed. Has there been any move that you have heard of to expand this initiative to other visiting government departments, the other thousands of people who wander in and out every day?

Ms Wargent—It has actually gone further than Queensland Health. Because we are not Queensland Health, we are a university, we take any and every opportunity to talk about it. So we have presented it at various conferences at a state level and a national level. Our previous director, Dr Melissa Haswell-Elkins, has now moved to the University of New South Wales and she has actually been talking about it down there and I suppose getting it out. There have been really good responses and New South Wales collections have been interested in it. It is being peer reviewed at the moment by some people in Western Australia as well as Dr Ross Bailey, who is from the Northern Territory. It has been getting out there presented more than just Queensland.

CHAIR—What sort of impact do you think it will have on the people going into the communities in resources sense? Is it going to take more time, is it going to cost them more money? Apart from just having more information, have you done any analysis on those sorts of impacts?

Dr Laliberte—We have not analysed that at this point because, as I said, we are just starting to trial it in the pilot sites with Queensland Health. But we do have an instrument to measure empowerment that was also developed by the work around the Family Wellbeing, led by Dr Melissa Haswell-Elkins. From the feedback we are getting with this instrument, it is just the fact that it is culturally appropriate and it talks to the people more, so it does create that awareness and they do feel that they are listened to and that their voice is heard. So if we consider the tools that are in the protocols that have been trialled in the Northern Territory by Dr Trish Nagel, there have been positive reports to the use of those tools, but that is just the tools within clinical settings and it is not the whole protocol.

CHAIR—Perhaps my question would be better answered at the end of the trials.

Ms Wargent—Just an early example is that we have been working with the community in Pormpuraaw. One of the staff members there has recently visited us and was excited to share her experience around using the tools. She does not have an alcohol and drug background or a social work background but she was able to sit with the client who has drug and alcohol issues and use the tools to go through it step by step with the client and then take that person with the tools to the primary health care centre and sit with the DON and say, 'This is what we have done with

this person and I'll hand over to you.' The client's experience through that process was really positive and they gave good feedback to say they have never done this before and it has really been useful that they have been heard. Then at the clinic level the DON had said, 'Thank you very much, you have done a lot of work for us and now we can continue with this patient's journey within the centre.' That is one example we can give at this point.

CHAIR—You will be getting a whole lot of feedback. I know this is not a draft but is a document, but what sort of frequency do you think is reasonable to have a lot of this scientific and evidentiary feedback about what perhaps is not necessarily working on the first assumptions? Would you have a review of the document? Have you thought about how often you would do that?

Dr Laliberte—We are not too sure how often, at this point; but within our doing a formative and summative evaluation of its implementation. The goal of the formative evaluation is really to collect the information, to guide the implementation and to improve the document, improve the service. So it is not only rendering a judgment on critical aspects; it is actually to improve the whole endeavour. There will be a second edition of the document. We are already thinking about that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. The fact that there are no more questions from the committee, and the fact that we are a little before time, does reflect on your collaborative approach with previous evidence today.

Dr Laliberte—Yes, we are impressed!

CHAIR—But there may well be some other questions on notice provided to you through the secretariat. If there are any issues or things that may be useful to the committee that you think you may have omitted, we would be delighted to receive those. I am not sure whether you have some spare copies of the book, but I know the secretariat is very loath to part with the one they have that has been tabled. I would certainly appreciate the provision of at least one other one.

Ms Wargent—We actually have it electronically, so we can email it to you. It is also on our website.

CHAIR—Terrific. It would be great if you could provide any evidence of that nature to the committee, through the secretariat. Thank you very much for your evidence today.

Ms Wargent—Thank you.

Dr Laliberte—Thank you.

[11.47 am]

BIRD, Mr David, Executive Manager, Indigenous Business Unit, Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association

CHAIR—Welcome. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement. After that I will ask the committee if they have questions.

Mr Bird—First, thank you for the opportunity to come here and address the committee about what we are doing throughout the whole of Queensland—not just in Cape York—through the Indigenous Business Unit. My background is that I am a senior sergeant attached to the Queensland Police Service. My role is to work with the Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association as a manager of their Indigenous Business Unit.

I have a small presentation in respect of what we do and how we do it that may be able to support the committee in its knowledge of the work that we are doing up there. I will just go through what the Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association is and how it supports mainly the youth but also members of the Queensland public overall through its activities across Queensland, especially from the Indigenous Business Unit's perspective.

The Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association commenced in May 1948 at Lang Park in Brisbane. It was an acknowledgement of the problems that were faced in Brisbane. We now have 47 what we call 'PCYCs'. You will hear me use 'PCYC' as short for QPCYWA. It makes it a little bit easier if we do it that way! We still use the objectives that were set in 1948 because they are still relevant right across Queensland. We have over 80,000 members, over 1,200 employees and 1,000 volunteers across Queensland. We are the biggest youth development organisation in Queensland. Our management systems and governance have been tried and tested throughout that period of time.

The mission statement for PCYC is: in partnership with government, community, business and families, to achieve excellence in youth development by encouraging participating in recreational, sporting, cultural and welfare programs. Like I said, we do not focus just on youth; our main objective is to support youth in Queensland. A lot of our centres do a lot of activities beyond the youth area. The vision for PCYC is: enhancing Queensland communities through youth development. That is where we focus most of our energy.

To see how the Indigenous side came into PCYC I would like to give you a bit of a history of how PCYC ventured outside its metropolitan boundaries and into the Indigenous area. Back in 1996, we identified that there was major problem with youth suicide and juvenile crime within Yarrabah. We then went into Yarrabah and worked with different organisations in Yarrabah, specially the council, and we started the first PCYC in Yarrabah in 1996. We proved to the council and the community over a three-year period that, through Commonwealth funding, we could start a PCYC centre there.

From 1999, after signing a lease agreement with the council to 2004, we ran it as a centre. Then in 2004 we made it into what we class as an Indigenous PCYC. The commissioner offered us a sergeant and two police liaison officers. Through the success of Yarrabah, which won national and state awards for its excellence of work, we progressed—with the support of the state minister of the day—to do feasibility studies and needs analysis at Palm Island and Mornington Island. That is now history. We now have PCYCs at both Mornington and Palm islands. Just recently the Mornington Island has also won national and state awards for its performance. We are continuing to support Palm Island in its endeavours to achieve those outcomes as well.

Back in 2004, we found that there were other Indigenous locations where, because of their size and location, we could not see the state government giving us a sergeant and two police liaison officers—for 290 or 300 people at Wujal Wujal, 500 people at Pormpuraaw or at other locations. So we developed a program called the CAPE program. CAPE stands for Community Activity Programs through Education—not Cape York; it was just tested in Cape York. We trialled it at Wujal and within its first six months of operation we reduced juvenile crime by 67 per cent there—just by reducing their boredom and ensuring we had sustainability of activities that were constant. So we then developed a larger model and went to Hope Vale. We now have a Hope Vale centre which employs seven local staff and is managed by a local person who we trained up to manage that location. We then moved to Napranum, where we have a similar program.

Through the achievements of those locations we were then given funding to roll out the program to four separate locations, one being the Northern Peninsula Area, called NPA, which covers five communities, three Indigenous and two Islander communities, and the other ones being Aurukun, Kowanyama and Woorabinda. We started off in Woorabinda and worked with NPA, and now we are negotiating with councils to start the operation both in Aurukun and Kowanyama. There has been a delay at Kowanyama because we have been waiting for the centre to be finalised and finished in that location. Until that happens we have just been running activities in these locations. We have resources and staff in there but we are not running the full program in those locations until we can have operating centres there.

You can see that we identified the larger communities and the more isolated ones, namely islands and the greater population, Palm Island being similar to Yarrabah—about 3½ thousand. Then we identified that other communities should have a similar PCYC but on a different scale, and we addressed that. Also, just recently, we have been given the opportunity to manage 35 sport and rec officers throughout the whole of Queensland. There used to be 60 sport and rec officers and now there are 35. The funding used to go to Indigenous communities, community groups or the councils, but it now goes to us to manage those sport and rec officers. With regard to the IBU—Indigenous Business Unit—we manage 42 different locations, and we have 150 grants to support that. It is all grant funded; there is no flexible funding. The grants come from all different levels—government, non-government and private sector—and we are continually managing those.

The Indigenous Business Unit as a structure has 12 Queensland police employees. They are made up by me —I am a senior sergeant—three sergeants, located at Yarrabah, Mornington Island and Palm Island, and eight PLOs, police liaison officers. I have two in my office. They support us by assisting us both in training us about Indigenous culture and in allowing us to have

greater communication with the community through their contacts. They are essential to our operation in Indigenous communities. They assist us daily in learning how to communicate properly, who to communicate with and what protocols to use. We have two offices, one based here in Cairns—the head office is here in Cairns—and all my staff, except for two, are Indigenous. And we have a Townsville office that supports the Indigenous PCYC—there are three Indigenous PCYCs. We placed the office in Townsville mainly to support Palm Island, which was going through some major issues and we could see that the PCYC could support the community through that.

Every second Tuesday we pay 108 staff throughout Queensland. We have 108 staff on our books that we have to fund to carry out the sport and recreation programs throughout Queensland at 42 different locations. As I have said, we have an operation diversity. We have the Indigenous PCYCs at Mornington, Palm and Yarrabah. We have CAPE, which is at Hope Vale, Napranum, the Northern Peninsula Area, Aurukun, Kowanyama and Woorabinda, and we have 35 sport and rec officers at 34 locations. We have two in Townsville; that is why there are 34 and not 35.

The evolution of the model is to bring larger Indigenous communities into the Indigenous PCYC model. We have found the Indigenous PCYC model with a sergeant and two police liaison officers to be the one that has the greatest productivity. The reason is that, when we employ a staff member from an Indigenous community and we train that person up, government and non-government organisations see that as a good poaching area for employees. We have had people leave and go to the mines because we train our staff up from certificate I to diploma level. Indigenous people coming from communities are sought after by government and non-government organisations. We lose very senior staff to those organisations because they can pay more than we can. That then takes out a crucial element of our operations in that location. We have got to find another person and our operations can suffer for some time until we can progress that person up to that level. It goes through a cyclical system. By having the police sergeant at the other locations, we do not seem to have that happen as much. It does happen, but it does not happen as much. So we see that model as being more productive. It also brings the police closer to the community. It is an open-door approach to policing because they do not see the police officer there as totally reactive; people can be extremely proactive. Mornington Island is a very good example of that through its programs of having police being part of the community and not being totally reactive.

The other major area that we work on continually is building the relationships with councils. Councils are going through a change from being community councils, where they carried out all the functions for the community on behalf of nearly every member of the community. I have been working in this area for over 20 years. I was brought up at Yarrabah, so I know it very well and I have seen the change in councils moving towards the shire council model. They require support from organisations like ours to assist them whilst they are going through this transition, because they are not doing the social work that they have been in the past under their local requirements. We are there to support them so we build that relationship. That can take a lot of time because we have to build a rapport with them. That is something we go through and we expect. But when we do build that rapport, we are there for a long period of time.

One of the barriers that we face is sustainability of grant funding. I do not know if you have heard this previously but, when we are looking at the total volume of grants and we are reporting

monthly, quarterly, yearly and so on, it takes a lot of administration to maintain. Also, in a jigsaw puzzle of community needs, there are always going to be some gaps where grants overlap and do not provide for some of the requirements of that community. If you have only got one year of grant funding and it has taken you three months to put that person on by the time you do the HR process of the employing the person, it is very sad when you say to them that you can only employ them for nine months and then it will cease. So you start the training and they fall off the training wheel again. It is very hard under the current grant structure to be sustainable in these locations. We are looking at long-term generational change and that is what we are trying to work on. PCYC has been around for a long time. We want to be in these communities for a long time if we are going to see long-term changes.

In regard to overarching state and Commonwealth legislation, some of the legislation has not been designed, especially in the childcare area, where we are trying to be sustainable by using the ability to generate other income other than grants, for these communities; it is designed for mainstream. The process of having a child go through after-school care, before-school care or vacation care process is totally different culturally in these communities. A lot of times we do not see parents; we see young children carrying babies in disposable nappies down to our centres at eight o'clock at night. There is no way in the world that those people can sign in and sign out their child, because we do not see their parents very often. We try to. We do doorknocks and we have tried on all levels to be able to support the legislation, but it has been impossible to be able to do that. We are now just breaking through that with the assistance of Centrelink. They have come back on board and we thank him for that. The legislation does have a lot of barriers to get through. A lot of the buildings do not come up to legislative standard. We have had to pour a lot of money into bringing some of these buildings up to standard. The Hope Vale building was condemned when we took it over. We have now raised it up to a usable centre—and so on. That is one of the issues that we have. Most of the buildings that we go into and use in these locations in very poor condition.

Regarding the duration of the community acceptance process. Some people can fly in, fly out on. That is not going to achieve a lot of outcomes. You have got to be there and run your program. Our program Napranum is from the breakfast program at 7.30 right through to nine o'clock at night. It has got to be run five days a week—seven days a week if you can afford the penalties on weekends—to be able to achieve the outcomes that you want: to reduce suicide, to reduce crime. They have got to have a place of safety they know that they can go to. They also have to know that the doors are open. You can't say that you are going to go up there once every three months and do an activity. That is not going to achieve the outcomes that we have achieved.

Some of the improvements, just quickly, that we have seen: pre-PCYC there were 60 Indigenous sport and rec officers part funded. Two identified audits by the minister in 2008 realised that that was not working and now there are 35, and we have filled over 80 per cent of the positions in the short period of time that we have had program. We have a three-year program to December 2011. From all sources I think it is working.

Millions of dollars have been spent on sport and rec facilities. A lot of those buildings are damaged and inoperable, just because they are not being used. Doomadgee is probably a very good example of that. We are working with government now to look at an Indigenous PCYC at Doomadgee. Those buildings have sat there. Mapoon has a very nice building sitting out there.

Through lack of use they get vandalised, because there is nobody in there to tell people not to do it. With PCYC, facilities are being maintained, well used, repaired and supported by the Commonwealth and state governments. I have meetings with the ICC on a regular basis here. We identify any funding that we can to support. I have just spent over $200,000-odd on the Napranum building to bring it up to standard.

There was little development of local community members in staff positions before PCYC. We are probably the largest employer in the communities, other than government. We can employ up to 12 staff at any one time in some locations. Some are part-time, some are permanent and some are part-time permanent, depending on the operations that we have in those locations. We ensure that we train and support those employees in the best way that we possibly can. Now we have close to 100 local community members employed in PCYC service delivery roles. Before CAPE was introduced there was a major problem with local people being employed for lengthy periods of time. We now have employment strategies in place to be able to support those people where we have CAPE and Indigenous PCYCs. We have over 100 locals involved from day to day and minute to minute in those locations throughout Indigenous communities.

That gives you a quick overview of the Indigenous Business Unit for the overall PCYC Queensland program. Here in Cairns we have a PCYC which is like a mainstream PCYC. Mareeba has one and so does Innisfail. The Yarrabah one is the Indigenous one within this region. From a policing point of view, we have employees in seven of the eight police regions. We do not have any on the Gold Coast, but we have them in every other location, from Goondiwindi through to Mornington Island, to the tip of Australia. I do not have any at Innisfail or Tully at the present moment, but in Mackay, Bundaberg, Charleville, Dalby, Ipswich and Toowoomba I have Indigenous PCYC employees.

Senator FURNER—You mentioned, out of a list of numerous locations that you represent, Kowanyama.

Mr Bird—Yes.

Senator FURNER—You go as far south as that in your area of representation.

Mr Bird—I go as far south as Logan.

Senator FURNER—That is a huge area to cover.

Mr Bird—Yes. Logan is just between the Gold Coast and Brisbane. We go as far west as Goondiwindi. I will be visiting them next week. I am doing a week's trip around to support the managers. I will be flying to Brisbane and going out there.

Senator FURNER—We were in Bamaga yesterday and we met Sonia Townson.

Mr Bird—She is my area manager.

Senator FURNER—No doubt she looks after the NPA. Are there any employees under her, covered by the PCYC?

Mr Bird—She has four employees. We have two vacancies there at the present moment. One has resigned and we have not been able to fill the other position through the first round. But it has been advertised again and that will close in a week's time, I believe.

Senator FURNER—You mentioned the PLAs, or police liaison officers. How many of those do you have?

Mr Bird—We have eight in total. We have two at each Indigenous PCYC—Mornington, Palm Island and Yarrabah—and we have two in my office. When I travel, I normally take one with me to assist me in protocols, even though I have 20 years experience in total. I was the officer in charge of the cross-cultural unit for the far northern region, which has the highest Indigenous police presence within any police region in Queensland. I did that from 1994 to 2004, for 10 years. I still believe that I need a police liaison officer sometimes to support me when I go to council meetings and that sort of thing. That support is crucial.

Senator FURNER—Are those PLAs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander?

Mr Bird—Yes. The PLAs for Mornington, Palm Island and Yarrabah are from Mornington, Palm Island and Yarrabah. There are two from each location. I have an Aboriginal and a Torres Strait Islander in my office.

Senator FURNER—The *NPA News* that we picked up when we arrived in Bamaga mentioned the weed-out exercise happening out there, where they are going around identifying issues involving, predominantly, marijuana. Is there interaction between the PCYC and those sorts of projects that happen in the regions?

Mr Bird—I was on the original project team for that project and assisted in developing it. We have a regulator 10 o'clock meeting with the Assistant Commissioner of the Far Northern Region every Monday. Part of that is to talk about police projects and how we can assist in any way proactively supporting them, and one is the Weed it Out project.

Senator FURNER—Do you think that has alleviated issues?

Mr Bird—I think that the educational side of it has, in NPA especially. We have just had the Something Better project, which is a suicide prevention project. It allows us when we go to schools and different activities within the community to be able to pass on that information and educate people about it. I think it will take time before we see any flow-on effect of that in our statistics. Because we get the statistics from the Queensland Police Service when needed, we will be looking to see how that works in the future.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you get involved in youth diversionary programs?

Mr Bird—At our centres between the hours of the breakfast program at nine o'clock and three o'clock, we have youth that under correctional services orders and those sorts of things. We do assist in that way but, other than that, no.

Senator CROSSIN—Would these mainly be teenagers who are in a juvenile centre or—

Mr Bird—No. These are youth who are under an order or under a requirement from court. The justice system has a supervisor with them. They have done activities within our centres. For example, they have done garden beds and different activities around the centre. We assist them in our equipment and services in the centre.

Senator CROSSIN—Is that successful?

Mr Bird—It is successful in that they have a location. I have never focused on what the outcome is in reducing that. We have focused on a lot of youth truancy but not diversion. We have youth truancy programs at all our locations. Some of our youth truancy programs are focused at trying to get kids back to school through positive reinforcement and not giving the kids who are wagging school benefits but giving the kids who attend school the most activities. We have agreements and partnerships with a large number of organisations. Ergon have provided seats at Dairy Farmers, and we identify those youth—the ones who have gone to school the most—from the Cape to go down and watch the football in Townsville. We find that they go back and, through positive peer pressure, have increased the attendance at schools. But with respect to the ones who have already gone through court, we have not had a great deal of focus on those yet, because there are other organisations that do that.

Senator MOORE—It would be useful if we won a few more games. That would help a lot.

Mr Bird—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—So, predominantly, it is about providing activities for youth in communities. Girls and boys?

Mr Bird—Yes, and not just youth. Our youth in communities is from four to 84 basically. We have what we call CAFS officers—child and family support officers—SED officers, social economic development officers. Some of those officers go to the old people’s home and assist those people in doing activities for health reasons and that sort of thing. We have had so many activities around bringing family back with their youth and doing family nights and those sorts of things. I do not know if Sonia Townson touched on a program that we started up there where the youth go back to the elders and do their yards—trying to bring back culture. There is a big gap between youth and Aboriginal culture. We try to cover that as well. We do focus on youth but, if another organisation wishes to do something with the elderly or we have grant money that focuses on other members of the community, we will do that.

Senator BOYCE—Do you allow other community organisations or voluntary groups to use the PCYC facilities?

Mr Bird—We do. In Napranum we have one room set aside for teachers to assist youth who have been disengaged from the school. Western Cape College has a permanent base. They come in during the week and try to get the students back up to a level. We have a large number of organisations that use the Hope Vale centre. We have been asked to charge them, but we do not.

Senator BOYCE—I am trying to tease out what happens in a community where you do not have the resources to run something. You told us about how your facilities had fallen into

disrepair through lack of youth. Why are there no other activities in those facilities in that situation?

Mr Bird—From my experience it is very hard for a community member to say no to another community member. Sometimes it is very hard unless they have a great deal of support behind them to be able to run a lot of activities. We have found that with organisational support behind them their self-esteem increases and they have the ability to then deliver some of the programs that they really want to do. We have community members coming to the PCYC and asking to deliver a program where they have felt that they did not have the confidence or they were worried about some redress that they may get with respect to activities. I will give you an example of that. When we have major sports like football, touch football, basketball or softball, a lot of times we have to bring in paid referees to finalise the games because it is very hard for a community member to live in the community and to be in a position where other people think that they have made the wrong decision during that game. There could be a lot of repercussions for that person. We have to build up their self-esteem and support them through delivering the programs. I am not just talking about us, there are other organisations but unless an organisation is there to support them through the process that they can fall back on I think that they find it very difficult to run those programs.

Senator MOORE—I would like to check some of the figures, because we live on figures in this job. In your opening statement you talked about a reduction of 67 per cent in this activity with corrections. Can we hear a little bit more about how that is assessed?

Mr Bird—At Wujal back in 2003 or 2004 we started the program by sending up a police liaison officer from Cairns for three weeks out of every four weeks to support the community. They had a community centre that sat idle and was not being used. We then started employing staff there. Because Wujal was seen as a highly volatile area, that is why the Queensland police service has put a police station there for 300-odd people, one of the focuses was if we reduced the boredom for not just the children but the adults and we had a lot of adults programs there—we had partnerships with the Bloomfield school and other areas—that crime hopefully would reduce. The front page of the *Cairns Post* through the release of statistics from the assistant Commissioner of the day, not my statistics, shows that we reduced juvenile crime whilst we were there. We cannot say that we did it all; all we can say is that, for the period 12 months before that versus the 12 months that we were in there and looking at the six months that led up to it, juvenile crime reduced by 67 per cent.

Senator MOORE—That is under 18. That would be graffiti, theft, all those kinds of crimes.

Mr Bird—Assaults.

Senator MOORE—Do you keep records or does anyone keep records about the impact in other places you have gone to? Certainly I would expect one of the expectations of your involvement and your expenditure would be looking at crime figures.

Mr Bird—Yes, it is. Because I am a Queensland Police Service employee and because my managers are Queensland Police Service employees at Indigenous PCYCs, my state manager is not and also my state manager for Indigenous sport and recommendation officers are both Indigenous people are not Queensland police employees. To give you a recent example,

Mornington Island did what they call a program over the Christmas period, 10 days at Christmas. During that period of time they had zero indictable offences for juveniles and the magistrate did not have to fly over and do juvenile court at that time.

Senator MOORE—Which is a distinct difference from previous Christmas periods.

Mr Bird—That is exactly right. That is why it won a number of awards. The commissioner’s police gold lantern award was won through that crime prevention initiative not just for that program but for the ongoing programs that Sergeant Dave Ives has carried out over there. So, yes, we are continually looking at how we are performing crime-wise. It is sad to think that I had seen in the paper that Mornington Island was such quite place. I was there two weeks ago doing a branch performance review and I see in our local paper that there were a couple of police assaulted just recently. That is the sort of thing I will be working with the assistant commissioner on to see why that happened and how PCYC can work with the police to try and reduce that.

Senator MOORE—A number of us were on a previous inquiry that went to Mornington Island, and one of the things people at the big community meeting were asking for was programs were kids during school holiday periods. With kids coming back from mainland schools, all kinds of interactions were going on. Your statement is that the PCYC program there has gone a step towards providing that, particularly over the Christmas period.

Mr Bird—Yes, we have, and we are using that model as a better practice model and we are going to roll it out over the near future into our Cape locations.

Senator MOORE—Also in your statement you said that there used to be 60-odd youth workers across the area and now there are 34.

Mr Bird—Thirty-five.

Senator MOORE—I know there is an answer to this, but why is that better?

Mr Bird—What happened was that the state government minister at the time for policing and corrective services, Judy Spence, took up the portfolio and one of her roles was to look at current programs and how they were operating. She did an assessment, did two audits of those 60 positions and found—there must have been a reason in her mind, I do not know what—that she preferred to bring that down from 60 to 35 and that, instead of Aboriginal identified community groups that had been previously funded in separate funding rounds, they not be given that funding and PCYC should operate those funds. That has caused some major problems in Indigenous communities for PCYC. PCYC three years ago was wanted by every Indigenous community. We could not roll out fast enough. We had a 10-year plan to roll out in every community. When the decision was made to take money from the council and give it to PCYC, and it was done by the department of sport and rec in those days and now department of community and sport and rec services, PCYC’s level of acceptance in those communities went to bedrock. I have spent the last 12 months trying to resurrect it.

We are continually trying to get MOUs with councils and they are still saying, ‘You’ve got our money.’ I am very open about that because I spent a lot of time trying to work through that

process with councils—that we did not identify the problem; we did not take the money. It was given to us; otherwise the program would cease.

Senator MOORE—So you were caught in the middle?

Mr Bird—Yes, we were. There was no consultation with councils. They were notified one day that it was going to happen and the next day we were advised that we were getting the money.

Senator MOORE—Through that process, which I am sure has been very difficult, have any of the workers who were previously employed been able to translate into jobs that you offered?

Mr Bird—They all were.

Senator MOORE—So people did not lose jobs, as such; it was money and the process of spending the money.

Mr Bird—That was one of the requirements that I put in place when we took it on. People who were already performing in those tasks could transition and we would support them if they needed training.

Senator MOORE—Your problem is more with councils?

Mr Bird—Yes. I can understand the lack of consultation and this non-government organisation coming here and telling us what to do.

Senator MOORE—When was that decision made?

Mr Bird—It was made in February 2008. We received the money in December 2008 to start in January 2009.

Senator MOORE—So there was a 12-month period without funding—is that right?

Mr Bird—No. From June until December, half the funding for that financial year was given to the councils to continue that employment.

Senator MOORE—Knowing they were going to cease?

Mr Bird—Knowing they were going to cease. A lot of the councils then decided that they would not take up that funding. Some of those locations were not funded for that period of time.

Senator MOORE—Only in a couple of communities we visited in the last couple of days—and it was only a go in and go out kind of process—the issue about policing came up consistently regarding dissatisfaction. It was not about the performance of the police—we did not get any questions at all about that—it was about the number of police available and the delay if you had an issue and called for support. We can talk to you at any time about what people were saying. Regarding the role of the PCYC, which is absolutely part of the wider activity of the police, do you ever get caught up with that kind of different pressure? That is, you are there

with your PCYC hat and your staff members are doing the programs for youth, support and other things, but then you have criminal issues within a community and they are upset because they are not getting the appropriate criminal support.

Mr Bird—Yes, we do. PCYC does because we are the police. You can see that I do not wear a police uniform.

Senator MOORE—Yes, I picked up on that.

Mr Bird—I try and make it very clear that I am there for PCYC. I am employed by the Queensland Police Service. My wages come from there and so to my branch manager's wages. We ensure that we try and focus on and work very closely with the police in those communities. They have a function. If we can support those police in any way, we will, but the community over the years that we have been there realises that the PCYC vehicle that is going around is picking up kids from their houses and asking them whether they want to go to an activity tonight—'Did you know about it?' or something like that—not to pick up children and take them to the police station. We have very strict guidelines with respect to that.

Senator MOORE—Not regarding your civilian staff but your police service staff, do you still maintain all your authority under the Police Act? If you needed to do it, could you make an arrest? That kind of thing.

Mr Bird—Yes. I am a sworn police officer and I take an oath of service, and so do my branch managers. There have been occasions where I have had to arrest a person. Through community consultation later and at the negotiation table they praised us for doing that, but they know we are not there to do that.

Senator MOORE—The other issue is recruitment into the police service. I know that the Queensland police force has a very strong recruitment focus. I asked in a couple of communities about whether young people have any aspiration to move into the police service. Is there anything you would like to add on that?

Mr Bird—We support that as much as we possibly can. When the recruiting drives are on we make sure that our police liaison officers are out working with those people. We have even changed the title of police liaison officers within our operation to community support coordinators. That makes a difference to why they believe they are there. In Cooktown we have two police liaison officers and they see the police liaison officers as tools of the operational police. My police liaison officers as community support coordinators go out and assist people in doing applications and assist them to know how they can get through. Sometimes a lot of the barrier is knowing where to go. We have had some successes with that.

Senator ADAMS—I want to ask about retention and housing. How do you house your staff? The accommodation situation came up regularly as we moved around.

Mr Bird—Housing is a major issue for us, and I think it is for every government and non-government department in these locations. We cover four major aspects of sport, recreation, culture and welfare. Sometimes we bring in people in those areas and we find it very hard to house them even for a short period of time. When we developed Doomadgee, a new location,

one of our major priorities was that the sergeant had a house. We employ our police liaison officers from the local community, so they have normal residences. Housing for us is a major issue.

I have mentors working within my office. They are skilled and trained people who go out and help community people through TAFE courses and what PCYC needs to deliver for their grants. We find it hard for them to stay on community for lengthy periods of time because it is very costly to put them into lodges, boarding houses and that sort of thing. We do not have housing for them. So at Woorabinda, Kowanyama, Aurukun, Coen and Lockhart River I have mentors. It is very costly for us to have them out there with both travel allowances and housing. Housing is a problem.

Senator ADAMS—And just funding for retention?

Mr Bird—Funding for retention or long term: our funding is month-to-month year-by-year. There are times when I have to go back to government. I have just done that recently in relation to funding places like Hope Vale and Napranum. I have gone back to the state government this time and said I will have to close them down because I do not have the funding. There was major uproar about us closing it down. We have had to close down one of our programs at Napranum—the breakfast program.

Senator ADAMS—We have heard about that.

Mr Bird—Yes. It is only because we cannot get our kitchen up to the standard. The health department has come in and advised us we need to upgrade our kitchen to the new standards. That means we have to put in an extra sink. We have two sinks but we have to put a third sink in and do modifications in the kitchen. Those are the sorts of things I am having a meeting with Mike Fordham from ICC on Friday. In my role I go to regional or state managers and discuss those things to assist.

If we continue the way we are going in relation to having to have grants, our administration will increase and our operation on the ground will decrease. We need to have central funding. People want us to continue to deliver and change the cycle that has been involved, especially while the alcohol management plans are in place. I know I cannot continue to write the grants. I have just done it for the Commonwealth. We are writing all the time. We have professional grant writers to assist us to do that. Then we have to employ administrators to administer the grant. There has to be another way, especially in Indigenous communities, for long-term service providers if there is going to be longevity of more than three years.

The maximum we can get is three years. The normal process is one. It is hit and miss with one because, by the time you get somebody in there, you are giving them false hopes. Communities have had false hopes for many years and they are sick of fly by night false hope situations to fix a small problem and then, if it did have an impact, seeing it not continue. We can only do the best with the system that we have got.

CHAIR—Indeed. Thank you very much for the evidence you have provided today. It has been very interesting. I am sure there is a possibility that members of the committee will require details of your evidence or have other questions. If so, they will be provided through the

secretariat. If there are other aspects of the questions and the evidence that you provided that come to mind or you need to provide corrections, please provide that through the secretariat.

Proceedings suspended from 12.42 pm to 1.15 pm

FYSH, Mr Rob, Principal, Peace Lutheran College

CHAIR—We welcome Mr Rob Fysh from Peace Lutheran College. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been previously provided to you. I invite you to make a short opening statement, at the conclusion of which I will invite questions from the committee.

Mr Fysh—First of all, I would like to thank you for this invitation. I hope that I have something worthwhile to contribute, although I think much of what I have to say will not be news to you. I understand the committee has three main areas of interest. I would like to make a contribution in two of them: the health of young Indigenous people—in particular mental health and suicide—and linkages there may be between education and employment.

I will tell you a little bit about my institution. Peace Lutheran College has been a day and boarding school in Cairns since 1994. From the beginning, we have served Indigenous families from remote communities, as well as international and local non-Indigenous families. Most of our Indigenous students in this time have come from remote communities, and most therefore have been members of our boarding school. Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal communities, because they have a strong Lutheran affiliation, have been major sources of our students, but we have also had many students from all over Cape York and Torres Strait. We have had approximately 200 students from remote communities pass through our school, and therefore have a relatively small but representative database of some of the health issues affecting these young people. Unfortunately, our database of post-school destinations for many of these students is not as complete as we would like it to be.

I will give you a short presentation about health issues affecting our students. The college has a small medical centre staffed by two nurses. We also have a local GP who comes in on a sessional basis, usually twice a week. The role of this medical centre is to look after the medical needs of boarding students. I have asked the staff there to compile a list of typical health issues our students present with, and with your permission I would like to read some of them: 'Routine health checks are carried out throughout the year by our GP. Through these checks we become aware of hearing problems, parasite infestation, head lice and scabies, tooth decay, recurrent boils, sexually transmitted diseases.' I will say here now that the first six that I have just read out are very common in our boarding students from remote communities. In addition, it is not uncommon to encounter cases of tuberculosis and weight problems due to diet. There are other long-term illnesses: bronchiectasis, rheumatic heart and genu valgum—knock-knees.

It is also, unfortunately, not uncommon to encounter mental health issues. We currently have 10 of our Indigenous boarding students, out of about 40, seeing a counsellor from Wuchopperen, which is a local sponsored health provider for Indigenous people. It is not unusual to have students self-harming or attempting suicide. It is not a weekly event, but it is not unusual. Our counsellor also helps children with anger management problems. We encounter general problems due to lack of hygiene, students with foetal alcohol syndrome and students dealing with sexual abuse. Almost every Indigenous student at the college would be presenting with one or more of the above issues.

The picture for our non-Indigenous boarding and day students is very different. Although we encounter issues of emotional and sexual abuse in our wider school population, the proportion is nowhere near as high as it is in our Indigenous boarders. Non-Indigenous students commonly present to our counsellor with depressive symptoms or emotional adjustment issues, but the incidence of items on the list I have just read out is minimal or absent.

That concludes what I have to say about health issues. As I said, I doubt any of that is news to you, but in some way it is helpful to me in the role that I occupy to be able to articulate that.

I want to say a little bit about the linkages between education and employment that we have discovered in our 17 or 18 years of operation. As I said before, our database is not complete. I am a little ashamed about that. We are taking steps to do our best to improve it. We have information on immediate post-school destinations for only about a third of the past students in the groups that we are talking about. You can form your own opinion about why that might be; I suspect communication is a major issue there. We are talking about approximately 200 students and we have information on a third of those—say, 60 or 70 students. Of that number, 20 per cent are engaged in TAFE or university study or full- or part-time work. We are not sure about the other 80 per cent. They are probably mostly engaged in raising families, I would think.

I have a list of occupations, which is of anecdotal interest, from our database. We have a public servant in Canberra. We have an occupational therapy student at JCU. We have a butcher. We have a manager at Hungry Jack's. We have a person working at the post office in Hope Vale. We have an apprentice diesel fitter. We have a couple of TAFE students. We have a storeman, a childcare worker at Kowanyama, someone studying dance at the NAISDA Dance College in New South Wales, someone studying at Batchelor Institute in Darwin and a couple in full-time employment. That seems a little sad to me that that is all I can point to. I am assuming, with some confidence, that that is not the whole story on the post-school destinations of our students, but it is the only firm information I can give you.

In our experience, it seems that the best predictor of a successful transition from school to employment in this group, as in any other—this is not rocket science, by the way—is the degree of engagement with and success in formal schooling. In turn, then, the best predictors of school success for students from remote communities in our experience seem to be the following. First is previous schooling history. The main part of that is whether they have a strong attendance record or not. That is what we look for when we receive applications from students. That does not apply only to students from remote communities, but it is certainly indicative and predictive of success in this group, in our experience. Second is whether peer group support is available, and by that I mean students from the same family or community at the school. It is important for our students from remote communities to not be the only one from that community. Third is whether the student can manage the transition from community life to school life. The transitions both to and from the community would occur eight times each year. These are very difficult for many of our students. Expectations and practices can be vastly different in the two cultures. Fourth is whether the student has a stable and functional family background.

There is nothing of revelation in this, but I have identified some barriers to engagement in formal education. We have a lot of accumulated experienced in interacting with students from remote communities, and I think it is not difficult to identify some of the main barriers to engagement for the students who do not succeed, for the students who go home. The literacy and

numeracy level, which is related to poor previous attendance, is also in some cases related in, my opinion, to low academic expectations in some remote schools. The other barrier we would own as Peace Lutheran College is that I do not believe my staff has the ESL—English as a second language—expertise that they need. That is something we have looked at and it has not yet been solved. Other barriers would be characteristic of remote communities themselves. Once again, I am not sharing anything there that you do not know. Dysfunctional families would be another barrier which is related to the remote community, and safety and security is also problematic for many of our children. Abusive relationships and absent or ineffective parents are far from unusual. Cultural influences are another barrier. For example, child raising practices in remote communities can be very different from those in traditional western culture, and that is where a significant number of our students encounter difficulties when they first arrive at Peace Lutheran College. The expectations are quite different, and relating to people can be quite different.

On communication difficulties between school and home family, I would not have thought before I came to my present school that they would be so determining, but they are. They are very difficult. It is very difficult to have instant, useful, effective communication, certainly not from our perspective, with remote community families, and I imagine the opposite also applies. I know that on the odd occasion when we do manage to link up, it is wonderful, but that is far too rare. This is a bit of a stream of consciousness, but the last barrier here is related to a few of the others: simply that the school routine and culture is a major barrier. We have incongruent values between home and school, time management is an issue for many students from remote communities, and violence can be seen as a way of dealing with issues. Those are things which are barriers that can determine whether a student continues with their education, certainly at Peace. Almost all students from remote communities encounter a selection of these. Some are able to overcome them; some lucky ones encounter only a few. Most struggle and many find the struggle too hard and give up. I do not mean to give undue weight to those who give up, because there are some who do not, but it must be said. I did write something about what we do at Peace to help this; I do not know whether you are interested.

What do we do at Peace to help with this struggle? Basically everything we can within our means. Can I say—and this is a bit of personal editorialising—most principles relating to Indigenous education seem to me to be contested or problematic in one way or another. In my experience—and the experience has been costly—it is easy in trying to please everyone to end up tying yourself in knots and making yourself and your institution ineffective. Something I have learnt in five years at Peace is to stop doing that.

So what do we do? We understand that remote students struggle with many things, but we try hard not to patronise them by encouraging them to be different or to take easy options. What I mean by that is that we try hard to support them but not to do that in a patronising way by saying, ‘You’re different; you won’t be able to do that; we’ll look after you.’ We offer support but we also have high expectations. We expect all our students to learn in a mainstream classroom environment. We do not encourage the withdrawal of Indigenous students into special literacy classes. If this occurs it is on the basis that special assistance is available to all students, not just Indigenous students. I might say at this stage that federal government funding policy has on occasion made it difficult for us in doing this because this ISA funding is available for the needs of Indigenous students, so when you have funding based on that principle it is often difficult to do what we do.

We do employ in-class tutors to assist students with marginal literacy skills. We operate a mentoring program for boarding students which teaches life skills and addresses self-worth perceptions. I think most importantly, we provide a safe and secure environment for learning. I do not tolerate any violence. Students who are unable to control violent propensities soon find themselves going home. We believe that in doing that we provide a safe environment, and we do. We do not allow cultural learnings or cultural backgrounds to be used as an excuse for violence. Having different sets of rules for Indigenous students is fundamentally patronising. Of course, what I am saying is not that we do not take into account that people come to us from different cultural backgrounds. What I am saying is that we do not allow those cultural backgrounds to be an excuse for poor behaviour or for lack of adjustment. We teach that certain behaviours and attitudes and values are appropriate in certain contexts.

There is a metaphor, which is in the literature—I do not know how widely disseminated it is—and that is the cultural passport metaphor. What we subscribe to is to give students the skills to apply for a cultural passport they can use when they go back to their communities and when they come to western culture. This applies not only to Indigenous students; it applies to our Papua New Guinean students, to our Japanese students. They are equipped to take this metaphorical passport with them to know that, when they are in a certain context, certain things are appropriate and they can function effectively. That is our aim.

We have high expectations of all our students. I think I have said what I need to say. That is what we do. It is obvious, I think, that we do not have complete success with every student. Simply the fact that we cannot locate 70 per cent of our past students is an indication of that. I am happy to expand on anything I have said. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Fysh. I have a couple of questions about some of your earlier remarks. You spoke about health and suicide and you have expanded quite well on how you engage with those matters. You talked about some of the health presentations more generally, rather than the mental health issues. It must be difficult to try to maintain a strong relationship with the students and the community when you are sometimes presented with issues such as STDs, often affecting those of a young age. What age we talking about in terms of those presenting with things like STDs?

Mr Fysh—Our boarding students come to us typically at year 8, so they are 12 or 13. It is not uncommon for them to present with STDs at that age. It is not universal, but it is not uncommon.

CHAIR—Do you have some sort of reporting regime? Is there some obligation? This is where I am saying it must be difficult.

Mr Fysh—Yes, for reporting abuse. We do, and that is an inexact science, partially because of the lack of communication. Certainly with any student that presented to us with an STD or STI we would make sure we were in touch with Children's Services. Not by any means all, but a significant number of students in that category would already be in the care of Children's Services before we begin.

CHAIR—Could you make some comments on when they first come to the school, and there are all those screenings, and then after a period of time. Is there some recidivism in the

appearance of these presentations or does the fact that they have been identified and it is resolved, or whatever, mean that they are reducing as you go along?

Mr Fysh—What I am saying is a personal synopsis; it is not sociometric. First of all, we do not achieve resolution in a significant number of cases. We manage the situation. We manage the health issues for the student. We are often unable to attack and address the root causes because we cannot get to the communities. So if we can provide a safe, secure haven for them at school and manage their health issues, that is about as far as we get.

CHAIR—Do you have any mechanism—I know you have said it is rare but fantastic if you do have that sort of communication.

Mr Fysh—Yes, we do have it.

CHAIR—What are the processes available to you?

Mr Fysh—The processes available to us, which we have used, have been visits. Hope Vale and Wuja Wujal are the easiest places to visit. They are within a day's drive. They are the most common places we listed. We visit families if families are there. We have had one trip to the Torres Strait in the past five years, which was hugely expensive and that is why we have not had more than one. When we go, we find that parents are keen to talk to us if they know they we coming and that is often problematic in itself. Personal visits are the main thing. Telephone calls are what we rely upon. There can often be a two- or three-day lag in trying to contact someone by telephone. That is the reality.

CHAIR—If you know a student comes from a particular place or you just have an address, if they are not wards of the state, when you ring a community would it be the community council or do you have somebody within the department of education who can actually do that stuff for it?

Mr Fysh—Yes, we have liaison people—sorry, the name has gone—who work for Education Queensland and I believe are federally funded also, who we use quite a lot in that respect.

Senator BOYCE—How do Indigenous students come to you? Is it because their families seek you out or for other reasons?

Mr Fysh—We are relatively well-known throughout the cape and the Torres Strait. Certainly in the five years I have been there we have received a fairly constant stream of applications from communities because they have older family members, siblings, who have been to the school. So word of mouth would be the way they would find out about us.

Senator BOYCE—So the parents or the families have some level of buy-in in because they have chosen to use your school.

Mr Fysh—Yes they do. I have no doubt that they want the best for their children, as any parent dies.

Senator BOYCE—We have had evidence in other situations about quite extensive programs—for instance, by Rio Tinto—to make people job ready, which means even the basics of just learning a routine and understanding that you need to come at the same time every day et cetera. Do you run any programs like that?

Mr Fysh—We would love to. We have had dreams; we do not run programs.

Senator BOYCE—I am not thinking about four job readiness; I am thinking about school-ready programs.

Mr Fysh—On our campus, yes. Remotely the logistics have defeated us. We would be interested in attacking a project which did have asked dealing with several remote communities and looking at readiness needs in literacy and numeracy in students before they come to us. We would love to do that but it has been too hard.

Senator BOYCE—Should changes in attendance rates at local schools assist in this area?

Mr Fysh—Yes. Changes in attendance rates and changes in levels of expectation of children would definitely assist.

Senator BOYCE—Have you noticed any changes at all in the two years we are talking about, until the present time?

Mr Fysh—It is difficult to say because in the past three years we have adjusted our intake policy whereby we have been testing applicants for literacy and numeracy and we have been advising people who come to us with very low levels to go back to their community and get themselves ready, knowing full well that the mechanisms probably are not there but knowing that we cannot do it either. When I say yes, that we are noticing an improvement in literacy issues of students coming to us, that is partly because we have been more selective.

Senator BOYCE—It is the way you are selecting them, rather than changes in their ability.

Mr Fysh—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—You mentioned your inability to contact 70 per cent of past Indigenous students.

Mr Fysh—Indigenous boys, yes.

Senator BOYCE—Are these successful students?

Mr Fysh—No, of the total roll of past students, we have not had any contact with 70 per cent of them. Communication issues would be the biggest issues there.

Senator BOYCE—Why is that a concern for you?

Mr Fysh—I think it is a little sad, because they are part of us, they have been part of us, and not to know what has happened to them I find is a failure.

Senator BOYCE—Part of the satisfaction of teaching is seeing what happens.

Mr Fysh—I think so. And they were part of our community, so it is a connection that has been broken. On a personal level, I find that a little sad.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you, Mr Fysh.

Senator CROSSIN—Thank you, Mr Fysh, for your time this afternoon. So there is no secondary education offered in the communities where your students come from?

Mr Fysh—In some cases there is. I think Western Cape College offers secondary education. We do get some students from Aurukun, but not a large number. When they come, they express dissatisfaction with the local options.

Senator CROSSIN—There is not a huge Lutheran influence in this area, is there? It is predominantly Catholic, isn't it?

Mr Fysh—Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal would be traditionally Lutheran strongholds, to use the term.

Senator CROSSIN—We have the same in the Northern Territory around the Hermannsburg and Central Australian area. As to Austudy: do students come in to you on an Austudy payment?

Mr Fysh—It is ABSTUDY for boarders.

Senator CROSSIN—No difficulties with it?

Mr Fysh—Oh yes, there are.

Senator CROSSIN—Let us get to the heart of the matter!

Mr Fysh—Yes!

Senator CROSSIN—Tell us about some of the treasures of dealing with ABSTUDY!

Mr Fysh—Whatever I say is said in the full knowledge that the people administering ABSTUDY have an awful job—we understand that. From our point of view, it hits the road with us in a number of ways. Communication, once again, is an issue because, typically, the people we speak with are run off their feet and find it difficult to get back to us and difficult to organise transport for students. The major difficulty that we encounter with ABSTUDY payments is—and this is not really ABSTUDY's fault at all—that they do not cover the entire boarding and tuition fee and so we end up wearing the cost.

Senator CROSSIN—In terms of what sort of thing—if you take your boarders out to the pictures on the weekend, for example?

Mr Fysh—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—So the school, generally, would have to pay for that?

Mr Fysh—That is part of what we budget for. We have to.

Senator CROSSIN—Kormilda College in the Northern Territory—you might well know Kormilda College.

Mr Fysh—Yes, I do.

Senator CROSSIN—They have just got a new principal there, actually. They try to get parents to volunteer some money out of their Centrelink payment each fortnight—$20 or $25—so that that can be used for that sort of activity. I do not know if you have thought about that.

Mr Fysh—We do a similar thing. That helps us a little financially; it does not address the problem. It is just a partial addressing of the problem.

Senator CROSSIN—So how many students are there at your college, and how many would board?

Mr Fysh—There are 530 at latest count; it varies a bit. There are about 90 boarders; half of those are typically Indigenous people. Most of those are from remote communities. So it is about eight or nine per cent remote Indigenous.

Senator CROSSIN—How many communities would they come from? Just give me an idea.

Mr Fysh—I would just have to total them. They would be from Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Lockhart River; there would be a few from Pormpuraaw and from Aurukun a scattering; and some from Kowanyama. That would be about it.

Senator CROSSIN—So from about half a dozen, perhaps?

Mr Fysh—And from the Torres Strait—there are a number of islands that we draw from.

Senator CROSSIN—We have struck a situation in the Northern Territory where a couple of our communities, through the ABS classifications, have just been reclassified from ‘very remote’ to ‘remote’. Has that happened to any of the communities you are dealing with?

Mr Fysh—I do not know.

Senator CROSSIN—You would know, because that classification structure is linked specifically to the amount of money boarding students get; you would have experienced a drop in money as of September last year if it had affected you.

Mr Fysh—I am a little embarrassed because I am not sure, but I know that we traditionally struggle with money.

Senator CROSSIN—For the numbers of students you have it would be a substantial amount, because the very remote funding is different from remote funding. You would have noticed a big difference, of probably $100,000 or a couple of hundred thousand.

Mr Fysh—We have not noticed that.

Senator CROSSIN—I am just trying to get a handle on it because I understand some communities in Queensland have been reclassified as well and it has an impact on boarding schools in Queensland.

Mr Fysh—We have not noticed that. I am a little embarrassed.

Senator CROSSIN—That is okay. I take it you have a boarding facility for girls and one for boys?

Mr Fysh—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—How many house parents have you got?

Mr Fysh—We run a boarding house rather than a dormitory. We run two boys' houses and two girls' houses, senior and junior for each. We have a house parent with each house.

Senator CROSSIN—How many are in each house?

Mr Fysh—In the larger houses there are 25 and in the smaller there are 12.

Senator CROSSIN—That is interesting because debate in the Territory, I think, is along the lines of: do we have boarding colleges where you might have 50 in a dormitory or do we actually spend money on boarding houses where there can be more of that one-on-one normality of house parents supporting students? I suppose you would say your experience favours the latter.

Mr Fysh—I would say that even the 25s are too big to give that family feel.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have many students who run off or who, after the second or third week, want to go back to communities? What is the turnover rate like?

Mr Fysh—It is not high. Every year we would have two or three who would come to school and just close up shop. They would have to go home. We would have one or two, maybe three or four in some years, who would decide that it is all too much and go for a walk. There are not large numbers—but enough to be a cause of concern.

Senator CROSSIN—Even one would be a cause of concern, I suspect.

Mr Fysh—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—How do you deal with that instance? Do you just accept the fact that they are not ready to come into town to board?

Mr Fysh—What we accept is the limit of our ability to change the situation. We are talking about a student who comes and then decides that it is too much and that they do not want to be here.

Senator CROSSIN—Does returning to their community mean they get no secondary education?

Mr Fysh—It does not always mean that, because often the parents will approach another boarding school.

Senator CROSSIN—I see.

Senator MOORE—Most of the communities have access to some education.

Mr Fysh—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do any of the ones you have mentioned have absolutely no access to at least grade 10 level?

Mr Fysh—Yes. There are some that only have access to year 7—I am just trying to think.

Senator MOORE—I do not think so.

Mr Fysh—Hope Vale has Cooktown.

Senator MOORE—They bus the kids. My understanding is that every community has some educational capacity within their region to grade 10 at least.

Mr Fysh—Yes. It is a question of whether the student can access geographically the—

Senator MOORE—There would be a number of schools in Cairns who are working through the same issues.

Mr Fysh—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Any of the boarding colleges would, I would imagine. Is there any network in Cairns where you can get together and work through these things as a group to learn and to share, even when students have gone from one to another? Is there anything like that operating?

Mr Fysh—The short answer is no. There are three other institutions I am aware of that offer boarding for Indigenous students from remote communities. One is Wangetti, which we really have very little contact with—and I should add that perhaps that is not a good thing. I should have more contact with them. The other two are St Augustine's and St Monica's.

Senator MOORE—They have been doing it for 50 years.

Mr Fysh—Once again, I am a little bit ashamed to say we have no contact. It is not for want of trying.

Senator MOORE—Sure. It is just one of those things. As you have said consistently in your evidence, the issues are ones that people know. There is a lot of knowledge—not all good. The other thing is that I know there is lots of exchange through the Lutheran education network. I have visited Yirara College in Alice Springs and, many times, Concordia College in Toowoomba, as well as a number of the others that have come up. Is there a network within Lutheran education about these things? One of the things I have noticed is that teachers move between them. I met several teachers in Alice Springs who had been in that kind of thing. Is there a learning network that way?

Mr Fysh—It is very tenuous. There is a network of Lutheran principals, and we talk with each other. St Peter's in Indooroopilly, Concordia in Toowoomba and my college would be the three boarding colleges.

Senator MOORE—In Queensland?

Mr Fysh—In Queensland. The other two colleges work from a different tradition, a different resource base. They encounter similar issues. There is interaction but, once again, not a great deal. On the other hand, with Yirara College in Alice Springs, the delineation there is that we try to offer a mainstream education—which makes communication, while useful, not necessarily problem solving. Yirara do an alternative program

Senator MOORE—And it is purely Aboriginal people. The whole issue of the choice between boarding and developing a more effective local mechanism is a dynamic that has been going on for a long time; it is getting more media now. Are you aware if there is there a hostel arrangement anywhere in Cairns?

Mr Fysh—I am aware of one for Papua New Guinea students. We have a number of our Indigenous students who use homestay arrangements with families.

Senator MOORE—Is there a difference between their adaptation and success rate and that of people within the boarding school proper?

Mr Fysh—Yes, there is. If there is a trend, students who are in homestay situations are predominantly students who have tried boarding and cannot do it or who were going to fail—who were possibly going to be excluded from the school. In almost all cases, they then continue through to year 12—

Senator MOORE—When they go to the homestay?

Mr Fysh—With a homestay family.

Senator MOORE—That is interesting in itself.

Mr Fysh—Yes, it is.

Senator MOORE—Is that dependent on the quality of the homestay? I would imagine it is.

Mr Fysh—I am not aware of any ineffective homestays.

Senator MOORE—I do not have personal knowledge of the homestay program. Are these families who identify and put themselves forward for this option?

Mr Fysh—Sometimes they are distant relatives. We have a staff member at school who sees it as part of her life's work to foster Indigenous kids. There are a range of people from different backgrounds who would do it. There are other staff members who do it because they think it is a good idea once in a while. It is not only staff members; there are parents who do it, but not so many.

Senator MOORE—Are you aware if that is a mechanism that is used by other schools who are offering education in Cairns for kids who are not from the Cairns region?

Mr Fysh—I do not have any specific knowledge.

Senator MOORE—There is no professional knowledge of this. It is a mechanism that happens but it may not be documented as well as it could be. That is interesting in itself, and we might put that down for future consideration. It is interesting that your example is that those kids do better.

Mr Fysh—I am talking about a sample size of half a dozen, but still.

Senator MOORE—Of course. The evidence base in this area is very slim, so we grab onto anything just to see how it is working. I have one more question. Is there any difference generally between girls and boys in terms of performance and the kinds of issues you have raised?

Mr Fysh—With health issues not predominantly—

Senator MOORE—Generally there is no discernable difference—

Mr Fysh—As far as completion rates, I have not got a big enough sample to draw from. I do not notice any differences.

Senator MOORE—Two of the three colleges that you mentioned are single-sex schools and one is mixed, so there are all kinds of education things being looked at. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Fysh. If there are other questions from the committee they will be passed to you on notice through the secretariat, and if there are other bits of information that you think would be important for us to know, or pieces of your evidence that need correcting, you will have access to *Hansard*. Please let the committee know through the secretariat.

[1.54 pm]

PRICE, Ms Tricia Edith, Senior Solicitor, Legal Aid Queensland

CHAIR—I welcome Ms Tricia Price from Legal Aid Queensland. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. As a government official you will not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy, although this does not preclude questions asking for explanations of policy or factual questions about when and how policies were adopted. I now invite you to make a short opening statement. At the conclusion of your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put some questions to you.

Ms Price—Thank you. Legal Aid Queensland provides legal services and legal assistance to disadvantaged Queenslanders. I am from the Cairns office, and we have a large number of disadvantaged people in our region, predominantly of Indigenous background. Our mission is to achieve fair outcomes in the justice system and our vision is to be part of a fairer justice system in Queensland that responds to the diverse needs of disadvantaged people. We do that by working with other legal service providers to deliver quality legal services where they are needed and to advocate for changes in the justice system around the state. We are committed to the delivery of appropriate legal services in remote and regional Indigenous communities and we recognise that some of those communities have social and economic indicators and geographical remoteness which create barriers to accessing our services.

Legal Aid Queensland have developed whole-of-organisation strategies to address issues of disadvantage in this area. We employ a Brisbane based Indigenous policy officer to provide specialist Indigenous policy support to our organisation and to guide the development of the Indigenous strategy. Our strategy has been developed to remove the barriers to the use of mainstream legal services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and our particular focus is women and their families living in those remote and regional communities. We are not the primary service provider for criminal law services and regard the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service as that service agency. We do, however, provide criminal legal services to Indigenous communities in cases where there are conflicts or where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service cannot assist.

Our strategy is really focused on raising awareness of our services in those communities and increasing access to those services—again, particularly for women and their families. We ensure that our services are provided in a culturally appropriate way and we conduct community legal education in the communities. We have an Indigenous information hotline that is specifically dedicated to Indigenous clients calling into the organisation so that they can receive priority for all legal advice and information. We have an Indigenous referral panel, which is a panel of lawyers or legal firms with specific experience in providing services of a complex nature to Indigenous clients, and it requires experience and more senior practitioners to be part of that panel. We also have developed best practice guidelines for providing legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. We have an Indigenous staffing partnership network. We take on public interest matters concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families—for example, inquests; in the last few years we have done a number of those cases. We also provide

culturally appropriate publications about our services and information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

We have a pilot service to remote communities. The areas of our organisation that undertake those pilot services are in Cairns and Townsville. In both of those offices we employ Indigenous community liaison officers, and they assist as a link between communities and our organisation. We also have conducted a pilot program for the past two years in the areas of Thursday Island, Bamaga and its surrounding communities, and Cooktown, including Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal. We currently employ an Indigenous liaison officer in Bamaga who is a community woman who also provides links from the community into our organisation. In addition to the strategy itself, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients can access our services through any of our 13 regional offices and our head office in Brisbane.

Legal Aid Queensland also provides representation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in the Cairns region under the Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program. That is a voluntary treatment program for Indigenous clients appearing before the Magistrate's Court for alcohol related offences. That is a trial program for three years, and it is a reimbursement arrangement whereby ATSILS provide the primary representation and Legal Aid reimburses the funds for it.

I think that concludes the range of services that we target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients throughout Queensland and the Cairns region, particularly the cape. We also have an outreach service to Ravenshoe, Tully and Cooktown, which has a large Indigenous clientele.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Price. I have a couple of points to clarify before I go to the committee for questions. You mentioned a best practice guide in terms of providing legal assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Is there a bound version that you could perhaps provide to the committee?

Ms Price—I can certainly provide a copy of the guidelines.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. You spoke about the Indigenous community liaison officers. Can you tell me about the nature of their employment—whether it is full-time or part-time, whether they work for other organisations as well—and the nature of their backgrounds and training?

Ms Price—The primary background required is that they have strong community links, so that they are known in the community. I suppose a good colloquial description is 'a good go-to person'. So they are identified by their communities, in their communities, as somebody people can go to for assistance, and they link people into our organisation. Our Indigenous liaison officer in Bamaga is employed on a contract of 10 hours per week. That is a casual arrangement, but it is a set 10 hours per week. It was aimed to enable somebody to still be receiving some kind of benefit, particularly if they were a woman with a family, and still have an opportunity for employment. We provide training for the on the ground in the community. We also have brought our ILOs to Cairns and to Townsville for training and for them to get together and meet people in the regional office.

Senator CROSSIN—I chair the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Over the last year or so the references committee did a comprehensive inquiry into funding of community legal aid. I do not know whether you are aware of that inquiry or our report. We typically concluded that your sector is significantly underfunded and that you could do a lot more and be even more effective with additional resources. I wondered whether you wanted to provide us with a comment about your funding level and how you exist, or your capacity to improve your services with additional funding. What are you not doing that you think you could do or could do better if you had additional funding?

Ms Price—It is a difficult question for me to answer in terms of commenting on funding. Questions of specific funding fall outside the confines of my brief from my organisation. The nature of my position is such that I am not able to comment on it, because I just do not have that knowledge. What I can say in terms of our service delivery, which is in the paper that I intend to table at the conclusion of this hearing, is that we have had to scale back some of our operations because the cost has been found to be prohibitive. The cost of travel and of literally being in the communities is very expensive.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have a breakdown, such as a graph or an indication, of the sorts of cases you deal with? Would a large percentage of them be criminal cases?

Ms Price—No. The reason for that is that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service is the primary service delivery agency for criminal law matters. As I indicated earlier, if there are issues of legal conflict, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service is not able to take on a matter, we will assist and provide funding. We also take on matters where we are directly approached by Indigenous clients from remote areas to fund their matters. The types of matter that we predominantly deal with in our service would be child protection. That forms a significant proportion of what we do. Issues relating to debt, consumer protection, tenancy, health and domestic violence also form a big proportion of what we do.

Senator MOORE—Like DVOs.

Ms Price—Assisting clients in obtaining domestic violence orders or variations thereof, yes, because the service is focused primarily at women and their families.

Senator MOORE—So it is civil matters really.

Ms Price—Yes. There is a small proportion of family law, depending on the community that we go into, in some more than others.

Senator MOORE—How many staff are at the centre? Give me an idea of how big it is.

Ms Price—In Cairns there is myself as senior solicitor and five other lawyers. In terms of travelling, we have one lawyer who does the more remote travel and she travels with the community liaison officer. Two of the other lawyers do more of the short-term travel, day travel. We have six administrative staff in the office.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have a bush court system here in the state?

Ms Price—If a bush court is similar to what we call the Murri Court, yes.

Senator CROSSIN—I am talking about an ordinary magistrate's court having a sitting in communities.

Ms Price—Yes, in every community there is a magistrate's court. There is a magistrate's court in Thursday Island with a registrar, and that registrar, as I understand it, looks after Bamaga. There is a courthouse in Bamaga, and there is a courthouse in each other community in Cape York. That includes Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw—

Senator CROSSIN—The magistrates would fly from here to hear civil matters?

Ms Price—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—DPP would go from here?

Ms Price—DPP is different. If you are talking about the magistrates court matters, they have two circuits a month that travel the Cape with the police prosecutors. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service primarily look after that. The High Court travel to some of the communities. I know they have travelled to Thursday Island, Cooktown, Pormpuraaw. I am not sure off the top of my head which other communities, but that is when the DPP goes with them.

Senator CROSSIN—That gives me an idea. And interpreters. Is there an interpreter service here in Queensland, or how do you get on with getting people to understand what you are doing for them?

Ms Price—Interpreters for courts are in my experience very difficult because there is a lack of accredited interpreters. That is the bottom line.

Senator CROSSIN—But Queensland has an interpreter service?

Ms Price—Not a coordinated one, as I understand it. There are various people in various communities who, as I understand it, are accredited, but otherwise it is not like the translating and interpreting service that is run by the Commonwealth where you can just ring up and ask for a particular kind of interpreter.

Senator CROSSIN—In the Northern Territory there is an NT interpreter service and you can ring up and get usually a person in that region who speaks that language to assist.

Ms Price—I am not aware of any such service in Queensland.

Senator CROSSIN—So you do not use interpreters in your work?

Ms Price—For our service in providing advice to clients we use our community liaison officer. She can speak Aboriginal, English and Creole. Where we have difficulty with language we would use somebody in the community. They may not be accredited to the court standard but we would use somebody in the community as a support person who would be able to assist in language issues.

Senator SIEWERT—You have partly answered my question when you were talking to Senator Crossin, and that is the nature of the legal work you are doing. You said the bulk of the work in Aboriginal communities is working with women and children. Are there situations where you do have to represent them in court as well?

Ms Price—Where they are eligible for a grant of aid we will either represent them ourselves or we will refer the matter to a firm of solicitors on our preferred supplier panel.

Senator SIEWERT—I know the riders you put on your comments around funding, however you did say that you have had to cut back some services. What is the nature of those services that you have had to cut back?

Ms Price—We did have an Indigenous liaison officer on the ground in two other communities and we have had to cut back on that service because of the constraints with funding and the cost.

Senator SIEWERT—That obviously would make it more difficult for you to work with clients but has it affected your ability to represent them or provide services?

Ms Price—I suppose the difficulty comes with not having somebody in the community as a link to our service. We are based in Cairns. For there to be somebody in the community who recognises that somebody has a legal issue is half the battle most of the time—it is about recognising that the letter of demand that is now a complainant summons is a legal issue and is not something that you can just put in a drawer and forget about.

Senator SIEWERT—It is the trouble-spotting.

Ms Price—It is the trouble-spotting. As I said, it is having a go-to person. 'Why have I got this letter?' The go-to person says, 'We've got a legal service coming up next week; we'll get you in for an appointment to get some advice on what you need to do about that.'

Senator SIEWERT—My colleagues may need to help me remember a few of the details here. When we were in South Australia we were talking to one of the legal centres there that works with some of the remote communities, particularly in the APY Lands. They were commenting on the problems they are having in relation to domestic violence and representing women in the circuit courts because women are not able to get access to support services. Quite often it is the perpetrators who are getting legal aid and support and the women are not. Do you have similar sorts of circumstances here or do you feel that there is enough support?

Ms Price—I do not. That is why I think that our service has been targeted the way it has; that was the identified gap.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Price—The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services generally represents perpetrators because of the very fact that they have been charged with a criminal offence. That being the primary service there was nothing then for women and children on the other side of the fence.

Senator SIEWERT—There are some services in South Australia; there are just not enough. We know about the funding cut issue, but if you were getting an appropriate level of funding are there enough services to meet community need?

Ms Price—We are constantly looking at legal need. That is why we have established a regional legal assistance forum in each region. That regional legal assistance forum is chaired by Legal Aid and the members are: the Family Violence Prevention Unit, ATSILs, the Women's Legal Services, Cairns Community Legal Centre. Then we can map what each service is doing in each community. Our pilot service targeted four communities of 20-odd in the Cape. We only targeted Thursday Island; Bamaga and the surrounding communities; Cooktown, which encompasses Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal; and Yarrabah. We do not provide our service to every community. The pilot has been for those four communities alone.

Senator SIEWERT—I have a couple more questions arising out of that. Can you remind me who provided the funding for the pilot?

Ms Price—Our finance section looks after that.

Senator SIEWERT—I thought you said it before and that I had not cottoned on.

Ms Price—I would not be 100 per cent sure whether it is Commonwealth or state funding. I am not sure of the split.

Senator SIEWERT—I hate to give community organisations more homework. Would you be able to let us know which funding program it is? There are lots of funding programs, and I am very interested in knowing which funding program is funding that.

Ms Price—I could take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be fantastic. As I said, I hate giving NGOs homework. The other issue I had that came out of that was what services are going into the other centres that you are not servicing.

Ms Price—In some communities the Family Violence Service is going in. They are the only other service that would be physically visiting that community.

Senator SIEWERT—So would it be fair to surmise from that that there would be towns that are not getting visits from legal support services?

Ms Price—They would certainly be getting a visit from ATSILS because the courts sit in those communities on a circuit basis, but they may not be getting a service with respect to people not having to go to court for criminal matters.

Senator SIEWERT—So we could be facing a situation in some of those centres, therefore, that is similar to a situation in South Australia, where there could be some women who are not receiving support services in the domestic violence situation we discussed earlier?

Ms Price—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—Who would we ask about getting a map of where the services are and are not?

Ms Price—It is a multitude of organisations. Subject to any direction I might have from management in Brisbane, I am happy to provide the mapping that we have done if that is of assistance.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be great. It would help us have an understanding of who is doing what where. Thank you.

Ms Price—Subject to approval, I am happy to do that.

Senator BOYCE—With regard to the pilot program, where do the go-to people physically do their work in the communities?

Ms Price—What we do is come to an arrangement with a local organisation in the community. On Thursday Island it was the Mura Kosker Society, which is the women's organisation in that community. They were our main hosting agency, who provided assistance to the Indigenous liaison officer. We would provide resources for phone, fax, paper, a filing cabinet, information and all of that stuff, and on occasion they have been housed in that organisation, but they have also been working part time for that organisation, so we have had one person basically doing two jobs. In other centres it has been the justice centre. We have also ensured that where it is a women's organisation we make time to go see clients at a neutral place like the courthouse while we are in that community. That way we can see men as well, because men do have civil issues.

Senator BOYCE—Exactly. I was particularly interested in that because where they are would affect how much they were used and how they were viewed.

Ms Price—And that assists in their support.

Senator BOYCE—You have told us a little bit about what they do. What else do they do?

Ms Price—In their 10 hours a week?

Senator BOYCE—Yes. What are some more examples of the sorts of things that they would do to assist people?

Ms Price—They would assist clients in filling out forms and getting those forms to us so that if they need urgent representation in court they could get their legal aid application completed and to us so that it can be processed in the Cairns office. They would spend time talking to other organisations in the community about the legal needs are in community legal education. For example, schools had an issue with the rights of young people when dealing with the police. That would be fed back to us so that we could provide, perhaps, a CLE when we next went into the community. The Indigenous liaison officer would help get that organised. They make sure that our visits to the community are advertised. They keep us informed of any things that might be happening in the community; if there has been a plethora of travelling salesmen and there are

issues that come out of that, they will let us know about it. They are really the link between the community and our organisation.

Senator BOYCE—We have spent some time in Weipa and Bamaga. There was some concern there about the prospect of an alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre in Weipa that was supposed to have been completed by now but has not been. Have you had any dealings with repercussions of the alcohol management plan and the fact that there has not been that final delivery and follow through?

Ms Price—Not so much that, but I will say that our work really comes at the pointy end of the stick. There are a number of issues in various communities—housing, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues—that are social issues that require address, and when they are not addressed people require our services. We have not been involved so much in the alcohol management plans. I will say that having a rehabilitation centre north of Cairns would be enormously useful.

Senator BOYCE—If you are going to have an alcohol management plan you need a rehabilitation centre. The other issue that was suggested to us was that there should be some juvenile detention centre or low-security detention centre on the western side of the cape for people with relatively minor crimes. Does your organisation have a view on that/

Ms Price—It is very difficult for clients and for families at the present time because of the fact that the only detention centre, Cleveland, is in Townsville. For young women it is Brisbane. That is a considerable distance. It is very difficult to have contact with family if the family cannot travel. So would we support whether a further detention centre should be established, we would support one that would be closer to where young people’s families are to enable them to keep that connection with their families. It is quite a distance away where it is.

Senator BOYCE—The other issue that came out of that was the fact that there was virtually no assistance for people to return to community at the end of their detention.

Ms Price—Are you talking about adults or children?

Senator BOYCE—I understood from the evidence we were given that it is both, but you might have more knowledge.

Ms Price—Physically returning to the communities?

Senator BOYCE—Yes—that you could literally be put out the gate and told, ‘There you go.’

Ms Price—From my experience with the majority of my juvenile clients, if they are released from detention the Department of Communities does arrange for them to be returned to the community. I know that sometimes presents logistical issues because of flight times and whether or not it is appropriate for a child to travel on a bus from Townsville to Cairns, whether or not they need to be accompanied, who is going to meet them at the bus station—all of those things.

Senator BOYCE—Theoretically.

Ms Price—I understand practically that the department does do that. I could be wrong, but I my understanding has always been that when Lotus Glen Correctional Centre releases somebody here in Mareeba or up on the tablelands they are repatriated to the community that they come from.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

CHAIR—Before we finish up, I have one quick question. I am not sure if you are aware in your experience of the frequency with which the court may say to an individual that they are not allowed to return to a particular community. It has been put to us that sometimes they have to then use the facilities of outstations and those sorts of things. What is your experience in that regard?

Ms Price—I have had experience of that primarily in bringing bail applications to the higher courts where it has resulted from decisions in the Magistrates Court or the Childrens Court for a person to be given a bail condition not allowing them to return to their community. That is particularly difficult with juveniles because where else do they go? Who is going to supervise them? What support do they get? That has been my experience in bringing applications to have those conditions removed or varied, because it has made it practically impossible for a 15- or 16-year-old—

CHAIR—Some of these eventually end up in outstations near the community so that by the letter of the law they are abiding by the court's decision but they are staying as close as they can.

Ms Price—I am not aware of that, but I am aware that there are juveniles that have been left adrift because they cannot return to their community as part of their bail conditions but there is no other support in place for them.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Ms Price. If there are any further questions from the committee, we will place those questions with you on notice through the secretariat. I understand you are going to provide us with a copy of those guidelines. If there is further information or a further submission you wish to provide, please provide that through the secretariat.

Ms Price—Thank you.

[2.25 pm]

CLAUDIE, Mr David, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman, Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—I welcome Mr David Claudie from the Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation. Do you have anything to say about the capacity in which you appear today?

Mr Claudie—I am from the Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation in central Cape York, which is located on the northern Kaanju homelands, Kuuku I'yu, based on the Wenlock and Pascoe rivers.

CHAIR—Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has previously been provided to you. I now invite you to make a short opening statement or provide some remarks to the committee. At the conclusion of that, I will invite the members of the committee to put questions to you.

Mr Claudie—My statement would be to get towards our boys. What I am talking about with homelands is that we are not recognised up in Cape York to rehabilitate our younger generation or even our own people in terms of centralised towns. All the programs that have been done by the federal government since ATSIC and all that went down took the homelands policy off the table, and that really crumbled our homelands movement. There are only a few up in Cape York that have gone back to homelands, and you are looking at him.

We like to grab our own funding out on our homelands to generate income towards working, setting people up so they can pay taxes. We set our own programs up. As I said yesterday at the wild rivers one, we set up an NRM program to generate economic development. In our homelands, from our ancestors, we are not allowed alcohol or drugs. A lot of our mob up in Cape York respect our homelands in that field. We have the alcohol management plan in there, between Lockhart, Coen and Weipa. Our mob are passing from Lockhart over to Coen just to get grog. They do not pull in there if they are drunk. That is the good respect we get; we can police our own people out on our homelands.

Homelands development is the key to closing the gap in health, social, economic and cultural outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. That is the way we see it. We have been there for about 13 years. We try to get up a working relationship as a local community with the non-Indigenous mob around us, in our homelands. The focus of government funding policies and programs on the centralisation of Aboriginal people in large townships and growth towns goes against the government's commitment to closing the gap; that is the way we see it. The focus of government funding policies and programs in remote areas needs to be on-ground initiatives, including those of groups and organisations based on homelands.

I think you were just saying to the lady who was here before me that the court system and justice system want to rehabilitate people under the parole system when they come out of Lotus Glen Correctional Centre. When they come up there into the towns, it does not resolve the

situation by sending our people back onto the homelands. They are not giving the homelands any programs or funding to accommodate them.

That is just reinventing the wheel in terms of keeping the Aboriginal people going on that one cycle. What we need to do is say to the courts, 'If you want to send Aboriginal people back to the Cape into those communities and back out to their homelands through the criminal justice system, you have to give support and there needs to be a whole-of-government approach in terms of Jenny Macklin talking to this fellow or that fellow, so that we can get the homelands policy back up and going and so that we can all accommodate it.' That is basically what I wanted to talk about—homelands development, centralisation and support for homelands development.

This has been short notice for me—and probably for you mob too. I heard that you were coming up into the Cape and having a Senate inquiry on all the problems and stuff in the centralised places, but really the problem in those centralised places is that Aboriginal people are not policing themselves. They cannot get a chance to do that. They do not have ownership. They do not have some sort of set of directions where they belong. Everybody in that one area is from a different clan or a different tribe. When you get all different people into one area, the only thing they do is fight each other about who has got the best car or who has got the best yard, house or things like that. That is a Western perspective. From our perspective, we have got our own homelands—and they are big areas. We need to repatriate our people back there so that we can grab a hold of it ourselves, but we need support from the federal government in that regard.

Senator FURNER—Mr Claudie, we have heard from the Cairns Institute this morning evidence with regard to economical development through endeavours such as tourism opportunities for Indigenous communities. Can you elaborate on those types of initiatives, if that is what you were saying in your submission when you referred to 'opportunities for enterprise development'?

Mr Claudie—When ATSIC was running, it did not recognise individual tribes up in Cape York or individual Indigenous clan groups. ATSIC said, 'This mob up in Cape York have low numeracy and literacy skills,' and set up programs down here expecting our mob to come from there down to here to learn and to be trained. We are saying that they need to be trained up there in Cape York. For example, you cannot have economic development down here for Cape York; you need Cape York people to be handling that economic development up there in terms of setting up businesses for themselves and having some sort of ownership in that field. What the institute said this morning was the first time I had heard about it.

Senator FURNER—You may be aware that we have travelled in the last couple of days through Weipa and Bamaga. There are initiatives in some of those areas where people have been very entrepreneurial with respect to setting up their own visions of businesses in various aspects of those communities. I think later in your paper you talk about opportunities for tourism in particular areas. I am interested in how that might work and how that might advantage communities in turning around the economic disadvantage in these communities.

Mr Claudie—As I said, in those communities you have all kinds of different tribes sitting there. For instance, in Weipa, you have a traditional owner, clan or tribe belonging to that area and then you have got all these other ones inside there. That is what I meant by centralisation. They do not have any ownership whatsoever. It is all pooled—for example, making boomerangs

or making spears or doing art. We are all pooled depending on different skills from our ancestors and culture and traditions. We are business minds. We have to be; otherwise, we would not survive. We want to be given a chance. With government sending money to centralised places down here or to subregional or regional centres that speak on our behalf and cut the money out from us, we have nothing. That money needs to be streamlined down to give us an opportunity to think for ourselves in terms of getting businesses up and running—for example, tourism. We cannot do tourism in our centralised towns. We can promote tourism on our homelands. We can do ecotourism and stuff like that—set up camp grounds and employ rangers or caretakers and get artists from that area who can do the art that belongs to that area. We need to market it, manufacture it and sell it from our homelands. We cannot sell it from a town, because we do not have ownership.

Senator FURNER—Is anything that you just referred to happening currently in terms of some sort of business plan or marketing?

Mr Claudie—Where we are?

Senator FURNER—Yes.

Mr Claudie—Yes. But it is like the chicken before the egg now. IBA have to give out loans. For us, as Aboriginal people, we do not have any money in the first place. If we get a loan, we will be paying that loan back for the rest of our lives and not making dollars. We need seed funding to get over the bump and then we will be on our way.

Senator FURNER—The committee has heard from various regions on issues regarding health, education and employment. Can you explain the situation in the homelands on those particular issues? Is there an issue in terms of employment, health or education?

Mr Claudie—Can you repeat that? I missed the first part.

Senator FURNER—The committee has been to several communities to identify issues with Aboriginal and islanders associated with poor health, poor education and lack of employment. What is the situation in the homelands that you refer to?

Mr Claudie—We do not have issues in terms of employment. If we are asking for dollars to create employment on our homelands. That is what I meant by the towns. We cannot create employment in towns. We cannot create businesses in towns. We cannot create our own autonomy. The main issue is autonomy for the people. That autonomy can be sustained by people on their homelands. This can eradicate health issues because we would be using our own medicines. If we manufacture our own medicines for our own people, that is even better than getting the raw materials down here—in terms of the many side effects. Ours is for cure. You are away from alcohol, you are away from drugs and you are away from all the other stuff that is in those centralised places. Out there, we control our own people in that field, so we are right on top of it. It is not an issue on the homelands.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you for your submission, Mr Claudie. I am from Western Australia, so I do not really know the areas of the homelands that you are talking about. How many communities would there be within what you are describing as the homelands?

Mr Claudie—My homeland is 840,000 hectares and it has 22 clan estates inside. We have, like anywhere else, a hub. I spoke about Chuulangun. We started off as hub there first.

Senator ADAMS—How many people are in that hub?

Mr Claudie—In that hub there are around 10 to 20 people at any given time. What we do if the government gives us a bit of training money and things like that is that we put it into our homelands to get young people or older people trained—we have different targets—we get groups to come out and set up training for conservation land managers. We cannot get our people to fit into Western concepts because we are land mangers; we belong to the land.

Senator ADAMS—You belong to the land, but you have to live somewhere. Are you saying there are 20-odd people perhaps living in that hub before they start going out to smaller communities?

Mr Claudie—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Also I note within your submission that there was a recommendation 20 years ago about state and territory governments providing funding to homelands for sanitation, power, schools and all of that. In the Northern Territory you are probably aware that they have set up 20 different regional centres so that all those health services, education and everything can be put together. That is a hub but then there are smaller ones going out. There is only a certain amount of money to go around, so how are you going to be able to service all those small communities with only 20-odd people living there with all these facilities? I know in Western Australia we cannot get rubbish collected.

Mr Claudie—One thing we have towards that is that it is one big homelands whereas the ones that you are talking about and what happened in the Cape was that we formed subregional groups—subregional centres we call them. There was one in Coen that we came out of called CRAC—Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation—and there were eight different tribes inside there that represented the Coen region. When the government gave, say, $20,000 to go to the hub for a certain thing out on the homelands that money would be split between those eight tribes. Each one would get probably $2,500 each. That is what we meant by centralisation. With what I am talking about my homelands gets one big hub then Chuulangun is one big hub. The money comes into there. That money will be evenly spread out amongst those 22 clan estates.

Senator ADAMS—But how are you going to provide water, power and all of the services that you expect to be there just to a small group of people?

Mr Claudie—What I am doing is repatriating my people to come back to their homelands. All those 22 clan estates, those people will eventually come back to. They cannot come back if there is nothing there.

Senator ADAMS—That is what I am saying. How far is the money going to spread out to set up each of these little communities with all the essential services?

Mr Claudie—We did our own plans. We did our own evaluations as to how much power and water we need in one clan estate and how many houses. In the 22 clan estates we know who is

who, what is what, what has been taken out. We have all that planned there. All we need is the money. That is what I am saying.

Senator ADAMS—How much, say, just for one hub is it going to cost to set it up with everything that you require for those 20 people?

Mr Claudie—Give and take, it is not just one big lump sum of money. We are talking about long-term stuff in terms of how many years it will take, say, the next 20-odd years. There were 5,000 people who were taken out. We were a stronghold of 5,000 people. They are spread all over Australia now. What we decided was to evaluate what is already there in Cape York first to come back out to start it off. So for the next 20-odd years we are looking at probably around $10 million roughly. For just Chuulangun itself, we estimated probably around $1 million just to get the basics—a little bit of housing, accommodation and stuff like that. At the moment, we have one big house there now that accommodates 20 people.

Senator ADAMS—Has it got power? Has it got water?

Mr Claudie—We set it up with solar power. We got that through the rebate program that went through the Bushlight program.

Senator ADAMS—What about education for the children?

Mr Claudie—My kids go to school at the School of the Air. I had to buy my own classroom for them. I work out of an eight-metre by nine-metre shed. I set up telecommunications myself. I started out from Coen on CDEP money two days a week. It was a hundred and something dollars. I saved it up and bought my own computer and telephone deals and things like that. That is where we started.

Senator ADAMS—How many people have you got living there with you now?

Mr Claudie—We have about seven, at the most. People come and go. Because we cannot watch TV and things like that, they say, ‘We’ll go back to town.’ If I can have something there that will draw them out then we might get a winner.

Senator ADAMS—How far from town are you?

Mr Claudie—From each town we are probably around 180 kilometres or something like that.

Senator ADAMS—For your tourist enterprises, what are the tourists going to do when they come out there?

Mr Claudie—We have camp grounds set up all over with our river systems and catchment. What we can try to do is hook up with Tourism Queensland so that we can have some sort of network where we get bigger support from the Queensland government in that field with the national parks with their state land dealings so that we can get some sort of economy created inside so that we can pay for fuel, water and whatever we need into the future.

Senator SIEWERT—What response have you had from government to date?

Mr Claudie—No response. It was always a negative response. If you haven't got a homelands policy on the table and I am singing the homelands policy tune then what is the point? That is why the government gives me the answer, 'We haven't got a homeland's policy on the table.' I cannot answer that with a nice answer.

Senator SIEWERT—So all of the work you have done so far is—

Mr Claudie—Based on what I funded.

Senator SIEWERT—based on what you have funded.

Mr Claudie—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you get a lot of support from your broader community?

Mr Claudie—Yes, but everybody is all talk. They always say, 'Yes, yes, we will support you,' and things like that, but then when they come out they say, 'You've just got a shed,' or 'I'll do that when I go back home.' I want Chuulangun to be an example for other homelands and people in those communities. I want them to go back out and grab their own accountability and responsibilities in that sense.

Senator MOORE—You said you are about 180 kilometres from the nearest town. I imagine Coen is the nearest town. What are the roads like and the accessibility for people to move to and from?

Mr Claudie—It is all dirt road up there.

Senator MOORE—And in the wet season?

Mr Claudie—In the wet season we are cut off altogether.

Senator MOORE—So for several months a year in the current arrangements your people will be totally self-sufficient?

Mr Claudie—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What about food? You were telling me about trying to bulk buy and stuff like that.

Mr Claudie—When we first moved out to our development we first thought about communications, then access, then water reticulation, then power and then accommodation.

Senator MOORE—And you ticked all those things off as you did them?

Mr Claudie—Yes. We did it all by starting off with the CDEP money and then we bought some computers and wrote submissions to the RASS program to set up the airstrip so that we could actually get food and basic mail every week. I had a bit of experience working on another

airstrip. I worked there for about six years. I engineered the airstrip myself and set out a model and then got my mate the pastoralist next door to do the clearing work on it and then we got some money from the RASS program to set it up as an all-season airstrip.

Senator MOORE—So RFDS gets in and out, if required?

Mr Claudie—Basically we have it for RFDS.

Senator MOORE—I am interested in the relationship you have—and we have talked about it—with the pastoralists who are out there, because there are not many people around and it is very isolated. What kind of relationships have you built up with the people who have been using the land? It is for cattle usually. There are a lot of cattle up there.

Mr Claudie—You can work up a deal with a cattleman; you cannot with a miner. So it is give and take. With the cattlemen, we have programs like feral animal control and stuff like that. To save paying a big lump sum of money, which we get from the federal government, to pay for someone down here to come up into the Cape to help us what we have is a fee-for-service contract with our local mob. We keep the local economy going, because the pastoralists, the poor buggers, cannot even kill their own beef to eat it because the old government will want them to pay taxes.

Senator MOORE—There are regulations around those things. You know that.

Mr Claudie—But they cannot apply for feral animal money or weed control money or things like that.

Senator MOORE—So you negotiate with the pastoralists rather than with government?

Mr Claudie—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Even though you have done training through the rangers program and those things.

Mr Claudie—Yes. That is what I took to the government to try to get a collaborative relationship between us, government, pastoralists and industries around there.

Senator MOORE—Did you have any success with that?

Mr Claudie—Yes.

Senator MOORE—You already have that established, haven't you?

Mr Claudie—I think we are the only place in Australia that has a relationship like that.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Mr Claudie. There are quite possibly some further questions from the committee and they will be provided to you on notice through the secretariat. If you have a further submission or other elements that you may have omitted from your submission

that you wish to provide to the committee at some later stage you can provide that through the secretariat.

Proceedings suspended from 2.52 pm to 3.09 pm

PEARSON, Mr Noel, Director, Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy

CHAIR—I welcome Mr Noel Pearson from the Cape York Institute for Leadership and Policy. I am sure you have been through this a fair few times before. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to you. I invite you to make a statement or presentation to the committee then we will go to some questions.

Mr Pearson—All right. We are two-and-a-bit years into the Cape York Welfare Reform trial in Hope Vale, Mossman Gorge, Aurukun and Coen. We proposed to the previous federal government a framework for reforming welfare and getting a development agenda going in these communities. The starting point for our thinking was to ask the question: how has development taken place in other parts of the world? The international literature on development was the starting place for our thinking. The literature seemed to suggest a number of critical ingredients that are needed and that were present when places like Singapore and Malaysia and places in India and so on moved along the road to development. The ingredients were good governance, incentives to benefit from work, good health and education provisioning, the rule of law, social order, good physical infrastructure and a system of property rights. Of all of those ingredients, the single most challenging one for our thinking in remote communities is the imperative for land reform and property ownership. The literature was telling us that if you do not have a system of private property you are not going to get very far. That was a direct confrontation with our system of communal land ownership. But that was the starting point. Land reform is on our minds. It could be said that some of the things we are striving to achieve do not go far enough. People experienced in international development will turn around to us and say, 'You haven't addressed a critical part of the lessons learned from around the world.'

Our welfare reform agenda was largely informed by us looking at the international development story. When you look at all those areas that need to be tackled, it is the whole picture. One way of representing it was to lay out all of the pieces of the puzzle that needed to be put together. We needed to tackle individual welfare reform, obligations on individuals, reinserting conditionality into the receipt of social support. The second part of that individually directed reform was some work reform, obliging people to take work, to seek and take available work.

If you imagine a soccer ball, the centre circle is an individual focused thing: work reform and conditionality in return for receiving social support. Around that is another circle on aimed at family oriented ingredients. From our point of view, those family oriented things were education for the children, good health for the family members and income management—managing the resources and being able to manage the income that one earns or receives from government and so on. The fourth part of it was housing and homeownership. Then there is an outer circle of things that need to be tackled in the community context, dealing with infrastructure and good governance, land reform, social order and safety, enterprise development and so on.

So that was the kind of agenda that we sketched out—something focused on individuals, a family development agenda around income, housing, education and health and then a community development agenda around physical infrastructure, good governance, good

community environments and so on. But Lee Kuan Yew did not suddenly lift a crane and lever all the pieces of the jigsaw into place overnight; the picture has to be built cumulatively, over time. We have got to find ways of starting all that and work out the things that are going to have maximum value in the medium term and that might have knock-on effects and precipitate other good things happening.

That is why our agenda ultimately called for the things that are part of the Cape York welfare reform—firstly, putting obligations on welfare, inserting some basic conditionality: send your kids to school, abide by your housing tenancy agreement, abide by the laws of the community in which you live and keep your children free of neglect and abuse. And we proposed the Family Responsibilities Commission as a mechanism for supervising those conditions. We also sought a number of educational reforms and an agenda for homeownership—moving from social housing to homeownership. We also sought some employment reforms and sought to get some enterprise development going.

Two-and-a-bit years into it, I have to say that I am kind of positive about the social responsibility side of the agenda that we set. I am pleased with increased school attendances and so on. But the opportunity side of the equation has very much lagged behind. We have not gone very far with homeownership and we have not gone very far with employment or enterprise development. So if I was asked to give a broad account of where we are at, halfway through the trial, I would say we are going strong on the obligations side but not so strong on the opportunity side. I could talk further about where I think employment has not worked out for us and where I think housing has not worked out for us. But broadly, in relation to the social responsibility agenda, I would say that the basic idea we had with the Family Responsibilities Commission and the conditions attached to welfare was that if norms started to change then notices in relation to breaches of certain conditions would at some point cross over with the restoration of social norms. We are still in the throes of that process.

A big part of my own personal thinking about it was to set a time limit on how long we were on the thing for—four years—so that we did not just set up an exercise that made marginal progress but never really headed anywhere and just set up a perpetual institution. I thought that it was important that it was incumbent upon all the parties that we set ourselves four years and that we ought to justify any kind of further continuation beyond that point.

CHAIR—Thank you. I will just kick off with a couple of questions. With regard to your last comment about timing, as you are no doubt aware, there are many governments and individuals looking at the processes under which you are piloting. At the start of the pilot I think there were plenty of cynics, and terms like ‘courageous’ were widely used. As an observer it seems to me we can see clearly that there are a number of elements of that which are having a positive effect. If we come to the end point in four years when the pilot has finished, and we know that there were positive attributes about that aspect of the pilot 2½ years—now three—and yet we wait all that time to adopt those as policy, it seems a bit ludicrous.

Your institute are the ones who must be considering, where you have a level of confidence—people always talk about external and independent auditing, but you must have some confidence—that some of these elements are, without doubt, going in the right direction—with definite and observable changes that are sufficiently positive not to be considered marginal—and you would consider adopting some of those. What sort of processes do you have within the

institute, or what do you think we should be doing, as some of these parts of the pilot emerge that are positive?

Mr Pearson—In terms of some of these basic social norm issues, I could not be more pleased with school attendance and so on. In the trial communities there is now, as there used to be in the past, a general acceptance by everybody that Monday to Friday your kids are in school. That is kind of just a normal acceptance.

Coen is a place riddled with the normal social problems of a small Aboriginal community, but the kids get packed up every Monday morning and they go to school. I think the norm in relation to school attendance is solidifying at this stage of the game. Where we are struggling, of course, is in relation to some of the behavioural offences of adults and so on, whether it is breaching the alcohol management plans, traffic offences—the whole list of reasons why you would get a notice under one of those welfare reform conditions: that is you end up before the magistrate. That is a massive collection of a range of issues that is not going to be addressed easily.

One of the areas where I am disappointed and where we need different action is in breaches of the alcohol management plans. A key part of our thinking was that when we think about social norms the people themselves have got to own and defend the standards that they want for their community. In addition to that social ownership of the norm you have to make sure that the incentives support the norms, because if the incentives run contrary to the norms that you want they severely undermine them.

We also had to get alignment from the law. The law helps to buttress norms as well. The laws and the incentives are now in alignment. What we are struggling with in relation to, say, alcohol is a very mixed story in terms of community leadership on alcohol. There is no consensus amongst community leaders about the impact of alcohol, harm levels in the community and so on, and there is no consensus about what should be done in relation to alcohol. There is no strong ownership by community leaders of the alcohol management plans. I think that is a consequence of poor introduction. We did not introduce alcohol management plans in the optimal way to get community ownership around those plans.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you tell us how you did that? I am trying to compare it to Fitzroy Crossing, where, as you know, it was developed by the community and there is very strong community ownership. I am wondering how it differed here?

Mr Pearson—The Queensland government facilitated the planning process in communities, the consultation process and so on. My critique of that process is that bureaucrats cannot do this stuff. There has to be leadership and advocacy. You cannot convene a neutral process of consultation about something like this. There has to be leadership by Aboriginal leaders, from the community level, the regional level and so on if you are going to have an effective alcohol management plan. The story varies between different communities, but I would say that the way we introduced them overall in Queensland was not conducive towards building ownership by community members. The general view is that the restrictions are government restrictions, or by the government and inspired by Noel Pearson—putting those restrictions upon us, instead of saying, ‘Listen, we’ve got a problem here with grog, and the supply of grog is very strongly related to the levels of harm and so on. If you want to get on top of the levels of harm, reducing supply is a key part of what you have to do.’

One thing I would urge the Commonwealth parliament to think about is that there are no incentives at community level leadership. There are no incentives for them to make the reduction of harm levels resulting from alcohol part of their leadership. There is nothing. In fact, if you want to get re-elected, you had better go quiet on alcohol restrictions. The electoral incentives are against you. Nothing in terms of budgets and supports you receive from government is related to whether you are doing a good job or a bad job in reducing harm levels. It makes for disconnected leadership, because government support comes whether you have high levels or low levels of harm—whether you are really working hard to reduce the levels of harm. We made a proposal to the Queensland government and the Commonwealth through our own process. We started a discussion 18 months ago or two years ago. We said that there ought to be very explicit connections between government support and community performance on bringing down the harm indicators.

The Queensland government does produce a very good quarterly report with indicators on how we are going with school attendance, clinic presentations, Magistrates Court appearances and so on, so we have a very good monitoring framework. I would like to see community leaders and organisations operating on a very strong incentives basis, so that support is predicated on their performance in bringing those harm levels down to Queensland averages. It does not make sense to continue investing when there is no community leadership appetite for that. I believe that that is the single missing ingredient in us getting on top of the grog and getting ownership of the alcohol management plans: there is no shortage of women, elders and ordinary community members who want to get on top of the grog, but there is no leadership around it. And, as I say, the electoral incentives for local-level leaders means they run away from taking responsibility for grog and there is no financial incentive for them to do so.

Senator CROSSIN—Thanks, Mr Pearson, and thanks for your attendance today. We had representatives from the Family Responsibilities Commission this morning. There are two things I want to raise with you. There was a discussion about the work they have done, and certainly there have been improvements in attendance at school, from less than 50 per cent to around 63 per cent, I think we were told this morning. That is still not great; we would all be aiming for 90 to 95 per cent at least, I would have thought. What I wanted to ask you, though, was about the obligations of the education department in this state in respect of meeting the parents and their responsibilities halfway. Do not get me wrong here: I am not saying that teachers and principals are not working incredibly hard and doing the best they can. But the issue is about kids not being able to get to school because they live one or two kilometres away from the school and in the wet season it is very difficult or it is just hard to make that trek in the morning. The Education Department does not provide a school bus, for example. There is also a lack of active school councils, or parents and friends associations, in some of those schools, so there is no Indigenous parental involvement and there did not seem to be any program on behalf of the state education department to get that going. So I wanted a comment from you about whether you thought mutual obligation also means that the government has got to put some additional thinking and effort into complementing what is happening.

Mr Pearson—Absolutely. Of course, those school attendance figures are averaged out across the four sites and so on. Probably the best performing site, in terms of school attendance—or it was, before the FRC intervened; there has been an improvement since then—is Coen. Coen has had a very strong school attendance for as long as I have been involved there. So Coen is a place where the kids are attending at very high levels. The parents put money aside in a program we

run called the Student Education Trust Scheme—$20 a week. Four or five members of a family will deduct money out of their accounts—say, $5; $20 a week; $1,000 a year. Every kid under the age of 18 has got an account, and I think the average figure in those accounts is about $1,000. So it will pay for the tuckshop, and for school uniforms, excursions and so on. It is voluntary and there is 100 per cent take-up by parents.

So parents are keeping their part of the bargain and yet, when we look at the NAPLAN and other achievement results, we have got a level of underachievement by the kids, even though they have been present in school. Their parents have put money aside for it and the kids have got a feed and a school uniform on their backs, and yet the achievements are at this underachieving level. As you say, absolutely, the mutual obligation was not there to provide what the kids and the parents deserved.

We have since developed an academy concept, in which we are now partnering with the Queensland and Commonwealth governments in relation to Coen and Aurukun. It is called the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy and it is aimed precisely at this issue. My way of describing the challenge here is that we have a learning demand issue that we have to tackle, which is: kids ready to learn, parents supporting the kids, community valuing education—those three things: student, parent and community—and there are three things on the teaching side, the supply side: good teachers delivering effective instruction, good school leaders and a good school facility and system. It seemed to me that we were building demand. Coen demand levels were up, but the supply levels were down.

Senator CROSSIN—What is being done, though, to get Indigenous parents to understand and get them involved in what happens in a classroom?

Mr Pearson—The work that informs the Cape York academy that is running in Aurukun and Coen was based on work that we did to engage parents in their children's education. The hook that was used was the community's anxiety about their kids being able to maintain their languages and their culture. One of the parents explained that culture is the hook to draw the parents through the door and participate in the school program, but then the parents came to see that there were a whole lot of things that they could do, even if they were illiterate themselves, to support their children with their general education. It was a very effective way of engaging parents in taking an active interest in their children. Of course we needed an education department that was open to throwing the doors open to parents participating in the school, and that did happen under Don Anderson's leadership. The school opened its doors to the parents.

A large part of the anxiety of the community members and the parents is around cultural education, so our Cape York academy proposes three learning domains. We have called them class, which is basically a Western education, literacy and numeracy, domain; club, which is extracurricular activities in music, art, sport and so on; and culture, which has a language-learning and cultural knowledge component. We have not introduced the club and culture parts of the program yet; they are due to kick off midyear. The first term has been dedicated towards implementing the class component.

Senator CROSSIN—Where is this academy?

Mr Pearson—In Aurukun and Coen.

Senator CROSSIN—I see. Is it another school? Is it a secondary school?

Mr Pearson—It is a partnership between the Cape York academy and the Queensland education department. The academy helps to deliver the club and culture program. We have also designed the class program, which involves the Direct Instruction program. The funding for this has come out of the national educational partnerships, so Julia Gillard has given us the funding through the Queensland government. The academy operates in those two sites.

Senator SIEWERT—You probably know that I am not a big fan of income quarantining. However, I have had an opportunity to hear about the Cape York institute and its results twice in the very recent past. The thing that strikes me is the case management. Income management is a last resort and a lot of effort goes into case management. That is very resource intensive. I am not critical of that, but do you see the level of funding that is put into the commission per person needing to continue? The four-year trial is going. I think the commission said this morning that it potentially covers 3,000 people. If it ends in four years, we were told this morning that it would be unlikely that it would have achieved by that time all the results it could have. Do you think there is a need to continue providing those resources for intensive case management so you can handle all the cases, because you are not going to deal with everybody in the next 18 months?

Mr Pearson—I saw the comments from the registrar. I beg to differ with her view. I think where the curve goes down and where the curve goes up is really a question of how much leadership develops within the community. We can solve school attendance next week if there is sufficient leadership, resolve and ownership. Because school attendance is not something that is massively difficult—

Senator SIEWERT—The point that we were discussing and that you raised earlier is the other—

Mr Pearson—Absolutely. I think we should still hold ourselves to the four-year timetable.

Senator SIEWERT—And then see what happens.

Mr Pearson—My hope would be that you would then have some sort of minimalist mechanism at that point, perhaps involving Centrelink. A key part of what we proposed to the government was that we did not want to impose income management on responsible people. We want to set up a mechanism to encourage people to graduate from income management to freedom. That is why we have it. But you need an arbiter in order for that to happen. Using the local commissioners and giving them authority to deal with their people in relation to those things has been very useful.

Senator SIEWERT—The feedback I have had on a couple of occasions now is that the approach has strong community support. People like the fact that they are getting case management and are appreciative of the support. That is certainly the feedback I have had. Is that what you have had?

Mr Pearson—Absolutely. The way in which the commissioners conduct themselves and the fact that they are formally recognised by the law are very important parts of the design of this thing.

Senator SIEWERT—The other issue we talked about briefly this morning was the other support services provided by government. In some communities they are only just being provided now.

Mr Pearson—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—We have already been through the education issues, but there are other community services that have not been provided. How have you dealt with government in terms of ensuring those services are provided, and wouldn't that be an obligation on government as part of this whole process to supply those community services and support services?

Mr Pearson—Yes, it is a crucial part of the solution that we have an investment in those support services. A big part of the implementation challenge we have had is trying to make sure that those support services are in place. The two governments and our organisations have made as good a fist of it as I have ever seen, but there have been huge delays and shortcomings in that. What ultimately produces change, more powerful than any kind of service support you get, is the moral expectation of those who are most important to you. I will comply with the moral expectations of the people who are valuable and important to me. That is a stronger determinant of how I behave than having access to support services and so on.

Let me tell you about card gambling and the social norm in relation to card gambling, which is a horrific problem in our communities in Northern Queensland. I will tell you about my home community. It has all of the social problems of typical communities: marijuana, alcohol and a range of social problems. The one thing they do not do at Hope Vale is card gambling. You cannot find a card gambling school. There are very aggressive horse betters when the races go on in Cooktown, and there are pokie machine pullers. There are gambling addicts in Hope Vale. There are card gamblers in Hope Vale who go down to Wujal Wujal, Yarrabah or Laura to do cards, but they do not do cards in Hope Vale. It is an unwritten cultural and social rule that nobody is allowed to set up card gambling schools in this community.

I give that example as an illustration of the power of a social norm if it is in place and is defended. The reason why it is still in place is that whenever it was challenged—it was challenged on a number of occasions by young cousins coming back from Yarrabah and trying to set up a gambling school down the street—the challenge was shut down. The norm was defended.

Senator CROSSIN—So it is about leadership and the capacity for leadership in the community.

Mr Pearson—Yes, absolutely—more so than support services. I have to emphasise the importance of community leadership and ownership. Once people identify with the expectations that people have of them, you have something that does not need to be policed by laws, policemen and so on; it is policed by social expectations.

CHAIR—We have six minutes remaining and three questions.

Senator BOYCE—I have one quick question, then. Following on from what you have said, Mr Pearson, it seems to me that one other thing that we do not do properly is build capacity in

communities. There are the examples of swimming pools being built but no-one being taught how to maintain them, and there are examples of communities where they say they cannot have a youth program because the person with the degree in youth work left town—that sort of thing. I am sure it is related to leadership. How do we continue to build that capacity and embed it into funding in some circumstances so that the sustainability stays with the resources?

Mr Pearson—An issue that is constantly at the front of our minds is: how do we get local people to take charge of their own communities and their own destinies and so on? What we are trying to do with education is about building real capacity in people to make a contribution towards their communities being sustainable and so on. I am being a bit incoherent here.

I think governments think in terms of service delivery when we are trying to think in terms of supporting self-help. It is really hard for us to break the government way of thinking, which is: disadvantaged people need services delivered by government and NGOs. How does government instead change its way of operating to supporting people taking charge? I just do not see that policy conversation taking place, really.

Senator FURNER—It might be appropriate to take this on notice. You implied there were failings in the introduction of the alcohol management plan in terms of the consultative process. I would like to know what you have done in your capacity as director of the Cape York institute or board member of the Family Responsibilities Commission since that time to address that particular issue.

Mr Pearson—With the alcohol management plans?

Senator FURNER—Yes.

Mr Pearson—We proposed a six-point strategy in relation to substance abuse. Firstly, we need to rebuild intolerance for abusive behaviour. That is a kind of moral leadership issue, rebuilding intolerance. Secondly, we need to control supply and availability. That is where alcohol management plans come in. Thirdly, we need to manage money, to get the management of cash under control and help people to manage their money so that there is less cash available for substance abuse. Fourthly, we need to manage time, to help people limit opportunities for substance abuse and to get people diverted into more positive activities. The fifth point is treatment and rehabilitation, and the wellbeing centres are a product of policy work that we did in the institute aimed at trying to tackle the issue of treatment and rehabilitation. And the sixth is a full-on effort to fix up the home and physical environment of the community. So that was the six-part strategy.

We have tackled various parts of that. In relation to family income management, that is about managing money and getting people to devote their money to productive uses, rather than having cash floating around that can be used for substance abuse. We have the wellbeing centres, as I said, in relation to treatment and rehabilitation. We have also proposed a pride of place program, which is about home beautification and taking pride in your own home, so that we start to tackle the ghetto look of the houses and communities. Those are the efforts that we have made in relation to the big issue of substance abuse. We are still making representations in relation to alcohol management plans.

Two of our communities are township situations, in Mossman Gorge not far from the urban town of Mossman and in Coen. Those communities have talked to us about having restrictions on alcohol as well. It is extremely difficult to get attention to have alcohol restrictions, Halls Creek style, in those township contexts. We still do not have a solution for alcohol management in Mossman Gorge and in Coen.

Senator ADAMS—Speaking of rehabilitation centres, at Weipa the day before yesterday they were talking about the location of the proposed 40-bed rehabilitation centre, whether it would be at Weipa or at Cooktown. Do you have any information? With you knowing the cape as you do, where would be the best place for it?

Mr Pearson—Either location from my point of view. I think residential rehabilitation is a key part of the mix of responses. I also think our well-being centres need to be offering low-cost programs like AA, NA and so on. There is probably as much if not more potential to be gained from the well-being centres offering some of the self-help programs like Alcoholics Anonymous.

Senator ADAMS—So you do see the need for a rehabilitation centre somewhere?

Mr Pearson—Yes. The issue with rehabilitation is that the rate of success is very low and not just with Indigenous people. It has to be one part of an overall offensive.

Senator ADAMS—I am aware of that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Pearson, for your appearance and your evidence today. Any questions on notice from the committee will be provided to you by the secretariat. If you have information which you think may further inform the committee or corrections to your evidence, please direct those through the secretariat.

Committee adjourned at 3.57 pm