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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3

INQUIRY INTO REPARATIONS FOR THE STOLEN GENERATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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At Grafton on Tuesday 8 December 2015

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The Committee met at 9.10 a.m.

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PRESENT

The Hon. J. Barham (Chair)

The Hon. B. Franklin
The Hon. C. Houssos
The Hon. S. Mitchell (Deputy Chair)
Reverend The Hon. F. J. Nile
The Hon. S. Moselmane

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the fourth hearing of the inquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 into reparations for stolen generations in New South Wales. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gumbayniggirr, Yaegl and Bundjalung people, who are the traditional custodians of this land, and I pay respect to elders, past and present. I also extend that respect to any Aboriginal people who are here today.

The inquiry is examining a number of important issues for members of the stolen generations, including the implementation of the New South Wales response document to the Bringing them Home report and potential policies and legislation to help to make reparations to members of the stolen generations and their descendants and communities. Today's hearing is the fourth of a number of hearings we plan to hold for this inquiry. We plan to have more hearings in the new year, both in Sydney and in various regional areas. We visited Kempsey yesterday, visited the Kinchela home and had a hearing in Kempsey. Prior to that we had been to Cootamundra to the girls home. It is important that we are in this area.

Given the importance of this inquiry we also encourage anyone to make it known to other people, who might not have heard about the inquiry and had the opportunity to make submissions, that we will still be receiving submissions. Anyone who would like to make a submission may speak to the Committee's secretariat. Today we will hear from a number of witnesses who include people from the Clarence Valley Healing Centre, where the Committee is very pleased to be, and the Bulgarr Ngaru Aboriginal Medical Corporation, the Jali Aboriginal Local Land Council, the Grafton Ngerrie Aboriginal Land Council, Rekindling the Spirit and community members from the North Coast.

Before we proceed, I will make some brief comments. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media might film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside their evidence. I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they make to media or others, as parliamentary privilege does not cover any person taking an action for defamation.

There may be some questions that witnesses are not able to answer, or are not comfortable with answering today. You might wish to take those on notice when you have other information available to you. In those circumstances the staff will follow up. There is provision for 21 days within which to provide answers. Witnesses are advised that any messages to Committee members and staff should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. I ask everyone to turn off their mobile phones either off or onto silent mode. I now welcome our first witnesses from the Clarence Valley Aboriginal Healing Centre.

JANELLE BROWN, Coordinator, Clarence Valley Aboriginal Healing Centre, affirmed and examined, and

JULIE PERKINS, Chairperson, Gurehlgam Corporation Limited, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make a submission?

Ms BROWN: I would like to make an opening statement.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms BROWN: I have written it down. My name is Janelle Brown and I am currently the coordinator of the Clarence Valley Aboriginal Healing Centre, based here in Grafton. The healing centre is a program managed by the Gurehlgam Corporation, which is a community-based Aboriginal organisation. As everyone will recall, Kevin Rudd made a very emotional apology to the stolen generation in 2008. As a follow-up to that, a year later, as part of the Council of Australian Governments Closing the Gap strategy, the Indigenous Healing Foundation was established "to address the harmful legacy of colonisation, in particular the history of child removal that continues to affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people".

In 2013, along with 13 other Aboriginal organisations Australia-wide, we were fortunate enough to be funded by the Healing Foundation to compile a development plan for an Aboriginal healing centre here in the Clarence Valley. In March 2015, after completing the development plan, the Healing Foundation again funded our centre—this time for an additional $100,000 to allow for the initial implementation of our development plan. There were four other healing centres that also were funded as well: Three were in Queensland and one was in Western Australia. It is anticipated that our funds will be expended by February 2016. At this point in time, the Healing Foundation has not indicated whether it will fund us further. We are currently seeking other avenues of funding.

What is an Aboriginal healing centre? In a nutshell, an Aboriginal healing centre is a place that supports and runs healing practices within an Aboriginal cultural context. To define "healing practices", one must first define the term "healing". Our definition is extremely broad. We see it as anything that improves the quality of life of Aboriginal people, either individually or collectively. Therefore the term "healing practices" is also broad. Some of the healing practices that our centre has engaged in or intends to engage in include gender support groups; workshops focusing on mental health, grief and loss; suicide prevention and support for families; youth; lateral violence; trauma-informed practices; natural therapies and bush medicines; bush tucker; and cultural activities, such as cultural exhibitions and trips to country.

Aboriginal people, including members of the stolen generation, face many problems. However, many of those problems are merely symptoms of underlying grief, loss and trauma that Aboriginal people have faced for the last 227-odd years. Until this grief, loss and trauma is adequately addressed, the symptomatic problems will continue. I just want to finish by saying that healing is a long-term goal. It is a long-term achievement. It cannot be achieved in the short term. Healing needs to be holistic, so it needs to incorporate the mind, body and spirit. Thank you.

Ms PERKINS: I am here as the Chair of the Gurehlgam Corporation, which hosts the Clarence Valley Healing Centre. I also add that I am also the regional manager of Aboriginal legal services for the northern region. I have been wearing that hat as the regional manager and I have a couple of my staff here today, who work on the ground with people who have been very traumatised and who are facing the criminal justice system on a constant basis as well as in the area of removal of children in current practices. I am here as the Chair of the Healing Foundation and training centre, but I also have the other hat of the regional manager for Aboriginal legal services for the area as well.

CHAIR: You raise the issue about the legal situation. How often is it the case that the experiences of people are attributable or related back to a stolen generation experience in the family or community?

Ms PERKINS: As I said, we are actually the northern Aboriginal legal service, which covers from Tweed Heads down to the Hawkesbury River and all of the New England—Armidale, Moree, Tamworth, up to the border, Boggabilla, Toomelah. We see it constantly. We do criminal law; we also do family and care. We are seeing it on a constant basis. It is a real problem. With the increasing number of children who are going into out-of-home care, when we go back through the situations and scenarios we see that it is going back to a lot of

family members who have been members of the stolen generations. We are also seeing that in the criminal sphere as well. It is true what Janelle says—we all know the incarceration rates are very high in this State and we do our very best as an Aboriginal legal service in conjunction with a lot of other people and agencies but, as Janelle has said, we need to address the underlying issues. It is going to be a really long-term process to rebuild our communities from the trauma and grief that has been suffered over the generations.

Ms BROWN: It has also been acknowledged that the removal of children has not only affected the stolen generations themselves and their descendants but also the rest of the community as well. There has been a breakdown in those linkages with people being removed as part of the community.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could you outline some of the strategies and work you have been doing, particularly in the healing garden?

Ms BROWN: I guess the healing garden is one of my passions as well. It is a concept that we have been working on for a while—if you want to have a look at lunchtime the garden is over there past the tennis courts. There is not a real lot to see at the moment; it is a long-term project. Basically we are going to involve the job network agencies. They are going to send us a work-for-the-dole crew. We have actually been negotiating with them for some time to start that happening. Hopefully, in the New Year they will start building the garden but we have actually already designed it.

Some of the things we are going to have in the garden are what we are calling the Three Nations Garden bed. It is going to be a tribute to the three nations in the Clarence Valley—Yaegl, Gumbayngirr and Bundjalung people. We are going to have native bush medicines and bush tucker plants from each of those areas—for example, Bundjalung will have rainforest plants and Yaegl will have plants that grow by the coast such as pigface and those types of plants. That is going to be the main feature of the garden.

We also hope to have dedications for the stolen generations, our returned soldiers and our passed loved ones. We are going to have quite big memorials in the garden. It is going to be based on organic and permaculture principles. We want the whole of the community to be involved in the garden. We see it as a fantastic opportunity to heal, to learn more about Aboriginal culture, to learn more about bush medicine and bush tucker, and also for it to be a place where we can reconcile with the non-Indigenous community. We have got really big plans for it. As I said, it is not a short-term project; hopefully, it will be a long-term project.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The Committee is looking forward to seeing the garden at lunchtime. You represent Aboriginal communities across five different areas. Could you outline the issues affecting the Aboriginal communities in those five different areas and the work that you do with them?

Ms BROWN: There are two remote communities up river about 70 kilometres from Grafton—Baryulgil and Malabugilmah; and then we have Grafton, Maclean and Yamba. How much time have you got? We could talk about this for a while. I suppose one of the biggest issues up in Baryulgil and Malabugilmah would be the effects of the asbestos mine that ran until the late 1970s—I am guessing that people would be aware of that. That is still affecting community members up there—not only community members up there but community members who now live in Grafton, Sydney and Lismore and elsewhere. That is a really big issue and Darren Kershaw from Bulgarr Ngaru could talk about that in a little bit more detail.

Also I would say the isolation as well because they are a fair distance from town. There seem to be lots of issues now with the drug ice. We have heard lots of stories that it has really been infiltrated into the Aboriginal communities of the Clarence. We have been affected by suicide. This year we have had two young Aboriginal boys take their own lives and that has really affected the community. Is there anything you would like to add?

Ms PERKINS: My background is actually in employment and training so in that context employment issues are a real passion of mine. There are not a lot of jobs for anyone in small towns like Grafton and its surrounding areas but we see particularly in our community group such huge unemployment rates. That is why I think with any programs we have to focus on a holistic basis because we all know with the severe rates of unemployment in an area that that brings in lots of other things. It brings in what Janelle was saying—I am sure the Health people can speak better than what we can on the issue of drugs and the ice that is coming into this and surrounding communities. Then it connects into things like family breakdowns, once again child removals and those higher incarceration rates and all those sorts of things.

My passion is employment and I always believe with any person that if you have got a job it makes you proud. You can afford and you can go and get the things that you would like for yourself or your family, including things like homes. We all know once again in this area about the severe shortage of homes and homeless people but also homes that people can afford to even rent or social housing—there is a real shortage here for that. That is like a real root issue and if we can get our young people in the community up through the schooling system. As I said, the other passion of mine is education—I worked in Aboriginal education and employment for many years at a Commonwealth level—and getting children through the education system. I firmly believe that is our key.

We all know that there are a whole lot of issues connected to the education system. As I said, my day job is with the Aboriginal legal service but I am also chair of this whole community organisation so we see the various factors. Education has to be suitable and appropriate but it also has got to involve—I am also a strong believer in involving community—parental or adult responsibility in those schooling systems so that we can encourage our kids to go through the schooling system. A lot of community and young people we talk to will say, "You go to school but then there are no jobs here." That is partially true, of course, but I still encourage young people and children to go through that system because it brings us up to halfway being equal.

You can go on to university or the TAFE system but not everyone is going to be an academic and not everyone is suited to university or wants to be at university—fine; it does not matter. It does not matter whether you are at the local TAFE or at university or you are the bricklayer or the hairdresser; it is that purpose in life. That is my real passion and that is what I see for these surrounding communities. It is really sad in my day job—Janelle also knows this because we work really well here as a whole communal group at Gurehlgam and she also sees it in the Aboriginal legal service—and disheartening because we see recidivists or people coming out of the criminal justice system and then they are back in it again.

We see very young people in the system. That is why I think we have to really try in this community to all pull together, which we do. We have great interagency meetings that Janelle coordinates with a few of her other colleagues and we are all trying to work together in the Clarence Valley community for the betterment, particularly of our young people but also looking at the issues that were in the past in terms of the trauma and trying to address it at a multi-pronged level. I think here in the valley it is an opportunity. We have got to try to pull together. If you walk down the streets of Grafton you see a lot of vacant empty shops. We have got work in with mainstream for that. We are not going to do that on our own as an Aboriginal community. We are working in well and we have got to work in well with our local members, our council and people like that to try to address this in a holistic way.

Ms BROWN: Can I just add that one of the issues that is facing our communities in the Clarence Valley is the lack of service provision. The Clarence Valley is in between two major centres. To the south 80 kilometres down the road is Coffs Harbour and 130 kilometres north of us is Lismore. A lot of the regional services are either based at Coffs Harbour or at Lismore. Unfortunately, even though they are meant to cover the Clarence Valley that service provision is very light on the ground because of distance, time and lack of manpower and a number of reasons. But we kind of just seem to miss out a lot of the time in the Clarence Valley. We do not have a head spaceservice for youth but we are really lobbying for that at the moment.

We do not have a PCYC for youth but we are lobbying for that at the moment as well. At the moment we do not have an Aboriginal development worker with council because that position was vacated six months ago, or could have been even longer, but because the council is going through a review they have stated that they are not going to replace that person this financial year. That position is so needed. It really is a coordinating position. It coordinates all the services that are happening in the Clarence Valley and the Aboriginal interagency is really trying to push to get that position kept by council. Basically council is looking at ways that they can save money and we are really worried that because no-one is in that position that it would be easy just to cut the position altogether.

As Julie said, we actually do work together very well, like the services that are in the Clarence Valley basically because we have had to because of lack of funding and lack of resources. We really have to work together really well and I think we do that quite well. Another thing I would like to mention, it is not a problem but I would like you to understand a little bit about the Clarence Valley and our communities. Thirty or 35-odd years ago I would just about have known nearly every Aboriginal person in Grafton and possibly a lot of people in the other towns as well. But in the past 20 or 30 years there has been a real movement of Aboriginal people from out west and apparently it is happening all up and down the coast of New South Wales. So we are getting a lot of people moving in from places like Inverell, Moree, Brewarrina and also people from Kempsey and

Sydney. I guess they are moving to our part of the country for various reasons, and I could understand why they would want to move here because it is a beautiful place to live.

But it really has changed the dynamics of the Aboriginal community so now it is not just Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl anymore, but it is lots of other nations too. We have Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi and people from lots of nations living in our valley. It just changes the dynamics. I think it is lovely that we do have lots of different nations here but I want everyone to understand that as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I begin by thanking you for hosting the Committee this morning. It is obviously a very special space that you have created here and I look forward to seeing the garden at lunch time. I want to ask two questions. At the beginning of your opening address you said that you are looking for alternative avenues of funding already because of the lack of surety that your funding will be continued. Where are you searching for alternative venues? If you had more security of funding for longer periods of time what would that allow you to do?

Ms BROWN: We are putting in an application within the next week or so to the Indigenous Advancement Strategy through the Prime Minister and Cabinet for Federal funding. We have already put in an application to them and got knocked back but they did advise us that we could relook at the application, rejig it and resubmit it. Yes, we will do that. We are also looking at—apparently Mental Health has an innovative program that is open at the moment—applying for that. We have actually been applying for little bits of money here and there and have been successful in some cases. Like we have recently put in an application to Clarence Valley Council for a small amount of money. We were also successful in getting $10,000 from Warruwi Gambling Health Service. I guess we are looking at wherever we can.

If we got more funding I guess it would enable us to continue the work that we have started to do. Could I talk a little about some of those programs? One of the programs that we want to do next year is called Seasons for Healing. Now it is a program that is run by an organisation based in Sydney called Good Grief. They came up to Grafton, and this is only actually a couple of weeks ago, and ran the train the trainer for that program with us. We now have eight Aboriginal people in the Clarence Valley who are qualified to run that grief and loss training. That grief and loss training is education around grief and loss with small groups, say four to seven people. We are hoping next year to run that on a regular basis throughout our five communities. That is one of the things that we are looking at doing.

I have been talking to a service that is based in Coffs Harbour. It is a grief and loss service. So basically they go out and give one-to-one support to people who have suffered a grief or loss and they also provide grief and loss training. Again that service does not reach Clarence Valley but I want to try to see how we can either have an outreach service here or set up our own service because they are under the umbrella of the National Association for Loss and Grief which is based out at Dubbo. That is one of the things that I would like to do. We also want to continue to run forums. Last month we ran a forum with the StandBy Response Service which is a service around providing support for families and friends who have a family member who is a victim of suicide. They came along and talked about their service.

At some point in the new year they are going to come back and run us through their Indigenous-specific program and hopefully do a train the trainer with that so again we will have people who are qualified to run that training as well. We are just open to any opportunities to work with other services. If other services ring us up and say "Hey, would you be interested in this?" and it fits within what we want we do within our guidelines and development plan, yes, we will certainly look at it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This inquiry is specifically in relation to the stolen generations. Do you have any specific programs for survivors of the stolen generations or do they get captured by some of your broader programs?

Ms BROWN: At the moment they get captured by our broader programs and we do not have any specific ones at the moment. But, yes, we would love to do something specifically for members of the stolen generations.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is encouraging to see the way that you approach it not just as a specific issue but more as a holistic approach.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yesterday the Committee heard from the Kinchela Boys Home about the need for a healing centre. You have identified some significance of a healing centre. Will you provide the Committee with evidence of the success of the healing centre? How do you measure that success?

Ms BROWN: The success of our healing centre?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: For example, yes.

Ms BROWN: I guess in some ways it is hard to measure because, like I said in my opening address, healing is a long-term goal. No-one is going to heal overnight. Healing means different things to different people as well. What they found in Canada when they did research over there like, they took up to 10 years to see any real results in terms of healing. Canada is where the actual concept for the Healing Foundation and healing centres actually came from. The people who are using the centre they come along to our forums. Some of the forums we have are like for other service providers; they might not be directly for community members and some are for both. I guess at this point in time just the people that we are getting along, the attendance at our forums.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: In terms of the Kinchela boys who are over the age of 60, do you have programs for them that address some of the agonies and sufferings they have gone through?

Ms BROWN: Not at this point in time. I guess when we looked at the healing centre we had to figure out what we could do in such a short space of time, how we could get things going. You have got to remember that we have only really been funded to implement the healing centre development plan since March this year so it is not a long time. Yes, these are all things that we would really love to do, yes, particularly in conjunction with the other service providers and, you know, the experts in those different areas. We are not the experts in terms of the stolen generations or health and mental health but we work with those people who are the experts. We will work with Community Health, Mental Health and other agencies that do work with members of the stolen generations. I hope that answered your question.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I think the concept of healing centres is excellent but I am just very concerned about your future. You have a three-year budget of $677,000, you were hoping to get money from the Federal Government and it has just said no. The State Government has said no. The Healing Foundation only funds you up to December so there is an urgent need of funding and maybe these healing centres should have a special source of funding allocated to healing centres, not only yours but others as well. It seems like you are falling into a gap somewhere.

Ms BROWN: Yes, that is quite true and I think that was one of the reasons that we hadn't got funding from elsewhere. Because maybe they think: Well, the Healing Foundation is there; they fund healing centres. That may be what it is. Like, the Healing Foundation, they have been really good, I must say they have been really good to us. But, as I said, they can't give a guarantee at this point in time whether we will be funded beyond December. The funding was to 31 December but we are managing to stretch it out until February. But what they did say to us was that, in March, that they would actually allow us to go to Canberra and do a presentation to them, along with the other four healing centres.

So we are kind of hoping that, with that presentation, that there will be funding, that they will say: Yeah, this is great, we will give you some more funding. But, like with anything, there is no guarantee. And yes, personally I would be pretty devastated if the funding stopped and this healing centre didn't go any further, because I have put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into the place, and so have my co-workers. But all we can do is just keep going on the basis that we are getting funded and hope that we do.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Where does the Healing Foundation get their money from?

Ms BROWN: From the Federal Government, through Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: So they make a bulk grant to them?

Ms BROWN: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: And then they make allocations to the centres?

Ms BROWN: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: So why would they then say you only get funding to December? If you have got staff, how do you plan employment and so on?

Ms BROWN: Yes, I don't know how it works, sorry.

CHAIR: The limitations of the Federal budget.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: We might need to speak to the other organisations.

CHAIR: We might need to pass on some recommendations about extending that.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: A couple of things from me, if I may: The first is, you mentioned the other four healing centres. Are there five in this area in New South Wales?

Ms BROWN: Five in Australia. They initially funded 14 for the Development Plan and, of those 14, they then chose five to give further funding and my understanding is, three of those are in Queensland and one is in Western Australia.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: We have heard a lot of discussion and evidence about the intergenerational issues and trauma from the stolen generation. I was wondering if both of you could perhaps highlight specific concerns that you have or issues that you see that are part of that intergenerational trauma and anything that you are doing to assist with that, any strategies you have got.

Ms PERKINS: From the viewpoint of the legal services we certainly see a lot of intergenerational issues and trauma coming through our service. The way I look at it is that you have got to have that strong identity in terms of where you are from and your mobs, and things like that. And if there is a breakdown in that, you can see a bit of a lost sort of soul, if I can put it that way. And, you know, that is where it has been coming down from our elder community, down through our mid community, and now our youth. And that is why we are seeing lots of that coming through.

Then we have got, when you look at issues like the care issues as well, with families, lots of young parents without those strong parenting skills and strong, to an extent, when I say "identity", I mean it in the terms of holistically, where a person is from, their mobs and all those sorts of things. Then it is like a lost soul. So that is then reflected back from our experience with that whole parenting issue, in terms of their children and then in terms of young people getting into trouble and things like that.

So we see it daily in the Aboriginal Legal Service with our clients, and that's with our criminal clients and our care and family clients. And then incarcerated people, that does not have—I know it is there as a deterrent and all those sorts of things—but we see people coming out of detention centres and jails, many times in a worse condition, a worse condition in their own being, as a person. You know, it takes people away even further and even in terms of some of our out-of-home care issues as well. That is a real problem because our numbers are increasing, as we all know, in terms of the legal system and the persons that we represent across community, and that is really sad. Because, in all honesty, we should be working ourselves the other way—they are terrible facts and figures.

I was reading a report just the other day even sadly, like we all know, on domestic violence issues. And if you looked at the latest reports—backing up again what Janelle said—if you look at the Clarence Valley area, the statistics are really high. We sit in this service hub, with a gap between the bigger centres—whether it be Kempsey-Coffs or getting up to the Lismore areas and beyond—but in the middle here we've been arguing for many, many years for an extension of Family Violence Prevention Legal Services. We wat them to come up from Kempsey, which we also host, to be expanded up into the valley. Every year we have been knocked back on that as well. That is a Federal Government program, and again we have been knocked back on that. Every year we put in funding for that and every year we get knocked back.

That is how I am seeing this intergenerational trauma, I am seeing it coming down through. And it is just that state too of—I take it back again to jobs and things like that in the community. If your family group hasn't been fortunate enough to have gained a job, been allowed in a school—we all know the histories. My own mother was removed and put out of schools and things like that. So that is coming down through that generation.

You have got to be a very tough person, very strong-willed, to break out of that cycle of your own being. We have seen that, we have seen wonderful people who have had that strength of character to come out. But that's not everybody. And that's what we are seeing in the criminal justice system, to be honest. We are seeing generations of that, which is really sad for us, you know? Some of our solicitors who have been around for many, many years—a person from down the Kempsey area has been in the legal service for 40 years—and he sadly tells stories of representing granddad, dad, son and grandson in the same family group and persons who did come through the stolen generations era. So that's really tragic.

CHAIR: Unfortunately, we have run out of time but I would certainly invite you to provide any further information from the Aboriginal Legal Service, if you can extend to them an opportunity to provide any of that related information, that would be valuable. Your presentations have been really informative for us to understand how things work in the regions. So thank you for allowing us to be here.

(The witnesses withdrew)

DARREN KERSHAW, Executive Officer, Bulgarr Ngaru Medical Aboriginal Corporation, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr KERSHAW: I would like to thank the members for attending the Clarence Valley and welcome to Bundjalung country. I am a Bundjalung man and I have just recently moved here myself. My grandmother, great grandmother and two of my uncles were part of the stolen generation. My great grandmother worked as a servant in homes in Strathfield in the 1940s and 1950s. My uncles, both of whom resided at Kinchela Boys Home, who I understand you met with yesterday, spoke of some of the experiences that they had. And I would like to give my testimony in memory of those people who have all passed away, from my family members who experienced what we are talking about today. If I get a bit emotional during the course of the discussion today, that is the reason why. As I said, welcome to Bundjalung country. I think previously it was mentioned that we also service Yaegal and Gumbaynggirr in the Clarence Valley.

There are three points I would like to make in my opening statement. One is that I am not fully sure that mainstream Australia still understands the experience that Aboriginal people went through in the stolen generation. I would like to give an example of that later, if I may. But I think there is still a need for education around the true impacts of what happened to people in the past.

The second point I would like to make is about services for people, and you have touched on it already, around mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. I understand there has been a recent announcement by Government—I think it is Commonwealth—in regards to significant funding for mental health services. There has to be strong advocacy and strong development of programs for Aboriginal people who have been impacted largely by their experiences as part of the stolen generation and the impact on their families as a result. And it would be a travesty if there wasn't any program development around accessing some of those funds to Aboriginal communities.

The third point I would like to make is about the significance of early intervention programs. There are models around that support families in crisis in the social welfare setting. But it is my belief that there is a program that has been running as a pilot for a number of years here in New South Wales, called the Intensive Family Based Services program. Bulgarr Ngaru is an auspicing service for the local Intensive Family Based Services here and it has proven, over the last three years of its operation, to help maintain the family unit.

My suggestion today would be that it is a back-end service, where it deals, through the Department of Community Services, with families that are in crisis. My suggestion would be that we have a look at trying to open that up, so it is available for all families that are in crisis, no matter what stage that crisis is. The work that they do has proven to be successful in maintaining the family unit, which completely opposes what we have talked about so far today. They are the three key points I would like to make. I am happy to discuss those more and happy to take any questions that you may have in regard to the Bringing Them Home report and the stolen generation.

My background is in social welfare. I have a Diploma in Social Welfare. I have worked with Aboriginal community-based organisations and I have also worked for the Department of Community Services for 14 years, both as a district officer, dealing with child protection and out-of-home care matters and also as a community program officer, developing policy and programs to address Aboriginal issues within community, dealing with Family and Community Services. I have had involvement with Juvenile Justice programs as well.

For the last eight years I have been working in Aboriginal health, with the Durri Aboriginal Medical Service in Kempsey, although my responsibility was with managing the Nambucca Heads and Bowraville Aboriginal Health Clinics and for the last four years I have been the Executive Officer at Grafton at Bulgarr Ngaru. I am happy to talk about health as well.

CHAIR: Thank you for your opening statement and for providing the report. I am sure it will be valuable to us in gaining an understanding.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How successful has Closing the Gap been, particularly in Aboriginal health?

Mr KERSHAW: The Prime Minister at the time, Mr Abbott, spoke earlier in the year about some of the failings around the Closing the Gap program. I suppose it has been difficult when you look at it on a national level. There have probably been some successes but there have probably been some failures as well. Overall, it is probably recognised that there has been some slow progress. The report that I have provided for you today is more based on what we do here in the region. Bulgarr Ngaru also auspices the Casino Aboriginal Medical Service, so our footprint is from partway down to Coffs Harbour all the way up to the Richmond Valley towards the Queensland border. We do not do Ballina and we do not do Lismore. It is a big area that we cover. We have got close to 70 full-time staff.

I suppose everybody has a doom and gloom picture after the Prime Minister said how poor the Closing the Gap progress was but we thought that we were doing not an outstanding job but a reasonable job in addressing some of the health concerns. As you know, funded services have to report on their progress and be accountable for the government funding that they receive. We certainly are. We have highlighted in this report some of the key performance indicators [KPIs] that we are asked to report against. They are national KPIs, they are not State. There are some State KPIs in that report.

Bulgarr Ngaru has maintained a high achievement in addressing those national KPIs. That is the thing we want to highlight. Although there may be some criticisms and some of our sister Aboriginal Medical Services [AMSs] have faced difficulties in the past few years, we believe that we have been on the right track and we are doing the right thing. We wanted to promote ourselves as a successful organisation in carrying out the responsibilities that we have in improving the health of our communities both in the Clarence Valley and in the Richmond valley.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: When you describe the size of the area, how many people are you attending to?

Mr KERSHAW: It is contained in this report. In the Clarence Valley we have 4,500 registered patients and in the Richmond Valley we have 4,000 registered patients. Registered patients are people who have come to the clinic for a service three times within the past two years. That is how we define them. That is the acceptable definition through the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. When they accredit health services that is the definition they use.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Is it predominantly in mental health? What are the key health issues?

Mr KERSHAW: A lot of chronic disease. Smoking and alcohol has had a big impact on our communities. From a point of view of the health impacts of people who have been part of the stolen generation, I think drugs and alcohol have played a major role. They have shown big impacts on their health. That is particularly true for those older people, our elders, and probably those people who have been suffering as a result of not having a parental relationship with mum and dad where they have been raised in another setting or they do not have that close, bonding relationship with their parents.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: We heard people from the Kinchela Boys Home speak yesterday about the trauma that they have gone through. Every moment you could see the emotional side of that trauma. Do you address that aspect of their wellbeing as well?

Mr KERSHAW: We do not specifically say if you are a member of the stolen generation come and see us, but we do provide a mental health program. We have a psychologist four days a week, who is a full-time member of our staff. I think we are one of the few AMSs in the country that have a psychologist on staff. We have had her there for the last four years. Most of her dealings are with adults; she does not deal with children. Without going into too much detail, because patient files are confidential, there are a lot of people who have had some involvement with the stolen generation. To support her we have a mental health registered nurse and a psychiatrist.

The psychiatrist comes to our centre once a fortnight and, more recently, because he is retired, he has maintained his relationship with us. There is a lot of emphasis now on Skyping, because he likes to travel throughout the country. He spends a fair time in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, but he still provides that service to our patients. I think that is based on the relationship we have had with him from working with him over a long period of time. The mental health nurse supports particularly those patients who are on

medication. We do have a significant number of people who are on medication because of psychotic episodes. I dare say some of those are related to their experiences of being part of the stolen generation.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It seems from your report that one of the major health problems is type 2 diabetes.

Mr KERSHAW: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You say 62 per cent of patients have type 2 diabetes in the Clarence. What is the explanation for that? Is that because of the major change in their diet from an Aboriginal diet to a western-style diet with sugar and so on?

Mr KERSHAW: I am not a clinical person. I have got no medical background at all, I am more of an administrator, but from what I am told there are lifestyle issues and there could also be hereditary issues around why people have type 2 diabetes. From my own personal experience, I played a lot of sport when I was younger. I played a lot of football. Around the age of 35 I finished playing sport and I contracted diabetes type 2 then. I only discovered it by accident. I went to the local medical centre in Kempsey at Durri. I was sitting there waiting to see the dentist and the nurse said, "I'll give you a blood test while you're here." Lo and behold, I have got type 2 diabetes. I am not that much out of fitness. Back in those days I did like to have a bit of a drink. That is definitely a factor in contracting type 2 diabetes.

As I said earlier, there are lot of people in our communities that have had issues with alcohol. I dare say later on this afternoon you'll hear a lot more evidence about that from some of the other speakers that will be here. But it is an issue. We have an endocrinologist who comes to our clinic every month and has been doing so for the last three or four years. They have seen the majority of those patients and have tried to help manage their chronic disease much better. But we do know as a conservative figure that probably 60 to 65 per cent of the Aboriginal population in Australia have type 2 diabetes. And they are the people we know about. There are probably lot of people that we do not know about. Our biggest concern is making sure that people are accessing health services to address those issues, because if they are not addressed properly there are major complications later in life.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You spoke earlier about mental health and the Federal funding announcement a couple of weeks ago. You said that you would want to see support for that. You have just talked to us about what you run through your centre in terms of your psychologist, nurse and psychiatrist. Do you think out of that Federal money you would like to see more support for existing programs or do you think there are other mental health programs that are not available that would be of benefit if there was funding?

Mr KERSHAW: I think both. The mental health and social and emotional wellbeing programs that I know of struggled with getting funding, particularly in the early stages. The healing centre is a good example. I understand Rekindling the Spirit is going to have a discussion with you this afternoon. I also know of a program called the Tree of Life, which is being implemented here in New South Wales and has had some significant advances in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. I personally know the coordinator of that program. Again, they struggle with funding but they are very good programs. I think that there potentially could be some developing programs and I think there is a need for that because there are a lot of people who are now well educated, getting to become more educated and beginning to have different views and opinions about how we could work with communities, members of the stolen generation and other people who have difficulties in their lives.

I suppose one area or aspect for me, going back to my days working in child protection, is the lack of services for Indigenous people who have suffered as sexual abuse victims. That is both within care when they were members of the stolen generation, because there is significant evidence around incidences of sexual abuse, but also ongoing now, because sexual abuse is still an issue. I think there are developing opportunities for the mental health funding to provide support for people who are victims of sexual abuse.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could I ask about the Intensive Family Based Support program, which you mentioned in your opening statement. You have run quite a successful program here. Could you give us an overview as to why yours has been so successful and the work that you are doing?

Mr KERSHAW: We had quite a difficult period of recruitment because we specifically wanted people who had experience working with families and doing casework with families and who had some sort of

qualification behind them as well. It was a degree or a diploma in social welfare or social work or any of the human services type studies, and they had to be Aboriginal. That narrows the field a great deal. Then we wanted to ask them to come and work and live in Grafton, which made it even more difficult. But over probably a 12- to 18-month period we were able to find the right mix of people to do that and their hearts were in the right place. You have to be thick skinned to work in child protection and out-of-home care. You have to be thick skinned to work with some of the families that we would be experiencing working with, very complex and very difficult cases. I think we chose the right mix of people as staff initially to do that.

We have probably had a very small changeover of staff as well, so that has been helping to keep the stability of the service going. Certainly the manager of that program has been there from the beginning. He is a very experienced young man running that program. I think we have been lucky in that. We have had good relationships with the Department of Community Services, or Family and Community Services [FACS] now. We have also had good relationships with the head office and the branch that runs the Intensive Family Based Support [IFBS] program. But it is a commitment. It is a complex, crisis-driven program where you are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In the middle of the night, on weekends or whenever the crisis occurs within the family you are supposed to be available and our staff are. They are on a roster, they are on a call-out system. If families are in need of assistance at any time, if the actual caseworker allocated to that family is not available then certainly a caseworker available.

There is a deal of responsibility placed on the parents as well to participate. It is a voluntary program. They are typically families whose children are going to be removed from their care if they do not get their act together. So they have gone through all the other early intervention and other support phases that the Department of Community Services [DOCS] and community organisations can provide, but still they are not good parents. The program teaches them skills and then directs them to other services that can give them support to become better parents. They have to take that responsibility; they have to bite the bullet and change their behaviour. We have seen that that has happened. In our first year of operation we had 12 kids removed from their parents' care who were part of our casework. We had a caseload of 22 and that is what we are funded for over 12 months. We had 12 kids removed from those families, but eight of them were from one family.

In the second year of the program, we went to 35 families because we had additional funding and we employed another caseworker. Our funding was for 35 families. We have had one family breakdown in that period, which meant the child ended up in out-of-home care. Of the 109 children we worked with during that period—in the second year of operation—only one child went into care. That means we saved 108 kids from going into out-of-home care, and potentially into the juvenile justice system. We know that out-of-home care and juvenile justice matters sometimes run hand in hand. That is why I am advocating for support for the Intensive Family Based Services [IFBS] program. It is not only keeping the family unit maintained and communities a bit more harmonious, but it is also saving the taxpayer a lot of money in providing out-of-home care services and juvenile detention services for these kids.

CHAIR: The State Government has committed to funding Aboriginal organisations to do this work. There has been training for Aboriginal people to be able to meet some of those workforce needs you talked about and the troubles you have found. Is that working well in this area?

Mr KERSHAW: There has not been a great deal of changeover from government at the moment. I attended a meeting a fortnight ago with the local hospital district chief executive officer in Lismore. We talked about that actual thing—the changeover of hospital services to non-government organisations—and our interest was specifically Aboriginal health. There has been a lot of talk about community service aspects of their work going to non-government organisations too. I suppose we are in the early stages of seeing that. There are certainly programs like Brighter Futures developing. But whether they will maintain the success is something we need to look at.

CHAIR: You talked about the commitment. Surely that has to be about providing training and support services to ensure that that workforce is there in the community to do that work.

Mr KERSHAW: Absolutely. There needs to be a focus on training, our purpose, and an agreement that we are there to work for families, not for our own individual needs. Sometimes that unfortunately happens. I think that people who go into community services have that empathy towards supporting children in need.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You mentioned that once a family has been referred to you it has been through other early intervention programs. Is there an average length of time before a family is referred to you, or are there times when you are brought in early so they do not fail earlier programs?

Mr KERSHAW: At the moment there are very strict criteria. They are families that are on the verge of having their children removed from their care. That means a court process, which means DOCS has been involved with them for some time. I was talking to the IFBS manager yesterday. He said that if we had more staff we would have more families referred because DOCS has a huge waiting list of families to be referred to a service like ours. I am advocating that we do a good job, but I am also advocating that in New South Wales we need more of these types of programs and IFBSs to help families across the State, not only in the Clarence Valley. We know there is need in other communities as well.

My reason for highlighting that is that if a program is proven to be successful we should support it and expand it. I was involved back in 1996 and 1997 when we first mooted the idea of developing an IFBS program. As I said, I was working with DOCS at the time. I remember when we established this pilot program. It has been running as a pilot program in Casino since that time. It has only been in the past three years that the State Government has expanded it to a few more services. We need a lot more of these types of services to be effective. It is not just for Aboriginal families; there are families across the board that are in crisis.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: If you take the children away from those families they are the next stolen generation.

Mr KERSHAW: That is exactly right. When I was working with the DOCS I had responsibility for trying to help all staff to work well with Aboriginal families. The dilemma was whether we were perpetuating the stolen generation model. Where kids need to be put in care, they need to be put in care. We had great arguments—and it was my role to have the arguments—with the district office managers about whether children needed to be removed or whether we needed to work with families in a different way. That is why I like the IFBS model—it was working with families in a completely different way.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Building on that, the Committee has heard evidence about the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children going into out-of-home care. We heard two different sides of the story from non-government organisation providers and from the Government about the Aboriginal placement principle and its use in placing children in out-of-home care. Do you have any reflections or views about its use and whether it could be used better, or are there other things we could be doing? That link between out-of-home care and the intersection with the juvenile justice system is very concerning to the Committee.

Mr KERSHAW: I am glad you raised that. I do not know how often the Aboriginal child placement principle is being implemented.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: From memory, and this might be incorrect, Family and Community Services [FACS] told us that it is used about 75 per cent of the time.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: The aim is to use it 100 per cent of the time, but obviously practicalities limit that.

CHAIR: I think part of the problem—and NSWALC stated this in its submission—is that there is not the open and transparent reporting here that there is in some of the other States. That is an issue and people are not sure exactly what is happening. We are hearing different points of view.

Mr KERSHAW: Going back into my other life, when I was working on a day-to-day basis in that area I had a good grasp of that. As I said, in the past eight years or so I have been focused on health. I am still involved with some DOCS and juvenile justice matters from time to time. But my feeling is that the Aboriginal placement principles should be the first thing that workers look at, whether it involves a government agency or a non-government organisation. They should be looking at that. In the old child protection legislation it was towards the end. When the review was undertaken by Dr Parkinson in the late 1990s for the new child protection legislation, it was put up front to give it that notional importance.

It is important because it is the key mechanism in preventing children going back into a stolen generation situation. I do not know whether there are many gatekeeping mechanisms now to prevent children from slipping in there. As you say, it is 75 per cent. Some people might say that that is reasonable, but we

should be looking at a much higher rate than that. I would like to think that 90 per cent to 95 per cent would be the norm. Yes, there will be kids who cannot live with their immediate family or even in their community. There is probably a reduction in the number of Aboriginal people who are putting their hands up to be carers. But that should not prevent children from having contact with and access to their families and their communities. The child placement principle advocates that if you are not able to be in the Aboriginal community then you need to be in close contact with your Aboriginal community, not moved away to another area. I think that still occurs today. But, as I said, I am only guessing about that. I would like to see it implemented more rigidly and to see those numbers go higher.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: In terms of pathways to good health, what is the impact of healing centres on good health for indigenous communities? What relationship do you have as an Aboriginal corporation with healing centres?

Mr KERSHAW: We had initial talks when the idea of establishing a health centre was first mooted both with Julie Perkins and Janelle Brown. We needed to think about our core business, which is providing doctors and nurses to deliver primary health care. Off that, there are some other areas of activity, such as the mental health, sexual health, and drug and alcohol support programs. Apart from other clinical aspects of it—that is, checking people's ears and reducing otitis media, diabetes, heart-related risks and smoking—there are probably other areas of work. They include group work, counselling, social settings and services and therapies that we cannot deliver. That is where we think that healing centres play a role. They are a neutral venue where people can have a discussion with other people within the centre to help them address their problem.

Our core funding is siloed, for want of a better word, to provide a particular outcome, and we do that okay. We probably have the capacity to look at other areas outside that are just as important in terms of those other therapies, counselling and group work models. We support men's and women's groups and social programs with funding. That funding comes from our Medicare income. We are a bulk-billing service and we can claim a Medicare payment for each patient we see, and we invest that back into the community. Where we can, we help people like the healing centre and neighbourhood centres. There is a neighbourhood centre in South Grafton called Camellia Cottage. We try to support them and some of the programs they run. There are also the land councils, particularly at Maclean and Yamba. We try to support some of the social programs they run. Our core business is one part, but there are some other activities we can do. If it is better delivered by other members of the community, we will support that.

CHAIR: Does that indicate that there needs to be a shift in funding and thinking about how the delivery of services works within communities and integration? We are hearing about silos and separation between the State and Federal governments. Does there need to be a new way of thinking?

Mr KERSHAW: I think there is and there needs to be. You would hear the statement in Aboriginal communities across the country, "Aboriginal health is a holistic issue." You cannot address body parts or fund body parts. I look at the services we get. Yesterday we had a respiratory specialist come in and he obviously focuses on the lungs. We have access to cardiac specialists and their focus is on the heart. We have talked about diabetes and sexual health. But what we do need is a focus on the whole of the person and what is required within the whole of the community. We are actually looking at, in the new year, going back out to communities and consulting with them about what their immediate health needs are. We think we are doing a good job in some of the areas that we have highlighted in the report, but there are gaps in our communities as well.

I do not think there is enough funding in regards to the total mind and the interrelationship that people have with each other. That is what I would like to see: The focus and thinking about funding being more effective to allow flexibility in thinking about what sort of programs can be delivered and how we deliver those programs. At the moment, it is very much, "You're funded for this program activity"—that is, sexual health—and that is what you do.

CHAIR: But we are also hearing about the need for a longer-term commitment—programs that run for only three years rather than look at the big picture and the long term.

Mr KERSHAW: Absolutely. We have just been notified by the Commonwealth that we are receiving three-year funding. I think we still only get 12 months funding from the State so we have not had any commitment from the State as to that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am sorry, is that a reduction from Federal three-year funding?

Mr KERSHAW: No, no.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I ask because they have always offered three-year funding.

Mr KERSHAW: That is three-year recurrent funding. Previously it has been 12 months, year to year. We have been notified from the Commonwealth about our funding is now a three-year cycle, so we have got some stability for the next three years.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: That is great. That gives you some certainty.

Mr KERSHAW: That gives us some certainty—that is right—so we can plan that Commonwealth funding. But interspersed with that is some State funding and some other funding that we also receive from other areas. In order to continue to do the work that we are doing, we need a bit more stability, a bit more sustainability, and that equates to longer-term funding. The three- to five-year funding cycle would be the optimum, but a commitment—you know, the Closing the Gap report talks about making a generational change in life expectancy, so it would be good to have some security around funding as a health service to achieve that in the long term without worrying about, "Well, do I have a job in 12 months time?"

A classic example I come back to is sexual health. We had a really, really good sexual health program and a really, really good and motivated sexual health worker—well known in the community—but their funding got cut because it was a three-year cycle. It went for three years. They would not fund it again, so we had to let it go. But within six months, the Commonwealth changed its mind and put the funding back on for us. That person had gone, and here I was supposed to recruit another person just for another six months. We got the money in December. Well, I was on holidays in December. Everybody else was on holidays in January. By the time we came back in February, we had to recruit somebody. That takes six to eight weeks, and we have to have that money expended by 30 June.

CHAIR: Then you have to do an application to get an extension**.**

Mr KERSHAW: That is right.

CHAIR: It all becomes administrative and bureaucratic. But this inquiry is looking at the stolen generations and the impacts.

Mr KERSHAW: Yes.

CHAIR: The Bringing them Home report made the point that the past has affected the future and will continue to do so unless we address it.

Mr KERSHAW: Yes, that is right.

CHAIR: What you are doing here in this report is fantastic. You are taking a whole-of-community holistic look at things. It seems like you are on a very good path to heal the community in combination with this centre. The message I am getting is that you have an approach here that is working well, and you would like to be supported.

Mr KERSHAW: That is right. What we try to do, particularly in January of every year—we have a senior managers group—we are actually meeting on Friday. But in January of every year we look into the crystal ball and see what our services are going to be—not for this year, 2016, but also for the next three years and the next five years. The conclusion of that report talks about where we would like to be by 2020 and we would certainly like to be a service that is continuing to function well and continuing to provide good outcomes to our community. We believe we are good enough to be there and do that.

Our main threat, I suppose, is the tendering and competitive nature of future funding availability and whether that opens up to new players in the game; you know, whether we have to tender against people like the big health corporations, the big private health companies and people like the primary health network. They are the sort of threats that we have, but obviously we think we have a good track record and we are perusing enough. I do not think I mentioned that of the 21 national key performance indicators [KPIs] that we are asked to report against, we actually are exceeding in 18 of those above the national standards. We think we are doing a

good job, and that is why we think we are doing a good role in the impact of trying to close the gap, regardless of what is happening in other areas.

CHAIR: It is so great to get the report. It is wonderful to have positive outcomes being reported to us.

Mr KERSHAW: Yes. The longer-term funding and the longer-term sustainability of our service only equates to, hopefully, good outcomes for our community. But also we want to link in with other services as well and help to develop other services across the community.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your presentation and for the information. It has been a real pleasure to have you here.

Mr KERSHAW: Thank you for coming up and listening to me.

CHAIR: If you think of anything else or have the ability to provide more information, or if you can encourage other people to, we would very much like to hear what is going on.

Mr KERSHAW: No worries. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr KERSHAW: Good to meet you again.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you for your report.

Mr KERSHAW: No problem.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

RUTH POWIS, Homelessness Officer, Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council,

SANDRA BOLT, Board Member, Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council, and

JUDITH CURRIE, Community Member, Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Welcome to this hearing. I should point out that if you are asked a question that you feel you would like more time to answer or to obtain information that is not currently available to you then that question may be taken on notice. Before we proceed to questions would any of you like to make an opening statement?

Ms POWIS: Yes. Jali is made up of a few services: the land council, the aged care in-home care service and the homelessness program, which is part of Going Home Staying Home. From my point of view I do not believe when that program was given to Jali to run that anyone had any idea of the volume of clients that would come through our service. It is not always just for homeless; it might start off that way but then it develops into domestic violence, just out of prison, Centrelink issues and carries on. I am finding this every day and I am a sole worker in that role at Jali. Since I started at the end of December last year I have had 600 and something clients who I have personally seen. They might come in once and then they might be technically out of my service but then they reappear or re-present with another issue because they feel safe and I think they feel welcome at Jali. It is just overloading; it is overwhelming. In one way I feel that I have created the monster myself because I just cannot let them go and say, "No, you have to go somewhere else for this" if I can make it better for them. I am seeing it all the time.

I am also seeing a lot of people who have just been released from prison. It is a massive thing for them because there does not seem to be anything in place for pre-release. If we could get some sort of program to go into the prisons and even organise housing for them or get them on the register before they come out. We need to link them into some services so that when they are released and come back home or go to where they want to be living that we have already got things in place. Instead of them wandering into Ballina now knowing where they are going to live and trying to find accommodation linked to home, which is going to be no better than one or two nights. That leaves them homeless again after those two nights are up because we do not have any temporary accommodation in Ballina.

That is a massive part of my problem but I also see problems with the young men who come out of prison in their forties. A lot of the issues stemming from prison can clearly be seen as intergenerational—coming from them being stolen or they were adopted out and they have spent all this time trying to find their parents or trying to find where they belong, and the pain that has caused them. Then they will come, they have not got a house and it is a struggle for them to get houses. Within that, probably out of say 10 clients I have seen at least five have attempted suicide. They have not been successful but have attempted—not just once—and I can see the correlation from all the previous history.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Are the ones who try to commit suicide mainly descendants of the stolen generations or survivors?

Ms POWIS: Yes, stolen children.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: When you speak of volume—you mentioned 600—how long have you been in your position?

Ms POWIS: Not even 12 months yet.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Is that on an annual basis or will that number increase in time?

Ms POWIS: I believe so.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: And the funding is insufficient?

Ms POWIS: The funding for the program was when the Aboriginal alliance was on track but the funding is not sufficient—ideally at Jali for the number of clients I have got I almost need a full-time counsellor

or someone who can counsel and assist me. In the mornings sometimes it is like, "Take a number." It is not like that every day; it is like that, I would say, four out of five days.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Mr Kershaw mentioned earlier that they sometimes provide counselling support. Do you tap into the resources of the Bulgarr Ngaru Medical Aboriginal Corporation?

Ms POWIS: No, we are in Ballina.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you work with other medical agencies or counselling services?

Ms POWIS: Yes, I do but sometimes I have got clients who will not go to certain people.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What is the reason behind them not wanting to go to other agencies?

Ms POWIS: Because of fear that someone might know them and families talk—there are issues between families—or they may have been to someone and they are not happy with him or her. That is obviously a personal choice. Sometimes I just wish that I had someone on site if someone walks in saying that as a last resort they have come to see me and that was it, they were going to finish it all, and I have got grown men breaking down in tears.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Who provides your funding?

Ms POWIS: Contract through Going Home Staying Home.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Has the Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council made submissions to them as to its greater need?

Ms POWIS: Not as yet.

CHAIR: Perhaps to explain, your services are located within Jali's building and that is why it presents as a safe place for people to come to?

Ms POWIS: Yes.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: This is an inquiry into reparations for the stolen generations. Would any of you like to tell the Committee of your personal experiences or interactions about the stolen generations?

Ms BOLT: Back in 1978 I was employed by Youth and Community Services [YACS]. I was one of 12 Aboriginal caseworkers in this State of New South Wales. Prior to that, I was just a housewife with six children. I come from a family of 13 that was raised on Cabbage Tree Island. We moved off the island. My father worked in Sydney. My father actually was a member of the Aborigines Welfare Board back then—one of the first Aboriginal people. I was not aware of the stolen generations stuff. When we moved off to Sydney my oldest sister—we were a happy family of 13. My mother used to say to us on Cabbage Tree Island "Run and hide, you kids, because the welfare's here and they'll take you away." So we used to run and hide in the mangroves and everywhere when we knew the welfare was on the island. We had an advantage in that we knew when there were other people on the island because they had to cross by boat and everyone knew when there was someone in authority on the island. Then we moved to Sydney and my sister's children were removed. I am quite nervous.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is okay.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: These are the stories we need to hear. We really appreciate you telling us them.

Ms BOLT: My sister and me were sent to Vaucluse to work as domestics for rich people at Vaucluse which was an experience—it wasn't a bad experience for me; I quite enjoyed it but anyhow. My sister's family were removed while we were in Sydney. I met my husband in Sydney and got married and had six children, and my sister had six children too but her children were removed. We never knew anything about those children. We

were all fearful of the authorities. My sister never ever approached the authorities to ask where her kids were because she thought she might have been locked up or whatever. So we knew nothing about these children. They were placed all over New South Wales.

In 1978 I moved back up north to live and got the job in DOCS YACS as a caseworker. For the first time in my life I had access to information—information on my sister and my sister's children. When I look back now I can see the stress that I must have been under having to read stuff that had been written about my family which I thought wasn't right. I couldn't go back because over the years since my sister's kids were removed we never forgot those kids: they were always included at Christmas and in birthday times and whatever. We had no information. We had no idea where they were, what they lived like. When I got access to this information I thought, what I wanted to do was run home and tell my family, tell my sister "look". Because my sister died aged 36 of a broken heart, among other things because she never got over the loss of her kids and she was only a year older than I was.

I had access to this information but I couldn't go out and tell anyone because I was bound by confidentiality and red tape and whatever. I knew I would be breaking the law if I went out and told her so I wasn't able to tell her that I had read stuff about her kids and I knew where they were. I used to think "Let's go out past the Blue Mountains past this school where I knew the eldest one was going to school because I saw the information there". But I couldn't do that. I wanted to just drive past just to see what she looked like. My sister—another sister—came back to me one time and said, "We were up at the Gold Coast", she said, "And walking through this park and I see this little black girl walking with these white people." She said, "I'm sure that was Vera-Lee" one of my sister's kids, you know because her name had been changed; the foster parents had changed her name.

But later on in life they all eventually came back in different ways. Later on in life we learned that that was probably her because she was brought up on the Gold Coast. But what I would like to say is the effect it has had on the whole family, not just those kids that had been removed but me and my family and all my brothers and sisters and their family. We all suffer as a result of those children being removed. One thing that sticks in my mind is when, through my work in DOCS, I was able to get the eldest girl who had been fostered out who was 13 at the time. On the DOCS file I read like she is going through this identity crisis where she is asking questions about who she really is. Because she grew up thinking, believing she was a white person but she was a black girl and she questioned it. This identify crisis thing, which I read a lot on the files of Aboriginal children who had been removed, this identity crisis that they had and the foster family couldn't handle it.

Anyway they agreed to let her come home and I was all excited. I am this DOCS worker with another white officer. She's coming off the plane and I thought she's going to know who I am, and all excited. And she walks off and, like, "Who are you? I don't know you." And that really cut me to pieces. I get emotional every time I talk about my sister's children, but I'm sorry, but that's just one example. And my sister, I've tried, I had six children of my own but I've tried to replace my sister within the family and it's not always been happy times. I'm still trying to replace her to a degree in that her grandchildren and her great grandchildren I have tried my best to keep them from being fostered out with strangers which causes lots of problems too.

So the eldest girl, the one I talked about in the Blue Mountains who had come home and who didn't recognise me, didn't know me from a bar of soap, she's had four children. They have all been removed from her and placed with different people. I tried to keep it within Aboriginal family or if it wasn't immediate family other members of the Aboriginal community. But those four children have been removed and now the eldest one, she's just a shell of a person, of a woman. Her four children had been removed. Her youngest daughter has had four children who have all been removed. I at one stage had one of them living with me but, yes, that caused a lot of friction within the family because they were all traumatised people, to a degree. Her four children had been removed and one of them has been placed with a non-Aboriginal family in Sydney right now, who is a year-old baby who is actually named after me because her mother was one that I had played a big part in her life. This is my sister's grandchild whose four children had been taken.

I spent a lot of time with her. They call me Nan because again traditionally I think that was the way, the traditional thing with a lot of Aboriginal families that sisters became the grandmothers anyway. But the fact that the last three babies, she's had twins and then she has had another baby. So the twins, I've supported one of my sisters to get custody of the twins and the baby one who's not yet 12 months old she named after me, Luesandra, and I have not seen her because she's in Sydney. The mother did everything right for DOCS in Sydney at the time when she was pregnant because she's aware of this whole situation with her mother and her grandmother and her cousin, what had happened. I hope I am making sense to you people.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: You are.

Ms BOLT: Because I am so nervous. I said to Ruth.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: You are doing a great job.

CHAIR: If you want to have a drink of water please do so and take your time.

Ms BOLT: I am shaking like a leaf. My sister is dead. She died aged 36. Her eldest daughter has had four children. Her youngest daughter is the one I am talking about who has had the twins, Jacinta and Tashintar, and Luesandra, had those four kids who had been removed. She is now on the streets in Sydney on drugs, just doesn't want to be here. She tried to do the right thing with the last three babies she's had to no avail. They still took the youngest, the last three babies she's had off her, that's why she's on the streets in Sydney; now she's totally given up.

CHAIR: With your experience of working in this area, you went back and looked at the removal and you knew where they were but the question is why were they removed? We are hearing that often children were removed just because they were Aboriginal, that was the only reason given. What more can be done with this repeating pattern? You say someone tries to do the right thing but it is not good enough. What is failing in that system in that there is not support or the ability to break the cycle and keep families together and provide the support that was needed?

Ms BOLT: When I worked in DOCS way back in the 1970s I was always uncomfortable when it came to taking children away from their mothers, for whatever the reason may be. The people that I worked with could always justify their actions. I was only new to the game at the time and wasn't able to challenge them. By the end of my term in DOCS I was able to challenge because I had learned a lot more by then. I always maintained that if the department had put more time, effort and money into keeping families together as it did to break them apart, you know, they would have had a better outcome. I still feel that way, even more so with my sister's kids. I can't repair the damage that has been done to my sister's children and it breaks my heart, and I'll go to my grave with that thought, knowing that I'm powerless to fix it now because the damage has been done.

It breaks my heart to see Charlene on the streets in Sydney just in a drug haze because of what's out there. They never knew their mother or their grandmother, and when I worked in DOCS I asked my bosses. I made a written submission to assist me to bring these people together, all these kids were my sister's children, all of them and their children so they can come back home and meet their mob. Because that's a big problem too in that they don't have the connection. They can't go out there and say, "I'm a Bundjalung". My kids can say "I'm from the Bundjalung mob in Lismore". They can't because they didn't have that connection. They never got brought up like that.

I have a niece down in Nowra where she got brought up in a foster home down there and she rings me in the middle of the night when she's been drinking heavily. She'll say, "Aunt, when I die could you bring a busload of my Bundjalung people to my funeral?" I've got another niece who's come home as an adult and she just wanted to get to meet her people. She established herself. She got brought up on the Central Coast in a foster home. She found herself accommodation in Ballina, had a little unit there and is so happy. She just wanted people to accept her. What had happened to her? She got pack raped by men in the community, not my family but other black men. They didn't know who she was or whatever but, you know, she just wanted to be accepted by her mob, by her people. She got pack raped.

She got up in the middle of the night, she got on the highway, got a lift in a truck and got out of Ballina and just left everything that she had accumulated there, her fridge and stuff together in that unit and never ever came back. She's struggling out there. She's got a couple of little girls, and she's got all sorts of issues. I go and visit her whenever I can. I try to keep in contact with them. But that was my biggest concern and I still feel that way that there should be more effort to keep our families together and not split us up the way they have.

CHAIR: So the services to be there early, and everyone to access them before they get into trouble, before there is a problem. So an early intervention process that works?

Ms BOLT: Yes. I was about to say that I had applied to my bosses to get these kids brought back together. They have never ever been in the same town, the same room or the same community at any one time.

If they had remained with us, they would know who their mob is. On Cabbage Tree Island they know who all their families are, around Coffs Harbour and places. But they don't. And I tried to get some assistance to bring them there, because I couldn't afford to pay for them to come. Because one of the kids was in Western Australia as well, because some of the foster parents skipped the country and took them away so that we wouldn't get them back. But to no avail, they declined my application for assistance and I had approached Linkup on a couple of occasions but that was never successful.

As I see it—and I have spoken to the children, well they are adults now a lot of them—I know I can't bring your mother or your grandmother back but at least you can go to her grave and see where she is buried. Because they hear stories from other people, you know: Your mother was this, or your mother was that. And they didn't know her; they have no memory of her. And at least look at her grave and we can cry—even if we just cry, because that is all we will be able to do. And I have never been able to do that so, yeah.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Thank you very much. Judith, did you want to tell us anything about your experience?

Ms CURRIE: Yes, I am Sandra's niece. You can see how a lot it has affected me. Basically, it has just recently been my immediate family but in the past, seeing my aunties, like Aunty Sandra and Aunty Rene and all them grow up. I knew as a child about Aunty Rene's kids, like Aunty Sandra is talking about. But the reason I am here today is, I have an aunty and she has a white partner and her kids were taken—not taken, but she had Department of Community Services [DOCS] involved with her because she had problems with alcohol. And because they were involved with her, her daughters went on to have their children—they were special kids, they went to Southern Cross school—but never took any drugs or drank heavily or was not ever violent. But there they had their babies removed.

So I asked the question about my niece's little girl. She has just turned one. She was removed from the hospital. She never got a chance to be a mum. She actually had two removed, one just a few weeks ago, another niece that was removed, didn't get a chance to be a mum. She asked why the first one, asked why was her kid taken? She had marijuana in her system but she was never a smoker, she never took drugs, never drank or anything but because she used to sit around people, somehow it got into her system. So they removed the little girl from the hospital. And then I asked them, was she given to an Aboriginal family and was she okay? And DOCS's answer to that question was—I said to them, "To me, this seems like a stolen generation all over again". Their answer to me was, "She doesn't fall under stolen generation". My question was: How can she not fall under stolen generation when she is an Aboriginal child? Because her grandfather is white and her father is white. Her mother is black as me.

But the other niece, the baby that was taken, she suffered through the same system and her grandmother's kid was taken. DOCS was involved with her mother and they walked into the hospital room and said they were taking her baby. That is a few weeks ago. And she said, "Why are you talking my baby?" "Because you're not feeding it". How old is she? A 17-, 18-year-old girl doesn't even know how to be a mother. This is why the nurses in the hospital show them how to feed and breastfeed them. DOCS just came in and took them and said that she was not feeding the baby. But she doesn't know how to be a mother. She is only a young girl. She needs to be taught, invited. But yeah, her baby was removed and now she hit the grog one night and she wanted to commit suicide. This is only a couple of weeks ago. So it has really, really affected our community because of the removal of our children. And it is not just the family that feels it, it's the whole community, because we all support each other and we are one family.

And so my aunty, she is a real quiet one. She is a yes, yes, no, no person. She won't talk back to you, she will just agree with you. Because it is just so unfair that she just doesn't have the support by the department to have her children and her grandchildren in her home. I feel that they failed her and they failed our family as a whole. That is what I have got to say.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am not too sure which lady mentioned to me, you said about the children could be sent from West Australia to here and children from here sent to West Australia?

Ms BOLT: No, that wasn't what I meant. I said that one of the foster parents had taken some of the foster children, my sister's children, to Western Australia, so that the kids couldn't come back and live with us.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: So you couldn't contact them?

Ms BOLT: Well at the time I wanted to get them all together so that they could be together, so that they could get to know each other. They don't even know each other, my sister's kids, let alone me and my kids and my brothers and sisters and their kids—all their mob. Which is how blackfellas work, you know. That's how we live—extended family.

CHAIR: That is probably the point that keeps coming up, that removal from country, the removal from family, community and culture, that is what we are hearing as some of the reasons why there has been that intergenerational harm and pain that is being caused. And perhaps non-aboriginal people not really understanding how important those factors are, what it means to belong, to be part of something, to have a connection with the mountain, or the river and that is who you are. And those foundational things about why belonging to country is so important and belonging to mob. So the Linkup programs, the support to bring people back to give them a sense—I think someone said it before—a sense of identity, a sense of who you are and where you are in the world. Is there something else that you can tell us about why that is so important and why it should be supported by government, to fund that travel or connection?

Ms BOLT: I look at people who I believe to be confident and I look at my family, my sister's family, and think they have no self-confidence. And I try to find answers for why they are like this. And then I sort of put it down to, in order to become a happy, healthy, confident person, you have to have pride, pride in who you are and where you are from. And to me, personally, knowing your mob, your community, your connection to the land is very important. And because they have lost that, I find that they become these, you know, these disenfranchised—I don't know what other word to use.

Ms CURRIE: Lost souls.

Ms BOLT: Yeah, exactly. We need to break this cycle and when I look at my sister's kids, how are we going to break this cycle? It needs to be broken. There needs to be, I don't know, more services out there. Even Linkup is diminished to a degree, my personal experience has been. I don't know where it's at now, because I have given up work a while ago.

Ms CURRIE: Brighter Futures, I think it is now.

Ms BOLT: Brighter Futures—is that part of Linkup?

Ms CURRIE: I think it is.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do you think because of that emptiness in their lives that is why they might be inclined then to try drugs or other things?

Ms BOLT: Yeah, of course, of course. You go around the parks, I reckon you could drive all around Australia and talk to the element of Aboriginal people that supposedly sit in the parks and you listen to their stories, you will find a lot of those people have been removed as kids.

Ms CURRIE: And abused while they have been removed.

Ms BOLT: Oh yes, not even to mention that.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Or their parents have or their grandparents have. And the stories you have told shows the impact that has through the generations.

Ms BOLT: See, when I look for answers within my family, I find that my mother was reared by her father on the island, because her mother came from an orphanage in Deebing Creek out near Ipswich. And on some other family members, they have had more detail of that old grandmother from Deebing Creek in Ipswich, she is supposedly from Normanton. And when we have done family research, we found that she was aged five at the orphanage in Deebing Creek near Ipswich. So how does a five-year-old get from Normanton down to Deebing Creek? We can't find it, there is no record. When people do their family history—and I watch "Who Do You Think You Are?" Europeans can trace their ancestry way back to 1400 or whatever and we can't go any further than Deebing Creek in 1905 when a five-year-old grandmother of mine was placed there.

CHAIR: Is that because there are no records available? We have just heard that records have been destroyed so people can't trace.

Ms BOLT: There have been some records before 1905 apparently, that is why we couldn't find out how she got from Normanton. So there is this great debate about, did she come from Normanton or did she come from Ipswich? And how did she end up over here? Well, I have got all those answers along the way but I can't find out how this supposedly little girl got brought from Normanton down to Ipswich and ended up in New South Wales and gave birth to my mother. She couldn't care for her, so her father took her and reared her up on Cabbage Tree Island. It still goes on, you see, it is intergenerational.

Could I just say one thing about my sister's children who have been reared in non-indigenous families, foster homes. That eldest grandchild of my sister's who I talked about, the example that I had given. I remember when her placement had broken down totally with this foster family in the Blue Mountains and because I had worked in DOCS at the time, I was able to get her brought back to the island as a teenager, to live with family. And I remember taking her out to the island and introducing her to the relations who she was living with, a cousin of mine and her husband.

And the first thing she did was, she went and got a bucket of water and put some disinfectant in it and washed the bed that she was going to sleep on, cleaned all around the bed. To me I sort of thought, well, what has she been taught about black fellas? Blacks are dirty, so before she would sleep on that bed she had to clean it. That is just one example. I could name heaps of examples that I experienced in working in DOCS but it all comes to the same conclusion: They have been removed and lost their culture and their identity and all of that.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The stolen generation is not just the boys and girls taken into those big children's homes but also the ones who were put into foster homes?

Ms BOLT: As well, yes. The big issue is how Aboriginal families work. It did not just affect those kids, it affected all of us. My example of trying to replace my sister I would suspect would apply to a lot of old grandmothers throughout the country.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Having heard that experience, Ms Bolt, what can the Committee recommend? What ideas do you have to address some of the ongoing pain and suffering?

Ms BOLT: To be honest with you, I don't have the answers. I am still searching for answers because if you look at it in that context you think immediately of the alcoholism, the problems with alcohol, and the ice use now and you go back to find out what could be the root causes of that kid being in that position. Where are the answers? Where do you take them other than the mental facilities at the local hospital? I honestly don't know.

CHAIR: Are you aware that at the time of the Bringing them Home report and the New South Wales Government's response to that a program was set up within the mental health department that was specifically for responding to the trauma in relation to the stolen generations? Do you think that is still needed today? My understanding is that the program does not exist any longer. I am not sure how long it operated. Would that still be an important program to have today?

Ms BOLT: Specialist counsellors to deal with these issues—there is no-one that I can go out there and talk to to help me to deal with the issue. In order for me to help my sister's kids I need help too.

Ms CURRIE: With me, I would reach out to someone like Aunty Sandra and someone that is older than me who knows a bit more. That is what we talk about with the support of the whole extended families as well.

CHAIR: The idea that the services that are required are services run by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people so that the training and opportunities that need to be created to ensure that in the future those structures are there—

Ms CURRIE: Everybody's circumstances are a little bit different too. I don't know how you would be able to deal with somebody that has got a thousand other issues besides the stolen generation. I just have no idea.

Ms BOLT: This is great just to be here to talk to you people, as nervous as I am.

Ms CURRIE: It is a bit of a healing process for us, starting to talk about it.

Ms BOLT: It is great that someone is prepared to listen. Hopefully something positive will come from it.

Ms CURRIE: Yes, just being heard.

CHAIR: Thank you so much for travelling to be with us and for being so honest and open. We really appreciate it. As I said, if anyone is in contact with other people who wish to make submissions—

Ms CURRIE: Can I just say that we have started an organisation in Ballina. Our group is called Grandmothers Against Removals. We have started that with the Bundjalung day care down in Ballina. We are into our third week. We will be taking some of the issues up with some of the young women. Hopefully that will be a strong program to support the women with the kids being removed.

CHAIR: You might take to the group that it would be valuable to get a submission from them as well.

Ms CURRIE: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

BARRY WILLIAMS, Chairperson, Grafton Ngerrie Local Aboriginal Land Council, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for being with us. It is great that you are here so that Mr Tibbett's absence is able to be filled. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr WILLIAMS: I have filled in at the last minute for my chief executive officer, who is otherwise detained with a medical situation. As the recently elected chairperson for the Grafton Ngerrie Local Aboriginal Land Council, the land council provides a lot of services for the local community. We are legislated to make land claims but also to act in the best interests of the community. I have recently returned to the area after living off country since 1984 after I completed my high school here. My mother's side and my father's side are from Clarence Valley.

One of the things that I have heard and experienced in relation to the stolen generation is the disconnection to culture and disconnection to country. I have been involved in working with government. I also work with the police and with the military. I have done a lot of working on country stuff with natural resource management and the environmental science stuff that I have been working on recently. But coming back to this community really gave me a sense of belonging, a sense that I have always had but more so in the last 18 months. Of course, I would come and visit relatives at least once a year and more if possible. My wife's family is Gumbaynggir from up here and I am a Bundjalung man. Actually living on country and working on country—my country—certainly gave me that sense that I am home. It made me feel good inside. It is quite hard to describe it any other way than that.

I have got friends who were removed as children. I have got friends whose parents had been removed or their grandparents. I have an aunt on my mother's side who was removed as a child. Certainly it is not something that really is talked about a lot. It is a conversation that I find difficult to raise because I do not want to bring up any bad feelings of that person's experience. Sometimes if that conversation happens then it happens, but it is not an incentive of mine to go out and seek these stories. It is quite a difficult disclosure, I would imagine, for people to live with and to be able to talk about.

Grafton land council has been successful recently in getting some funding from Local Land Services to do some work on country, some Learning on Country activities. Things like that provide an opportunity where some of those stories can be told that perhaps ordinarily might not occur. It is not something I open a conversation with with anybody. Even my aunt's experiences, I have never heard that from her. My family members have talked about it and I have talked to cousins about it. I have seen some of the effects within the family, how they felt being separated and that loss. But my aunt returned back to the area and has grown up and has got three children who are quite involved in the community. Like I said, it is not a question I have asked her. I advocate things like those Learning on Country activities for opportunities to discuss and to get away from technology and have a conversation. That is what I wanted to open with.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You mentioned the Learning on Country program. Are there other programs that you are aware of, perhaps even before you came to the land council here, that work directly with the stolen generation?

Mr WILLIAMS: I know Janelle Brown and the work that she has been doing. I have seen that, the Clarence Valley Healing Centre. Darren Kershaw was talking earlier about some of the stuff that they do with the medical centre. I can see that people would be captured in some of those broader programs that were not specifically targeted. Apart from those sorts of things through the medical centre and through the Gurehlgam and the healing centre there is nothing else that I see apart from some of the stuff that we are trying to do with the land council.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I know what you said earlier is right in terms of the agony involved in telling the story and what has happened, but it seems that on the other side of the coin it is important to tell the story so that people know what went on. How do you encourage people to come out and speak? This Committee provided an opportunity for the ladies to speak and they saw it as part of the healing process as well. How do you encourage people to come out and speak to not only to help them heal but also get that information on the record for history and the knowledge of future generations?

Mr WILLIAMS: My aunt is on my mother's side. I lost my mother when I was quite young so I didn't have the opportunity to speak to my mother about that. I am sure that she would have quite the story to tell in

relation to that. But, like I said, it is just something where a conversation has not really occurred. But at forums, a retreat or something like that or some sort of activity or, in a more recent context, some of the Native Title claim meetings that we have had where you can sit around and just catch up and tell yarns some of those things might come up. We need to provide an opportunity for some of that dialogue to occur, which is where I see some of that Learning on Country stuff coming into it. That can be sitting around a campfire and having a cup of tea and talking about some of those stories where people in their own time can make those disclosures but they do not feel like they are forced. That has been my hesitance to ask those questions, because I do not want to pester anybody to tell me about this and tell me about that.

Culturally we find out information when we need to. That is not our determination when we need to; it is older people's determination when we need to find that information out. I do not see it as my point to question. But if we can be involved somehow in having some of those activities where people get the chance to go away and there could be a number of activities, ancillary to that could be some of those stories coming out from people who have been affected and saying how it has affected them in their lives and their children's lives.

I worked for the police for seven years. In terms of some of the stuff that was said earlier in relation to crime and justice within our communities, I would see that when I went around the State. Having an opportunity to share those stories, whether it is at a designated forum such as this or some other meeting, sometimes that conversation comes up. I am not sure I would want that label: "Come on Barry, come along and tell us your story about when you were removed." It is something that I cannot imagine. I lost my father only a couple of weeks ago and a number of people have asked me how I am feeling. It is driving me batty. I feel sad and I will be sad in my time. But I went into the workplace and had five different people ask me to recount the story. It was only a couple of weeks ago. I do not see it as my place to put people in that position. I know how I felt when I was talking about losing my father, who lived a good long life—he was 89 years old. I respect other people's wishes. If they want to talk about it then I will be there to listen. I do not know whether that has answered your question.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It has. We are trying to understand the situation and how we can make the best recommendations.

Mr WILLIAMS: Of course, things like that take time and money and they need to be resourced. Through the land council we have been able to get some funding to do some of that stuff. Maybe some of those conversations will occur. Of course, to get the funding we must meet set criteria. We are talking about natural resource management and cultural heritage. In my experience when I have gone away for something many stories get told. I make them fit into the criteria that we have funding for and I do the report. But there are many other stories that do not make the report that are told and shared. That is part of having that forum and space where things can be said.

CHAIR: Are you involved with the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsib8ility and Empowerment [OCHRE] program through the local decision-making [LDM] process? Is that happening with the Manning Rivers group?

Mr WILLIAMS: Brett Tibbett is involved with the LDM. I work full time with Local Land Services. Next year we are going to kick off an Aboriginal community advisory group and tap into those existing frameworks for LDM. People like Brett and Joe Kelly at Kempsey Aboriginal Land Council are the movers and shakers in their respective communities.

CHAIR: Is there a general feeling in the community about the OCHRE program and the fact that healing has been inserted as one of the core issues that needs to be addressed?

Mr WILLIAMS: It is not a conversation that I hear a lot. I am a public servant and I know that these things occur. But when I am not a public servant, when I am a community member, it is not something I hear a lot about. It is not as though I think, "This is the part of the conversation where we are now talking about OCHRE." We might just talk about things. I do not think about it in those terms. It is a more holistic conversation. I might hear something through the OCHRE process or the LDM where the community has some impact. We talk about that of course. Sometimes it is a hard conversation to have. Community members have been asked specifically about certain things, and we wonder what we are going to achieve this time that has not been achieved before after all the questions we have answered. That is the general flavour when I talk to communities. I might have in my mind some questions I want answered, but I will put them into the

conversation. I do not get out my note book and say, "Okay, this is OCHRE and this is one, two, three." If it comes up, it comes up. If it does not come up then I find a way to get it to come up.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Your surname reminds me of my numerous visits to the Mulli Mulli area. There are many Williams there. They told me a story that made me think that not only do we have individual children who were stolen but also whole community were moved around. They had been there for 60 years and I asked where they had come from. They said the Government told them they had to move and the whole tribe was uprooted and went to another location. Are there many cases like that of people being moved away from the graves of their ancestors?

Mr WILLIAMS: My dad's people are from Yaegl. Ogilvy came up in the mid-1800s and took the land and set up cattle stations. My great grandmothers worked for Ogilvy and my grandmother worked from the station. I know other relatives who also worked from the station. Ogilvy set up a specific area of land for Aboriginal people by Yaegl known as "The Square". That community has been pretty static. I know about the situation at Mulli Mulli, but I am not sure about other communities. It is a history that is repeated around the place.

When I was working for the police I did a lot of travelling across New South Wales and spoke to communities and local police about policing Aboriginal communities and better working with communities. I would hear those stories of dislocation and forced removal of communities as well. It is quite a depressing area, but I do not work in it any more. I am working more towards environmental science, natural resource management and cultural heritage. It is not as depressing; it is more encouraging. We want people to be involved in that. I have been in communities across New South Wales.

CHAIR: I would like to follow up on that. Does that not then create major problems for Aboriginal people to take advantage of their rights under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and to make claims for land if they cannot prove where they come from, their association and connection to country and that—

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Continuous living.

CHAIR: That is right. There is a process, but it is very hard to complete when government intervention took them away and the records were lost. Do you as a land council deal with a lot of those issues?

Mr WILLIAMS: Yes.

CHAIR: You have responsibilities under New South Wales laws.

Mr WILLIAMS: More and more people are coming to the land council asking for a confirmation of aboriginality letter or statement because the Department of Housing wants it, or such and such said so. The first question that we ask is whether they are a member. If they are, it is simply a matter of providing a letter. But if they are not, we ask why not and where they are from. If they are from that community, why do they not go to that land council to get the letter? People say, "My father is from the stolen generation and I do not know exactly." It causes real difficulties for us as an organisation to provide that service to the communities. We direct people to Link-Up. That gives them the opportunity to explore their past and history. I know that the Native Title Service [NTS] helps with family history stuff. Sometimes we are not in a position to help people.

CHAIR: Perhaps you can explain the aboriginality test. The Government requires that for people to again access to housing and other services. There is a quandary about proof.

Mr WILLIAMS: There is a three-part test of Aboriginal decent, identifying and community acceptance. We are not sure how scientific it is. Biologically a person is Aboriginal. Some people identify with and have lived in communities. There is also the community acceptance aspect. But sometimes some of them have recently discovered their family history. That could be chased up with Link-Up. If someone comes along to one of our land council meetings and applies for membership, if the people do not know them they will not vote to accept them as a member. If they are not a member they will not get the letter. The membership meetings are held every few months, so it is not a case of coming in on Friday and getting it by Tuesday. It can take a number of months. If you are not known to the community then the community will not accept you as a member. Unfortunately, it puts more pressure on their situation. They found that out and want to be a part of the community, but then they might feel like they are being ostracised by people. We say those things to them.

We do not have an anthropologist on staff, and we do not have direct connections to Link-Up apart from referring people to it. It really places them in a position that they do not want to be in. It also places us in a position that we do not want to be in. If they get a letter confirming their aboriginality they can access other services to help them with their situation. We want to be fair dinkum about it, but if we do not know someone we do not know them. That is an unfortunate truth.

CHAIR: Is it true that the Government is tightening that process?

Mr WILLIAMS: As I said, that seems to be happening a lot more. There is a young man who is well known in the valley, and his family is well known, but he is not a member of the land council. He had to get this letter to say that he was Aboriginal. I know this man's family and I could vouch for him being Aboriginal; that was not an issue. But there is a procedure that has to happen and getting the magic letter is one part of that procedure nowadays. It can help with the provision of services that people can access. That is the way it seems.

We have conversations at the land council about what are some of the motives for people finding out about their history. I advocate on behalf of people and talk about those things. You do not know their story and it can be very hard for people to come and tell their story and get that across. Some people are not patient when listening to stories. They say no and that is it. That is the beauty of a collective membership of an organisation where we all decide, not just one person. I am seeing that more. People are coming in seeking letters of aboriginality from the land council because other organisations do not provide them. The medical centre had a sign in the foyer saying that it did not provide letters of aboriginality. If you want to access services and you are not known, you need to provide a letter confirming your aboriginality.

CHAIR: Is the land council the main provider of confirmation of aboriginality now? Is that another responsibility for the land council?

Mr WILLIAMS: Yes, and because we are not resourced to do it it places pressure on the organisation. We get limited funding from the State land council. Like many other Aboriginal organisations, we apply for grants and get funds for short-term projects. But things like that take time and resources from other things we can do for the benefit of the community. I am not saying that that is not a benefit for the community, but it is a drain on our time and resources.

CHAIR: Thank you very much more appearing before the Committee today. It was great that you were able to step in in Brett Tibbett's absence. Please advise the board and Brett that if they would like to provide other information they are welcome to do so. People in your community may also want to make a submission and they are also welcome to do so.

Mr WILLIAMS: I will do that.

(The witness withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

JEFF RICHARDSON, Bringing them Home Counsellor, Rekindling the Spirit, and

GREG TELFORD, Managing Director, Rekindling the Spirit, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I welcome Rekindling the Spirit members. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr TELFORD: Not really. I am just interested to ask the panel: Is the panel aware of what we do at Rekindling the Spirit?

CHAIR: I think some of us are. What would be valuable is taking this opportunity to get on the record, if you can encapsulate it, what you do, and how long you have been operating what you do.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Who we work with, and so on.

Mr TELFORD: Yes. Rekindling the Spirit is an organisation that was set up by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people to work with families around drink, drugs, violence and parenting. Rekindling the Spirit started back in '98 and since then over the years it has grown into an organisation and become incorporated whereas at the start it was started by Community Services—the Department of Community Services, DOCS. I was working for DOCS at the time and was very lucky to be a public servant that created a non-government organisation [NGO]. It does not happen that often, but it happened. Now I am employed by Rekindling the Spirit.

One of the things that we have found is that we have a number of people that are involved in our service that are either descendants of people who have been taken away or directly taken away over the years. That is where we got our Bringing them Home counsellor position that Jeff Richardson is in. We constantly and continually work with people around those issues to the extent where we are helping people find their families but also find themselves.

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes, likewise: If I could add to what Greg Telford has said, at Rekindling the Spirit we look at the whole person. I am officially called a Bringing them Home counsellor, but it is not just about stolen generation issues; it is not just about drug and alcohol; it is not just about violence; and it is not just about that whole gamut of things that people come to us with. It is about looking at the entire person and, rather than concentrating on their addictions and every other problem that they have, I am concentrating on how the person might move forward—how best to give them some skills and empower them to take control of their own life again—the lives that have been taken from them, their control, through various things.

I am an Aboriginal-Chinese-Anglo cross. I hail from western Queensland. One of things I would like to address briefly today, if there is the chance, it is the struggles and difficulties of the fairer-skinned person fitting into society—too black to be white, too white to be black, not yellow enough to be yellow. It finishes up producing strong people, but only if they are strong enough to withstand the rigours of that. It is probably where my specialty within this organisation is—concentrating on empowering people. In my second role as the service manager, I look after the funding applications and procuring funds, with the support of the board of course. The other thing I would like to talk about today, if we could, is that dedicated funding for stolen generation counsellors seems to be a thing of the past. It is something that needs to be redressed, I think. Thank you.

CHAIR: Can I just ask you to elaborate on that? Do you know the time frame when that funding was available and when it might have ceased or decreased? To clarify, it is Federal Government funding, yes?

Mr RICHARDSON: It had been available for a number of years through the Federal Government. Rekindling the Spirit used to be funded through OATSIH, the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, which was a Federal organisation. With the introduction of the Abbott Government and the introduction of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, organisations like us were moved from Health and over to the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, so we no longer had access to this discrete stolen generation funding. We have managed to work it into our program, but now it is part of an overall thing.

That is an issue for us because, even though I will continue to call myself a Bringing them Home counsellor, it is not funded as such. That causes problems in the reporting-back on the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and meeting the key performance indicators [KPIs] of that funding. We will do that, but to do that you are pushing things sideways. It is not a true and accurate reflection, so that it is a concern for me—that that

discrete funding is no longer available to our organisation, and I am not aware that it is available to other organisations as well under the same package that it used to be.

CHAIR: Can you tell us what you are defined as under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy? What are you meant to be delivering? What box are you fitting into with that?

Mr RICHARDSON: Under there, we are charged with three or four main objectives. Number one is reducing the level of violence in communities; getting people work-ready, or preparing people to go into work; health, social and emotional wellbeing; and a reduction of drug and alcohol. The emphasis is on prevention for us. Whilst we do the majority of our work in treatment right now, we need to look at prevention; otherwise, we will never break the cycle. I am afraid it is exactly the same to me for the stolen generation.

The legislation may have stopped but we are removing more Aboriginal children now than we ever have done in the past. Those children, even though every effort is made to have them raised in an Aboriginal home with Aboriginal people, the evidence that we see at Rekindling the Spirit is that the same problems beset them—the sense of identity, the sense of belonging; the addictions; and the health problems that go along with that. We have not really stopped it. We have stopped the legislation. Now we are just doing it under different legislation. But I would like to say that the motto of Rekindling the Spirit is "Keeping Families Together". Way back in 1951 the World Health Organization was talking about exactly that.

If we could, we would like to have the resources, before a child is removed, to work with that family. That might mean that you need a rehabilitation clinic for parents. It is fine to have them for the addictions and everything else, but where do young parents get the leadership and the parenting that they require to turn them into good parents? The transgenerational trauma we know and we are really well aware of the effects of that; but I am also really well aware, from my own experience and from Greg Telford's experience, that that can be stopped in one generation. All it takes is one family to climb out of that rut and that cycle is broken, and it is then broken for the children of that family.

Mr TELFORD: I think the biggest thing to go hand in hand with that is that most services do not seem to address, and even therapies when it comes to rehabilitating people, is talking about the word "love". Love itself is something that is like a taboo in society. We talk about violence and abuses like a taboo but the word "love" is a taboo as well. We don't talk about it enough. I have been working in the field for 21 years in a number of different therapies to motivate people to change but it was only two years ago that I actually got to work with a therapy that mentioned the word "love" in it.

Through my own life experiences I have had the experience of alcohol, drugs, violence and all of that. What I did not realise was that I was searching for love but I was looking in all the wrong places—they write songs about that. I had to realise for myself that that was what I was searching for. I see the same thing with the stolen generations—everybody is searching for that love, that relationship. Sadly, we get misconstrued and we go down other tracks to find that. Sadly, we are leading those people who come with us down those same tracks and the families they are trying to establish for themselves are all going in different directions. Really we are looking for the same thing but we don't talk about it. It is a societal thing regardless of race but it impacts on us as individuals. It is what we work with men around, we sit in a group—like yesterday we had 15 men sitting around in a group and I was talking to them about love but the good thing is they were open to it because really that is what they have been searching for.

Even this morning I had a guy come to see me looking for work but what was nice was that he shared his story about being adopted and he also shared his story about alcohol and how alcohol was part of his problem. He is an Aboriginal man who was brought up in a white family. He said all throughout his childhood he knew there was something different inside of him; he just was not sure what it was. He had a sister who was also adopted. He said eventually his mum and dad sat them down and said, "I need to tell you something. You are both adopted." He said his sister broke down and started to cry. He just sat there and his dad said to him, "How come this is not affecting you?" He said, "I have always known." He said, "How did you know?" He said, "It is inside of me." That is something that a lot of our people have.

It is strange, I saw a non-Aboriginal person reading a book one day about how to be Aboriginal. I thought when it comes to being an Aboriginal or an Islander it is in here; it is not something that we have to search for to try to find. The sadness is that we miss out on the connection to family, which is where love should come from. That is a societal issue again because I think some of the stuff that gets misconstrued is that Aboriginal people are sometimes seen as non-human. We are human just like everybody else. Sometimes we

have got to encourage our own people to understand that we are human just like other races throughout the world. We are no different. Some of the stuff that has been lost over time we have got to recreate in a contemporary way today to be able to move forward and to progress our families into something worthwhile where we can show and feel the love.

I think even with that I can go on a little bit more and elaborate from my own experience. I am not sure how many of you guys have researched people who have been taken away but there is another thing called genetic sexual attraction [GSA], which people also get mixed up—I talk from my own experience with this. The words "love" and "lust" can get misconstrued again. They say between 60 and 70 per cent, if not higher, statistic wise that mums and sons and dads and daughters when they reunite after a period of time can have this happen in their lives—a genetic sexual attraction. You could call it incest, you could call it abuse, you could call it what you want to call it but really there is an attraction that occurs and unless it can be articulated in a way then others are going to see it as abuse or incest.

Mr RICHARDSON: Rekindling is one of the few organisations that broach subjects like that—the truly too hard ones. This has made my and Greg's honesty and openness with that because it is an issue that has sat there for so many years and not been addressed. You cannot help people to heal without addressing those areas too hard to go to.

Mr TELFORD: It is like the alcohol and the other drugs. We have got to take the alcohol and the drugs away for people to be able to feel. We cannot heal if we cannot feel. We are numbing ourselves all of the time but it is numbing ourselves to get over issues that we do not want to face. One of the things we do at Rekindling the Spirit is to talk about everything you do not want to talk about. It is not nice; it is very uncomfortable. We talk about being uncomfortable to get comfortable. It is not just about us but the people who are coming behind us—where are we leading them?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is obvious that you are doing very constructive work in this very difficult area. Thank you for sharing your experiences with us today. One of the previous hearings of this Committee was held at Wagga Wagga. The "Bringing Them Home" counsellor there talked about how as a woman she sometimes found it a little difficult to get men—and other speakers have also told us about this today—to share their experiences. What works for you when it comes to reaching out to people to tell their stories?

Mr RICHARDSON: For me what works is when you work for Rekindling the Spirit you turn on its head a lot of the things that you have learnt as a professional counsellor. One of those things you turn on its head is self-disclosure. To work at Rekindling the Spirit you have to have had some lived history to understand and have true empathy. I think that is where the connection can come in. It is the skilled used of self-disclosure. You never take over the client's story; you are not telling them their story. It is always done in their time but it is done in a way that you can empathise because you may share some of that history. The other thing that makes it work is a program run by Aunty Lorraine Peeters called the Marumali program. Once again for Aunty Lorraine to run that it costs money and not all organisations have the money to send students there.

You may need to do it a couple of times but Aunty Lorraine herself is a long-term survivor from Cootamundra girls' home and the training she can provide gives you those skills so that you can connect with those people. I probably would know the person from Wagga Wagga. We attend training and meetings together. One of the big difficulties I find for people is that they are attracted to these roles because they have their own healing to do yet, there is a factor in here—I am a stolen generation person, I have been abused or I have got some other issue and I really would like to work with people around that. But if you have not done all your own work, if you have not been trained as a Rekindling the Spirit counsellor, for example, where you have examined your own issues and worked through that you tend to clam up a bit when the real issues come when you want to connect with someone but it is probably too close to home and you have a tendency to clam up.

There are great training programs that run for Aboriginal counsellors but I think the thing that could help most was if those programs had a component of the Rekindling the Spirit program taught about the self-disclosure and about how you can use your own story skilfully. It is not about doing your own healing whilst you are working with the client—you have support around you to do that later. Rekindling the Spirit has a wonderful program that we could put in there but we do not have the funding to get out and promote it, we do not have the funding to replace myself and Greg if we went around doing that training. It is a thing that sits there that could help those workers. With the workforce support unit in Sydney through the Aboriginal Health and

Medical Research Council [AH&MRC], we work very closely with them but they are restricted for funding in that as well. So there is an issue there around training for people in that area.

It can be quite scary when you make that connection with someone and they start to open up and the story becomes really quite graphic, then you have to put that back together. You have a session with that person for an hour or two but you need to be able to pull them back together before they go home and you need to be available the next day. You might need to be available for a number of years. For example, a client who comes to Rekindling has been coming for 18 years—a stolen generation man horribly abused. About all I can do for him right now is to give him a lift home each day because the hill has got too steep for him to walk up. We have a conversation, we have a connection and he knows that someone cares about him.

This three-year funding cycle or 12-month funding cycle all the time makes it really difficult to retain good staff because they have families and they need to move to where there is more permanent work. But we have been lucky to have three-year funding because a lot of the time it is only 12 months. Our staff go through that whole turmoil, "Will we have a job next week? Can Jeffrey get some funding? Is there going to be a benevolent politician out there, someone who'll push the cause for us?" We have been lucky we have good ones, including the Rev. Fred come to our organisations to learn stuff. We've had Nigel Scullion there just recently. We get a good run like that. But that's what we need is some long-term permanent funding because it takes a long time to train.

Mr TELFORD: We need some bipartisan agreements from government to government because as different funds come, they come with different sets of guidelines and principles and what we need to adhere to so we have got to change focus every now and then. But what we are doing, we see the need is there and the need is huge. It makes it difficult. We were just talking on the way down that there is different opportunities for us to gain some funds from different organisations where it could fit into housing, could fit into employment or something but the work that we are doing, you sort of do that work to fit people into those boxes. This year if we can't do that there is a part of us that, well, we won't do anything, we'll just give up and go in our different directions that we have got to still try and do some of the work we are doing because I think it has to be done but it's finding the right people to be able to do the work as well. Like Jeff just said to disclose.

I'm not sure how many of you guys have done any sort of training in counselling but one of the things they talk to you about is not to do too much personal disclosure. What I've found working with Aboriginal people is you have to, because I'm trying to dig something out of you that I'm going to keep inside me, it's just not fair. If I share some of me with you, you are more inclined some of you with me. Once people can see that occurring they're only too happy to want to share with you. People have taken me to Sydney. The Health department took me down there a number of years ago to say, "Greg, how do you make this happen? How do you get people to disclose when you're talking to them?" I share some of my story about growing up in a violent home and before I know they're talking to me about their life and how they grew up. I say, "You see what I mean." They are like, "What?" It is so simple that it can be missed, but it is just something that if we look at training it is a different way of working with people that I think is more personal and you can achieve a lot more with. Again it comes back to humanity.

The thing is that we have white guys come and sit in our rooms and talk with us as well doing one-on-one. They have the same issues. I've had Hawaiians, Fijians, Islander guys: it makes no difference who you are, it is how committed you are to be real and best honest. I think unless you're being real—I say it is not the appropriate word—but you bullshit. Who are you bullshitting yourself to? Yourself and others and it's not going to take you anywhere and we see that all the time. What I talk about is taking the mask off. We have to take our mask off and just be real as difficult as it is sometimes but there is a lot of growth in it if you can do it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The point you made about ongoing funding has been made to the Committee quite a lot. It is very useful for the Committee to take away. You have both talked about rekindling the spirit is special and about how tackling issues that other people might not do it, and self-disclosure. Can you share anything else with the Committee that makes rekindling the spirit different from other approaches?

Mr RICHARDSON: We have heard tossed around for years now the word "holistic". It is an easy word to say but it is quite difficult to do. The assessment we do on people will include their mental health, physical health and their immediate needs. It's not much use digging into someone's lifestyle when they haven't got a feed to go home to at night or haven't got a roof over their head. We will try to address that problem with them. We don't do it for them but we will give them the skills to go to Housing and fill out the Housing forms and stuff. There are a lot of people out there that I call "saviours" or bleeding hearts, fluffy duck type stuff. It's

very easy to get caught up in some of these fella's stories and want to do everything for them but we are disempowering them. I think that's the real difference with rekindling the spirit if I could put it in a nutshell.

We ask people to take responsibility for their actions. We ask them to take control of their lives. We'll hold their hands and keep the training wheels on them until they get to there, but at some stage they need to be able to walk without us. The other difference is to complete the circle of the holistic stuff, we are trying very hard now to help develop the Aboriginal Medical Service in Lismore. It has been there for a number of years but it is not an official Aboriginal Medical Service that is funded and works through what used to be the General Practitioners mob and now it is Primary Healthcare Network. That looks as though it will, if the community want it to happen, transition over to rekindling the spirit.

What will make us different then is that that AMS will not be dependent upon government funds. We want some government funding to get it started to help it through but eventually it will be self-sufficient. You will have Aboriginal people in the community giving. For too long we've been painted as the takers. We have something to offer. We go so far as to say to make those funds spread out we would open that service to the whole—I don't like the term but I know other for it—lower socioeconomic group who need assistance. I don't think it's fair and reasonable that I as an Aboriginal person can access an AMS and get bulk billing and the benefits that go with that but if I take three-quarters of me that is not Aboriginal up to another service that I can't get that. I don't think that's fair and equitable. We talk about that openly at Rekindling the Spirit.

Aboriginal people, as much as we've downtrodden, hounded, harassed and harangued and everything else that has happened to us we don't want to see that happen to other people. Other people need a good service. What we would do then is reinvest that money back into the Aboriginal Health so it would grow a stronger service. We would not be subjected to the whims of government changes. We want to see pride on the faces of our fellas that is their organisation, they're managing it, it's making its own money, it doesn't have to go with begging bowl in hand at the end of every couple of years. That's our dream and think that's what makes us different.

Mr TELFORD: The other thing that we do is we talk about spirituality more so than religions that can guide us to somewhere worthwhile. The other thing is talking about doing our own healing so that we can help the dominant cults to do their own healing because that needs to occur. I share that with the guys and I do lots of research and reading and look at history and share with people, you know, the colonisers who colonised our country and impacted on our families and lives have their own work to do to do their own healing. And on the way they treated themselves and treated each other, it is a wonder they got here in the first place to be able to do the damage they have done to us and that in time as we do our healing we can help them do theirs. I think that needs to happen.

I can speak from my own experience. I am married to a non-Indigenous woman and just watching the history within her own family I think "Wow". It's easy to point the finger and look at us as black fellas and what we do in our homes, and the dysfunction that occurs, but just keep ours hidden. I watch that sort of thing and think "Wow" there's lots of healing to be done and it is not just for us, it's the world over.

Mr RICHARDSON: Greg just talked about reading and research and in the stolen generations report Professor Henry Reynolds was mentioned for his work. His books—in particular *Why Weren't we Told?* and another one that has just come out fairly recently is *The Forgotten War*. When Australia can stand up and when we can tell its true history, warts and all—and it's not a bad history—there's a lot of goodwill on both sides. Some tremendous things went on. The effort for Australia in 220 years to become the country what we have is magnificent but there are some things we need to acknowledge.

From a kid I used to read old cowboy books, and American history. I could read about Custer and his battle with Sitting Bull. I could read about South Africa and the Battle of Rorke Drift and other battles with the Zulu warriors and all those things but nowhere in Australia—I stand to be corrected if I'm wrong but I don't think I am—is there a monument either to the British soldiers who came here with the First Settlement and fought to keep those people safe, nowhere is there a monument to the Aboriginal warriors. It has led our people to think from what I believe and what I see and what I read that Aboriginal people were victims. We fought as Aboriginal people—I say "we" even though I am only part Aboriginal but I feel a belonging there—into the twentieth century guerrilla warfare.

There are battles that are poorly catalogued that went on all over this country. Had those Aboriginal people been fighting and recognised that they were fighting for their country some of their valiant efforts with a

spear against a musket is worthy of a Victoria Cross. It wasn't even worthy of a mention in our history books. It was until the start of the twentieth century when it was all taken out. When you read those books you can get a deep understanding of where the fear and loathing come into this relationship between black and white. It was a genuine fear. Aboriginal warriors were to be feared. They weren't to be messed with. They killed large numbers of white settlers and that's not to be applauded, and the white settlers killed many more of them but it was a genuine battle. These men were fighting for their country but no-where is that recognised.

Instead of me as an Aboriginal man being able to be very proud of here is a battle site that is commemorated where my fellas fought and died to try to preserve my way of life it will be written up as a massacre site. That is good in its own way: we need to commemorate those massacres but not all of those ae massacre sites. Some of those were very historic battles. It is not hidden in other countries why should it be hidden Australia's history? We need to build the bridges. I am not for assimilation but I am for a united Australia where all three parts of my triparteid—I get really annoyed when I hear on television people saying "should we have a multicultural Australia?". Hang on buddy, I had no choice in this, I am multicultural. I've done okay.

Show me many Europeans who are pure German, pure Dutch or who are English? There is a lot of multiculturalism gone on out there. I would like to see our history reflect how badly the Chinese were treated in Australia. Probably the only race ever treated worse than the Aboriginal people arguably in this country. It is a magnificent history. It is a thing we could draw strength from that we have been able to move from that to where we are now. It is not something to be shunned and hidden away, it is something we could rejoice in. They are only my opinions, forgive me, but I had to get out there.

Mr TELFORD: Jeff is a little bit older than me and it is something that we are all doing all of the time: we are all looking up to somebody in front of us but what are we looking to? When it comes to the people that have been taken away through the stolen generations who are they looking to for that guidance as well? Regardless of what race you come from everybody is working all the way through from when you are born, to preschool, to primary school, to high school, out of high school and into college or university everybody is looking up to somebody. I look up to this man because I need somebody to look to as a mentor to guide me. As I mentioned at the start I grew up in quite a violent home. My dad hasn't spoken to me for 25 years, since my mother passed away because I talk so openly about violence and abuse and the impact that it has had on my family.

I have been one of those people who has had a daughter who was taken away back in the 1970s. I was a kid. I should have been still at home but I was out living in a flat trying to be a big man before I should have been. A lot of the stuff that I have learnt through my life to have me where I am today, you know, I went down all the wrong roads before I decided to take the right road. Today I mentioned about having a non-Indigenous wife. I am so glad that she is a part of my life because she had characteristics that I really needed in my life but didn't know how to get. If you don't have them in your life you need to find them or you need somebody to be able to give them to you. It is what we do at rekindling. It is not just "I look up to Jeff." We have got younger guys younger than me that are looking up to me. We have got young women exactly the same thing. All the way we are modelling. We are all modelling but where are we leading people? Somewhere worthwhile or over a cliff? We need to be thinking about that all of the time, regardless of where we come from, what we are doing because there is somebody looking up to you.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Greg, how do you heal one of the four boys from the Kinchela Boys Home who basically said in evidence yesterday that he does not know what the word "love" means and all he knows is hate? How do you heal a person who has gone through so much at this age, now beyond 60?

Mr TELFORD: It's a thing that's an ongoing process; it's not something that you learn overnight, like "I've got it; I know all about it". It's ongoing, it doesn't stop. I'm talking about the ripple effect and how it has impacted on him and how with the ripple effect it filters down and keeps going out from him as well. That word "hate" used to be my favourite word. I did not realise it until a number of years ago. I was sitting in a group and this guy brought it up; he talked about hate. I thought, "Oh, shit, I haven't thought of that word for a long time". But it's helping people to understand that you've got to learn to love you as an individual so that you can give and receive love; you've got to love yourself first.

But for somebody to do that it takes time. It's not something that comes easy because you have got to break through all of the exterior of the macho man. You've got to break through that first off and get through

that and keep going through. It's like penetrating layers and layers and layers of stuff that helps somebody to survive to get to where they are. My dad is a prime example. He's still wearing those exterior sorts of walls that aren't letting anybody in, and he's in his eighties. Sometimes you've got to realise too that you can't help everybody; you've got to want it yourself as well.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I was just going to mention that you may have heard that the Redfern Aboriginal Housing Company is going to name the new development after the Aborigine Pemulwuy. That will be the name of the whole area. It is a good thing that will be happening and it is probably the first time.

Mr RICHARDSON: Steps like that and then they just grow—it is an acceptance thing. I appreciate that that is going to happen; I had not really heard about that. Thank you.

CHAIR: When you say that you do not think there has been historical recognition of the battles and the warriors and that side of it, do you think that there is a broad understanding of the stolen generation and how that has affected the way Aboriginal people live? Do you think the non-Indigenous community have an understanding of the impact of what actually happened?

Mr RICHARDSON: No, I do not believe so, and I base that statement on the fact that I've worked for about 15 years as a cultural awareness facilitator with Queensland Health. It's interesting how I came to get that job. I was the only Aboriginal person working in the hospital in Roma at that stage that had some qualifications in teaching—not official teaching but training, I should say. So because I was Aboriginal I was asked to do that job. I talked with the local community and they were not happy with the program we were going to present. When I went back to my district manager she reminded me that I had been given a lawful instruction to carry out that training and that if I was refusing it I needed to show cause as to why I should not be disciplined for that.

I attacked that program with gusto because I was angry by that stage and I beat a lot of innocent white people over the head with black issues because the program was sort of written that way. That was quite fun, beating up on them for a while, but I wasn't connecting with people and building those bridges. We used to have elders in the room and I would ask them for their input, because I was always very conscious of being lighter skinned and that I had no real right to be there telling the story and this history when there were other people in the room who had that. They would say to me, "You tell 'em, boy. You tell 'em what they need to know" and they were happy for me to tell that. But it was embarrassing and hurtful to be talking about some very painful things that no doubt were painful to them. But they always encouraged me to carry on telling that.

But I do not think people know the half of it. If you have a scan back through the stolen generation report you will see we were taken away or people were taken away and one of the reasons given was because they were Aboriginal. There were all sorts of other flimsy reasons, but quite often that was all it would say: because they were Aboriginal. But the intent of that was to take the lighter skinned ones away, so you were a half-caste. Straightaway then you were Aboriginal but you were half-white. So it is quite evident to me that even though you're half-white you're never going to be accepted into society because straightaway you had to become an Aboriginal and you went under the Aboriginal Protection Act. That stuff in itself is amazing to me.

People know of the sadness of people being ripped from their mother's arms and all that sort of thing, but there are more insidious ways that that happened. I believe hundreds, if not thousands of people were removed without the official sanction, without it officially happening. There were pressures put on Aboriginal people, Aboriginal parents—and I do not say Aboriginal mothers, I deliberately say parents because I think the emphasis has been on the mother most of the time. Each of those children had a father. If you go through that whole stolen generation document you will not find much reference to Aboriginal fathers who lost their children; you will not find very many of them who have spoken and given evidence. They will speak of being taken away as a male child but they do not speak of the experience of a father.

I think in other evidence it says that we do not understand stolen generation things. You were taken away as a cross-bred person and you link up with some marvellous organisation. I fully support it, but they will only try to find your Aboriginal family. There is no organisation that I am aware of, except for the Salvation Army and that, but there is no specific stolen generation organisation that looks to link you back to your white family or your non-Aboriginal family. I don't see how you can holistically put a person back together if you are only going to link them to one side of their family. Those reunions aren't always successful and many times they are very joyous and that, but there can also be things happen there.

People have said to me, "Well, how come Aboriginal people turn on their own people? How come they went back?" and the stolen generation people have said, "I've found my people but they didn't want me. The white people didn't want me and my own family didn't want me". When they have been able to dig a bit deeper, the circumstances in which that child was removed, they may not have even known that the child existed. That child might have been by a father that it shouldn't have been by. There are all sorts of issues and underlying things in there and that's why I go back to telling the history of it.

I think it's still quite poorly understood—poorly understood for a woman from an emotional point of view of how it must have been to just be removed and then try to expunge all your Aboriginality out of it and yet still call you an Aboriginal and then say, put your little ad in the paper, "This child could easily be taken for being of Maltese extraction", or whatever. So that's okay, it doesn't matter if you're black so long as you're not Aboriginal black. I think the real truth is that we have to start to talk about that sort of stuff. Many people were raised believing they were Indian or any other breed other than being black. So black wasn't a crime; it was only the fact that you're Aboriginal was the crime.

Mr TELFORD: I think it's the mentality throughout the world. I'm married to a Kiwi girl, and her dad challenged her about marrying an Aboriginal: "You know you're marrying the lowest path in the world". Jeff and I were talking about that on the way down. It makes me more determined to be able to give to my wife and have her happy so that her family can see that she's happy. Then buying a home and all that sort of thing, even to do that and being Aboriginal—and quite openly you can see I'm black—the neighbours say to me, "Are you buying this place?" It's like "Where are you getting the money?" They'll say it and I got challenged about it.

The community were sort of up in arms: "We can't work you out". Why? "You drive nice cars, you're buying a nice house, you're married to a white woman. We know she's Kiwi, and that's bad enough. How are you doing this? We can't work out whether you're a drug dealer or a thief". How can you say that to somebody? Even if it was in my head I wouldn't let it come out. But this person said that to me and it was like "I have the right to say that and question you". At the time I was working for DOCS and I said to them, "Yes, that's okay, we'll let the community keep thinking that way but tell them to watch their children". I didn't tell him that; that's wrong on its own because I would give him the same sort of stuff that he was giving me.

At the same time, one of the things that I think of from that question you just asked before was that when it comes to Anzacs and what occurred in this country, we hear it all of the time, over and over and over again, and when it comes to our people and the stolen generation and how it has impacted right across this country I hear other people, non-Indigenous, saying, "When are youse going to get over it and get on with it?" There's a part of me when I see Anzac stuff—because our people went away with that too—to think "When are we going to get over it and get on with it?" It's having that opportunity to see that what occurred with the Australian New Zealand Army Corps was an atrocity that had an impact on the world. What's happened with the stolen generation is the same thing in this country; it has had an impact right across this country.

I worked with another guy that talked about his mate that was taken to Holland and raised in Holland as an Aboriginal person. His dad suicided when he was 12 and he came back to Australia and went to meet his people in South Australia. When he got back there his people wouldn't accept him. Admittedly, he talked with an accent and he was wearing clogs, so it was a bit different. At the same time he wasn't accepted there he wasn't accepted by the people that adopted him and he finished up getting a heroin problem. He overdosed and went on the nod driving a car on the freeway in Melbourne and after spending a period of time in hospital—he almost died—he realised that he had to take the alcohol and the drugs out of his life. I was pretty grateful to meet the guy and stayed in touch with him for a number of years and he lives up in Brisbane now. When he sees me it's a connection that we have that is, like, we're not family but we feel like family because we know different parts of one another's story that other people don't know about us.

But it's having the opportunity to see those things, to have those things become available to you through opening your heart a little bit. Because in Australia I'm not sure what it is that keeps us separated between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal but it's something that we've got to change and we've got to start instilling it into younger people coming through. Jeff talked about a multicultural society and how he doesn't like those words. I think we have to open it up more and talk about relationships with one another regardless of race or where we come from because I think that's where the world is coming to in the long run and we're part of that world. We need to be getting our children that are coming through to be more loving and caring to one another and we might have a decent world one day.

CHAIR: Thank you. Unfortunately, that is the end of our time. I thank you both for coming and providing that valuable information. Today we have received some reports. If you have any information that gives us a bit more of a background to what you do that would be valuable. Please spread the word that we are still accepting submissions. If you know people who would like to tell their stories or who have recommendations or ideas for us that would be much appreciated. You may have taken some questions on notice and we might send you additional questions; you will be advised. Thank you both for what you do.

(The witnesses withdrew)

GWEN HICKLING WILLIAMS, Community member, North Coast, and

JACQUI WILLIAMS, Community member, North Coast, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Welcome and thank you for being here with us.

Ms G. WILLIAMS: Jacqui is my sister. We want to talk about our parents and the effects that it had growing up, and about our grandmother who was taken away and brought up in a home and later found their father, and the effect that that had on our family. She was born in 1898.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms G. WILLIAMS: We just want to tell the result of someone taken away—in our case, our grandmother and our mum and their family was taken away—and the effects it had on two different families. It affected one family, our family, the most. For instance, our grandmother came from Normanton and was taken away to a home but later came to a place where their father was and they found their father. She was born in 1898. By the time she was 20 she had six kids and one died. She roamed around and had other kids. She had three others as well in different places and that affected our father in his life because it affected us in his attitude towards parenting and our mum.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: Mum was sent to Cootamundra; I think she was 14 or 15 when she went to Cootamundra. She had a sister, Kathleen, who was also sent to Bomaderry. Her two brothers were sent to Kinchela. We just found that we didn't have the nurturing what we could have had with mum and the nurturing by her mother. We don't know. Back then also mum told me when I was 24 years old. I said, "I'm 24 and you're telling me now that you were sent away? Oh, my God, all my life you've never said a word", and I had two children. I said, "Why are you telling me this now?" She didn't tell anyone about it. Back then everything was taboo, you wasn't to tell your family. As it is, you were only told certain things and you were only allowed to do certain things and that's how it was with them.

Then when she came home she didn't say anything to anybody; she was just taken away. Once she was taken away, the language, everything, had gone; the culture, the whole lot of it has gone. I felt that with us, with our family—I'm the youngest of nine—our mum failed us in a big way, just parenting skills alone. I had grown up with issues—just to be in a home where you were not wanted and didn't feel that you were wanted, the lack of attention, just the lack of everything, and to have abuse go on in your house wasn't good. And to think, "Why aren't people talking? Why aren't they asking me questions? Someone should ask me a question". No questions were asked; you weren't told anything. You weren't even allowed to talk about anything. When you spoke up you actually were told, "Don't worry about it. Just let it go", it was sort of like, "Just let it go. Just put the shit under the carpet again". That's how it was with me.

With my brothers and sisters it was different; they had a different life compared to me. And our other sister has gone through that same mentality as mum would have, because she neglected her children. Her children always ask me, "How come mum's not like you?" I said, "Well, every one of us are different. That's life. Either you step up to the plate or you don't". That was just her issues alone. She's gone through alcohol and drug abuse and what she's coped with is not good. I believe this is an effect after mum, that she didn't have the parenting skills what we needed to cope with.

Ms G. WILLIAMS: Dad neglected us too. He went off and done his own thing. I remember the police saying, "Well, you don't have to go with your dad". Dad left us and our mum, and she was pregnant. The police said, "You don't have to follow him up to Woodenbong, you can stay here in Box Ridge". But she didn't; she followed him. As a result we ended up living in the bush, her having another child. There was no real caring in that sense when we were there. I think it's come back to his mother because she had four or five children and went off and had three others and I think that that had an effect on him; he didn't show he cared for them and that sort of thing. They were taken away and our mum went to Cootamundra and her sister went to Bomaderry and their two brothers went to Kinchela. I think that had an effect on all of us growing up and our way of life. I think it's lucky that we never became alcoholics or anything; we were able to get our act together. But the others never did, which was sad. And that's what it was: not having anybody with us, no guidance, no grandparents, they were all gone. That's all we have to say anyway.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The boys that came here to Kinchela, what happened to them?

Ms G. WILLIAMS: They went off with some other aunties that took them down to Newcastle to help them, but then they made their way back; they all came back to Box Ridge, Coraki.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: Clarrie didn't live long after he came home; he died young.

Ms G. WILLIAMS: Even our aunt, she died young too.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How old was that?

Ms G. WILLIAMS: She was a babe when she went to Bomaderry.

CHAIR: When you say she died young, what age are you referring to?

Ms G. WILLIAMS: Late thirties, I think. No grandparents, that's the sad part. The generation that is today, there's hardly any grandparents. Two generations back they're all gone.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: And those Kinchela boys when they died, did they have children themselves?

Ms G. WILLIAMS: Yes.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: One had one boy.

Ms G. WILLIAMS: And one had three boys and a girl.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: How are those kids doing?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: His boys were in and out of jail since they were young too. It was just a repeat of history, that's what it became. It's only just lucky that our family didn't end up like that. We could just see what was going on. It wasn't a bad thing; I'll just say it happened. Things happened at the time, but just the thought of growing up and thinking that you're in and out of jail all the time, you think there must be more to life than just doing that. But then, as it is, you have to make your own choices. The choices that you make, you either say yes or no. That's what I believe anyway. That's how I brought up my children: you do the wrong thing, you pay the price. I've only got two and I've been very blessed.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: It sounds as though they are very blessed to have you as their mother.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: I have to say yes because I put the hard yards in, I'm telling you. If every person, every school was to put 10 per cent of what I've put into my children, mate, that would make them children a lot more better than what there is today. I'm right, aren't I, Gwen?

Ms G. WILLIAMS: Yes.

CHAIR: Where was the support for you when you were growing up and you realised that you were not cared for, that there wasn't the parenting and nurturing?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: Our sisters. I had five sisters and we could all bounce off one another. We had no choice, you had to. Growing up we lived in the city in Sydney, but I would never go back there now. God, no, you can have all that to yourselves. We grew up down there and that's where we lived.

CHAIR: Until what age?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: Until I was 15, because I went back up to Lismore.

Ms G. WILLIAMS: She was five. I went straight to work. So I supported the family. This is where the lack of parents—our mother and father was too involved in each other more than they worried about us and what was going on around them. That's where all things went out of proportion and our life changed. With my

younger ones, my youngest sisters and brother, I went straight to work, supporting and buying things for the family and everything through their schooling. My mum and dad, they were more worried about each other; they was drinking, neglecting the younger ones.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The two of you have done an amazing job. Congratulations for everything that you are doing with your own children and grandchildren as well.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: I'm a survivor. I can say that I'm a survivor and I'm here to say that.

Ms G. WILLIAMS: And mum never told us but we heard a lot of things out in Cootamundra—they couldn't speak the language, they were whipped, and things like that; not only that, other things.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: She also worked on properties. She worked on cattle and sheep stations out west. When I looked at that piece of paper there, you said in 1995, I think, they had a meeting here. I actually brought my mother and my auntie over from Casino that day and I wasn't impressed because they had a guy from the Parliament come here and he wanted them to all talk about things. We had elders come from Armidale and all around the surrounding areas here. For people to come a long way and want to talk about their issues that they had in their life and stuff like that, that wasn't good. Because the impression that I got then was—actually I was pissed off with it because the guy from Link-Up was there and he just cheesed me off. Because I said, "These elders come here from a long way and you fellers didn't even have anything here". Like you had snacks here today, thank God for that; because that day I came all they had was a cup of tea. When you come from Armidale to here you're looking at an easy three or four hours, right? I mean, just the distance alone, then they wanted these elders to come and talk about what has happened to them. I mean, come on.

It goes hand in hand and I said to the guy from Link-Up, "You should be ashamed of yourself, mate, just being here and disrespecting these elders here". That's what happened. I brought my mum down but I didn't get to hear what she said. I heard what all the other people had to say and it wasn't good. Just to hear what they said wasn't really good. Like I said before, with our mum, she told me she had worked on a cattle station and sheep farms. We don't know what that was like because back then all you was was basically a jacky. That one woman, you do all the work for that white woman. She's there and she's got to have the maid. You've got to have everything prim and proper the way things are; you've got to make them look good.

They say, "We'll give the stolen generation compensation". That's only a word. You'd never hear half of what has gone on because they won't say it. Because what they have done is they have also tuned into the fact of silence is golden, don't say anything. You automatically go to shut down; you shut yourself down. We can all shut ourselves down and say, "Say nothing. Let's just go with the flow". That's what black fellers say: "Don't say anything because somebody will say something about you" or "Don't go there". That's how it is. The handful of people that we've got here today is only a handful. You could hear a lot more issues but we're not out there and it's the domino effect of what has happened. That is the difference.

We are only voicing our little bit what has happened to us. I'm a classic example of what there is a lot of out there, but I've just made myself stronger and willed myself that I'm not going to go there and I refuse to have my children go there. That's why I gave them 110 per cent of my time. I'm the first one to put up my hand and say that in today's society it's not what you know it's who you know, that's what it comes down to. In every little town around here—Casino is one of those towns, as you know, where it's not what you know it's who you know. If you know anyone you're right, and that's how little towns go on.

CHAIR: Everyone is not Indigenous.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: It's every town, and I can say that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Ms Williams, you say you are a survivor. How many Aboriginal people are survivors?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: I would say a majority, a good majority, because there are a lot of people who don't say anything. I'm pretty open to come up and say it because I've been there and done that. I've been open with my children and made a better person out of them. As I said to you, if somebody was to put 10 per cent more time into their children the way I have done, 10 per cent of my time and what I've done, their children would come out equally, if not better to where they are today.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: We went to Kinchela and some of the men who are now nearly 80 told us terrible things that happened to them—beatings and so on. Did your mother tell you anything about what happened to the girls? Did they have the same treatment?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: No, they didn't say anything. Like I said to you, it's better to keep your mouth shut and not say anything.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Not complain.

Ms G. WILLIAMS: Yes, to take it.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: Because out there back then you were sent out to a farm and that's what you did—you were meant to go to work, and they were supposed to get paid £5 a week. Back then we got nothing—no compensation, no nothing, nothing at all for all the years that she worked there. She would've worked over five years; she came home and when she came home—back then you just didn't do things, that's what it was like.

CHAIR: You did not access the stolen wages fund?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: No.

CHAIR: Did you know about it at the time?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: No.

CHAIR: Did you hear about it later?

Ms J. WILLIAMS: No.

CHAIR: Back in the 1990s there was a fund because the records are still kept about who worked and the wages that they had, but that is now closed. That is something that has been brought up by a number of people—the work that was done on properties.

Ms J. WILLIAMS: I'll find out.

CHAIR: Hopefully we can find out. Thank you so much for coming along. Thank you for being honest and outspoken.

(The witnesses withdrew)

ROBYNE BANCROFT, Elder, Cultural Heritage Officer, affirmed and examined:

Ms BANCROFT: I'm a Gumbainggeri Bundjalung woman, an elder in the community, and I'm also a Cultural Heritage Officer. I was a public servant until I retired two years ago but I'm still very involved in the community. I'd like to give my apologies for Brett; he's had a bad trot in the last week with his son and him and horses and yards and falling off and breaking bones and everything.

CHAIR: I am sorry that we were not informed that you were meant to be speaking here; we just have Brett's name listed. So apologies from us too.

Ms BANCROFT: I'm on the Grafton Ngerrie council as well. What I wanted to do was just give you a little bit of information about the Clarence Valley, which is where you are in now. If I have to call on Janelle I will. We have got here about 3,000 Aboriginal population, half men, half women. Of those, half of them are young people. I'm a firm believer that education—we look at a holistic point of view—you have to have education to get anywhere, to be able to be a voice, to get in there and talk and to change things. The stolen generation, everyone's families have been affected by that. But, as you saw before I came here, we're adaptable and we've got guts and we go in there and of course we are a natural linear line here on the North Coast. So you have to be very strong women to have taken on everything over the years when the men weren't around, through no fault of their own circumstances.

I first became aware of the stolen generation when my Uncle Bill, who was born in 1900, was talking about Cootamundra, which was set up in 1912, I think, and we had three young girls taken up to Cootamundra. The result of when they finished at Cootamundra and they were sent out to work with people, they got pregnant and the kids were adopted out. One of the ladies, her adopted son, who is in his fifties or something, contacted her after many, many years. No-one in the family knew he existed and she had a heart attack when he rang her. She survived, thank goodness. There are all these stories.

Janelle and I, our mother's sister, her eldest boy was taken to Bomaderry down the South Coast and his son worked for Link-Up for many years. So it's all getting back in there and trying to do something, which we have been doing over the years. Janelle has set up this healing centre here; we're all part of something that's trying to get our children and our youth to give them some pride in who they are. It's very difficult when you haven't got a job and it's that holistic approach again: if you haven't got a job you've got no money coming in; if you've got no money coming in you can't pay for rent, you haven't got a house, you get sick. It's a cycle, a very vicious cycle.

What I do as a Cultural Heritage Officer, and I've been doing this for 30 years, I take schoolkids out with the teachers and show them Aboriginal sites. I can't tell you how proud they are to be out in the bush looking at a scarred tree—not just a picture of a scarred tree, to actually see a rock shelter and to see axe-grinding grooves. That makes them proud and makes them go away and say, "This was our ancestor, our grandparents", or something. It is reinforcing the pride in the younger generation where there are no options left for them, and for a lot of them it's jail—they get caught in that cycle, and once you're in that cycle it's very hard to break.

Here, as I say, we're all trying to do something in our own way. We elders try to do things by passing on stories to the next generation. Unfortunately, a lot of the elders feel that we have missed a generation, meaning that the kids and the grandkids maybe don't get what we got in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s. I can talk pretty confidently about this area because my grandmother was born in the 1880s. Not many people can say that they had a grandmother going back to the 1880s. She survived this area where the massacres happened. It's important to mention the massacres too because it shows a survival. How did she survive? She survived by marrying a white man, legally marrying a white man. It wasn't done in those days so she got a bit of flak from both sides and so did he. So we were never on a mission or a reserve, and that's given us the strength to go in there and fight and try and make things better and do things better.

I was working in Canberra for 18 years in government and got to be involved on the periphery—small fry—of the royal commission into black deaths in custody. I think it is very important that we revisit those recommendations. What is the use of us talking here about stolen generations and everything else? The royal commission came out with all these recommendations and only half a dozen of them at the most have been really implemented or looked at. It's very sad for us around my age who are battling to have these things done, like education and health and housing. It's very distressing really when you think that we take one step forward

and three steps back, and with a change of government all the time you never know where you're going because the funding situation changes all the time. If you've got no funds to implement positive outcomes you can't do that much. We've all got great ideas how we can help people and what we can do for them but it all boils down to money, doesn't it?

It's all about land too. At the moment we're in the middle of a native title gathering; it's happening this week. We're still going on and it's called the Western Bundjalung native title. What really is native title all about? It's just another name and my personal opinion is I can't see us getting anything out of it; it's always been the lawyers and the workers in native title that have done things. But we have had a couple of really good judges, especially from the Nambucca native title that happened last year and the judge got up and said, "These things are taking much too long"—18, 20 years, when most of the people that started them looking for positive outcomes are dead. So we are pushing this through and we'll see what happens there. But with no jobs it's not good.

We do have a good education rate here in the Clarence Valley. According to the 2011 statistics, we've only got 3,000 max people here, half men and half women; we've got about 65 that have university degrees. So the importance of an education is there for the parents to try and raise their children. The other thing we have is a very young population of under-25 and there's nothing there for them. It's all very well to talk about warriors and men's places and all the other stuff, but we need more than that. I can't say really what we actually need because I've been out of the situation for a few years now, but I did try to start off when I was in Canberra working in child care.

In child care, every child care in Australia was to have a place for an Aboriginal kid if there was an Aboriginal child in that area where the centre was and they didn't have it. So we knew that we had to set up Aboriginal child care services, which is what we did in Canberra. I was the only Aboriginal person in the team—a lovely team, a great team. You can't move forward unless you've got a good team working with you. We got the parents, the grandparents, the uncles, the aunties to come in and tell them stories and to take them bush, cultural-wise, to do all of that. These little kids, by the time they got to school they were really proud little kids—proud of their culture, proud of their heritage. I'm going back to when I started there.

CHAIR: I am sorry, Robyne, we are running to a tight deadline.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: We agree with you, it is a disgrace with the native title claims; thousands of them are just sitting there and have never been finalised.

Ms BANCROFT: One last thing that the elders have asked me to ask is what's happening about this stolen generation compensation? Is it going forward?

CHAIR: This inquiry is looking at those issues. There are two aspects; a stolen wages fund has been brought up. This inquiry is looking at those issues around reparations and I invite the land council to make a written submission; it would be really valuable. If you would like to go back and talk in a meeting and submit a submission if you have a position on the inquiry. These things are what we are here for, to hear from people about what their ideas are or what they think should happen.

Ms BANCROFT: I apologise, I would have liked my sister here—stolen generation from Queensland—to have had five minutes of your time, if the men hadn't taken so much time.

CHAIR: We had to allocate people we had prior notice of. Thank you for being here today. I thank everyone for their hospitality and I thank all those who have provided evidence to the inquiry, it has been really valuable.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 2.34 p.m.)