

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN AND
WATERLOO**

At Sydney on Friday 22 October 2004

The Committee met at 12.45 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. K. F. Griffin
The Hon. R. M. Parker
The Hon. I. W. West

LESLEY ROBYN TOWNSEND, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Redfern Local Area Command, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Welcome. In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms TOWNSEND: I am appearing as an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer [ACLO] with the Redfern local area command. I have been an ACLO for almost 7½ years—on 5 November it will be seven years and six months.

CHAIR: As you know through your conversations with Julie, this is an in-camera hearing. Perhaps at the end of the hearing it will be appropriate to discuss whether you want to make any of your evidence public or whether you would prefer to keep it in camera. To some extent that depends on what you say and how you feel about it afterwards. Did you receive the questions that we prepared?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

CHAIR: There are quite a lot so we are conscious that we will be pushed for time. We have categorised the questions under a number of different subheadings because it seemed to us that your comments to the Committee—apart from your contribution earlier in the week—will fit into different categories. So, if it suits you, we thought it would be appropriate to go through the background. We know you have some concerns about the evidence given to us a few weeks ago. We will stick to the questions as much as we can but we always find that things get out of order. We will see how we go. Have you worked only in Redfern?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

CHAIR: How do you describe your role? What are the positive and the negative sides? What do you do and how do you feel about it?

Ms TOWNSEND: Our first dealing is offenders in custody. If they are arrested and they are Aboriginal, we are contacted. We go to see them to make sure that they are fine, that they are not suicidal or under stress or whatever. We contact friends or family for them, the Aboriginal Legal Service. If they are juveniles and we cannot get a parent or guardian—in many cases we cannot find a parent or guardian—we get a suitable support person in for them. That is our main objective. Part of what came out of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was the need for an ACLO to be present when an Aboriginal person is in custody. Our other role is to try to better the relationship between the Aboriginal community and police. I am on different committees within the community such as the NAIDOC committee, the South Sydney Koori Interagency. I also have a lot of dealings with the Streetbeat bus, which is a very good program that is running. Also with Mudgin-Gal Women's Centre with the Enough is Enough program. I am out and about in the community as much as possible.

CHAIR: Are the things you have just told us about decisions that you have made because you see that that is how you could best be useful and fulfil your role or is there a kind of a definition that sits somewhere about what you should be involved in?

Ms TOWNSEND: A bit of both. My co-ordinator likes me out and about in the community, getting out so people can see me. The majority of people in the community do not like coming up to the police station. They would rather contact me, or if they run into me in the street. I work in the community, I live in the community and I socialise within the community. Even if I am out with friends socialising I have people coming up to me asking me questions for any help or if they have warrants or anything like that. I prefer not to talk to them when I am in a socialising area but I will give them their options. I will ask them to contact me when I am in work time. But a lot of the time, as I said, the community do not like coming in to the police station so I will make arrangements to meet them elsewhere. I will sit down and talk to them. I do not tell them what to do; I give them so many options and then it is their decision what they do. I like getting out and about in the community. I am born and bred in Redfern. I know the majority of the people there. If people see me out and about, they can come up and ask me things or talk to me and that. I am always open to anyone.

CHAIR: So the local area commander and others accept that this is part of your role? It is a role that is not exactly 9 to 5 and you have a list of duties that have to be ticked off; it is self-directed.

Ms TOWNSEND: We do have taskings and that but the thing is with my position I cannot walk in in the morning at 9 and say that at 9.15 I will do this and at 10 o'clock something else because I never know when an offender is going to be brought into custody. It could change at the last minute. I feel comfortable going out in the community.

CHAIR: We also asked you in that question about some of the difficulties that you face, the positives and negatives. That might also flow into question 3 about the relationship between police and the local community, which I guess affects you as well.

Ms TOWNSEND: Oh, it does affect me. When I started 7½ years ago I started feeling like I was the meat in the sandwich. The community was not trusting me because I worked for the police and the police did not trust me because I was part of the community. You did feel like the meat in the sandwich. But over the years I have built up a trust and rapport with the police I have worked with at Redfern. There has been a lot of coming and going with the police over the years. Only a handful are left that were there when I started 7½ years ago. But the rapport that I have with the police at Redfern is really good. I have had to virtually prove myself but no doubt whatever job you go into you have to show that you are there to be trusted, you are there to back them up as well. I know that if I am out and about in the community and anything happens the police will be there to back me up 100 per cent.

CHAIR: What about the relationship between the police and the Aboriginal community? Is that bad or is it worse since the riot? Has it improved over the years?

Ms TOWNSEND: When I started 7½ ago there was a lot of mistrust and dislike between the police and the Aboriginal community. But we got a commander who was very good, Peter Parsons. I started in May 1997 and he came in at the end of July 1997. He was there for three years. Even though I have had good commanders since, Mr Parsons was the best. He did not muck around with anyone when he walked in. He told them what he expected. He did not want any racism or whatever within his command. We had doubts about a couple of people there. Mr Parsons did not worry about it. He transferred them out. One of them actually left the service and another one got transferred out. He said he would not tolerate it. He brought the community back in as a whole. The Aboriginal community liked him, trusted him and respected him. In the time I have been at Redfern we have had eight commanders. The longest serving commander was Mr Parsons, for three years—

CHAIR: So you have had six commanders since 2000?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

CHAIR: How long has Mr Smith been there, a year or 18 months?

Ms TOWNSEND: I think that in November-December Mr Smith will have been there two years. He is doing a very good job at Redfern. Since February it has been hard on all of us at Redfern. We are there trying to do a job to the best of our capabilities. That is ACLOs, police, even the community members. We are there trying to do a job. We have had the media hanging around like vultures really. It is like you cannot even drop a piece of paper on the ground or they will report on that. The police are there trying to do a job but nothing good is ever reported in Redfern. If anything good happens down there, they do not worry about that; all they want is the sensationalism that has come out of the riots, TJ's death, which was a terrible accident. They do not focus on the good things that are coming out of there.

CHAIR: Was that true before the riot as well or has it got worse this year since the riot—that media focus on bad news?

Ms TOWNSEND: No, it has always been that way at Redfern. Even before I was an ACLO living in the community, none of the good things were ever reported on. It does not sell papers.

CHAIR: The Committee knows from your conversations with its staff that you are concerned about some of the things that were said in the hearing on 24 September. What do you want to say? There may be things that you want to tell us you agree with too, because the inquiry was wide-ranging. What are your concerns about what was said about relationships in the command and between ACLOs and so on?

Ms TOWNSEND: I am not here to point the finger at anyone. I am here to be a professional and to give evidence to the best of my capabilities on what I know is the truth. I am not here to slander anyone. On one instance, when I was reading the report, we were told to spy on the community. I have never ever been asked—because the crime manager's name was mentioned in that report—by Mr Bennett to spy on anyone. He will say to me if we think there is going to be a bit of issue down the Block or elsewhere within the command, just to go down and get the feel of things; to make sure there is not going to be anything like what was in February. But at no time has he ever asked me to spy on the community, which I do not think should be my role anyway.

There were also allegations made about myself going into the community and telling the community about what the police were doing and so forth. Yes, I have gone into the community. I have seen people that have got warrants. I have pulled them aside and told them "You have got warrants. Instead of being picked up by the police and getting hassled" or anything like that "make arrangements with me. Meet me at the police station and give yourself up on the warrants. The earlier you get in to the police station the better because you have to go through the charge process and everything and then we can get you to court as soon as possible." Like I explained earlier, when people come up to me in the street or if I am socialising, they have a problem, I will give them their options. I prefer not to talk to them but within the community they want to talk then and there or not at all, so I give them their options. But I do not go into the community and give the police up about anything.

There has been a lot of animosity—I am shaking and getting tongue-tied—between me and my other two co-workers. I have three strikes against me straight off: I am an Aboriginal, I am a woman and I work for the police. I am afraid some people, especially men, do not like that, especially when I am forthcoming and I have my say.

CHAIR: Many of us here know exactly how you feel. Please do not be nervous. You know from the recent forum that we are fairly harmless.

Ms TOWNSEND: The forum went well. It is a pity it was not long enough.

CHAIR: We are doing a youth forum this afternoon and we are hoping we get as much from that as we got from the recent forum.

Ms TOWNSEND: Good.

CHAIR: It sounds to me like almost a nightmare job: you are an Aboriginal person, a woman and work for the police. Those three things, particularly in a community where there is tension and the media is looking down your neck as you describe, make it difficult. The Committee does not necessarily want you to go into any personal animosities and so on because it is trying to find out whether the ACLO system is good. Should it be expanded? How do you feel about it? What do you need to tell us about any more personal things, but our job is to look at the whole system and how well it is working?

Ms TOWNSEND: Being an ACLO at times is very hard. I have been called everything but a "woman" at times and I have just got to shrug that off because when offenders are first brought into custody they are all fired up and curse and swear and whoever is closest they pick on. But then again they feel more at ease talking to another Aboriginal person, having someone there to be with them, than what they with a non-Aboriginal person. Not that often, but quite a few times after I have had offenders in custody, I have walked down the street and run into them. They have come up and thanked me for helping them out or just for being there for them. Not many do it but it makes me feel like I am actually doing something within my job and community when even one or two people come up and thank me for helping and being there for them.

CHAIR: Would having more Aboriginal police officers help? Would it make your job easier in a community like Redfern with a relatively high percentage of Aboriginal people? Would it make it better to come with these issues?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, right across New South Wales we need more Aboriginal police officers, especially in Redfern. At the moment we only have one and over the years we have only had the odd one or two. When I first started in 1997 it was just after the January riots and they seconded Aboriginal police from other areas to come into Redfern. They were only there on secondment for six months and that was a bandaid solution, which should not have been done. They need to bring more Aboriginal police into Redfern on a permanent basis.

CHAIR: The Committee gets the impression in regard to ACLOs and Aboriginal police officers that there is a big difficulty in recruitment. Why has it been so hard to fill those ACLO jobs at Redfern? Apart from the two officers on leave a fourth position is a vacant?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

CHAIR: Do Aboriginal people not want to do the jobs?

Ms TOWNSEND: Some of them do not want to do the jobs. The fourth position at Redfern has been advertised. There were interviews but, as a result, no-one was picked for the position. We have now readvertised which has closed and the interviews will be in the next week or so. Hopefully, we will get the fourth position filled then.

CHAIR: Do you need four people on deck? Is that a sufficient number for the Redfern command?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, we do need four positions at Redfern because we are virtually on a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week basis and we need someone available. We also need someone to be there when the others are on leave, on holidays or just having their rest days off; someone has to be available.

CHAIR: So you think it is a pretty good system and that it should be continued.

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, definitely.

CHAIR: Should it be expanded? Do you think you should have six or eight ACLOs?

MS TOWNSEND: No. We have not had four ACLOs at Redfern for more than four years. Someone has either left, gone on secondment, gone on long-term sick leave or whatever. We have not had a full contingent at Redfern for more than four years.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It seems significant that the four posts were not filled. One ACLO was seconded to Marrickville and one is off on stress leave, so only one out of four is working.

MS TOWNSEND: Yes. The ACLO on secondment to Marrickville is off on stress leave, the one at Redfern is off on stress leave, there is one vacant position and then there is me.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How long has the position been vacant?

MS TOWNSEND: Almost three years.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Does that suggest that if we had not had an inquiry it might have stayed vacant forever?

MS TOWNSEND: No, it had been advertised not last year but the year before. Interviews were held but no-one was suitable for the position. That is a HR matter; I do not know why they were not suitable. Then there was a freeze on within the Public Service. Before February they were looking

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at re-advertising the position. But with the riot and everything else, everything has been a mess at Redfern.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: As the only ACLO on deck were you involved in the interview process? Surely you should have been.

MS TOWNSEND: No, that is a role for the local area manager, the State co-ordinator for ACLOs and the local area commander.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You have said that there had been friction with the other ACLOs. Does that relate to job definition or what you think you should be doing?

MS TOWNSEND: No, it is not related to the jobs; it is personalities.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It is a personality clash.

MS TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think the ACLOs agree on what you should be doing as far as the police and the Aboriginal community are concerned? Do they see it pretty much the same way as you do?

MS TOWNSEND: Virtually, yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You said it was a difficult position to be in—the ham in the sandwich—and you feel you have made it less "hammy".

MS TOWNSEND: I have made it a lot less "hammy".

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Strike Force Coburn report seems to suggest that some people are more keen that you should feed back information to the police—they wanted you to work as a spy. Did you feel that pressure?

MS TOWNSEND: No.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So it was the expectation of some police but not your immediate supervisors or the top command.

MS TOWNSEND: I do not know whether it was an expectation for anyone. However, no-one has ever approached me to tell me to spy on anyone.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Where you consulted as part of Strike Force Coburn?

MS TOWNSEND: No, never.

CHAIR: Could you have made a submission if you had wanted to?

MS TOWNSEND: I did not know I could.

CHAIR: So you were out of the loop.

MS TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think you were adequately briefed and should you be briefed more often or daily?

MS TOWNSEND: ACLOs should be briefed daily when they come on duty. At Redfern we have a rostering system. We do two weeks on day shift—9.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.—and then two weeks

of afternoons—3.00 p.m. until 11.30 p.m. or whatever. I believe that ACLOs should be briefed at the start of their rostered shift on what has happened in the previous 24 hours or since they were last on duty.

CHAIR: Would that briefing be specifically in relation to issues of concern to the Aboriginal community or does it need to be broader than that?

MS TOWNSEND: No, just in relation to what has happened, if anyone has been brought into custody over the past 24 hours or incidents have occurred in Redfern or Waterloo concerning Aboriginal people.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you ever asked for that to happen?

MS TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What has been the response?

MS TOWNSEND: It does happen. When ACLOs starts shift they should go to the shift supervisor, report and sign on. The supervisor then tells the ACLO what has happened. We must also report to our immediate supervisor—the crime co-ordinator. We talk to her and she gives us an update and so on.

CHAIR: Does that mean you do not agree with that statement in the Coburn report? Is it too critical, are the facts wrong, or what? It says that ACLOs have experienced difficulties in performing their roles because they are not briefed daily in relation to operational matters. In sounds as though in your experience that is not true.

MS TOWNSEND: Not all of it. When you walk into the police station to start your job there could be a crisis. You will not always be able to grab a supervisor or shift sergeant for briefing. They are under-staffed at Redfern. If there is a crisis or anything going on, you are not able to catch them all the time. You have to catch them when you can.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The report found there was a breakdown in the relationship between Redfern police and ACLOs and an inability of ACLOs to identify unrest in the Block leading up to the riot. Would you like to comment?

MS TOWNSEND: Yes. On the weekend of 14, 15, 16 and 17 February I was on rest days and rostered leave days because I had family commitments. I went away on the Saturday and I did not come back until late on Sunday afternoon. I was not rostered on for duty or recalled to duty. I did not know anything about the riot until I turned on the television at 7.00 a.m. on the Monday morning and saw the news report. Where I work I hear about offenders in custody and so on all the time. When I am on my own time I do not like watching the television or reading the newspapers.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You switch off.

MS TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are not living locally.

MS TOWNSEND: No, I live locally—in Alexandria. However, I went to my sister's place at Caringbah and I did not know anything about the riot or TJ's accident until the Monday.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I gather one of the ACLOs was still working at that time and the other one was at Marrickville. So there was only one around at the time.

MS TOWNSEND: Yes, at Redfern.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Would you take that as an accusation against him?

MS TOWNSEND: What do you mean?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The report finding, that there was a breakdown and an inability of ACLOs to identify unrest in The Block?

Ms TOWNSEND: I do not know about that. He was rostered on duty to start at 3.00 p.m. on a Saturday. As far as I know he did turn up for work. No-one was rostered on on the Sunday, but normally whoever is on the afternoon shift, as I explained earlier two weeks days two weeks afternoons, if they are needed there is a call out and they will contact the ACLO that is on the afternoon shift.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That unrest would have started with TJs death. Would there have been a shift there for an ACLO to have discovered it?

Ms TOWNSEND: The ACLO who was on on the Saturday afternoon after TJs accident before his death, they would have had to contact him.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Sorry, to contact that ACLO?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

CHAIR: We had some evidence from him, which is in that transcript that you have looked at today about the events of that day.

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So it is not reasonable to ask you because you were not there and you would only get it second hand from him any way?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The report states that Superintendent Smith indicated that Redfern police officers were sceptical of the ACLOs. Have you experienced this scepticism, and does it affect your work?

Ms TOWNSEND: No. As I said, I have been there for almost 7½ years and I have a good rapport with nearly all the officers there. It does not matter where you work. You could work for the Department of Housing, medical, or whatever. Wherever you work you will have the odd one or two people that you do not get on with, and that is just logical. At Redfern there are the odd one or two police that I do not have a rapport with, but 99 per cent I do have a pretty good rapport with.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: At page 84 the report said that Superintendent Smith indicated that the community does not think highly of the ACLOs. Could you comment on that?

Ms TOWNSEND: As I said before, the ACLO is the meat in the sandwich. Some of the community mistrust the ACLOs. They think we are giving them up to the police and vice versa, and that is going to happen anywhere. We are there to do a job, and to do a job to the best of our capabilities. And that does not mean everyone is going to like us.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If there is a little less friction then you have done your job, in a sense?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are not going to get it perfect.

Ms TOWNSEND: No, you are never going to get it perfect. We are not in a perfect world. But the thing is, the majority of the community respect what I am doing and say they would not do the job for quids because it is too stressful and because of the way that some people in the community

treat you. But, as I said earlier, if I do a good job for my people within what I am doing and they come up to me and thank me for it that makes me feel 100 per cent better than having the whole community like me.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We did not quite get to the end of question four. Do you have any comments on the other evidence given by ACLOs?

Ms TOWNSEND: No. I am here to talk on behalf of myself. I do my job to the best of my capabilities. I am not here to come in and rubbish my two co-workers. If they want to give evidence and say whatever they want that is up to them. I am here to tell you what I do with the police and with the community in the Redfern-Waterloo area, and my feelings. I am not here to play petty games like they did.

CHAIR: We might move onto the section on young people, particularly. We have some more questions on ACLOs. We will ask your opinion about training, resources and so on. Do you think the Aboriginal young people are over policed?

Ms TOWNSEND: In some areas maybe. Nothing against the police, they are out to do the job. But Koori kids roam the streets at all hours of the night. The police come across them and as soon as the kids see the police, see a police vehicle their first instinct is to run. Then the police see them running so they think they are up to no good, or something like that. But it is just instinct in the kids. Then the police chase after them. They catch them. They ask them questions. The community starts to think that it is overpolicing by the police, but it is just instinct in the kids to run and then the police think they are up to no good so they chase them. No doubt, a lot of the community think that the police are overpolicing, especially when it comes to the youth in the area. But, really, there is not much there for the kids.

CHAIR: Why do the kids run? Is it because of a long history of relationships, because the kids have been playing up and they think, "These cops are going to get after us"? Is it just a vicious circle that keeps going on through the years?

Ms TOWNSEND: It is. It has been said that four kids are walking down the road, two of them are white and two of them are black, and the police pull up and they send the white ones on their way yet they search and question the young black ones. That has been said over and over again. I have not seen it personally. I have heard it does go on. But I have not seen it personally, so I cannot really comment on that. But within the Aboriginal community it stems back to the Aboriginal Protection Board ERA and so forth. It is inbred in us about the stolen generations and so forth, and that is one of the reasons, and also because some of the kids are up to no good, so that is why they do run, but not all of them.

CHAIR: How do we all address those sorts of problems, do you think?

Ms TOWNSEND: That is a hard one. Can we come back to that one?

CHAIR: It is hard for us, too. If we could solve that probably we could all have a bit of time off. Ms Parker may want to ask some of these questions as well. The mentoring program is an interest of hers.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I am conscious of the fact that there are lots of questions and we are running out of time. The police mentoring program for Aboriginal youth in Redfern, do you think there are some problems with that? And, if so, how can we improve it or how can it be improved?

Ms TOWNSEND: I have been on part of the Redfern LAC Youth Mentoring Program since its inception. We have had three camps. I have been away on two of them. The second one I could not go; I had family commitments. But I think they were very successful. I think they were very successful. Beforehand none of the kids in the area would even ventured into the police station, not unless they were being brought in for getting up to no good or so forth. After our first camp, taking the kids to the football and all other different activities that the Redfern police were doing with them we were actually having the kids come into the police station, come in and ask for any of the constables

or anyone they wanted to talk to, and we were having a really good rapport with the kids. We were breaking down those barriers up until the February riots. After that everything just went by the wayside. But we are looking into pulling it back together again now and getting on with the kids, because they other ones we have to target to try to break down those barriers.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Last week at the forum you spoke about a youth committee. Is that committee run by the Redfern Local Area Command?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes. It is run by our youth liaison officers, Mick Brown and Jack Taylor-Stott. There are also community people, myself as an ACLO, and when we do get another ACLO they will also be on it. We have kids from the area who come in, and we talk to them and get them to open up to us, so they can have their say about to what bad things they think the police do, what good things they do, what the kids want us to do, and so forth. It is very interesting with the kids, because they are so innocent and forthright and they come out with the truth. It is really good.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How of an does the youth committee meet?

Ms TOWNSEND: About every six weeks.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Earlier you spoke about believe is perhaps interviewing black children and not white children. Have you experienced any racist behaviour or attitudes among the police officers stationed at Redfern?

Ms TOWNSEND: No. As I said before, when I first started there 7½ years ago, there were a couple. But I cannot put my finger on anything at Redfern—any the police there who are overly racist. We did have one officer there who was, but he has been moved to, as I explained before. I do not think anyone would be game enough to say or do anything racist in front of me because they know that I would not muck around, I would go straight to the boss about it. And they would not be in Redfern for much longer either.

CHAIR: Because the boss would ensure that action was taken?

Ms TOWNSEND: Definitely.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: There has been a lot of discussion in this inquiry about the way in which new police officers are inducted, about how they are brought on board, and about new training programs that have been introduced. Do you think police receive sufficient cultural awareness training?

Ms TOWNSEND: I think that when the officers are students at the Academy they should have more intensive cultural awareness training at the Academy. It does not matter if they are going to the North Shore or where they are going, all officers will eventually go to a station where there is at least one Aboriginals family, and they should be put through intensive cultural awareness training at the Academy, even before they go into a station.

At Redfern, before the riots, when I first started back in 1997, I put together an ACLO induction program for probationers and transfers. The probationers or transferred officers would come with the ACLOs for one or two days. We would talk to them, see what socioeconomic background payable from. We would give them a talk on what to expect at Redfern from the Aboriginals community, show them videos such as *The Secret Country*. We would also take them around to the community organisations, introduce them to keep people within the organisations, such as housing, health, schools, preschools, and so on. They would get a talk from the key person, a spiel about what the organisation is about.

At least in that way, the officer could go away—say, if he had an offender in custody, or a victim or whatever, and it was to do with housing, health or childcare, for example, they could contact the person they have met and tell them they have a problem. As far as I am concerned, that has been successful. It has gone by the wayside over the last 12 or 18 months, but we have got it back on track now.

We also have the Aboriginals lecturer from Goulburn Academy come up at least three or four times a year to give cultural awareness talks to the officers, and that is from probationers all the way up to sergeants and duty officers. Over the last six weeks or so they have also been doing a cultural awareness course at TRANBY Aboriginal College. At the moment it is starting to feel like overkill. When the lecturer from the Academy comes up, I am with him on all the courses.

CHAIR: You have also had the ACLOs co-ordinator spending a couple of weeks at Redfern just recently. Has that been connected with the cultural awareness program?

Ms TOWNSEND: No. She has only spent a couple of days so far because the Aboriginal football knockout was there and everything has just been hectic ever since.

CHAIR: Was that to do with cultural awareness training, or was it more to do with checking up on how of the ACLOs program is going?

Ms TOWNSEND: I think a bit of both.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: There has been a lot of discussion about DOCS and the interaction between the department, the police and the Aboriginal community. Do you have any comments to make about that relationship?

Ms TOWNSEND: My personal view about DOCS is that when the DOCS workers are specially going to the Block to see about removing children or to check up on them, they get the Redfern police to go down with them and the police get the ACLOs to go down. At times it feels like we are going back to the Aboriginal Protection Board era, where we are removing the kids and it is up to the local sergeant or constable remove it.

I did a four months secondment to DOCS, and I have seen the way they work, how much red tape they are tied up in and how stressful their position is. I could see both sides of it. It is very frustrating for asked working for the police. If we do and notification on a child and nothing comes out of it, we get a really frustrated that DOCS are not doing their job. But I have seen the other side of an DOCS, where their hands are so tied they cannot even go to the toilet without asking for permission. So they are in a Catch-22 situation. I feel sorry for them actually.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Why is it so difficult? This is quite a critical question, is it not, if DOCS cannot function?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Why do you say DOCS cannot function?

Ms TOWNSEND: It is not that they cannot function, but they have to go through all this rigmarole before they can go out and try to do something about it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you referring to a lot of paperwork?

Ms TOWNSEND: Paperwork, and they have to make sure that they have all the evidence. If they think the child is in dire need and it needs to be removed from the parents, they have to dot their i's and cross their t's before they can even approach that family really.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is it not the fact that they have to remove people because there was not work before? It is one thing to say that you have to get the paperwork ready for a crisis, but it is another to say that the family is at risk and let us give them some help before it gets that bad. That is red tape, is it not?

Ms TOWNSEND: The thing is, they are virtually only acting. We were talking about this last week at the interagency forum and they are virtually only going for the crisis point first of all instead of getting out and trying to help them in the first place. It has got to get right to the crisis with

the child has to be removed before they go in and try to do something whereas they should be there in the first instance to try to help that family.

CHAIR: How welcome is DOCS? We talked before about attitudes of Aboriginal young people to the police and the history behind that. Does DOCS have a similar sort of problem? Is it hard for DOCS to go in at an early stage because of the history of taking children away and the history of DOCS and the welfare board, and so on?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, it is very hard for DOCS. That is why we need more funding to go into the non-government organisations within the Redfern-Waterloo area so they can get out there and start helping the families.

CHAIR: Would Barnardos be one of them, for instance?

Ms TOWNSEND: Barnardos, Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Corporation Women's Centre, the Aboriginal Children's Services centre—all places like that. They need excess funding so that they can go in and try to help these families that are in crisis before it comes to having to remove the children.

CHAIR: Is that because there is less suspicion of non-government agencies [NGOs] or the newer ones, or is it because they are more specific and on the ground and they understand the situation better, or is it both those things?

Ms TOWNSEND: A bit of both which is because the people from the Aboriginal Children's Services and Mudgin-Gal and that, they are people who are known in the community and are respected in the community. They know that they will be able to get help out of them.

CHAIR: Excuse me, Lesley. Robyn has to go early and there is one thing we have to do. I am sorry to interrupt you.

Ms TOWNSEND: That is all right.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think that Aboriginal-based NGOs have more credibility than Barnardos, for example—white faced ones?

Ms TOWNSEND: Definitely, yes. Barnardos, since their inception, have done a lot of good work. They do have Aboriginal workers there. They are very good. They have done a really good job but you really have to earn trust in the community.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That takes a fair while and Barnardos has only been there pretty recently, has it not?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes. That is why the other groups that I mentioned before, such as Mudgin-Gal and that, they are established and the people in the community know that they are there for them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: They have had a pretty hard time funding wise.

Ms TOWNSEND: Definitely, yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Excuse me, I am sorry but I have to leave. Thank you very much for coming in today.

Ms TOWNSEND: Okay.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you have any comments about our interim report, and what you would like to see come out of the inquiry? What did you think of the interim report?

CHAIR: You can be honest.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You do not have to say it is good. The reporters did not.

Ms TOWNSEND: No. I was not too happy when I first read the report. I have actually read it over about four times and I am still spitting chips now, especially after allegations were made against myself.

CHAIR: You are talking about the Coburn report.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you?

Ms TOWNSEND: I was not very happy with that, either. When it comes down to—I have marked it somewhere here—page 90, it comes down to the State co-ordinator of Aboriginal community liaison officers [ACLOs] saying that the Redfern ACLOs are not doing the jobs, and the inability of the community to see the unrest in The Block after the death of T. J. Hickey, and also that the ACLOs were not doing the job that they were supposed to do, I found that virtually was not true. She has set down here that the ACLOs should go in under this and so this and do this and that. Every local area command is completely different: what will work in Redfern will not work in Moree. The ACLOs cannot go by a set a lot of guidelines because each community is different. These are people saying things like this and who are sitting up in headquarters and are not seeing the grassroots level.

CHAIR: Do you think they felt they could sort of get away with criticising people down at the grassroots level?

Ms TOWNSEND: Well, I think they should come and live at the grassroots and be an ACLO for a couple of months to see what we have to go through before they criticise anyone.

CHAIR: Has there been much discussion of the Coburn report at the Redfern police station or among the officers there? Have you joined in any discussions since it came out?

Ms TOWNSEND: At Redfern, we are lucky if we get to read a newspaper, let alone a full report, because the police are on the go. We have 12-hour shifts there. They do two days and two nights and have so many days off and then they are back or they are at court. There is no way anyone could read anything when they are at work. It is just a very busy and incredible police station, and I will tell you one thing: those police are doing the best job they can.

CHAIR: Do you think there is a need for some time out? Do you think there is a need for the police and ACLOs and so on at Redfern to have occasional time to sit down and go through things and have a bit of a think about strategies, or does that happen?

Ms TOWNSEND: There may be a need for it, but the thing is, when do we find the time?

CHAIR: Yes, that is what I was thinking. Is there a need to build in to people's work a certain sort of time? You know, teachers have a pupil-free day. Is it possible for ACLOs to have that?

Ms TOWNSEND: We would love to have that. We would love an offender-free day.

CHAIR: It does sound a bit silly now that I think about it, but you know what I mean.

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, I understand what you mean. Our main priority, especially at Redfern police station at the moment, is trying to find somewhere where you can have a minute to yourself. Within reports that I have seen—and I have read and have heard comments in the community from non-Aboriginals as well as Aboriginals—that is what has come out of TJ's death and that is that the Redfern police are getting a brand new police station, all this money spent on them and that, and what about spending money in the community. I thought that that is not right because Redfern, well before the riot last year, was told that we were getting a new police station and they were just trying to find suitable premises. They were actually in negotiations with the people from the TNT tower months before the riots about purchasing floors and doing the renovations and everything. But all of a sudden, seeing that Redfern is getting this new police station—that is, as they call it, the

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supercentre, which is what some of the community are saying—they are saying that it has come out of TJ's death and the riots, and that is totally untrue.

CHAIR: A bit of it comes back to what you said before about media reporting and focusing on certain sorts of news?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think it is a widespread belief that the bicycle was hit by the police car?

Ms TOWNSEND: No.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It is not a widespread belief that the bicycle was hit by the police car?

Ms TOWNSEND: No. Some people in the community are still saying the bicycle was hit by the car and blah, blah, blah, like that, but the majority of them do not think so.

CHAIR: I think that just about does it. Thank you very much for coming in. I said earlier on that it is very much your decision as to whether you want us to do as we have done sometimes before with other evidence, to make public the transcript of what you have said today. I do not think you have said anything that you would be ashamed of or concerned about or that we would. So if you would like us to do that, that means you have had a slightly less nervewracking experience because there has not been a gallery here to listen or comment. Would you be happy if we made the transcript public: it goes on our web site and so on?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, I would be happy.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Conclusion of evidence)

(The Committee adjourned at 1.52 p.m.)