

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

At Macquarie Fields on Tuesday 13 December 2005

The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans

The Hon. K. F. Griffin

The Hon. C. J. S. Lynn

The Hon. R. M. Parker

The Hon. I. W. West

OWEN ROGERS, Chief Executive Officer, State Council, St Vincent de Paul Society, 1 West Street, Lewisham, and

PAUL POWER, Manager, Vincentian Social Action Centre, St Vincent de Paul Society, 24 Iolanthe Street, Campbelltown, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Are you both appearing on behalf of the society?

Mr POWER: Yes.

Mr ROGERS: Yes.

CHAIR: You have received some questions from us which we will use as a guide. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr ROGERS: My name is Owen Rogers and I am the CEO to the State Council of the St Vincent to Paul Society, New South Wales-Australian Capital Territory. I would like to introduce Paul Power, who is the manager of the society's social action centre at Campbelltown. It is my intention to speak for a few minutes and then invite Paul to contribute on matters we believe are relevant to this inquiry. The society is grateful for the opportunity to make this submission, and I believe you have already received the society's written submission, a copy of which we have here. From a society State Council perspective, the St Vincent de Paul Society addresses these and similar social justice issues in more than a dozen places throughout New South Wales. Similar situations dealing with social exclusion and disaffection exist.

The Legislative Council standing committee terms of reference outline a number of points and I would like to make mention and comment on what the society believes may be the underlying causes and problems which may have contributed to the social unrest at the beginning of this year. The underlying problem relates to the issue, I believe, of poverty, social exclusion and disaffection. You will note that one of the recommendations in the society's submission highlights the real need for the New South Wales Government to advocate actively with the Federal Government for the development of a national strategy to reduce poverty. When you look at the definition of poverty as being people living in poverty if their income and resources that is, material, cultural and social—are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by society generally and as a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which would be considered the norm for other people.

In broad terms, we believe that poverty has three elements. The first element is financial hardship. Our research shows that about 3.6 million people have a weekly income of less than \$400, and this amount is less than the minimum wage. All of these people will struggle throughout the year simply trying to make ends meet. This begs the question: Could you keep a household on that amount of money? The cost increases in education, health, hospital, medical, dental and urban transport range from 98 per cent to 173 per cent—higher than the CPI. Again, statistics show that there are some 850,000 children living in jobless households and another 140,000 living in what we term working poor households. This is about a total of one million children altogether we know are in severe deprivation. Most of these people, along with others on the margins on low household incomes, live mostly in ghetto-style situations in outer metropolitan suburbs and in rural and regional areas, and Macquarie Fields is no exception.

The second element of poverty relates to lack of access to essential services and commodities, such as health. People from poor households will generally get more seriously ill and die younger than the rest of the population. Access to dental services are almost non-existent. In fact, our statistics show that there are some 500,000 people waiting many years to see a dentist. Access to housing—public housing stock has been reduced by some 25 per cent over recent years. Waiting lists have increased and private rental costs soared up between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of some incomes. Access to family services—having family services would avoid family breakups and violence. Having access to transport and of course lack of access to jobs. Last but by no means least is access to a decent education. We believe that education is fundamentally important to the life changes

of individuals and plays a vital and key role in social and economic mobility from generation to generation.

The third element of poverty is the loss of self-esteem and hope. The members of the society see it in the faces of the people they visit every day. It is a loss of hope for a safe, secure, healthy vibrant and purpose of life for themselves and their children. In addition, most of us would agree that good communication can lead to the development of personal skills and self-esteem. However, education at any level in Australia is no longer free. Schools in low socioeconomic areas will receive less money than those in most affluent areas, and the facilities will be affected in similar proportion to the level of payments. The society knows from experience that many children arrive at school hungry. We know because the society operates breakfast clubs. These breakfast clubs in some schools provide breakfast to those children who go without. If a child is hungry how can he or she concentrate on learning?

We also know that children from low-income households are more likely than others to experience a family breakdown and violence. These children bring the traumas of those experiences to school. So the chances for a student from one of what we call the postcodes of poverty getting to a tertiary education is negligible. Of course, this leads to the revolving door process. Without employment, without access to essential services, without access to education, health, transport and the like, the problems remain and become entrenched in areas where there is heavy unemployment and underemployment. With poor housing, decaying infrastructures, ill health, poor educational and training facilities and programs, one can only expect the level of crime to fester and to grow.

What is the cost of poverty? For the individual, poverty brings about loss of self-esteem. It brings about powerlessness, exclusion from normal lifestyle, hopelessness and antagonism, solace and substance abuse, poor health, high mortality rates and mental illness. What is the cost to the community? Poverty brings about sharpening divisions, a sense of competition rather than co-operation, increased crime, a breakdown in trust, urban decline and deterioration, and social disharmony. What is the cost for the economy? Poverty brings about a loss of production and productivity. The public cost of crime and the additional cost to the economy for services such as health, housing and community services to cater for disadvantaged people, especially in times of crisis. So I ask the question: Who is responsible?

The society believes that we all are—the business sector, the community at large, charities and individuals. We all have varying contributions to make to minimise poverty and disadvantage. However, the bulk of responsibility lies with both State and Federal governments, we believe, due to the legal and constitutional powers they have, the substantial funds of revenue they command and the institutional frameworks they operate and their responsibility for the duty of care for all citizens. For the long-term solution at Macquarie Fields, we have to acknowledge the infrastructure mistakes that have been made in the past and develop long-term strategies in reshaping public housing. That concludes my preamble. I now call on Paul Power.

Mr POWER: I was interested in just drawing out some of what Owen has said in the local context. As you would be aware from the nature of our submission, we are not particularly interested in getting heavily involved in the policing issues because that is not our area of expertise. Although it is important that the Committee looks at policing issues, we believe that the long-term social factors, which led to the situation developing, really need some concentrated work by the Committee and by the State and Federal governments.

If you look at the planning of the Campbelltown district, the promises that were made to people in the early seventies about how the district would develop just have not been followed through. In fact, I have a copy here of the New Cities Structure Plan of 1973, which was the blueprint for the cities of Campbelltown, Camden and Appin—500,000 people moving to the Macarthur area in self-contained cities that had housing, infrastructure and jobs.

The first major residential development to occur after the release of the New Cities Structure Plan was the development of the public housing estate of Macquarie Fields. From discussions that I have been having in the last few weeks with people who were involved with the St Vincent de Paul Society locally at that time, there was considerable concern about whether or not it was a wise thing to

build a large public housing estate in similar form to parts of Green Valley which, at that point, were fairly high in the public consciousness as having significant social problems.

The then New South Wales Housing Commission was saying that Campbelltown would be different because, "We are integrating jobs and housing together". If you look at what actually happened since 1973, public housing came first—privately-owned, low-cost housing followed, not at quite the same rate as anticipated but at a reasonably rapid rate; in fact the population of Campbelltown city jumped from 30,000 to 110,000 within a decade, but public housing came first—the infrastructure came through in dribs and drabs and employment was a long, long way behind. In fact, I think you could probably say it was 15 years before there was any significant increase in local jobs within the community. Certainly, when I started working and living in the area in 1983 the industrial area was just a ribbon of empty land through the middle of Campbelltown. It was basically undeveloped and by then the population was around 110,000 people in the Campbelltown area.

So the promise of housing and jobs coming together was never met. Also, the way in which the then Housing Commission developed public housing in this State and developed public housing in Campbelltown it was designed to produce as much housing as possible for as little cost and all of us would agree that the long-term financial costs and the long-term social costs far outweigh any money that was saved at that time. The way that public housing was designed has left us with a legacy in the Campbelltown area where there is a stigma associated with public housing that does not exist to quite the same scale in many other parts of New South Wales.

I grew up in Western Sydney, in areas where there is significant public housing fairly well integrated with other housing and when I moved to the area I was shocked at the way in which people spoke about, and continue to speak about, people who live in public housing estates. The State Government's planning has had the most significant impact on the dynamics on both public housing tenants and other people living in the district and the promises that were made at that time which were never delivered have, I would say, made the most significant contribution to the circumstances that we saw earlier this year.

No-one could have predicted that the disturbances would occur in Macquarie Fields at the time they did. There was no indication in the community that I am aware of that anything was just about to blow, but anyone with the most basic knowledge of sociology would tell you that if you create situations such as we have in the public housing estates in south-western and Western Sydney at some stage there is going to be some negative social consequences and really what we saw was an outcome 30 to 35 years down the track of some very poor planning decisions.

So, from that point of view I think the responsibility on the State Government to play a lead role in addressing the issues is very, very high, because there were issues of planning that local people warned against at that time but their warnings were ignored. Also, what occurred during the 1970s and into early 1980s was that concerns within the Campbelltown community about the way in which public housing was being constructed were being constantly raised but the Housing Commission continued to ignore them. Our organisation became more vocal as the years went on about the impacts because, as a local group of volunteers, in many situations we were left to try to cope with the difficulties faced by people who were moving from the inner city to very isolated communities on what was almost beyond the urban fringe. We were left to respond to the situations that people were finding themselves in.

It is important also to say that our organisation is a very strong supporter of public housing because every day we are assisting thousands of families in New South Wales who are in financial difficulty because they cannot afford the housing that they are in. But public housing needs to be planned well and integrated well. As public housing becomes more concentrated on people in the greatest financial need, there needs to be a whole lot of community support put in place to ensure that people have opportunities and pathways through education into employment. That is probably one of the major things missing in this community here in Macquarie Fields—pathways to employment and a sense of hope, as other people will attest.

I think it is also important to note that the issues related to the disturbance earlier this year are very much seen in the local community as being localised to the public housing estates in Macquarie Fields. The suburb of Macquarie Fields has 13,500 people but many people who live in the suburb,

including members of our organisation, were completely unaffected by what occurred. It was not happening in their neighbourhood. In fact, they heard of most of it through the media even though it was only happening a few hundred metres away, but it was very much an issue localised to the public housing estate just east of here; east of Harold Street.

When you look at the socioeconomic indicators for that particular neighbourhood, they are significantly worse than for the whole suburb of Macquarie Fields. The State Government submission in terms of its socioeconomic indicators does not give any idea of the scale of the problems—and certainly it is a little more difficult to get accurate statistics for that neighbourhood alone—but similar estates in the Campbelltown area consistently show that well below 30 per cent of working age people are actually in any form of employment—people in the 15 to 64 age group.

As Owen was saying, that has connected with it a whole lot of issues about the place that people feel they have in society, their sense of commitment to the social order in some situations; if they feel that they basically get nothing back and that there is really not much long-term hope for themselves or their kids.

CHAIR: I thank both of you for your very thoughtful opening remarks. Most of our questions are specifically to Mr Power, but feel free to comment, Mr Rogers. Mr Power, our first question asks you to describe the services that the society provides in the area, particularly to young people. I think you said you have lived and worked in the area since 1983 so you might include something about what you have been doing over the last 20 years?

Mr POWER: The St Vincent de Paul Society's main work in communities right across Australia is in the emergency financial assistance area and we have had a local group actively involved in emergency financial assistance in Macquarie Fields since 1964. We have been assisting people in this district for 101 years, so we have been around a long time. That gives us an opportunity to get a fairly deep sense of the families who are in the greatest financial difficulties and the financial difficulties they face are indicative of much deeper problems that families face.

We have an active group of volunteers in the area providing a significant amount of emergency financial assistance to people in the area. In the past two years we have developed a community development program, which we have operating in three other public housing estates in the Campbelltown area. We have developed that in Macquarie Fields and it is really focused on working with community organisations and emerging community leaders in developing their skills and helping community organisations to get on their feet and become more equipped to be more effective. It is a relatively small program working across four estates, so our impact in Macquarie Fields is necessarily limited.

We have been able to start to develop connections between people in communities such as Macquarie Fields, Minto, Claymore and Airds to talk about common issues, to participate in common training programs and also to share information about things that are working well within their communities. There are a lot of positive things that are occurring to a small degree in different communities and part of the long-term answer is to collect all the information about the good things that are happening and to share the information and really inspire and encourage people to take on new local projects.

So the focus of that work is really about equipping and supporting local people to develop the sorts of things that they would like to see in their own community. One of the big issues in Macquarie Fields is that decisions are taken by government and decision makers from outside the area in many cases, so we are trying to build some local and optimistic leadership in working with others to do that. Next year we are actually planning to develop a further community outreach focused on working with other organisations in the area on developing volunteer-based support to families that are in difficulty—some of the many families that we see through our emergency assistance work, some of the families that are known to other services like Burnside's Family Support Service, to see whether we are able to contribute, as an organisation focused on volunteers, to get more volunteers involved in providing the support and the mentoring needed for individual families.

We are also waiting to see what transpires out of some of the changes that are going on in the community. We are looking at how we can develop our community development work in a way that

has more impacts on some of the people who are not participating in community organisations or in volunteering at the moment. We can see a real need to find some more effective way of engaging with people who simply have no connections with what is going on in our community.

Our other services in the area are Macarthur-wide services. We are very heavily involved in all sorts of programs for people who are homeless or facing homelessness. One program that has significant outreach into Macquarie Fields is a home visiting program, which is run by our women and children's refuge in the Campbelltown area, for public housing tenants who are identified by the Department of Housing as being at potential risk of losing their tenancy. The program provides fairly focused family support work with those families. It is a positive way of tackling issues of homelessness before they actually occur.

We have a Drug and Alcohol Addictions Recovery Program, we have community centres in other parts of the Campbelltown area, and the newest program we are developing, which is only just getting on its feet, is the Compeer Program, which we run in the Illawarra area and in Sydney. It is a volunteer-based support program for people living with mental illness. But that has not really started to have too much impact locally yet because we are still in the process of promoting the program and recruiting volunteers.

We offer a whole range of other services in the Campbelltown area. But, like many of the other services that are mentioned in the Government's submission, they serve about 245,000 people who live across the Macarthur area. They definitely have some impact amongst the 4,000 people who live in the Macquarie Fields public housing estate, but we could not claim that they are all local services specifically for Macquarie Fields.

CHAIR: Granting that, can you give us a quick snapshot of your staffing and where your funding comes from, noting that you have mentioned volunteers in a couple of those programs?

Mr POWER: Yes. Our organisation is overwhelmingly an organisation of volunteers. With regard to our emergency assistance work, the great bulk of the funding comes from within our own resources. In the Campbelltown area, every year the St Vincent de Paul Society would probably be putting well over \$400,000 of its own funds into local services.

As the Hon. Charlie Lynn knows, it requires all sorts of fundraising events, which we participate in at different times. We work hard to raise the funds we need for different services in the area. We get State Government funding for much of our work with homeless services, and for our addictions recovery program in Campbelltown, but our emergency relief work is mostly funded by the society.

With regard to our community development work, currently we have attracted some Federal Government funding and a little bit of State Government funding, but most of the work we have done over the past 10 years in public housing estates in Campbelltown we have funded ourselves, or through some Catholic religious orders who have put some funds into what we are doing.

The Compeer Program is something that the society is also funding directly. Not many organisations are in the position where they can put a lot of their own resources into local services, but I think probably our organisation is one that is perhaps putting more of its own funds into work in the area because we have the resources to do so.

Overall, if you include the homeless services, for which we get significant Government funding, probably at least 40 per cent of the work we do within the Macarthur district is funded by the society through its own resources, from our shops and from public fundraising.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Mr Power, your submission, along with many other submissions, talks about two issues with regard to non-government organisations: a lack of co-ordination and also a lack of long-term funding. What lengths of time do you think projects need in order to be effective, and do agree with the comments about co-ordination of non-government organisations generally?

Mr POWER: In terms of long-term funding, the strong push from both Federal and State Government funding agencies is for programs to really be of no more than three years, and there is great pressure put on non-government organisations to produce evidence that there will be some long-term, lasting outcomes of their three years of work.

It is possible to argue that, but I would suggest to you that to receive funding, organisations are really forced into a situation of overstating what the long-term outcomes will be, particularly in communities such as this, where, in order to make a real difference, you really have to win people over. That is done through personal relationships between the people who are employed and the individual residents.

To battle that deep sense of pessimism that a lot of people experience, it really needs a building of trust. What you find is that the people who are most disadvantaged are less likely to benefit from short-term programs. The community programs that last for quite some time, and that also have great stability of employment of staff, which is a big issue within the welfare sector, are the ones that will make a difference. It is all built around personal relationships.

In terms of the impacts of funding, yesterday I was talking to somebody who was a community worker 10 years ago. We were discussing what were regarded as the programs that were making a difference in Macquarie Fields at the time. They were the Glenquarie Family Support Service, which a number of years ago—for a whole lot of reasons that I am not exactly sure of—fell in a heap. Then funding was withdrawn from that group and handed to Burnside, and the family support service now operates at Minto. Burnside does a lot of outreach into Macquarie Fields. But there was a sense of loss that that service shifted from the Macquarie Fields public housing estate, out of the area, and that there was not the support given to those service at the time when it was going through difficulty.

The neighbourhood centre continues to function, but it has also been through some pretty difficult times, and there is a sense from people within the community that at times when the neighbourhood centre needed assistance that assistance was not really there. Its services suffered as a result of that. With regard to the Department of Housing's Housing Community Assistance Program, which is basically a community worker working in the estate, funding for that program was withdrawn about four or five years ago and was shifted to other areas.

The Primary Connect Program is a very highly regarded program in this community. Funding for that program runs out in the next week or two. The Schools as Community Centres Program has made a very significant difference over the past 10 or 11 years. I understand that at this stage there is no funding for that program beyond June next year.

If you look at the programs that are seen by people within the Macquarie Fields public housing estate as the ones that they are most connected to, there has been a fairly sad experience of key services being lost. In terms of co-ordination, the Macquarie Fields area has probably one of the more effective local interagencies, the Macquarie Fields-Ingleburn-Glenfield interagency, which our organisation participates in. It brings together nearly all the organisations that provide services directly into the Macquarie Fields public housing estate.

It is being quite effective, within its very limited resources, in working together on common strategies. They were working on a review of the services in the area to identify gaps, and also overlaps, at the time the disturbances occurred. But that process was then overshadowed by the Premier's Department investigations; in fact, they were asked to put that process on hold because it was replicating what the Government was going to do.

Also, as a group they have co-operated in a number of initiatives, including monthly community lunches, which started in June, as a way of getting people together to get some sense of how people are feeling about things and what some positive steps could be; supporting community barbecues; and working closely with the new residents group, which has developed the Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group.

I think the sense of co-operation between the agencies on the ground is relatively good, even though there have been difficulties in the past. There is a strong sense that the lack of long-term funding for key services is a major barrier.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Are you saying that a number of those problems have been caused by a lack of capacity within the organisations you have referred to? Would they be assisted if there were some sort of capacity-building exercise going on? Or do you think the funding should go to large organisations such as yours, rather than to small organisations?

Mr POWER: Obviously there needs to be a mixture of different types of organisations. It is interesting that the ones that have had the most difficulty are the more locally based organisations. In a sense, the ones that could be more representative of what the local community wants have struggled to survive. It would definitely be a loss for the whole community sector if all the services were left to large non-government organisations. That is speaking from the perspective of somebody who is involved with a large non-government organisation. But it is a really important that local organisations, wherever possible, also have very heavy local involvement in the running of the Service.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You mentioned the Primary Connect Program. We have heard other people make similar comments. What is your organisation doing to assist Primary Connect? Do you see it as a valuable program?

Mr POWER: Yes, we do. Apart from advocating to various people in the State Government that its funding should continue, I'm not sure what other things we are able to do. Certainly the Macquarie Fields-Ingleburn-Glenfield interagency is looking at how some of the services it has provided could be picked up in some way by others.

Also amongst the questions is a question about Professor Tony Vinson's work, and I will briefly touch on that. He has focused on locational disadvantage and on how issues of poverty are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods. One of the outcomes of his research in 1999 was to focus on the needs of Windale, in the southern suburbs of Newcastle. Working with the Premier's Department, they developed a whole series of community services around the local primary school, because they saw the primary school as the most effective community meeting point. Here in Macquarie Fields we have two programs that have been doing that for some years, and it appears that the State Government is in the process of withdrawing funds from both of them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Which programs are they?

Mr POWER: The Primary Connect Program and the Schools as Community Centres Program.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The funding for one will cease at the end of this year and the funding for the other will cease next year?

Mr POWER: Yes. As I understand it, the Schools as Community Centres Program is still up in the air, but I am informed that currently there is no funding past June next year.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You said, somewhat obliquely, that the non-government organisations have to justify their outcomes and that it is such a short-term thing that it is difficult for them to do that. Do you think that academic groups should be a separate group that look at what is working and what is not, that they should report to the Government, and that the funding for the decision should come from that model?

Mr POWER: I am not sure exactly what you are proposing.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: At the moment either the Government evaluates the programs when they are retendered, or the individuals say, "Gee we are doing a great job" and they write more or less credible material to justify that position. So, in a sense there are only two players who might take positions, whereas it may be better to have a neutral person who said, "This is what is working and this is not working"—a referee, if you like.

Mr POWER: Really in a sense the central problem is the philosophy within government that long-running, entrenched social issues can be turned around in a short space of time. There are many people in the community sector who probably would favour a lower level of funding per year and much longer timeframes in some cases. Some of the funding programs that I have seen, including from the Federal Government, give organisations significant amounts of funds for two or three years to produce miracles. Certainly a lot of things can improve through good community projects of that kind, but if you really want to make a long-term difference you have to look at longer timeframes. Unfortunately, political timeframes tend not to allow for longer term funding of projects. It is really about the philosophy of government decision makers in the timeframes that can bring about long-term change. In fact, that was one of Professor Vinson's concerns about what happened in Windale. The funding was for three years and some great things were achieved, but just when things were starting to hit their straps the funding was withdrawn and diverted to another area of the Hunter Valley.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Presumably it is hard for organisations to expand and contract quickly in terms of getting credible good people.

Mr POWER: Yes, and the longer-term organisations in the area have seen excellent programs run by other organisations hit their straps and then see the impact when funding is withdrawn. Certainly there are situations where other organisations or programs within the same organisation have had to carry the load of quite successful short-term programs that have needed longer-term work.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think there is a real problem with evaluating programs and saying you may go on? It sounds like whoever writes the submission gets the money at the moment.

Mr POWER: That is definitely the case. Sure, there can be deeper evaluation of some of the programs that go on, but really there needs to be some serious questioning of the timeframes. That would seem to me to be the central issue.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How do you think these programs should be evaluated? It seems to be a very tricky problem. The evaluation of tenders seems to be the major mechanism at the moment.

Mr POWER: One of the issues is that decisions are being made at a level far distant from the local communities that are meant to benefit. In terms of more effective evaluation and more effective funding there needs to be a more serious connection and more serious research of what is happening in the community for the funding that is intended. One of the problems for NGOs is that the Federal and State governments will come up with particular funding programs and particular ideas will be the flavour of the month. If you are interested in receiving funding, and I am speaking from an organisation that often does not chase a lot of these funding programs because often our focus is in different areas, I observe that people are forced to try to match what they would like to do to whatever the flavour of the month happens to be.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Then they are trying to bend what they are doing and trying to bend the rules so that they get a match?

Mr POWER: Yes, and often it does not necessarily reflect the needs in particular communities and the highest priorities.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think that if the Government were more regionalised it could make better decisions, or do you think that simply moving the head office from Sydney to Campbelltown would not make a huge difference if they were not on the ground?

Mr POWER: I think there are other strategies. Perhaps it involves independent researchers assisting with the process of decision making about where funding is allocated and how it is evaluated, and also how realistic the timeframes are. It does not necessarily require the shifting of government offices, but it requires that people who are making decisions have much more information

at their fingertips about the particular communities for which the funding is intended, that it is not just a decision being made in Canberra or Sydney.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I understand that the 13 Vinson indicators identify communities in terms of how well they are performing in social indices. If the programs are running well do they fall quickly? Can you say, "The NGOs are doing great work here. The Vinson indicators have improved"? Can you track them like the share market and see how you are doing?

Mr POWER: Professor Vinson was able to track in Windale some significant changes in terms of child abuse notifications and the health of newborn babies—low birth weight indicators. They improved significantly over a three-year period. He also noted some changes in some of the indicators and not a lot of change in some. There are no miracle cures.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But it is not a bad start?

Mr POWER: No, it is not a bad start at all.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It could be used. Has it been used?

Mr POWER: Only to a small degree.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: I congratulate you on your outstanding submission. You showed a good practical feel for the problems and for the solutions. I am interested in two areas. What is your comparison between Claymore and Macquarie Fields? It probably is a bit glib, but the emphasis in Macquarie Fields was to turn the houses around, whereas the emphasis in Claymore was to turn the attitudes around. I note that Claymore has been a very successful, low-cost strategy. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr POWER: In the longer term there needs to be gradual change to the built environment, as experts say, in each of the estates. Our experience with Minto is a dramatic announcement that the whole place is going to be bulldozed just turns the community into absolute turmoil. In fact, the people who suffer most are the people who are the longer-term residents who are the most committed to the community. They are the people who have the most to lose out of a dramatic announcement like that. I do not think anyone would hope that the Macquarie Fields public housing estate would continue to exist in exactly the same form in 40 or 50 years time as it exists now. There needs to be some well thought out and gradual process of change so that housing in that area is not so separate and so stigmatised. I suppose I am saying there needs to be changes to the buildings in the area, but it needs to be well thought out and not as dramatic as occurred in Minto.

In the short term there has been great dramatic improvement, as you say, in Claymore through government and non-government organisations and local residents groups working together on a whole series of strategies, which really has been about handing back some of the decision-making power in whatever way possible to people who live in the community. Our organisation probably has been most heavily involved in community development work in Claymore out of the public housing estates in Campbelltown. We have been working hard, along with others like Burnside and Campbelltown City Council, to develop strategies to put the people who live in Claymore at the centre of decision making. A lot of projects have come out of that, that a government decision maker would not have come up with, like the development of community gardens, the development of a community laundromat and coffee shop, and the development of recreation facilities in a park in the centre of Claymore. But the way in which that has been done has heightened the sense of local ownership and different projects have provided great opportunities for people to get involved in volunteering.

We are very closely connected to the community laundromat, which is only a small local project but it has provided opportunities for people to rebuild their confidence and, from that, move back into study. Quite a number of volunteers have gone to TAFE and started to get back into the work force through that initial experience of getting involved in a form of volunteering that they did not have access to before. Those sorts of small things make a big difference. While government decision makers might focus on broad community consultation in offices and halls, we have found

over the years that the most effective way is to do it through lunches, barbecues and informal discussions, and by encouraging individuals to run with their ideas.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: This capacity building and community building within the housing estates would seem to be threatened by the long-term tenure that the Department of Housing spoke to us about yesterday. If they take that away then you are taking away the foundation building blocks for this long-term attitudinal change.

Mr POWER: Yes. As we try to say as clearly as possible, the large public housing estates need to be managed in a different way to other public housing in New South Wales. The information we have is that 30 per cent of public housing in New South Wales is on large estates and 70 per cent is more integrated. Although we have some deep concerns about the Reshaping Public Housing reforms, our concerns are most concentrated on what is going to happen on the large public housing estates. If you build into the system a system of tenure that means that once people get on their feet financially they are asked to move out of the area, what impact does that have when you have 4,500 people living together and the primary qualification for living in that community is not only being unemployed but remaining unemployed?

We already have a serious enough situation with access to pathways to employment and local role models, but it seems that this decision, which is based on a belief that public housing should be focused on the people who need it most financially, has not been thought through carefully enough in terms of large public housing estates. What we are saying in the submission is that we really need to draw a definition between the majority of public housing in New South Wales and how public housing on large estates is managed. As our submission outlined, we are suggesting a series of strategies based on things that we have seen working in different communities, particularly in the Campbelltown district.

CHAIR: Could you comment on the relationship between Macquarie Fields residents and the police both before and after the disturbances? Would you also enlarge on the comment on your submission about the role of the media? You have mentioned already that you are concerned about that.

Mr POWER: Both of those questions probably are best addressed by residents of the area. But from our perspective there is a real divided opinion amongst people within the Macquarie Fields area and the Campbelltown district about what happened and the role of the police. It really depends on people's experience. There is a lot of support within the community more broadly for the police and the difficult situation in which they were placed, but just from feedback that I have received, some people had concerns and quite negative experiences—people who were not involved in the public disturbances. You probably would be better off talking directly to those people about it. In the submissions I read from the different organisations, some of the points are made fairly clearly about the perspectives of people who have concerns about policing issues. I balance that by saying that there is a lot of support within the district for the police and in many ways the police in this area are being asked to deal with a set of circumstances, which, as we said before, results from very bad planning decisions 30 to 35 years ago. That is also acknowledged by people in the area.

In terms of the media, again the local residents have the most detailed information about some of the things that occurred, some of the tactics that were used by some of the television stations to encourage people to act in ways that appeared aggressive and violent as well. There are a lot of anecdotes in the community about some of the things that occurred. There is a lot of anger about Channel 9 and the news program and Mike Munro's involvement in the community. There is also significant anger about the *Sunday* program which went to air about two months after the disturbances. There were concerns about the production of that program because there was about a two-month lead time and there were all sorts of assurances given to the community that this program would be different, it would give a more balanced coverage of issues in Macquarie Fields, and we are interested in hearing about the positive things that are happening in the community, the good stuff that is occurring. But none of that got to air.

What did get to air was a caricature of some of the deepest problems amongst a small section of the community and that was presented nationally as indicative of what is happening in Macquarie Fields. It was just a deeply inaccurate picture. Also, reading some of the submissions and hearing

from people in the area, one of the reactions I am hearing from people is that the people in the area are saying that they want to withdraw from the rest of the community. They feel so battered about the head by the media coverage and attitudes from outside the area to their community that they just want to be left alone. In fact, in the Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group submission there are some comments that touch on that.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Just in terms of the media, do you think we would be here? Do you think there would be the attention in terms of the Government's focus on words about paying some attention to Macquarie Fields had the media not covered the riots, had they not taken an interest?

Mr POWER: Again, you would probably be better off speaking to local people about their experience, but the common discussion in the area appears to be that the media, particularly in the days following the first evening, played a significant role in keeping things going and also presented what occurred in a quite unbalanced way which gave people a distorted view of some of the events. So I think the media had a significant role to play in exacerbating the problem locally and also presenting what occurred in a quite unbalanced light. So it would be interesting to compare various reports from people who lived through the experience, the police reports, with the media coverage to compare in the cold hard light of day what actually did occur with how that was presented publicly.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We ask everyone the same question. You have given us some answers in your submission about what you think could be done in Macquarie Fields. If this inquiry is to be anything other than something that gets filed away and we have some recommendations that will achieve something for Macquarie Fields, albeit because it started with a riot, can you tell us what you want to get out of this inquiry?

Mr POWER: I suppose there are four things. Two of them are mentioned in the submission. One is that the State Government take up the idea of developing a statewide strategy to address issues of poverty, particularly in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the State. As our submission notes, that was a recommendation of a Senate inquiry into poverty and financial hardship that the Federal Government did not take up. That was a strategy strongly promoted by the St Vincent de Paul Society based on some positive experiences in poverty strategies in the United Kingdom and Ireland. There is certainly scope for the State Government to take that up on a State basis and to engage the Federal Government in discussion about that and also talk to people in other State governments about a national strategy. That would bring together a lot of the good ideas that exist in small local communities and see how they can be applied more broadly. There is a lot of successful and good practice around this State but often the experiences are not widely known.

The second would be to proceed with a community action plan. A draft community action plan is in the government's submission. That would need further consultation with people in Macquarie Fields. There has been only fairly limited consultation up to this point but I think that further work needs to be done on that. One concern that people are expressing is that they are not sure to what extent there will be a financial commitment to make things in the plan happen. If the plan is to work, it will need to be backed up by funding commitments from the State Government, not merely an expectation that the State Government will be able to go to the Federal Government and get funding.

The third is reviewing the Reshaping Public Housing changes particularly in relation to security of tenure in public housing estates and actually developing a separate strategy for the management of public housing estates, as outlined in our submission. We and many other organisations would be only too happy to work with the Department of Housing on developing and refining their strategy. The fourth is—and hopefully it could be part of some statewide strategy to address issues of poverty in disadvantaged neighbourhoods—to look at how the State Government funds and supports community services, to review the expectations around the length of funding and also ways of ensuring that locally run community services are given the support they need at times to avert long-term difficulties so that we do not end up with a situation where only the largest and most professionally run NGOs are capable of running community services, that there is still a strong place for locally run, locally managed NGOs.

CHAIR: Mr Rogers, do you want to add anything to what you would like to see come out of the inquiry?

Mr ROGERS: Just making a comment in terms of the tendering, the tendering process was certainly new to the society a number of years ago. The State Council, in reviewing that, identified if there was a need as to who is the best person or organisation that might be able to address that need, whether it was the society or an external corporation. If they won the contract, that means that the need was being addressed but the society was to some degree inexperienced in terms of tendering. It is a science, and I think you have to have your tender submission to the extent of being very professional. I sometimes wonder at the assessment committee when they look at the number of tenders that come in. What are they actually looking for? I am sure they are looking for a lot of things in terms of a good business plan and resources and the bottom line costs.

There are organisations out there that can produce a very professional and attractive tender submission. And it tends to be that the assessment committee says, "This looks good. Let us put it on a short list." But when you get to small organisations that have a very good track record in terms of producing outcomes and outputs over many years, they are not perhaps very professional at submitting tenders and may get in the basket that says, "not today". That is sad because they are missing out. But one would hope that the assessment committee would be able to say, "Instead of looking at the bottom line and the need for producing this, what is the track history of the people who have submitted?" I know that the society has an excellent track history in terms of the works it has done over the past 170 odd years and sometimes we miss out simply because there are a number of reasons. But it is good to take into consideration—I just thought I would make that point.

The society will continue to meet with people in disadvantage. It is not just a matter of providing a model of charity to them in terms of paying their utilities and such like. There is also the model of justice which the society will advocate on behalf of these people in terms of identifying why they are in this situation and try to link up with them and establish a relationship and walk with them in their journey. By establishing a good relationship with them we are able to empower them and perhaps to suggest that they become engaged in local activities so that their self-esteem is restored and they are able to get out from where they are, the rut they are in, to an area where they are able to say, "Yes, I have made it. I am on my own and I can become self-sufficient." So the society will certainly continue to do the work it has been doing over the years.

(The witnesses withdrew)

STUART JOHN WILKINS, Superintendent of Police, Local Area Commander, New South Wales Police, Macquarie Fields,

DARRIN MITCHELL WILSON, Chief Inspector of Police, New South Wales Police, Macquarie Fields,

ALAN WHITE, Senior Sergeant, Crime Co-ordinator, New South Wales Police, Macquarie Fields,

SARAH CLARK, Senior Constable, Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, New South Wales Police, Macquarie Fields, and

CHRISTOPHER COTTER, Senior Constable, Youth Liaison Officer, New South Wales Police, Macquarie Fields, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: It was probably helpful that you were present earlier and heard quite a bit of the evidence from the St Vincent de Paul Society. Thank you for coming early. Superintendent Wilkins, do you wish to make an opening statement before questions?

Mr WILKINS: I will rely on the commissioner's opening the other day, but I will also let you know my position. I started with the command on 20 June this year. I had a request from the commissioner to take over the role of the local area command at Macquarie Fields. When I got there I perceived that there was some negativity between the police and the community and I very much brought the focus of community consultation and pro-active policing to the local area command.

You have met my team. I have Chris Cotter, the youth liaison officer, and Darrin Wilson, who is the chief inspector duty officer and when on duty he patrols the operational part of the police station. Alan White is the crime co-ordinator. Senior Sergeant White runs the crime management unit and is responsible for the youth liaison officer, the domestic violence liaison officer, the crime prevention officer, the intelligence program through the police station, the ethnic liaison officer, the licensing officer and the field intelligence officer. Alan runs the crime management union in the police station and, of course, Sarah is our newly appointed domestic violence officer.

CHAIR: You have been here since June and you have just said that Sarah is newly appointed. Were the others here at the time of the disturbance?

Mr WILKINS: Yes, they were.

CHAIR: Some of our questions will relate specifically to them. Could you give us something of your background?

Mr WILKINS: Yes. I am in my 26th year of policing, from 1980 until now. It has been very much operational, and also as a detective. At the early start of my career I went into the undercover operational area, then to homicide and I spent a significant amount of time in the homicide area. I worked specifically in the Drug Enforcement Agency. I worked on the backpacker murders for a number of years and some of the more significant murder investigations, both as a commander and as an investigator. From 2000 I was the staff officer to the Deputy Commissioner. I was the crime manager at Bankstown through to 2002 and the duty officer at Castle Hill. I commenced the Vikings unit, the street unit that will now become the riot unit. I was the commander of support Taskforce Gain, which helped with significant violence throughout the south-west of Sydney through 2003-04. I was appointed to the command of Hawkesbury in November 2004 for six months and then appointed to Macquarie Fields.

CHAIR: That is quite a spread.

Mr WILKINS: It is.

CHAIR: Given what has been said by other senior police and the Police Association, I will join the first two questions together and ask you to give an overview of the level of policing resources here at the time of the disturbances and now. From the impression we have gathered so far, in terms of

the turnover and average youth and experience, there is nothing that particularly marks Macquarie Fields as different from other commands but if you have a different picture on that, please tell us?

Mr WILKINS: No, that is right. There is very little variance between February and now. We have an authorised strength of 156, and we have run pretty much over that for the last 12 months. It changes on a daily basis basically, through promotion and through transfer but, importantly, we have a transfer and tenure policy. Tenure is an issue at any police station throughout the State, not only Macquarie Fields, that you must spend, unless there are exceptional circumstances, three years at any local area command, so anyone who comes to Macquarie Fields will spend at least three years here.

We have a range of experience from an average of our duty officers of 22 years experience to the sergeants, who have 20 years experience, down to constables, who average about 6½ years experience. As I said, we run on 156 as our authorised strength. We have 158 today. Tomorrow we will have 166 because we get eight probationary constables from the academy, who are passing out tomorrow. I have a number of police who are coming into the environment. I do not have many who are coming out but I do have a constable from Waverley coming in and a constable from Newtown who applied to come into Macquarie Fields, so we are running around 165 from next Friday and it will probably go up to 166 or 167. But it is variable, because people are promoted, they go in and out, they get leave.

I lost a leading senior constable recently to Camden but this is part of the normal process of transfer and tenure. But having experience in Castle Hill, Hawkesbury Bankstown and here in the last five years, there is nothing remarkable about Macquarie Fields and the turnover of staff or any of those other areas. There are police who want to come here and there are police who want to advance their careers as well who have moved on as well, but there is nothing remarkable about the movement of staff. Most of them have been here for three years. I have police who have been here for 15 years.

I generally think as a benchmark that five years in any one place is probably long and enough certainly in a place like Macquarie Fields that is always on the go and it is dynamic, there is no question about it, that after five to 10 years you are given an experience level where you have done a lot of work and perhaps it is time for a new challenge and a new environment after that time. And that is healthy for an organisation and it is healthy for change, but generally there is nothing remarkable about the movement of police at all

The Hon. IAN WEST: Of that many staff, how many how many would you have on leave at any one time out of 156. What percentage, one-third?

Mr WILKINS: No. We manage the leave very closely. For example, on general duties, out of three sergeants and 10 constables, I certainly would not want more than one sergeant away and say two constables at any one time. The team leaders manage that, so it is evenly distributed through any time of the year. There is nothing remarkable about that, but we certainly do our leave through the human resources manager, a duty officer who manages that and we put out a leave roster on an annual basis so that police are not all off at the same time.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In answer to the question, roughly on the ground at any one time out of 156 you would expect to have, say, 100?

Mr WILKINS: Available? Probably a little bit more than that. Those are obviously through rostered shifts, but up to about 130 at any one time. We have issues that everyone has of maternity leave and those things, but there is nothing more remarkable about Macquarie Fields than anywhere else.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In light of that, can you describe the level and nature of crime in Macquarie Fields compared to anywhere else?

Mr WILKINS: Yes. It is important to grasp the demographics of Macquarie Fields local area command. We are a level one command, which places us in the top 14 in the State. I think there are 14 level one commands and there are a number level twos and level threes, but we are a level one command, which means we have a different rank structure and a chief inspector as opposed to an inspector, and senior sergeants in some of the key positions.

We are a level one command surrounded by many others, including Campbelltown, Green Valley, Liverpool over to Cabramatta, Bankstown, so we are in that south-west of Sydney demographic. Overall, crime is on perhaps a downturn you could say, and I have got the statistical return for November this year. For assaults we were ranked 19th in the State. For break and enters we were ranked 22nd in the State. For fraud we were 54th in the State; for fatal crashes we were 63rd in the State; malicious damage we were 13th in the State; robbery we were 14th in the State; stealing 46th in the State and stolen vehicles 30th in the State. There are 80 local area commands in the State of New South Wales so that is where we sit in the picture of overall commands.

I can go into these specifics of where we are trending. In assault, the command ranks 19th in the State. The last control chart break, which is our average—and our average moves either up or down depending on how we are going over a period of time—but there has been a reduction from 103 to 90 and we are trending downwards in assaults. Macquarie Fields is ranked 22nd in break and enters. Our last control chart average was a break downwards from 103 to 94 and we have a business plan target of 85, so we are trending towards that and we are actually going quite well and aiming for that level.

We have had an increase in drug detection of recent times. We have gone from 8 to 15 per month. We are doing some high-level work in relation to drug activity and in recent times we have taken out a significant amount of hydroponic set-ups; multimillion dollars worth of hydroponic houses have been dismantled over the last six months. We have also done some covert work, which has resulted in significant seizure of amphetamines and ecstasy.

Certainly, malicious damage it is one of our bigger problems and certainly at this time of the year, taking into account alcohol and the longer days with people out in the streets because of the warmer weather, traditionally this time of the year is a busy time for us and we have had an increase of 126 to 131 and it remains above our business plan target but we are ranked 13th in the State for malicious damage. Robbery is certainly a concern to us. Robbery incidents have fluctuated over a significant area. It is gone from 9 to 14, and we have averaged about nine over the last couple of months.

Those robberies are not your traditional type of armed robberies but a lot are kids on kids; stealing phones. At times some of the younger Pacific Islander kids are overrepresented in crime in the area. Stealing is the lowest it has been for some considerable time. It has dropped significantly and we are ranked 46th in the State. When you consider our level and the area, I think that is significantly good. Stolen motor vehicles is the same. It is trending down. Major traffic accidents are an issue and we cover a number of areas and the number of traffic crashes again is the lowest it has been for some considerable time.

What has also been notable in the last six months, and certainly since July, is that we have had a significant increase in the proactive side of policing in the Macquarie Fields area. Our move-ons and person searches, which directly target those responsible for crime, have increased significantly, going from 30th or 40th in the State to, when you put those things together, including arrest scene intelligence reports, move-ons and person searches, we are the best in the metropolitan area and second in the State. For example, in November this year we did more move-ons than anyone else in the State. We did one-third amount of person searches and the second best amount of intelligence reports throughout the State. That puts us squarely as one of the most pro-active commands in the State.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you incorporated domestic violence with assault or do you have separate statistics? I am under the impression that domestic violence is very high in this area?

Mr WILKINS: I know it has been spoken about before. We do average about 200 incidents of domestic violence. For example, in November we had 86 assaults in the command; 37 of those were not domestic-related. In October we had 97, 46 of those were domestic-related. I have some analysis here over two years. It runs about 45 per cent of assaults in this command are domestic related. We run at an average of 36 to 52 to 43, so it is around the mid-40 mark down to the high 30s that we average for domestic violence assaults in the command per month.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You mentioned at the beginning that you stood by Commissioner Moroney's opening submission, where he stated that it was not about more police, more police and more police. Yesterday the Police Associate said that it was concerned there were not enough numbers coming in to replace those police who were transferred to the various task forces, the riot squad being one of those. What are your views on police numbers?

Mr WILKINS: We work with the association. We have just signed a new first response agreement, and they believe that the response we have to the public through the association is appropriate, and so do I. That comes from the numbers we have at the moment. We are obliged to supply staff to the Vikings unit and the street unit. I am not aware of anyone who has applied for the riot squad from Macquarie Fields.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: They have had enough, have they?

Mr WILKINS: Probably so. But the numbers we run on the street and the cars we deploy on a daily basis are appropriate, and the association backs us on that. As I said, we have just signed a new first response agreement, which is the expectation that the public have for the number of cars out at any one time. It goes on to the calls for service, and the times. Obviously, we have more police available on a Sunday night than we have on a Monday night, because crime statistics and intelligence tell us that we are far busier at those times than at other times.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Are you disappointed that the riot squad has not yet been established and will not be established until January, given that the riot in Macquarie Fields took place in February? Are you also disappointed at the level of numbers the riot squad will have? The Police Association recommended in excess of 100, and the squad will have something like 50.

Mr WILKINS: 47 or 45, I think it is. We have learnt from the experiences of both Redfern and Macquarie Fields; there is no question about that. Part of the recommendations from the Police Force is that we implement the riot squad. I think that is also a recommendation of the Police Association. It takes time to put it in place and set it up. But we have OSG police, who will be part of that riot squad, who are working right now in an environment, whether it be in Macquarie Fields or anywhere else, who have the same skills base but they are coming together and will enhance their skills in response to the riots.

There is no question that we have police who are trained in those public order management issues, as I am, and as quite a few of the other police at Macquarie Fields are. I have a number waiting to do that sort of training. Again, it will take time to set up the riot squad. It has been nominated by the Commissioner, it has been set up by the commissioner, and it will be up and running in a couple of weeks time. But we have police to respond to what is happening currently at Cronulla and through the south of Sydney, and they are well trained to handle those types of incidents.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In the last few days there have been calls for police to have the power to shut down alcohol distribution outlets and reduce alcohol availability in an area in times of crisis. Do you support those calls?

Mr WILKINS: Absolutely. I noted with some interest on the television on Sunday night that a number of the people involved in the riotous behaviour at Cronulla were drinking alcohol openly in the streets. I distinctly remember one fellow throwing a VB bottle at an ambulance, as he just finished his last sip out of it and the ambulance drove past. That is a significant issue for us. If you take alcohol out of any of those incidents, including the riot, would it have been as bad? I am not sure that it would have been. We could certainly utilise powers at a time and place, given the events that happened in Cronulla, to ban the sale, use and consumption of alcohol; it would help us.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Regarding the domestic violence liaison officer—

Mr WILKINS: May I interrupt. Sarah has been in the role for two or three months. I am certainly not making any excuses at all. We had a domestic violence officer there for something like 10 years before that. Sarah has taken over from Kim Ryan, who also did a very good job. Sergeant White will be able to tell you anything else about domestic violence.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I am aware that there are some pilot programs for domestic violence. Could you describe the sorts of programs that are being conducted in the Macquarie Fields area and how you are involved with them?

Ms CLARK: We are currently involved in a project that commenced on 12 September. It is called the Domestic Violence Intervention Court Model [DVICM]. It is a pilot program being run with the Campbelltown Court, and it incorporates Macquarie Fields and Campbelltown, which is where most of our court matters go to, and Wagga Wagga also runs it.

It is a program whereby we liaise very closely with what is called the Victims Advocacy Group, which addresses the needs of the victims of domestic violence. Basically the model is designed for charge matters, where we have to arrest people for domestic violence offences. To reach a charge, we refer the details on to the Victims Advocacy Group, the victim, as well as the offender in the matter. The Victims Advocacy Group speaks to the victims at court on our list days, and they determine the referrals to groups in the community—whether it is the community nurse for young children, or whether it is for drug and alcohol services. They speak to the victims and determine what services they need.

The model does not change anything that we are already doing; it just puts other things in place. We attend the scene, and if there are injuries to a victim or there is malicious damage to an item, we seek the victim's consent to take photographs. We then place those photographs in what is called a charge folder, which goes to court on the first mention date. Basically the program is designed for the defence to see those photographs and to see the extent of the injuries, in the hope that we will get an early plea and deal with the matter quickly through the court.

The program is based on a program that is being run in the Australian Capital Territory, which apparently has been conducted for some time, whereby they have a large number of early guilty pleas. That is what we are trying to achieve.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: So far is there an indication that more cases are then proceeding through the court process and victims are prepared to go to court?

Ms CLARK: From my experience, they are prepared to go to court. Obviously there are some cases where some do not want to go, but for the most part they are prepared to go to court, and they speak to the Victims Advocacy Group, which refers them to other agencies.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Would it assist police if ADVOs could be issued immediately by them, rather than police having to go back to a police station and then follow up later on?

Ms CLARK: At the moment we have telephone injury orders that are done straightaway, through the courts at night and so on.

Mr WILKINS: The short answer is yes, absolutely.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What is the highest ranking that a domestic violence liaison officer can achieve?

Ms CLARK: My understanding is that they are senior constables.

Mr WILKINS: That is right.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Why are they not able to progress to higher ranking?

Ms CLARK: There was a program where they were looking at leading senior constables for domestic violence officers; that was only about a month ago. But I do not know where that is heading at this stage.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Superintendent Wilkins, one of the submissions we received went into a lot of discussion about legislation, and particularly the fact that it decreases police efficiency and almost binds your hands with regard to what you have to do. With regard to the Law Enforcement (Controlled Operations) Act 1997, it was stated that the applications are time consuming and that it can take up to four weeks minimum for authority to be granted. With regard to the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Act 2000, it was stated that the taking of a DNA swab adds a further two hours to the charging process to comply with the Act, and that simple procedures like taking photographs also lengthen the process and reduce police hours on the street. Could you comment on that?

Mr WILKINS: Yes, they do take time. I have been involved in a lot of those processes of controlled operations, and they certainly do take time. But they also give us the legislative powers and protection through the courts. It is very important that we have that protection and legislative backing when we have to present evidence at court relating to a drug matter. They are very important pieces of legislation, to ensure that we have the power to present the evidence in court. They give us power to purchase drugs covertly, to handle drugs, and to undertake all those operational issues. We need that legislative protection to be able to do our job.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: You do not see it as binding you to the office, so to speak?

Mr WILKINS: They do take time; there is no question about that. But, for the short-term pain and the long-term gain, is important that we have that protection and the evidence that is required to present before the courts to convict people involved in drug distribution and all those issues.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: The issue of resources has also been raised, with regard to your increasing use of listening devices, telephone intercepts, and so forth. The person who made that submission said that the police in the local area have trouble gaining access to these resources because they are dominated by the State Crime Command Authority and Internal Affairs. Do you have access to those resources?

Mr WILKINS: Absolutely. I think you may have been out of the room when I was going through my background. I spent a lot of time in the specialist areas, so I am well aware of all those processes. But I am also aware of how to use them, and we use them significantly at the local level as well. We have access to them, but a lot of times people do not ask, and that is half the problem.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: So it is not an issue for you?

Mr WILKINS: No, not as far as I am concerned at Macquarie Fields. I cannot go through the operational issues we have at the moment, but we use them significantly.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are at the sharp end of social problems, when people who are dysfunctional or antisocial give trouble, and you either arrest them and charge them or you do not, or you caution them and hope it will not happen again. Do you think that prevention might be a good thing?

Mr WILKINS: Prevention is a wonderful thing.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How do you liaise with the people who are concerned with implementing preventative measures? How do you try to change that situation?

Mr WILKINS: In my opening address I said that we are consulting with the community, and that is what we are doing very strongly at Macquarie Fields. My push is to put us out in the community and to have the cops on the street all the time, so it is not unusual to see the police in the Macquarie Fields environment. When I say Macquarie Fields, I mean the Macquarie Fields local area command.

We now consult considerably with the community. We run a number of programs. We consult with the non-government organisations as well. But one of the important things we are doing is giving the community ownership of some of the problems in the area. I think someone spoke to you about an issue at Minto recently which involved the murder of a young chap and there was significant

tension. We responded in two ways: by community consultation and by giving some ownership to the community leaders and elders to take control of a potentially volatile situation—as a preventative measure, rather than going in tactically to resolve the issue.

So we have given the ownership back to the community, to say, "Here is a problem. Try to help us, in consultation with us, to prevent that from happening again." The Minto scenario was a wonderful example of preventative measures put in place early on, to stop what potentially could have been a significant problem.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: With regard to domestic violence or DOCS situations, do you feed back to DOCS and the policy areas within that?

Mr WILKINS: Absolutely.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you do it through interagencies locally?

Mr WILKINS: Yes. I am on a number of committees. I am on the interagency committee, which is the local group, the Macquarie Fields-Ingleburn-Glenfield group. I am on the higher-level groups, which are looking at strategies to reduce the incidence of domestic violence. I am also on a high level group, together with the heads of all government agencies in Macquarie Fields and the Campbelltown local government area—in fact, all of south-western Sydney. We also refer people to the advocacy group, to help people to start on the process of going to a benevolent society; and teach police what we can give to victims and how they can help us.

Chris Cotter is a youth liaison officer who does a lot of work with the local youth. We are introducing a process of case management, which we have done with the Pacific Islander community, with regard to young people at risk. We are referring young people to Mission Australia. We have funding to run programs for Pacific Islander families as a whole-of-organisation approach, whether it be the Department of Education and Training, DOCS, Housing, or anyone else we believe may be able to assist. We are part of developing a referral system out of a case management process, in which all those government agencies are involved.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Will you be able to share information across agencies in that situation, or will privacy get in your way?

Mr WILKINS: We will. We are starting with the kids, and through the child protection legislation we have had the ability to transfer information to different government organisations.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is JIRT, is it?

Mr WILKINS: No, not only JIRT, but also kids at risk, so we can share information with DOCS and through a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Housing.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you find DOCS responsive when you take your concerns to them?

Mr WILKINS: Yes, they are. We have had a number of examples recently where we have had children at risk. The police have contacted DOCS, and they have attended, sometimes at 2 o'clock in the morning or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and taken some action. We are at the front end—the sharp end—but we are actually doing something about it. There are number of examples where we have brought kids who are at risk back to police stations in recent times and handed them over to DOCS.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What sorts of things do you do? They talk about its development, but what does that mean?

Mr COTTER: My role in the youth liaison department—I have been working for about five years in Macquarie Fields—is to provide a vital link that affords the youth of the area an opportunity to understand why and what we do for our business. A lot of them have the inability to understand

why they have been moved on and why they have been asked to do certain things as part of our duties in responding to calls from the community that a certain incident is happening at a certain location. They fail to understand who has complained about that and how it has come about. They always see the police coming and asking them to move along. It is a linkage that affords me the opportunity to get out into the community to discuss some of these issues and put to rest some of the problems in regard to our policing issues. It gives them a voice. It allows me to facilitate referrals from other police who attend jobs over a weekend or of a night-time. When I come back in the morning they will refer one or send me a memo and say, "This is what has happened overnight. Can you address this issue?"

Maybe something was happening in the school, so I would contact the school and get the principal and the staff involved. A lot of issues stem from the school. They are taken home and into the community then, unfortunately, police are left to deal with it. It could be as a minor as a push and shove between two kids at school, the parents get involved, it becomes a neighbourhood dispute and suddenly we are called in. We are there 24 hours a day and we afford that service provision all the time. It seems that we are left holding the can the majority of the time. I try to liaise with the kids and the schools to do some of these things that the police do not have the time or resources to do, to explain why we do things and make the process of whatever steps we take—arresting, charging and going before the court—understood by victims and the children involved. That is what my primary role is, to facilitate some of those things within the community between youth and the police.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you run camps, soccer training or PCYCs or anything like that? Are those programs in place?

Mr COTTER: As a result of the disturbances in February we established Camp Impact, which was an idea that Commander Hughes came up with. He said, "It's not about just taking kids. I don't want you to take kids for a camp. Plenty of other PCYCs and police LACs are running camps, but this is a camp with a difference." We took those who were affected by those rights and involved in the criminal justice system not just to entertain them but to find out why they may have acted or offended in that way and to address it, and to find out what the issues are and what the police responses are to it? It was not just me and the PCYC police, we took seven of our police officers off the street because at one o'clock in the morning Chris Cotter is not going to be there. They need to know a series of police in that local area command so that some credibility can be put at the forefront so that confrontations are put to rest there and then.

If one person in a group of 10 people knows me by name I can guarantee that I can get that group of persons to move along without incident, without any further action flaring up because we had things like those camps where they get to know a few of us. We had nine young people and seven police who went to the camp. If you look at success stories, that camp went without a problem. One or two of them may have reoffended, but after reoffending we had phone calls from those persons ringing the police station and asking for me and one or two of the other officers to hand themselves in. We might not be able to stop it in its tracks, but we have affected them in some way because they now have the ability to come forward and hand themselves in without confrontation and without having us chasing them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you have to move them on because of lack of things to do? Are they hanging around a street corner waiting for something to happen because they do not have anything to do? If there were a facility to play in or a PCYC they may not be hanging around to be moved on.

Mr COTTER: I am sure you have heard from a number of different organisations, government and non-government, to address the problems. It is no use presenting a program, you have to find out exactly what they want. If they want to do trail bike riding we need to try to find them something like that or get on to an agency to address that issue. It is no use saying, "We are going to play footy or soccer" if none of them is interested. We need to find out what is affecting the young people and what is going to interest them. Earlier this year the Wests Tigers came out here. If they can draw a similarity with young person who may have come out of a community just like them, who are doing it hard and made good, and now have credibility, they are the ones who will influence decisions of these young people.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you facilitate that sort of thing?

Mr COTTER: Yes, we do. We work together with West Tigers, who will come along to a lot more of our camps and the Positive Choices we run with a lot of our community members. It is about giving them the ability to respond. It is about giving them an understanding that, with the police standing next to them, they can see someone they can trust who has credibility, a person who has problems that they can understand because they have come from a similar area or a similar background, but who has made good.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can you say that there is a reasonable range of recreational and development programs in that area?

Mr COTTER: I think there is. I think there are enough programs here. We just have to find the right types of things, how we are doing things and work on ways of putting it to better use. You have probably heard submissions from a lot of agencies working in the area. We have to make sure that we have tapped into the right thing, not just say, "We are going to provide this." We have to make sure it is what they want. We need to consult further. Perhaps the Youth Advisory Council, which we hope to set up in 2006, will address some of those issues.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You said you measured the outcomes of activities you undertook and you asked them to tell you why they involve themselves in certain activities. Can you give us some insight into your analysis?

Mr COTTER: In regard to some of the comments of some of the kids who went away on camp, in regard to the riots they told me that on the very first night some of them acted out of pure emotion, a belief or a perception that somehow the police had hit the car and pushed it off the road intentionally. I do not know where that came from, but that sparked them to act emotionally with rage, thinking that police chased them and that we were responsible. It was not until one week later that we were able to respond to some of that. I went to the schools and youth centres to try to put to rest the perception that police were actively involved in hitting them and pushing the car off the road, which was totally incorrect. But we could not comment at the time and the coroner's inquiry is yet to determine that. A couple of days later I gave my guarantee to the young people that the police did not touch the car. Yes, there was a pursuit but the car crashed on its own devices, not as a result of the police hitting it or colliding with it.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Nine young men and seven police were involved. How did those nine young men respond to your comments?

Mr COTTER: I think they responded quite positively. As I said, it is the little things that you recall. One of us left a \$1,000 camera at the camp, which one of the kids picked up and gave back to us. Ordinarily, given the chance, they probably would have stolen. It is those little things that count. When they went to the camp they said, "We've never been looked after like this before in our lives." They washed up their own plates, not because we asked them but of their own accord. These little steps show that these things, hopefully, will work in the long term. Those things make an impact on the kids.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We included a question about the Youth Advisory Council that you are about to set up. We want to hear about it.

Mr WILKINS: The philosophy behind the camp was to make sure that there was a relationship between some of the youth in the area and the police. It is about having a relationship, regardless of whether it is good, bad or indifferent. At least we have one, and that is really important. That is the whole philosophy behind taking the kids or some of these young adults away with the police, and the police on the ground with whom they deal, as Chris Cotter said. There are some really good examples of how it has worked. A couple of kids have reoffended, but six or seven of them have not. Some of them have jobs now and they are doing really well. Part of that process is the Youth Advisory Council. The idea is to set up a structure with some of the really good outstanding youth in the area to stop those who are on the springboard of making poor decisions or who have made poor decisions.

It is about police also, not us but younger ones in the command, to have some dialogue—it is about that relationship I was talking about—to explain to the young adults or young children what we are doing in the environment, but it is also about what they want from us. If they want to raise an issue about the policing aspect of the environment or if they want to know why we are doing things or how we are doing it we can explain it to them. The council will be up and running in January. We have consulted with Youth off the Street and a number of other people who want to be involved with the youth in our council.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How will the young people be chosen to be part of the council and how will it be set up? How have you found the people who will be on the council?

Mr WILKINS: A couple who went on the original camp have been asked, a couple are coming from Youth off the Street—Father Chris Riley's program at the James Meehan High School—and some that Chris Cotter knows. He knows a lot of the youth in the area and he has looked at a large range of them from those who are some of our best. I go back to the young fellow who is the captain of James Meehan High School, who is exceptionally good. He is a role model in the area. He is an international karate champion. A couple of weeks ago I spoke to him and he is about to do his Business Studies exam for is Higher School Certificate. He is a really wonderful role model who has been brought up in Macquarie Fields. There are other positive people who are role models to some of the other kids. There will be a broad range, but that is how they will be selected.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How many people do you anticipate, be they young people or police? Will the others be involved apart from young people and police representatives?

Mr WILKINS: No. It is about the relationship between youth and the police. There are a whole range of other committees and other issues that involve other people, but this is for the police and youth of the area.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How do you intend to operate it once it is set up? How will it be serviced and how will meetings take place? What will be the timeframe for meetings?

Mr WILKINS: We have not set the agenda as such, but we have the kids identified. We want to start in January. It will be bimonthly. We will sit down somewhere away from the police environment—one of the high schools or one of the parks. It is about just sitting down and having a talk, exchanging ideas and information, and answering questions.

Mr COTTER: We will have it bimonthly because if an issue is identified we need some type of timeframe to work it through to determine how we are going to do it next time. We need to get some of those things in place. We are hoping to run it next year, which will give us a split for a couple of months.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: If an issue is identified how will the police and young people deal with it?

Mr COTTER: We need the young people to influence the other young people in their community to say, "That this is what the cops are doing." We are not about locking up people. There has to be a balance between being proactive and taking preventative measures. It is no use us or other agencies taking up the ball all the time. It has to come from them. Those solutions have to come from them.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Can you explain the referral system between the schools, community groups and the police?

Mr COTTER: That is really alluding to the Positive Choices program, which we set up in 2003—the Premier funded the program with about \$4,600—to run interventions for kids at risk of offending, not so much committing criminal offences, but kids who are going down the wrong track. It could be through the schools, the community or another organisation that feel the kids need help before something happens. We take on referrals. We developed a referral sheet as part of the Positive Choices program, which started off through a conference process with the parents and a cultural support person present, but it developed and we have to take groups of kids because they do not act

out alone but within groups. We started running a whole day program at the PCYC engaging them in activities to do with trust, self-esteem and building trust between the police. That is what we try to do with Positive Choices and how we deal with the referrals.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How does PCYC fit in with the work you do and the programs it runs for young people?

Mr COTTER: They are involved with a number of the programs we run and they run their own separate programs also. The priority one and priority two programs are our referrals from our crime statistics and depending on their age and how many times they have offended we would refer on through our crime management unit and Sergeant White looking at their offences so far and if we can put them into a program at PCYC which actually specifies certain things and spends a lot more intense time with those kids, actually takes them on activities and those type of things. That is the priority one and priority two program that they actually do and commit on to that.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: And the relationship between some of the programs that PCYC has that are not directly those ones you have just spoken about, what is the relationship like in terms of say young people who are involved in other community groups and services through those community groups, and how does the relationship mesh with yourself as the community liaison officer and the police?

Mr COTTER: It is a bit of a threefold partnership basically. Depending on the agency referred on to me, then I would assess it and pass it on to the PCYC. They would actually run those programs in conjunction with them. Some of them we have instigated and some of them they have done themselves. So it is a partnership between all agencies. The PCYC is quite heavily involved in our area, especially post riot also. We run our blue light discos six times a year. That is also running. We have a work experience program that we run down at the PCYC for our kids to try to put back local kids in our local communities to maybe come out as police officers and role models to police, that type of issues. Like I said, the biggest thing is consistency and credibility. It has to come from someone who has come from that community. It goes a lot further.

CHAIR: Can we have a copy of the referral sheet?

Mr COTTER: Yes.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: My next two questions relate to the report of the Police Association of New South Wales. Have you seen that report?

Mr WILKINS: Yes I have.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: There are two areas of concern when you talk about your relationship at the grassroots level and your knowledge of the local area and the high command of police. They note here that the free flow of information between the command post and officers on the ground during the incident was restricted by the command post due to concerns that the information may be leaked to the media. Consequently, greater emphasis was placed on the image of NSW Police rather than on the safety of its officers. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr WILKINS: I was not there during the riot and the command post was placed where it was for specific reasons at the time. I do not know that that was the case. I have not been told that that was the case and I do not know that anyone I have spoken to would agree with that.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Mr Wilson, I understand you were there. Do you have any comment to make on that?

Mr WILSON: On the Friday and Saturday nights I set up the command post, obviously in different locations. The Friday night was location specific because we had a crime scene. The Saturday night I set the location where I did because of intelligence I received. I totally disagree with that. I believe the information that was disseminated from the command post was accurate at the time and was disseminated in a timely manner to the troops on the ground. That is one of the main reasons we did not have any troops who got injured or lost.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Why would the Police Association have put that in its report if you, who was at the coalface at the command post, had a different view on that?

Mr WILSON: I am aware that there was criticism of the command post but it was done at the time based on information received that a certain group of people were going to attend the police station. The police station is in an area with very poor access and egress, and one of the first rules of defence is depth. So I put the command post between the police station and the location where the offenders were congregating. In my opinion the command post worked very well and it was there for a number of nights afterwards. I cannot help you as to why the association has stated that.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: One of the other things the association stated in the issues brought to light during the riots was that local police were excluded from briefings and intelligence gathered, including the possibility of alleged offenders possessing firearms. The only way they could ascertain this information was by talking to other police and the media. Do you have any comment on that?

Mr WILSON: I can only comment on the Friday and Saturday nights that I worked. I personally briefed on the Saturday night local police at the police station prior to deploying, and the local police were utilised in an arrest phase situation where they were manning arrest trucks. They were stationed at the command post and were deployed with OSG as arrest teams. Any intelligence that was gleaned from the command post went out and was disseminated to all team leaders.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: So you prepared the intelligence and getting it down?

Mr WILSON: Yes, I believe so.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: So, again, why would the Police Association have that in its report?

Mr WILSON: Sorry, I cannot help you on that.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Did the association consult with you during this report? Did you have input into the Police Association report?

Mr WILSON: I have not been consulted or questioned by any Police Association members, no.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Yet you set up and ran the command post.

Mr WILSON: That is correct. There was a Police Association representative at the command post on both the Friday and Saturday nights, and I believe they had a representative on all concurrent nights but in relation to that specific report no association members have come down and sat with me and asked me why I made my decisions, no.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: It would seem a bit odd to you, would it not? Given that you were at the coalface and that you are local here and you have all this intelligence, I thought you would have been involved in all decisions made and also any subsequent feedback and reporting.

Mr WILSON: I cannot comment on that. It is something the association will have to answer.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Superintendent Wilkins, do you have any comment on that?

Mr WILKINS: There have been a number of inquiries and submissions from both NSW Police and the association. We have learnt an enormous amount from Redfern and Macquarie Fields, and I suggest we are doing it much better now. I am trained in the area. The association has made a submission to this inquiry, as has NSW Police.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: When you say you have learnt a lot from the Redfern and Macquarie Fields riots, it would seem to me that we have not learned a lot at all if they have not sat

down with you, the police hierarchy, because one of the issues that has been identified is a lack of leadership of the hierarchy. If they had sat down with you to do a detailed debrief in every aspect of the campaign, surely—

CHAIR: You are referring to the Police Association's submission, not the police hierarchy. I think things are getting very confused here.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Sorry, yes, in regard to the Police Association which has a lot of input into this.

Mr WILKINS: The only person who can answer that for you is the Police Association. They did not consult me and I was not there. They did not consult Mr Wilson, he was not there. But they have made a submission on information that they have gleaned from somewhere and you would have to ask them. Since Macquarie Fields we have put in a new process of our response to public order management and I am very well versed with the way we will handle it and very well versed in the new process to be taken that is in place at this time. So I have no issue whatsoever, if there is an event that I am called to as a major incident response commander, that I would easily take a team and put in place an appropriate response to any incident, as is happening at the moment. If I get called tomorrow, I am more than comfortable with the way I would undertake the process.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: My comment would be that the police hierarchy would give a lot of weight to any Police Association report as representing you. I just find it difficult to understand that they would not have consulted you in greater detail to give more weight to that report.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You said you have learnt a lot from the Redfern and Macquarie Fields riots. The Coburn report after Redfern had recommendations from the Police Association in terms of OSG response and equipment. With the benefit of hindsight do you think those recommendations were applied with the Macquarie Fields riots?

Mr WILKINS: My understanding was that they have been applied.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: There was a conflict in terms of what the Police Association said in terms of right equipment. They said that not enough equipment was available, it was inadequate, it was too slow to get to the scene, there was no rehydration for officers. I think Mr Clifford disputed that. What is your view? Were your front-line police adequately supported and resourced?

Mr WILKINS: All I can say is what I have been told because I was not there.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Mr Wilson, would you like to comment?

Mr WILKINS: Certainly, we have improved and there was equipment on the ground at the time. There are two differing views of that. There is Mr Clifford's and the association but Mr Clifford was on the ground at the time and he believes there was enough equipment there. I certainly have enough equipment available to me at this very moment. I have run operations as recently as last weekend, two weekends before that, food is organised, logistics are put in place, planning is done, operational issues, investigations issues are all in place. So I have no issue with that at this current time. So I think we are well and truly well equipped and we can handle the issue without any problems whatsoever.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Mr Cotter, in terms of your role, do you have a dedicated vehicle? You do a lot of outreach work, do you not? Do you have your own vehicle to get out there?

Mr COTTER: No, we utilise a pooled vehicle. There are several officers using that pooled vehicle at the time. But we do the best we can and try to share that amongst us.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Is that a problem?

Mr COTTER: It could be an advantage if we had another vehicle available but we utilise whatever we can at the time. A lot of that has to go for police response to maintain visibility and all

those types of things. So it is a bit of an issue as far as juggling the cars around but it is not a major issue as such. It would just be an advantage.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What is the highest rank that a youth liaison officer can achieve?

Mr COTTER: Senior constable.

CHAIR: Superintendent Wilkins, would you like to tell us what you would like to see come out of this inquiry?

Mr WILKINS: What I would like to see is some recognition for the good work that is being done in Macquarie Fields. I go through a process of most places I go that I am very positive about the work that is being done by both the police and the community of Macquarie Fields and I take note of the chap from the Salvation Army on before. There is a whole range of good work being done out here. The police are working at an exceptionally high level at the moment. I am very proud to be their commander. But a lot of the time that good work is not being recognised; it is overshadowed by a very small group or a very isolated incident. So I would like some positive outcomes from this Committee to recognise the good work that is being done in the community, not only the bad or those incidents that were unsavoury. The other thing is that I would like to get feedback from the community via this Committee to say, "Look, this is the way we can do things better. This is the way we think we can interact with the police." We are very supportive of the groups and we are very supportive of the community. That is my strong focus. So if the community would tell us how we can do our job better in interacting with them, I would like to hear that.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: They are more likely to read the *Daily Telegraph* rather than read a parliamentary report.

(The witnesses withdrew)

BRUCE SANDER, Principal, James Meehan High School, Harold Street, Macquarie Fields,

MARGARET BALLANTINE, Chairperson, Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group, 1/34-38 Gordon Avenue, Ingleburn,

JULIE LONGLAND, Team Leader, Campbelltown Youth Service Incorporated, 40 Broughton Street, Campbelltown, affirmed and examined, and

BEVERLY ANNE NEWITT, Principal, Guise Public School, Eucalyptus Drive, Macquarie Fields, and

ROY DANIELSON, Campbelltown Youth Centre, 30a Victoria Road, Campbelltown, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Will you please tell the Committee what you do and give us your views? We do not have any formal questions. We will give each of you about five minutes to talk and then perhaps ask you questions. Who would like to start?

Ms BALLANTINE: I would like to start, as a resident who came to Macquarie Fields in the 1970s. Although we were all very thankful for our lovely houses, we did not expect the complete isolation and the lack of services, even basic services. There was a bus service that ran Monday to Friday from six o'clock in the morning until 5.30 on Friday night. On Saturdays and Sundays a lot of families were left on the estate with nothing to do and no means of getting anywhere because they did not have their own transport.

A lot of families had left their family support systems behind. Consequently, a lot of them had not honed their living skills, never mind their parenting skills. A lot of men who had jobs gave them up because there was always this big promise that the Ford company was going to build a big factory at Minto. That never materialised either. Then alcohol started to play a big role in Macquarie Fields, one to relieve the boredom and one to get them through the weeks. Domestic violence became a big issue.

Victims, for various reasons, would not charge the perpetrator. One reason may be because they were frightened of retaliation. Another maybe because a bad partner was better than no partner at all. The police were blamed because the victim expected the police to take action. The police could not take action—then, they could not anyway—so you had children listening to police being blamed for everything that went wrong on the estate. The police station then was a three-roomed affair at Ingleburn, which covered Macquarie Fields, Ingleburn, Glenfield and Minto.

I should imagine there was only about half a dozen police in that station then. They were overworked and they just could not cope with the situation that was happening at Macquarie Fields. The next generation was listening to what their parents were saying and, to me, the whole episode at Macquarie Fields is a generation thing. It has been passed down from one generation to the next and we have to step in and work with the whole family, not just the children. We need to work with the family if we are going to see any success. That is my opinion about it, anyway. The Government is taking services off us. The Primary Connect goes at the end of this week.

Mr SANDER: It is back.

Ms BALLANTINE: It is back, is it? That is good. What about the one at Curran School? That has only got six months, so we have been told. And these are programs that have been shown to work with both the family and the child. We do not need services like that to be taken off us. If anything we need more funding so that we can hire more workers. One worker working with a large group of families is asking for burn out.

Mr SANDER: I have been principal at James Meehan High School for eight years. Prior to that I was deputy principal at the same school so I have been working in this community for 14 years. I think that the school has been able to achieve quite a cultural change in the time that I have been there and I think that the school has an interesting and almost unique place in the community.

During the period of civil unrest we adopted an attitude of sanctuary and we deliberately avoided dealing with the media and we deliberately avoided making any sorts of statements on either side. It was part of the image that I think we have tried to develop over the years with people who have worked in the community for a long time. We have a very high retention rate of staff, which is contrary to expectations of schools in potentially difficult areas. Throughout the civil unrest, throughout the period of two weeks while things were going on, the school was no more than 200 metres down the road from where the action was occurring. We suffered no vandalism and no graffiti. We took no extra steps to add security or to have security on the site.

The approach we took, I think, was rewarded right up until the very end when the police did request, through the department's liaison with the police, come into the school and make public statements to the students about avoiding conflict with the police and so on. I might just come back to that in a few minutes.

My perceptions—and I do not come with a wish list; I think the thing that is important here is that people need to establish themselves in a community like Macquarie Fields to be seen as an effective agent of change. As I say, we have turned around the turnover—something like 25 per cent of the school changed every year—to less than 10 per cent over the last six years. But I think relationships are very important and the reason I mention this is because one of the points that I would like to make about the interaction between the community and the police was that the school has a very good relationship with people in the local police and I cannot speak too highly of Chris Cotter, who has been working in the community for a long time.

Margaret and I jointly run with Chris the blue light discos, which serves the school well because the police assist us with the discos and I guess it serves the police well because we provide the local knowledge and local contacts with youth. In fact, on the evening of the accident there was a blue light disco, which was very successfully completed. We had about 160 or 170 kids there that night. It finished at 10 o'clock without incident. Unfortunately, an hour later things became unstuck, but the important point that I wish to make is that I believe that the local police who come into the area and stay in the area long enough can establish real contacts with people and I think Chris has been able to do that.

In the 2nd week of the unrest I was asked to have police speak on assembly. I said that I was not prepared to have general police come into the school and make statements to an assembly. After 2 hours of negotiation I agreed that Chris Cotter would be allowed to come. Chris came in plainclothes and I introduced him on a school assembly and spoke briefly. I actually said, "Look, I am going to introduce Chris Cotter to talk to you. He deserves your attention, he has earned it." Fortunately this was at the end of the civil unrest. Chris came along and the kids, without being requested, gave him a spontaneous round of applause and they gave him another round of applause at the end. What he said was very cogent.

Of the many arrests that were made, only two of them were actually our students, but one of them came forward at that time and said to me, "Sir, I have got things that I am concerned about and I would like to present myself to the police but I only want to talk to Chris." And he subsequently did and he was charged. Many of the people close to the people involved I did not recognise in the media. There were a number of ex-students and I think there is certainly an issue in relation to contact with young people who have left school.

We, as I say, have quite a good relationship with the local police so I guess the only two points that I wish to make at this time are that in a community like Macquarie Fields, relationships and building up credibility with people over a period of time are very important. Unfortunately, the Macquarie Fields local area command works with lots of domestic violence and that is a difficult situation to work in.

If something could be done to retain police in the area longer so that they could overcome that cultural change, which is the change that we made within the school—my average teacher has been with me now 9½ years—and if you look at western suburbs schools and south-western suburbs schools, I think you will find that is quite a high number of years; it is possible to do that once you have been there and you have known the families for a long time. Then people see you as individuals

and not as someone representing the Government or the Department of Education and Training or someone behind the uniform.

The final comment I wish to make—and I have probably used up more than my five minutes—is that I just have a perception that throughout the event there was a decline in the level of community support for the police. We had a swimming carnival on the Monday after the initial event and there were a lot of community people there and there was strong sentiment in favour of the police but by the end of the second week of things, I think that had eroded quite badly.

I have lost track of whether it is the tactical response group or who the non-local police were, but I heard them referred to by people whom I respect in the community as the "black shirts". I honestly felt that some of the anecdotal stories that I heard of rather heavy-handed policing certainly impacted, and it took a bit of time for the local police to overcome the damage that was done by that. I will hand over to Bev.

Ms NEWITT: I have lived in the local area for about 27 years. I come from Minto. I am the principal at Guise school, only coming back this year. So I came back to not a very nice welcome in the community. My first experience at Guise was my first 11 years of teaching, so it was no surprise to come back to the area, and it was lovely to see that some of the people who were there then are still there, and new people as well.

I choose to comment only on government programs and service provision in the Macquarie Fields area and their impact on, and relationship to, the underlying causes and problems which may have contributed to individual and collective acts of violence and social disorder. That is points 2 and 5 of the memo sent by you.

In addition to low socioeconomic status and/or the associated problems of dissatisfaction, hopelessness and depression, and lack of personal resources, the way the community is organised and segregated leaves them isolated from the community at large. Probably the only people that some families and high school students see from the outside world are teachers, health workers or DOCS workers. That social isolation is a sad thing. You do not understand it until you see it; it is hard to believe.

Mistrust is rampant. This in turn leads to aggravation, and then to aggression against neighbours, police, school, DOCS, and so on. Violence and confrontation is often the only way some members of the community communicate. Children learn from their parents, their siblings, and their peers. Quieter residents—of whom there is a majority—live in fear and anxiety, careful not to say or do anything to upset the thugs: locking themselves in at night, frightened to speak out or assist the police or authorities as they are in fear of what could happen to them. It has already happened to other families, so they know it may happen to them. This is a real fear, as others have been beaten and stabbed, and houses burned and property vandalised.

Mental health issues are prevalent. Some adults are barely able to look after themselves, let alone raise children. Others live in fear of these people too. Drugs, alcohol, time—some have far too much of it. And those people affect everyone else, in a negative way. A few "entrepreneurs" prey on the mentally, physically or emotionally weak. This trend is only to get worse as the Department of Housing now intends to have shorter leases, and to grant tenancy only to the most deserving, with preference to disabled people. I am sure I read that in the Department of Housing report at the beginning of the year.

So the problems, as I see them, are growing bigger exponentially, whilst the services, the solutions, are getting weaker at the same time. It does not make sense. Commonsense would expect that if the need is greater, then the services would be greater. But then, there is nothing so uncommon as commonsense. At Guise and Curran, two services that have given support to the families, Primary Connect and Schools as Community Centres, are to be discontinued. I have just heard that Primary Connect is now not to be discontinued, and I am so grateful to have another two years.

CHAIR: You have Primary Connect, and Curran has Schools as Community Centres?

Ms NEWITT: That is right. The positive outcomes the programs have provided in building trust and cohesion in the community have been established. The community values the two co-ordinators, and are willing to seek help and work in a positive way through them to ensure improvements in their lives. Families have been learning how to deal with difficult neighbours, older children, and so on, in a more positive way; people have learnt to seek training to improve their prospects; and parents have learnt to trust these people to look after their children so they can improve the lifestyle for themselves and their families. This has led to a more positive outlook for everyone. If people are depressed, concerned, worried and fearful, it is not a good thing. The work is constant, however, due to the 30 per cent turnover of families, which is now due to the new housing conditions.

The holiday programs that Primary Connect provides enable students to learn appropriate social skills, and enable them to participate in a wide range of enjoyable activities in a safe venue. Parents entrust their children to these programs, giving them respite. Many parents have no partner, and some have no family support either.

Miss Bishop, who is the co-ordinator of the program, is paid to organise, support and run a huge range of activities, and I will list some of them. They include information sessions, which includes family and individual counselling; and DOCS and Burnside programs in the school, such as Families First and Seeing Positives and Negatives [SPIN], which is a wonderful program for children who are a little depressed, feeling that everything is overwhelming and too much for them.

The program also includes after-school activities such as dance, sport and art; a breakfast club; student lunches; and school excursion notes. Some students do not get their notes in on time; some parents are not able to do that. The program also includes mothers' and fathers' activities, such as fitness, craft, garden, sport, and parenting groups; holiday programs; boys and girls and at-risk groups; and playground support. Playground support was especially needed during the riots, because what happens in the community often comes into the school. If we can get on top of it, it does not go too far, but we still maintain that we need extra vigilance during those times.

The program also includes further training for parents, such as TAFE computer courses, and speech therapy for students. There does not seem to be any other way that parents can get speech therapy for their children; it is very costly and it is not available in the local area.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Could you give us the percentage of students who require speech therapy?

Ms NEWITT: I might not be able to tell you the percentage. The speech pathologist sees about three groups of five children once a week. The program also includes local community celebrations, such as community barbecues and carols evenings; and evaluations and exit strategies for the program. The positive outcomes of the program are really too numerous to mention. Sometimes we do not see all the positives that happen down the track, because we do not always see the difference in the families. I think we would see a lot of negative outcomes if we did not have the program in place.

Positive outcomes include trust and co-operation between home and school; partnerships developed with both government and non-government providers; access to on-site service provision for families; the establishment of a safe community space that is used for a variety of purposes; greater participation and involvement in school life and activities; empowerment and support for families working on projects to improve their school and local community; improved educational opportunities, and improved student and family welfare; reduced violence in the school and playground; support and counselling in crisis situations, such as the riots, and the death of the Primary Connect counsellor earlier in the year; families, students and teachers in distress because of domestic violence, drugs, and all the other social impacts in the area; suspension programs in the community; school improvements, such as gardens, displays, and parent helpers; and the development of exit strategies.

We are so grateful to have Fiona because there is so much to do and not enough people to do it.

Ms LONGLAND: I have worked in the Campbelltown area for about 14 years, but for only 18 months in my present position. When I came on board in this position we were a relatively new team. Out of 10 staff, 5 had been hired in the six weeks prior to my starting. So a lot of time was spent looking at the area around us, looking at the local government area. Some of the things that became really obvious, and have already been spoken about, were the isolation of the families, low incomes, and domestic violence. The problems we were finding with the adolescent group were the high DNA problems and self-harm, and in the last 12 months a lot more teenage pregnancies have been occurring in the area as well. It is perpetuating the cycle that they are already in with a lot of their families. We have also come across two and three generations of State wards, where it is the child, the parent and the grandparent before them, so that whole cycle has been perpetuated once more.

What we looked at this year—and the need was really accentuated by the problems at Macquarie Fields—was the service that is being implemented by the youth programs, especially the community-based ones. They were operating out of buildings. Those buildings are not placed where the majority of the community. At the time they were built, maybe 20 years ago, they were appropriate. The present youth centre is not even within the vicinity of where the riots occurred; it is in a different part of Macquarie Fields again, so the families are isolated from that youth service. Often the only way they will access the service is when we are able to use our buses and pick up the young people and bring them in to the centre.

This year we looked at changing our service delivery model, where we now take the programs out into the community. It is too awkward for young people to get to us where we are situated, so we now go out to them. We also have the problem of staffing. We have one full-time worker, and so far this year we have had four part-time workers. We are about to hire the fourth one. That really affects service delivery.

CHAIR: One after the other?

Ms LONGLAND: Yes. We had two employed, but they moved on. The third one did not return from maternity leave, and we are about to hire another one. With regard to some of the programs we have been running in partnership with other services, we attempted to run a sports program, whereby it was not going to cost the local residents anything to belong to it, so they were not looking at high fees to join. We are still discussing with the local police the setting up of that program—and not just with our youth centre but with other youth centres as well so it becomes a total community project.

We have run cultural programs for young people in the area to enable them to understand their cultural background, to take ownership of that, and to look at their self-esteem and their sense of belonging in the local community. We have run an arts program as a way of allowing them to express themselves and what has been happening for them.

We have been in partnership to run literacy programs here at the TAFE college, which includes working with young offenders in the area. We have been in partnership with Shine for Kids to work with the local kids who have parents in gaol and help them deal with those issues as well. We have also been running, in partnership with Burnside, anger management groups in the local area.

We were given funding for an outreach worker, and that program is now up and running, where we have a third worker based at the centre who will now outreach into the community as well. For us, that has been the main issue. A high percentage of young people in the area cannot access our program because of its physical locality. We have had to change our whole service model to take the programs out to them, and base those programs around what they see as their needs. As has already been said, it is important to work and connect with the whole family, not just the young person.

Mr DANIELSON: I was one of the five workers who just started at Macquarie Fields, and I have only worked in Macquarie Fields for the past 18 months. However, due to the disturbance at Macquarie Fields, the youth centre worked in partnership with Macarthur Legal Aid and also with Trackside, which came to the youth centre. An average of between 10 and 30 young people access the youth centre on a day-to-day basis. After the disturbance occurred, we approached Macarthur Legal Aid and also Trackside to come to the centre to provide counselling and legal advice, and we also

opened it up to the families. However, not that many came to the youth centre, but those who did spoke to the different workers who came to the centre.

I continue to run programs today to assist in helping the relationship between young people and also the police, and I have worked well with Chris Cotter in building our relationship to try to bring that back. I was not really prepared for this meeting today; I just found out about it yesterday. But I would be willing to answer any of your questions for the sessions.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It sounded as though people actually got worse when they came to the estates because they gave up their jobs and then there was some social decay, is that correct?

Ms BALLANTINE: Exactly. They got the feeling that they had been dumped in Macquarie Fields and nobody had told them that there was not a shopping centre and there was not a proper service. There was a train service that ran every hour then. They had all heard about the big factory that was supposed to open at Minto, which was going to give them these wonderful jobs. When all of this did not materialise with their jobs they lost all hope, a lot of them.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The collective loss of hope led to domestic violence and alcoholism?

Ms BALLANTINE: I would say so, or contributed to it anyway.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: People had jobs before they went there?

Ms BALLANTINE: I a lot of men had jobs, yes. Maybe their neighbour had not worked and he may be \$5 worse off than the man who was working 40 hours a week. He was staying home and he was having a drink every day. He was going to work, but what did he have to show for it? Really nothing, except maybe this \$5 extra.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It was institutionalised. You were saying there have been three generations of State wards and an increase in teen pregnancy. Do you think that is the baby bonus kicking? Why is there an increase in teen pregnancy now?

Ms LONGLAND: I think part of the problem is that even when the workshops are done to educate the young people they do not seem to really comprehend what you are teaching them. All too often you get a response, "It won't happen to me." I know that is an old response, but we still hear it. "I am okay. I can live with my boyfriend. I won't fall pregnant." It is a naive comment, and it comes down to when you are trying to educate them that they do not really understand the implications of what you are saying to them. Maybe it is just following in their parents' footsteps, "Mum's had a few kids and been able to live on the pension, so we'll be able to do the same thing and everything will be okay."

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is DOCS very effective in interventions?

Ms LONGLAND: I think DOCS are very overworked. I think they need to concentrate on severe cases that are turning up in the community. It is more coming back onto the community services to help the other families as much as they can.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Who would you see helping these people who are getting pregnant? How would you stop it? What means would reach them?

Ms LONGLAND: A combination of services in partnership to deliver the workshops, whether it be in the schools, in the neighbourhood centres or in the youth centres—wherever young people are—even if it means handing out information at the local shopping centres.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is there a problem of accessibility? You are looking at a health promotion message, which tends to use either medical or educational models?

Ms LONGLAND: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The people who most need it least get it, is that the problem?

Ms LONGLAND: A lot of the people who really need it are not aware of where to get it. We need to project more in the community what is available.

Mr SANDER: There is a more fundamental answer to that regarding teen pregnancy and it is linked to comments Ms Ballantine made. This community has a huge self-esteem issue. If you come from a family who has internal self-esteem issues, if a boy gives you attention you are not thinking, "What did the teacher tell me last Friday about not getting pregnant?" At a very fundamental level you are thinking, "This is something that really feels good to me." The education programs are running, but the two comments that were just made are very closely linked. Particularly since the media portrayal of Macquarie Fields the self-esteem of the people living here is shattered even more than it was before. The historical comments that Ms Ballantine made certainly are reinforced by things that we have found within the school.

Some 60 per cent of our students come from a single-parent background, 37 per cent of them have parents who are unemployed and we turn over about 25 per cent of the kids in the school each year. But it is the same 25 per cent so that 75 per cent of them who start with us in year seven finish, but there is the cost of mobility and turnover within the community often coming into and out of the same houses. If we imagine there are three houses, Ms Newitt might have lived here for the whole time, I might have lived here for five years and Ms Ballantine's house might have changed five, six or seven times in that period. Youth issues are very much embedded in a situation that the parents find themselves in for the last three or four generations.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: You have given some great responses today. The report states that for families from other cultures there is a cultural breakdown between generations. Young people are adopting the cultural mores while parents try, but fail, to maintain judicial discipline. I did not quite understand what you were getting at there.

Ms BALLANTINE: I found that in the beginning there were a lot of Arabic families in Macquarie Fields. The girls especially wanted to go out with their Australian friends that they had met at school and stay out until 10, 11, 12 o'clock at night or whatever it was. But the family had the rules where the girls did not go out unless they were accompanied by a male member of the family. That caused a lot of conflict within the families. A lot of young Arabic girls left home and ran away from home rather than staying in the environment that they did not want to be in. They wanted to do the same as their Australian friends and live by the same rules. They did not want to live by the old cultural rules that their parents had brought with them.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Is that still the case?

Ms BALLANTINE: Yes, in certain families it is still there. It is not as prevalent as it was, but it is still there.

Mr SANDER: The Pacific Islander culture suffers from those now, too. There is a very strict religious upbringing, predominantly Lutheran, among Pacific Islander families. They come from positions of some standing within their community in Samoa, Tonga or even New Zealand and when they arrive here and they find themselves perhaps economically slightly better off, in Macquarie Fields their social status diminishes considerably. They find security in the religious mores that they have always espoused, yet often the youth who attend church resist that sort of strict upbringing because they are living and immersed in a culture that is entirely different.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I note today an announcement to extend Primary Connect but only for two years, is that correct?

Mr SANDER: That is correct, to the end of 2007.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Has that program always been funded for only two years? Is that the recurrent funding for it?

Ms NEWITT: I am not sure about that. It was a two or three-year program initially, and it was extended this year. We have an extension from June this year until December this year. It was from June to June and then we got a six-month extension until December and now it is very welcome news that it has been extended again for two years. It is wonderful. I think it commenced in 2002. It is a fairly recent program in the big scheme of things.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: That is government funding to a school but the NGOs we spoke to have stated that the same issues about finding concern them. You might like to comment on the continuous cycle of having to resubmit for funding that lasts for only a short period of time.

Ms NEWITT: I can speak also on behalf of the parents who talk to me a lot. Whenever you put a program into a school or into a community a lot of community members are co-opted to put in a lot of work to sustain it and to make sure that they spread the news and get excited about it. What happens in Macquarie Fields, indeed any community, when you keep recurrent funding or you change the program and put other people in is that you are really wearing out the good hard-working local community members who support it. It gets very difficult to get people excited and interested. It is a problem.

Ms BALLANTINE: I think St Vincent de Paul said it very well this morning when they said that the big groups, the big organisations had a better chance of getting the funding than the individual organisation. I really think that is true.

Mr SANDER: It certainly is true that Macquarie Fields even prior to this event was one of the most studied communities. I know that people got sick of studies being made of them. It is true that there are lots of really good equity ideas, but the funding seems to come along and I have seen so many people come in and promise so much only to disappear a year later, and that is universally true. If there were one recommendation that would be really useful to come out of this in the long term it would be that programs need a three-to-five-year lifespan because it takes a long time to establish the relationships I was talking about earlier. You are spending all your time writing submissions, too, which becomes painful.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you have members of management committees that are on a number of other management committees and are you wearing out the people in your communities?

Ms NEWITT: Yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: It has been suggested that having an overall authority, not the same as one established in Redfern because it is mainly a real estate authority, to oversee the social services component of an area to co-ordinate and build capacity would be worthwhile. How do you think that would work?

Mr SANDER: I think it would be essential. If you could overcome the political and cultural gaps between different agencies that would be a fantastic thing to see. Schools are the government representatives in the place so we end up doing a lot of things. For example, every Monday is a very busy day because we do counselling for all the domestic situations that occur over the weekend. Someone threw something over the fence, or parents broke up and you end up doing marriage counselling, or finding homes for kids who are on the street. The comment about DOCS is absolutely true. Maybe DOCS is in a position to take up that mantle, but unless it is a critical sexual assault or a child protection issue the chances of getting a quick reaction out of DOCS realistically is very poor.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I have one final question in terms of services on the ground. Are we better placing government funding towards large NGO organisations such as the benevolent

Society and the St Vincent de Pauls of this world rather than spreading it around smaller localised services?

Ms LONGLAND: I worked for one of the large charities for quite a few years, and I have worked for a small NGO. Personally, I would like to see more money directed into the small NGOs. I think they are more grassroots, more in touch with their local communities, more aware of what is going on and what is needed. I have nothing against the big charities. As you said, a lot of the money tends to go to them anyway and we need to partnership with them to run the programs to meet the needs. But they are such large structures that their policies are being made by people much higher in the management level who are no longer in touch with what is happening in the local communities. Most of the NGOs are staffed by people who work or live in those communities or around those communities and are much more aware of what the needs are and how to meet those needs and what to do about it.

I believe that the funding needs to be looked at in view of the NGOs. It probably sounds biased because I work for one but it needs to be increased because the small percentage that it is does not always meet the increases. At the moment we are paying more than \$20,000 a year just for our insurance. That is a fair whack out of our funding to run a program. Then we have added costs, like the funding has never kept up with technology. The NGOs are battling to keep up these programs and they are the ones that are on the front line trying to achieve that.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I ask for your advice and opinion as to my comment that self-esteem and a positive image are vital and important for us to look at from an early age and the schools are the front line of that. When we looked recently at the issue of literacy and numeracy and the question of early intervention to ensure that a person has the ability to be part of the drive, to belong, we found that the issue of being able to communicate, speech therapy and early intervention in regard to that was so vital. Can you give us some advice as to what is happening in that particular area in trying to get young people, especially the seven-year-olds to 12-year-olds, to the point where their understanding in literacy and numeracy is being brought up to scratch?

Ms NEWITT: When children come to school they come from such a wide range of backgrounds. Some of the children come in and they come from very different parenting so you would have those children plus a lot of children who are barely weaned off the bottle and very poorly toileted and have very limited English. They cannot tell you what they want. They are not able to verbalise a lot of this. So we work very hard in the schools at first, even before they come in with orientation programs and the SAP program up at Curran as well, to ensure that we give the children that opportunity. The Primary Connect program also runs parenting programs for the whole family, to teach parents to be parents. Teach them how to play with their children, to teach dads what to do, teach mums what to do, how to react, behaviour management strategies, everything. So that is very important and we tell them to read with their children.

We model it. We have days when we do that. So there is a whole range of strategies that we employ and when children come to school we hope that they have got a little bit from us before they get there but when they get there we do a lot of activities first and get the spoken language done first and then we start looking at reading and all the strategies that go with that. But it is a very long trip for some children and some children are very developmentally delayed. We have a lot in our community, and it is even longer than what you might call the normal. I hope I have answered that question.

The Hon. IAN WEST: What are the percentages?

Ms NEWITT: I cannot give you the percentages.

CHAIR: If you have some information in the school that you could share with us, you can take the question on notice.

Ms NEWITT: I would like to do that.

Mr SANDER: What particular percentages are you looking for?

The Hon. IAN WEST: I am trying to get a handle on the numbers in a classroom who have reading difficulties, the percentage who have physical and mental difficulties.

Mr SANDER: I understand. Against State averages, I could give you anecdotally that pretty close to 60 per cent of our students would be below State average. I just want to make a comment because you started off with a thing about self-esteem and it was following up on something that I had said. The sense of isolation that occurs in Macquarie Fields has a huge impact on that and I just want to give you one example. We developed a relationship with a law firm in the city, Minter Ellison, a few years ago. One thing we did was set up a mentoring scheme where students in our year 10 class go into the city and sit with a mentor from the law firm every two weeks of the year.

This is the first year that we ran that scheme. There were 23 students involved. Without significantly changing the year 10 curriculum or a year 10 delivery, we saw the best school certificate results that we have seen in five or six years and I attribute it as a direct link to those 23 kids who almost all excelled in the school certificate, relative to previous cohorts. No-one was teaching them to read better when they were sitting at Minter Ellison, but they were having life experiences and they were learning that they are part of the world and that they have a future and they are entitled to have aspirations. They became more engaged in learning. I have never seen a quicker academic outcome as a result of a program than that. Having said that, my 56 staff run 88—I do not make this number up; I have them here—different welfare programs.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: You were talking about children who are developmentally delayed coming into school. I assume that when you are talking about those specific children you are referring to issues other than the ones you mentioned as some of the problems with children when they come to school, some of the issues about toileting and all those sorts of other things. Can you perhaps just speak a little further about some of the issues and what the school has to do with other children who come in as developmentally delayed?

Ms NEWITT: A lot of developmentally delayed children, when they get old enough the counsellor tests them and we may find out that they fall within an IM range. Even so, parents often choose for those students to stay at school. So although they may be entitled to go off to a special class, they do not always. So they are always in classrooms. We do not usually test those children straight away because sometimes we work with them. We make sure that it is not an anxiety thing because they are coming to school from such a different environment. We give them an opportunity to learn with everyone else. We do not ring warning bells until we give them an opportunity to learn first. Sometimes there is no information before they come to school so we are learning about those children from day one. But when we see that they are not progressing as we expect they would with the good teaching practices, then we certainly look into intervention. We have the STLA assess them, and we get the parents in and talk to them. I do not really know what more you are asking.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: I think you have answered the question about how you identify some of these children and the fact that one of the difficulties you have at school is the fact that you may not have some information on these children before they actually start school.

Ms NEWITT: Yes. In most communities you would probably find that children who are developmentally delayed have already been targeted. They have been to a paediatrician, probably from the time they are born. A lot of our children have never been assessed or diagnosed and that goes for behavioural problems as well.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: I suppose the other question in relation to that would be before children come to school but just in terms of children being taken to early childhood centres and some of these issues being picked up there.

Ms NEWITT: I think it is very difficult sometimes to know what is an issue with the student's learning and what is a family issue. Some of the children move around so much that none of the health care professionals or DOCS people really know how they are. It is not until we try to get them to school on a regular basis that we can even do that, and sometimes that is a difficulty as well because attendance is a problem.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Some of it comes from the fact that in terms of record keeping and things like that it has been impossible to do that with some of these children.

Ms NEWITT: That is right.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: So you are working, once the child comes to school, I suppose to use an analogy, working out what happens with a child and their learning capabilities and all the other things that go with it and then picking up some of those problems as they are in school.

Ms NEWITT: That is right.

CHAIR: I want to ask particularly about what happens to kids when they leave school. We know from the Government's submission the percentage of kids who do not finish, who leave at year 10 and so on. I am just wondering whether basically they are in a sense thrown out of school and left in the lurch. What do they do with themselves? There must be a number of kids in the community who are leaving school early with pretty bleak employment prospects. You were talking about 56 staff running 88 programs but I guess every one of those programs ceases once the kids leaves you. You also mentioned recognising a number of ex students during the disturbances. I just wondered whether we could get a bit of a picture of that age group and what is available for them through the youth service and so on.

Mr DANIELSON: With the 30 young people who use the youth centre, I guess 75 per cent of them are schoolleavers and are not working at the time. But we try to provide, in partnership with TAFE, to put them into education opportunities and make them more aware of what is accessible to them for career opportunities as well. So I try to provide programs and ask them what they want to do. There is a program that I am working with Guise High School with a mentoring program. I have asked each of the students what kind of careers they want to do and I have tried to find out ways that that could be accessible to them to achieve the careers they would like to do and some of the employment opportunities they could receive after school. There is a big issue there but I am trying to break that down by providing programs for them and researching different areas for these young people. I guess it comes back to believing in themselves, whether they could actually achieve it and self development within themselves. I am trying to let them believe in themselves and enable them to be able to stand on their own two feet and to go out into the work environment.

CHAIR: I have an extra question to you, Bruce. I think the witnesses from Burnside yesterday also mentioned the very high levels of suspensions from school in this area. Are many of the kids who leave school early also the kids with a history of suspension?

Mr SANDER: There is a significant relationship. Having said that, we have been doing suspensions of about 40 per cent over the last five or six years, so if you are looking at the history of Macquarie Fields in the mid-nineties we were running 70 or 80 suspensions per term. Now we are running 35 to 40 suspensions per term, which is relatively high.

CHAIR: Is that the number of suspensions or the number of kids?

Mr SANDER: No, that is the number of suspensions. It is usually probably two-thirds that number of kids. By far the vast majority of that would be short-term suspensions, four-day suspensions. Probably one-fifth or one-tenth of them would be long-term suspensions, up to about 20 days. But the issue you have identified is quite correct. Young people who leave school really disappear into the vast unknown. We track them as much as we can.

For example, we established the Mac Thing Tutorial Centre for students who become disengaged from school in 1999 and, in fact, I just came from the graduation ceremony. It is the longest running State program as an alternative education centre for up to 12 people at a time. They attend three days a week, three hours a day, and it is done in conjunction with Macquarie Fields TAFE. I think that has catered for about 200 students since that time.

Some of them exit back into school, some of them exit back to employment; some exit to TAFE and some to incarceration because that is the nature of the young people we are dealing with. But I would identify that as one of the most significant issues relative to this inquiry because so many

people that I saw on television were people who had been in school three years before or two years before and, to the best of my knowledge, are not doing anything in particular now.

There is no big agency, as Robyn mentioned, that could co-ordinate or pick up the people, as individuals, who have slipped back into that cycle and are now having children, who are going to continue in that cycle.

CHAIR: I am conscious of the time and we have more people to speak to this afternoon. There may be matters that we think of later. If it is all right with you, perhaps we can get back to you at a later time, just as we will get back to Beverley with a specific question or two. If other Committee members have questions, we may contact you at a later time, if that is all right with the five of you. I thank you for your attendance, for your written submissions and for allowing us to grill you. On behalf of the Committee, I congratulate you also on the work you are doing. I also acknowledge the new local member for Macquarie Fields, Mr Chaytor, who is present today.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

(Evidence continued in camera)

IN-CAMERA PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

At Macquarie Fields on Tuesday 13 December 2005

The Committee met in camera at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans

The Hon. K. F. Griffin

The Hon. C. J. S. Lynn

The Hon. R. M. Parker

The Hon. I. W. West

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

The following community members appeared before the Committee:

Mr Adrian Parente
Mr Peter Raymond
Ms Jan Nicoll
Ms Annette Rogers
Ms Fiona Bishop
Ms Jenette Duckett
Ms Sue Dobson
Ms Julie Alley
Ms Michelle White
Ms Helen Tana
Ms Maree Mullins
Ms Trish Fogarty
Ms Jan Watson

CHAIR: The Committee is essentially here to listen to what you have to say. There is probably not much need for us to ask questions. Merely for own sake, we have itemised the matters we would like to hear about, such as the services that are provided in the Macquarie Fields area and their co-ordination, or lack of co-ordination. You may wish to comment on the adequacy of the services, both government and non-government, and how they work. Secondly, we want to explore the relationship between the community and the police. That is obviously an important long-term issue, and things may have changed for the better or the worse since the disturbances earlier in the year.

We would like to hear a little about living in Macquarie fields, from the point of view of being in Macquarie Fields but also how people in Macquarie Fields feel about the attitudes of people outside the area towards them, particularly in light of what happened earlier this year. We have would also like to hear about the long-term effects on the community. We do not necessarily need to stick to those matters because they are all inter-related, but they are the sorts of matters we felt you might want to talk about. We would like to hear from all of you if we could, because you all have a contribution to make.

Ms FOGARTY: I am the co-ordinator of the Glenquarie Neighbourhood Centre, which is based right next door to the police station. The neighbourhood centre has been in the area for about 30 years. The centre was on the estate in the beginning, in a house, and then it moved to its present location. Recently we have had a change of auspice: it used to be managed by the community but it is now managed by the junction.

CHAIR: So you are an obvious person to talk about the services provided in Macquarie Fields, and about how well they are provided, how they are co-ordinated, and who runs them?

Ms FOGARTY: Four services are based in Macquarie Fields: Primary Connect, the Schools as Community Services Program, the youth centre, and the Glenquarie Neighbourhood Centre. All the others are outreach services, such as Burnside. We work very closely with the first two services. The reason why I work very closely with those two services is that part of my job description is also to provide services in the Ingleburn and Glenfield area, which is a huge area, so I need to partnership, particularly with services that are based on the estate, which are the two school-based programs. That frees me up a little to go out into the other areas.

There are other pockets of public housing in the areas, but the Macquarie Fields estate is the biggest one. Sometimes the Department of Housing pockets feel left out because they are not in the mainstream, and they feel quite isolated. There are no services based at Glenfield at all, and yet there are still people in the housing estate with very complex issues, very similar to those of the people on the main estate. For them to come up to Glenquarie, you are looking at just over two kilometres; in some cases it is three kilometres. They are closer to the station than we are, but it is still a fair walk for them to access playgroups and basic services like that.

CHAIR: Do relatively few people have access to a car? Is the bus service not very good?

Ms FOGARTY: I do not know what the figures are, but certainly the percentage of people with their own car in this area, particularly on the housing estate, is a lot less than it would be in the private housing areas. Transport is a big issue, but it is not exclusive to this end. It is a big issue in the whole of Macarthur, in the sense that we have a private bus company and it is fairly expensive. If government buses were here, people would pay the \$1.10 or whatever. People who are on the pension have to pay close to \$2 for an adult and I think it is close to \$1 for children, so that is quite expensive.

For people to access health services or whatever, they have to go to Campbelltown. In some cases you are looking at a train and two buses, or at least three buses, or a bus and train, so public transport can work out quite expensive. There are some health services that do outreach here, but for the majority of services, for tests and specialist appointments and things like that, people have to go to Campbelltown. It is actually easier for people to get to Liverpool, but because we are under Macarthur Health Service, they have to go to Campbelltown.

CHAIR: Mr Parente, would you like to comment on that?

Mr PARENTE: I am from Macarthur Youth Commitment. A lot of the matters that Trish commented on were undertaken at the Macarthur Youth Summit, which took place in July this year. A lot of young people and service providers from the Macquarie Fields area attended the summit. We also run a transitional program, which supports young people at risk to keep them in training or education, and give them positive employment outcomes. So we work with a lot of young people.

One of the things that came out of the summit was the transport issue. It is an issue for young people to get around Macarthur, because of the lack of frequency of services, the services finishing early while young people are still out and about, and it is also an issue for young people trying to find work. Another issue was the lack of co-ordination of services and what is available through outreach programs. We work across the entire Macarthur region, which includes Camden, Wollondilly and Campbelltown. One of the things we have found is a significant lack of co-ordination of services across the entire region.

When you look at Macquarie Fields it is a microcosm that actually reflects what is happening across the region in many ways. There have been a lot of initiatives over the past six to 12 months where they are trying to get that co-ordination going on from the Federal, State, local and community level, which probably has been a major driving force for co-ordination. The trouble is the lack of that co-ordination. You have black spots where no-one is being covered and you may have two or three similar services that are repeating and fighting for clients in some ways because they are trying to support clients for a number of things where they cannot use outreach services or whatever and then you do not necessarily have a good referral process either. A young person can be referred to a service, but not necessarily an appropriate service. They are referred to a service that is available nearby doing the best that they can. That lack of co-ordination does not impact on just what the people can get, it is whether they get to the right service. That is the key issue for a lot of young people. That is what I mean, a backward nation.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Where do you get funding from?

Mr PARENTE: We get funding from the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Department of Education Science and Training. It is Federal Government funding. We have had small funding from the State Government in different ways. The Premier's Department provided some funding for the Macarthur Youth Summit and New South Wales government departments attended as well as Federal government departments. One of the things we were funded for as an organisation was to attempt to try to help co-ordinate services across the region. I could pass it on to Peter Raymond, who was the co-ordinator and who has a better picture on that side of it.

Mr RAYMOND: My name is Peter Raymond and I am the co-ordinator. Macarthur Youth Commitment was set up as a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to supporting school to work transition for young people. Our focus is school to work transition across the region. I also chaired Macarthur Youth Services Network, which is a broader range of youth services in the region, focussed not just at Macquarie Fields. We are coming from a broader regional perspective. If

we can we would like to table this youth summit report because of some of the issues that have been referred to in terms of relationships with police and relationships with services, employment and a whole lot of other outcomes have been touched on as part of that summit. We looked at socio-cultural issues, education and training issues, and industry and employment issues within that summit. They are covered in that. We wanted to leave that with you, if we could.

CHAIR: We would be grateful for that.

Ms WATSON: I am Jan Watson. I am the Facilitator of the Schools as Community Centres program at Macquarie Fields. The program has been running for 11 years. It is an early intervention program, working with families 0 to eight and I am based at Curran Public School. I just wanted to make a comment about co-ordination on a local level. We have set up the MIG, which is the Macquarie Fields, Ingleburn and Glenfield interagency, which works quite effectively on a microlevel within Macquarie Fields. It was established two years ago and we worked consistently to develop good partnerships between services that provide initiatives in Macquarie Fields. It is well attended. Every service that provides a program discusses what are minor issues pertaining to families and individuals on the estate. We have made an attempt on a microlevel to do what we can to increase communication between services on the estate. That is just one of the many issues at Macquarie Fields at the moment.

I support what Ms Fogarty was saying. One of our biggest problems at the moment is a lack of services in general. I found it interesting in looking at some of the Government audited statements about how many services and the amount of dollars that have been spent in Macquarie Fields over the years when in reality, in terms of consistent service provision, there has not been any on the estate. Youth services is a big area that has been severely lacking, and continues to be lacking on the estate in terms of appropriate services for children aged 12 and youth up to 25 or so. But we are very dependent on outreach programs, which often receive funding to support the whole of the Macarthur region or the whole of the Campbelltown LGA. Unfortunately, in between Macquarie Fields and Campbelltown where many of the programs are based there are also areas of a very high need. One of our levels of frustration is that services will peter out by the time they hit Minto.

Although we will hear, "This program has received either FACS funding or State Government funding" and we say, "Oh joy, just what we need. How wonderful!" the reality is that with other housing estates such as Claymore, Airds, Rosemeadow and Minto by the time they get up to this northern end of Campbelltown the services just are not there. We also suffer from a geographic positioning of being right at the end of an LGA at Campbelltown way and also at the end of Liverpool. Often we are forgotten and the community is bounced in between "It should be Campbelltown based, but you should go to Liverpool", which creates an enormous amount of confusion. But the reality is that we tend to miss out. Even though on paper it often looks very good when you do an audit, the reality is that there are still very limited services that come out here and that for the community to access the services you need to establish credibility and trust, which is very hard to do as an outreach service.

I have been working for 11 years and it took me a good 23 years before I felt that I had a very positive relationship with the community and that there was a good working relationship and an understanding. But when you have different workers coming in for an afternoon one week, two-week initiatives or four weeks the community tend to sit back and say, "Who are you? What's your agenda? Why are you really here? Is this a flash in the pan and then you are going to disappear?", which is more often the case than not. It is that combined effect of no services, outreach services that did not allow the community to build that trust, which is essential for this community, with the end result that we are lacking in services. We have also seen an attrition of services. I was delighted to hear that Primary Connect is back on board for another two years, which is excellent for this community. But at the end of the day we have lost the Housing Community's Assistance Project worker's position, we have had the family support services removed from the estate and also we have lost other small services and programs that were invaluable. Over the last 11 years, in the time I have been here, we have seen a decrease in services rather than an increase

The Hon. IAN WEST: What was the first service you mentioned?

Ms WATSON: The Housing Community's Assistance Project workers position, funded by the Department of Housing. It was auspiced by the Glenquarie Family Support Program before it was moved off site. Basically it is a community development position looking at empowering the community to take responsibility and to promote initiatives to create a positive environment for residents on the estate. The funding was shifted from Macquarie Fields to Rosemeadow, which needed the position as well. We have had it for nine years. I understand that we have to share resources, but the removal of the position had a significantly negative impact on this community.

Ms MULLINS: My name is Maree Mullins and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Junction Works, and we auspice Glenquarie Neighbourhood Centre. I wanted to reiterate what Ms Watson was saying. What we have seen since we reauspiced Glenquarie is that there are a lot of existing services in the area, long-term services, that are poorly resourced. Those existing services that are based here have built up that trust with the community. It is important for government to fund or upgrade those existing projects so that they can provide those services to the community. We also ran youth programs in Liverpool. During the riots we were not dragged—that is probably not a very good word—but we were asked to come over here and run programs for young people in Macquarie Fields.

CHAIR: Who asked you?

Ms MULLINS: Different services asked us. We liaised with some of the schools, which was great. With James Meehan, we went in there and ran a series of workshops on violence. Those partnerships were really great but we saw that there was a need and the local community members had actually asked us to come and run these programs here. So for a Liverpool service we were still trying to do programs in Liverpool. Enhancing what Jan was saying, Glenquarie and Macquarie Fields are on that fringe northern area of Campbelltown so in some instances they are seen as being part of Liverpool but not as such because they are really part of Campbelltown or Macarthur. It would be great to have some better infrastructure planning processes for existing services in this area.

CHAIR: Is the boundary a common one? Is the LGA boundary also the health boundary and the education boundary?

Ms MULLINS: It is all different. Each government, State and Federal, has a different boundary line. We would sometimes come into Glenfield and do programs in Glenfield but I think with the problems we had earlier this year we saw that there was a need to come into this area and because we were asked to come in and I think that young people particularly at James Meehan got a lot out of that project. Building those partnerships with existing services is very important.

Ms WHITE: I am from the Salvos at Macquarie Fields. I came in at an interesting time. It is interesting to see Jan face to face because we have spoken on the phone but we have never met, which is really good even though we are around the corner. I came into town at an interesting time. I received my appointment in early February and actually moved in at the end of the week of the riots. So it was completely unplanned to move in at that time but that is just how it worked out. We have a number of services. We are located on the estate on Eucalyptus Drive. We have a huge centre there. At our service we cater for a lot of different things. We are a community centre as well as a long day child care centre. We have a lot of stuff happening.

I guess the interesting thing from my perspective is that, I do not know about you guys but I have been running so hard since I landed in town that the opportunity to actually stop and get out to do other networking is huge because we all seem to be quite underresourced and therefore the time being to actually go out and meet other networks and other agencies is quite difficult. I guess that being where we are I have been able to develop some strong relationships with just our neighbours basically and communicating with them. It has been interesting to perceive, when we are talking about the way that people feel being a resident of Macquarie Fields and the negativity that is projected on to them in the areas that they live and I guess the stereotypical things I guess has impacted on people. I guess even through the subtle levels of communication that they feel towards government departments and a specific issue the other day arose with the Department of Housing.

As many of you know, there are some houses directly across the road from our centre which are being demolished at the moment. There was no warning, no consultation, yet asbestos signs went up on a fence and little men in space suits came out. We have a child care centre across the road. The

neighbours live three or four metres away from those houses and none of us was communicated with whatsoever regarding any form of risk or any kind of precautions that we needed to take. It is almost like there is a breakdown of communication with some of those things, which is not how to build the profile. I know that the residents I was speaking with across the road and around us were saying they probably just think it is Macquarie Fields so it does not matter. So I know that while not everybody has a negative perception, there is a large group of residents who see that either people are coming into town trying to tell them how to live their lives and have the answers for everything or they are judging them for the way they live or they just do not care enough to even communicate so what is the point.

That has been an interesting thing that I have picked up. Certainly something that I am excited about the possibility of is our venture with James Meehan next year with the suspension intervention centre. That is something that I guess is a passion that I have. Instead of kids having to be dealt with within the school system, it is almost like a further isolation from any positive help because obviously you cannot have the kids behaving this way at school. It is difficult to address the needs because we are also limited in our resources. In terms of things that are operating out of our centre, we are keen to be working with other community groups. We have the midwives from Campbelltown hospital. They come and work out of our centre on a Thursday and I know that they are expanding next year. But the difficulty we have found is that some clients of those services have this perception that, because of our location, they are afraid to come to the centre. So that has been an interesting thing. People who live in other areas of Macquarie Fields or even Ingleburn get off the bus and think, "My goodness, I don't want to come here".

So it is breaking down some of those barriers. I guess the other specific issue that I am keen to address is just the services that are available to young people after hours. We did have an accredited bush program. Unfortunately, because there is a need to register with Centrelink for the CCB for all those things, it was not an effective program after school in our area. The kids that we had coming to our centre, their parents were not interested in dealing with Centrelink. So we have recently changed last term to have it as a drop-in centre that is now funded through FACS block funding.

The children that we do get to our service are probably most of the kids that nobody would have in other services that are catered for—no, that is a bit of a block statement but they are the difficult children. The issue that we are having is finding staffing ratios that meet the needs of the children because they are two different things. We can have the ratios that are compliant but we have the kids who are high-needs kids and the kids whose parents do not appear to be aware of where they are a lot of the time. So we are trying to bridge that gap between the parents and the children and communications between I guess some other agencies that can network them in with help yet they are very high-needs kids. It is very difficult to try to fill that gap and keep running and doing everything else at the same time.

CHAIR: Who wants to pick up some of the points Michelle made?

Ms BISHOP: I co-ordinate the Primary Connect program and I am based at Guise Primary School which is on the estate. I had been on a school excursion this morning and just got back to school to come here and found out hopefully that Primary Connect is continuing for another two years. I still have a job. To reflect back to you, I walked back into school and there is a community meeting with a lot of mums and community members for the community carols they are running tomorrow night. Four of them were crying and are so empowered that they believe they have worked towards keeping the Primary Connect program here. It is not just the Primary Connect program; it is programs in their community that they believe in and support. Primary Connect would not be successful if it was not for the great community members who are around so I wanted to feed that back.

CHAIR: How many of the mothers are involved with it?

Ms BISHOP: It is both schools, Curran and Guise schools. At the moment there is a meeting over there for the community carols and there would be 15 mums and community members organising that whole thing, and they drive a lot of that sort of stuff. In terms of Primary Connect, I started here in August 2002 so I will just pick up a bit on what Jan, Trisha and Michelle have been saying. The first question I got asked when I walked in was, "How long are you staying for?" It has taken me I

guess until now in the last six to 12 months to feel comfortable or for the community to trust me. I think one of the issues is that they feel betrayed often in the community because services, as we have already said, come in and are taken away in the short term. The question I get asked is: Why can't people think long term about Macquarie Fields? I think that is an important thing to address.

Primary Connect works with primary school children and their families. It was a pilot program—I am not sure what I call it now. It has gone past its two-year pilot stage. We run school holiday programs, after school programs, parenting support workshops and groups, a lot of programs for women, but all of those exist only because we are in partnership with the other services in the area. We have partnerships with TAFE. We work with Trish, we work with Jan and we could not survive here if we did not do that. I am an isolated worker in a primary school. Jan is an isolated worker. Trish is and all of us here are kind of isolated and we have to rely on each other. I think that is a real strength of Macquarie Fields and something that often does not get portrayed.

Ms ROGERS: I am Annette Rogers and I was the Hcode worker at Macquarie Fields for the last six years of the nine-year program. I just want to say that I agree with everybody who has spoken so far. There is a problem of isolation, our area where we just get dropped off the face of the map, the lack of consistency, also for our young people that great matter where they finally meet people they like, they work with and they move on, that constantness, youth workers especially, and the youth centres not being open as long as they should be. In fact all the centres are working hard to keep the service but it is really hard for the workers when they have to go out and do community development and also run a centre.

At the moment it is very hard to get volunteers because volunteering costs money. I used to have 200 regular volunteers for Macquarie Fields. One thing I just want to say is how good the people were. People worked day and night for our project. They worked non-stop. They learnt a lot of skills but we treated them with a lot of respect as well. Every person got a reference in a reference book and pictures of themselves doing their projects. They got linked into TAFE, university, into management committees. It was a way of moving people on. One thing I would like to say is I am very concerned that TAFE outreach has been downgraded as much as it has. TAFE has been an integral part of the work at Macquarie Fields. A lot of our mums did a lot of the courses. They made the mosaic wall in Macquarie Fields and they got a certificate for working on that mosaic wall. So it was all integrated what we were doing with the TAFE outreach.

That does not happen any more and it is very hard for some of the mums. They cannot link straight into an ordinary course, especially now with new systems, new policies and procedures from government where you have to go back to work when your child is six. You still have to think of things like aftercare. We are very lucky that Primary Connect is still going to happen because my big worry was who would look after these kids until mum comes home. We have so many kids who are on the streets. The suspension centre will be wonderful because I am sick of seeing five-year-olds, six-year-olds, even three-year-olds crossing main roads and walking around with nothing. They do not eat properly. I have been part of area health's nutrition program and one thing I can say this area has really helped, the whole Macarthur area has been helping to integrate good nutrition into the schools and a lot of Jan's work and a lot of people's work has made that happen that the schools canteens are very healthy now.

It still comes back to mums and dads who are not eating properly. We trialled a food bank program and we had over 100 families in that trial. We did not have to advertise it. For \$15 they got a box of food. It was very good food. They learnt how to make fruit and vegetables in season. A lot of them just do not know the basics. I am sorry, it cannot just happen with the kids. They still have to have evening meals and things like that. People just cannot afford that sort of meal.

In the early days Jan used to run a service where we would take turns going to the markets in town and bringing back things. That was very successful too but again, trying to keep those things going around your normal job, it was virtually impossible to keep it going and the need is so great. That is another area I would like them to look at. Also with the young people, I did say in my written submission that I really felt we were going to have more expressions of anger and I think that whenever people feel like the powers that be who are in control of their lives do not listen to them, you are going to have these outbursts of anger.

I think it is wise to look at the reasons why and not just say, "This is illegal behaviour or rotten behaviour". It comes for a reason. Macquarie Fields came for a reason, like in Cronulla. My husband lived in Cronulla and he said that group trying to run the beach had been right back from his day, even before this Lebanese crisis, so again it has just got to a stage where people just said, "No more". They are trying to grab back a bit of their own power too. Yes, it is the wrong way.

I am really concerned where all this is going. This is the time we should really listen. I believe communication is a crucial thing. With the help of Macquarie Fields we put together a book called *Community Renewal: Community Development and Community Action from the Residents' Perspective*. That was the work we were doing all put into words. It was to help the people when the Housing Community Assistance Program [HCAP] left. Unfortunately, there was nobody there to drive it and people did not get taught it. I would like to table it. I have the whole thing on disk if people would like to help. People should keep learning these things so they are not lost. I have added an extra communication chapter.

CHAIR: Please give that to Rachel.

Ms ROGERS: That communication chapter is about working in groups and group dynamics. It is all the communication issues such as conflict resolution. There is still a lack of trust with a lot of people, even with the agencies that have been around a long time and who have worked really hard, but there was never a memorandum of understanding like there was supposed to have been when HCAP finished and things just dropped and all of a sudden nobody was there. There was nobody that the tenants trusted to pick up the pieces.

They did not want an agency worker but then they did not want just a tenant either. It was a catch-22 and a very frustrating time for services and tenants alike. These communication issues have to be worked out. There has to be a way where the groups can be different but where they can work together. I see them doing this at Airds, Claymore and places like that, where people are very different but for the common good they will come together for certain things and do other things on their own. I would like to see that happening again for Macquarie Fields.

The only other thing I would like to add is how many people are breaking down, how many people are having mental breakdowns in the area? I work with a group called Beautiful Minds, which is trying to get a clubhouse for people in the south-west area and hopefully in this area. I know people in whole streets now of Macquarie Fields that have a member in just about every second household going to Waratah health unit and that is pretty bad. When you see numbers like that, it is not one in five like the average community. We are getting one in three or one in four.

A lot of them are very healthy people mentally but they are breaking down because they have a lot of physical problems. The Federal Government at this stage is being very hard on those people. Centrelink is sending a lot of women, especially older women, out to pursue jobs. One Aboriginal woman here in Macquarie Fields had a bypass operation and she was told to go and look for a job. She ended up having mental breakdown on top of this because she was physically unwell. That is a Federal issue. We would really like people to look at what is happening there as far as Federal policies around Centrelink and how people are being treated, especially with intensive support services.

Ms FOGARTY: I want to pick up on Annette's comments on mental illness. That is the big issue and I probably see at least five people a week with some sort of mental illness who just need somewhere to go and someone to talk to. It takes up a lot of my time but they have got nowhere else to go. The other thing I need to say, which has not been said, is that one of the issues on the estate, while we do have a stable amount of people that live on the estate, it also has a big population that moves and they move across the State.

You could work with one particular family or a couple of families for two years and make some breakthroughs and a difference, but then that family moves on and you have to start again. The Government seems to think that you have a project for two or five years and that you solve all problems but they do not realise that it is a continuing circle and you have new families come in and you have to start again.

CHAIR: I think that picks up the point that Bruce made, that 25 per cent kids turn over all the time.

Mr SANDER: Yes. Turnover is the big issue. I did speak to the Committee at length this morning so I do not want to say a lot this afternoon. It is interesting, having heard people this morning and having heard this group this afternoon. I know all these people because they are all connected in some way. Although they work in their isolated pockets, they have contributed and I acknowledge that almost all of them have done work for kids in Macquarie Fields and James Meehan High School and almost all of them have been in James Meehan High School helping out in some way.

I am getting the image—and I have had it for some time, and I want the Committee to have this image that in a period of economic rationalism which is occurring in this country—a sense of disempowerment is coming across this community and there are a lot of people working desperately with diminishing resources, but still working to come up with lateral-thinking ideas to solve these issues. What has developed is a sense within the community of cohesiveness. That cohesiveness exists also among the young people. And you will get a chance to talk to them shortly.

Just to reconnect this to where it started with the police issue, that sense of connectiveness to Macquarie Fields and Macquarie Fields boys, who are not really an organised gang per se but have an identity among themselves is just an extension of all this. When I heard a police officer say, "We felt like we were in a war zone", I think that what they did not say was the corollary was that they were the invaders. They were seen by those people who were functioned in a sense of isolation and sometimes quiet desperation—and again this is where there is discrepancy between the local police and tactical response group, whoever they were, that when they came in, they were seen as people who never were interested in Macquarie Fields before but who came along to put us down and put us in our place. That sense of invasion was very real, particularly by the time the second week came along.

Ms DOBSON: I am a councillor on Campbelltown City Council. I also worked on the Airds-Bradbury housing estate where the young gentleman Kelly was picked up. I put in a paper to the upper House because my experience on the ground has been so varied and I thought our housing estates are interrelated. They are interrelated because we have whole families and their relatives living right across the housing estates in Campbelltown. Crime is interlinked across the housing estates. Drug trafficking is also interlinked.

What I would like to pick up on first of all is one of the issues that Trish talked about, that is, funding that goes into the housing estates is only minimal and it is usually short-term funding. Campbelltown council closely works with the Department of Housing estates. Our LGA understands the issues and it also understands what needs to be done but what needs to be done never gets done. First of all, I would like to say council has child care centres across the housing estates here in Campbelltown. Those child care centres and social worker could be funded to support families on the housing estates and to do respite care with recurrent funding.

One of the biggest issues I would like to talk about here today is preventing school failure and the students who fall out of school because they behave disruptively, they truant. They are more likely to offend than those who achieve at school. What sort of homes are they coming out of? Dysfunctional homes, homes where parents are on drugs and alcohol. They have not worked for long periods of times. They are families that have had no opportunities in life or had access to resources. They cannot resources their children through our public education system.

Here again we have schools on our housing estates so that those schools really need to be funded adequately to support these youngsters and their families to make sure that children are attending school. If there are problems at home, they should be linked into other services. I just do not think there are enough resources across the schools on our housing estates. There needs to be more money going into the schools.

We need to be refocusing youth at work. Youth work as an important role to play in reducing the delinquent lifestyles amongst the youth. Outreach youth work and more focus on preventative projects have been shown to work but they are never given the long-term funding to show real

benefits. I would like to talk a little bit about the Kelly lad. He came back to Airds after the fiasco here at Macquarie Fields. Why did he come back to Airds?

CHAIR: We just need to be a little careful. We are in camera but there is a court case.

Ms DOBSON: I only want to make the point that he came back for support because that is where part of his family were. That is all I wanted to say. I was not going to say anything else. I have a real issue with the bureaucracy making policies about our housing estates. I am sorry, but they are so far from the reality of it. There is a turnover in the bureaucracy so that people running these policies do not always have the long-term history of the housing estates.

Campbelltown copped the housing estates. It was told, "You are going to have it." Our local government has never had the resources to deal with the issues that everybody is facing out there with the estates. I watched a show on *A Current Affair* recently where it talked about the New South Wales Government and it costing \$850 million or some enormous amount in relation to damage done to property with burning and trashing of houses. I just want to say that I believe poverty and crime are all interrelated to mental health issues and we have enormous mental health issues on the housing estates.

The biggest issue is this. If I am working with a family in Airds and I know this family needs to go and see a clinical psychologist, how do I send them to see a clinical psychologist? They do not exist in Campbelltown, not in the mental health system there. You might have families that are suffering from trauma. The parents have had to carry that trauma from their own childhood. Where do you send them when the service is \$160 or \$180 an hour? Mental health issues on our housing estates are enormous, and they are costing the State Government millions and millions of dollars every year because there is no way to correct them, or to treat them, so people are just growing up the best way they can. I think that issue needs to be looked at. Area health in Campbelltown, in Cordeaux Street, has been closed and the staff dispersed into other centres. We have no area health centre in Campbelltown, and that is a real issue.

Another issue I would like to talk about is transport. In peak hours the Department of Housing estates probably have a good service, but out of peak hours it is non-existent. I think the State Government and the Federal Government need to work more closely with local government to create long-term programs to work on these housing estates. Local government has child care centres across the Department of Housing estates in Campbelltown, and they have sport and recreation centres across the estates in Campbelltown. Instead of just dishing a bucket of money out to one non-government organisation, there really needs to be a long-term strategy to lift the housing estates.

I honestly believe it can only be done through local government, who work closely with the services on the housing estates and do understand local issues far better than any bureaucrat that is on somewhere between \$300,000 and \$500,000 a year and lives in central Sydney or in the eastern suburbs. They have no understanding. That is why the policies over the last 25 years, implemented by the bureaucratic system, are not working on the housing estates. I really think this issue needs to be thrashed out with local government.

The services on the ground right across the housing estates are underfunded and the issues are far too complex for them to deal with. If anybody thinks that any of the services on the housing estates today will fix up the problems, let me tell you they are not. I have been on the ground at Airds for more than two decades, and I see one generation after another coming up with the same problems. And you are housing them on your waiting lists, because it is the next generation that is waiting to get in.

I get a bit passionate about this, but I felt I had to come here today and say this. I am not speaking for Airds; I am speaking for every housing estate in Campbelltown. I really believe that the way to run permanent programs, whether it is family projects, Campbelltown council has the infrastructure and the staff on the ground. When peak non-government organisations are funded, in a lot of cases they do not have the infrastructure and the professional staff on the ground that council has. I really think that the whole restructuring of the way money is going into the housing estates needs to be looked at, and I think that local government, the State Government and the Federal Government need to form some sort of committee to work together to make some really significant changes on the housing estates.

I am really concerned about the mental health issues. I am really concerned about the youngsters growing up in dysfunctional homes, and who will never have an education. They will come out of that system, and then the system will say to them, "Now you must work." We can get them a job, but how long will they keep the job for, if they have drug problems or alcohol problems? They simply fall into crime. I honestly believe that we could cut a lot of the costs and get the housing estates working, with a collective government approach, with the services, and with the infrastructure that is already here on the ground.

The best programs that will work on the housing estates will be the ones that are there for the long term. If you said to me today, "Sue, here is \$300,000. Go out and employ yourself"—a senior clinical psychologist, who is professional at the top of his or her field, can go and work with those families. It would not be so easy, because that person would have to be introduced to that community and the services that are running off that community for him or her to go in there and do the real work that needs to be done.

I have left some material here that I would like to tender. In summary, there are a couple of submissions here, one from the Community Drive Action Team [CDAT], an initiative of the Premier's Department, which went to the Federal drug and exercise commission to run programs through the support centres in Campbelltown. It was rejected. The next submission is from a disadvantaged community-based counselling service that came out of the Airds community service. We sent it in to Stronger Families at the Federal level. We also sent it into Stronger Regions. My feedback from the submission was, "Sue, Airds does not need this program." Let me tell you, if these types of submissions cannot get up, and if Airds does not need these programs, then there is no hope for Airds—and there is not much hope for the rest of the housing estates—in making significant changes.

Ms DUCKETT: I facilitated a community conference for three of the young offenders in the Macquarie Fields riots. What struck me most as a result of the conference was, first, the lack of understanding by the police officers present about the impact on the young people who took part in the riots about what they saw in front of them when they were confronted by the police. I think Bruce mentioned the notion that they were being invaded. They did talk about feeling like they were in a war zone, but I think there was an incredible disempowerment by seeing numerous police officers coming in and taking over part of their world when what they were actually doing was grieving the loss of friends.

I am not in any way condoning the stolen vehicle and all the rest of it, and we know that there are court cases and things happening. But there was an incredible lack of understanding that these young people were grieving and that is why they behaved in such a way. I just hope that is never lost as perhaps a cause behind what happened.

CHAIR: One of the points we wanted to address was relationships between young people and the police more generally. Would you make a comment on that, as it is at the moment and how it was perhaps months ago?

Ms DUCKETT: I had to go and talk to a lot of community people. What I heard, particularly from the young people, was that once upon a time they did have good relationships with the police, but the police had come into Macquarie Fields over those days, they did not know those police, those police did not understand them, and no-one told them why they were there. For instance, no-one told them that the reason they could not go to the accident scene was that it was a crime scene. No-one explained that to them. They said to me, and they also said that the conference, that if someone had explained to them that they could not go to where the car was because it was a crime scene, they would have accepted that, but no-one explained to them what was happening.

My impression is that the young people I have spoken to really do want to have a good relationship with the police, but they are not going to lose their pride to build that relationship; they need to keep their integrity and their identity. There is such an incredibly strong sense of identity with these young people, and that is really important to them.

CHAIR: Is that stronger in Macquarie Fields than in some of the other estates?

Ms DUCKETT: I work in a lot of different areas, and this is the strongest I have ever come across it—the way young people support each other without any reference to what their background is, what their race is, or what their religion is. It is quite marked to me.

CHAIR: Does anyone have any idea why Macquarie Fields is different from, say, Minto, Claymore or Airds?

Ms NICOLL: I am a full-time worker at Allawah House. I am based at Minto; I have worked there for 11 years. I am also a community member in Macquarie Fields. I reiterate what everyone else has said. The services that are available in the whole Macarthur area, particularly Macquarie Fields, are not comparable to the needs. It is at a level now where I believe it is beyond crisis point. As a run-off from what I do at Allawah House full time, I also run an outreach project in partnership with Argyle House, and DOCS funds the package per client. We have had four clients over three years; the fourth client has just gone in.

The purpose of this is to stop the cycle of homelessness and young people living in an abusive situation with babies and raising children—children raising children themselves. What has struck me in the four years we have been running that program is that 90 per cent of the referrals come from Macquarie Fields. All the clients who have been housed, due to need, have been housed from Macquarie Fields. There have been applications for more beds in the Macarthur area, but there is just not the funding, unless the Department of Housing frees up the houses.

Between Allawah House and the Liverpool refuge, based in Liverpool, there are only two beds. So we can only provide that accommodation for two females for 12 to 18 months. That is historically abhorrent. If we had not got on the bandwagon from the DOCS inquiry five years ago, this would never have happened; we would not even have been aware of it. We are now in the process of working out how services can collaborate together to provide a need in Macquarie Fields that most people do not even have any idea exists. Madam Chair, you asked me a question earlier.

CHAIR: I was referring to the comments about the young people of Macquarie Fields and their sense of identity, their cohesion.

Ms NICOLL: The community itself is very insular. I think we are at a time when we need to look at modelling from within—the energy that needs to be harnessed from within the community. I think it is time to look at assessing individual skills, achievements and goals that people can utilise from within. What is happening is that, while all the services and resources are provided and they are operating at a low-resourced capacity, your significant resources are the community members themselves, who have been largely undermined, I would say, for three generations.

The energy that needs to be harnessed needs to come from within, and they need to be empowering their own community. They need to be learning how to put together their own internal justice, so things like this do not repeat. The reason it is not working now is that they are not responding to services; they are not part of their core, insulated, cohesive community. We need to acknowledge that the riot is not a one-off incident; it is historical. I can give you incidences for every week over 15 years, if you want. But the reality is that it has to change.

Some of these young people who were involved directly in the riots know that their relationship with police has been through their older siblings. The barrier is already generational. About six or seven years ago it was at its best, that is when they were working together on the community skate park. Their profile working with young people was higher. You would see the police walking around and they would sit on the back of the pub wall talking to them. You would even see them out the back of the old squash courts talking to them and then change of command happened. One thing that has happened to the system in Macquarie Fields is that change of command has happened so consistently and quickly that there is no consistency. There is no cohesion. There is no opportunity to develop trust. It really demonstrates the police and the policed. It is quite marked in terms of who the police are and who are policed. It has developed a culture itself. At the moment the relationship is not good because it is waiting on the outcome of looking at how fair is our judicial system in terms of outcomes for the seven young men who were involved in the riot.

They have not taken them because they were in the riot, but because they were the only seven boys who could be identified on the video. What happened to all the other hundreds who were involved, the rest of the community and the families who were behind these seven boys? It is very important to the community today that these particular boys will not be scapegoats or made an example of within the judicial system. At the moment the relationship is not good. It is an extremely tense mood out there. Outside this forum I am sure that they always know that we must have the law in place, you must learn how to work and live within the law, you must have a relationship with the law and things like that because down the track their process through this experience since February is what will make them the best mentors and the best teachers. Henceforth it will come full circle and empowerment will come from within the community not people bringing it in from outside.

CHAIR: As many of you will know, we are also talking to a group of young people, which was due to start at 3.15p.m. They have been outside for a while. This always happens. Either we allow too much time or we do not allow enough time. We will have to wind it up. We probably can communicate with you, particularly people who feel they have more to contribute. Going around the table has thrown up so many things that you may be dying to say something, but we cannot keep the other people waiting any longer when they have been here for a while already. Everyone who wanted to say something has had a say. I feel as though we could go on for hours, but the people outside are very important to hear from as well. It is always a dilemma.

Ms DOBSON: The latest policy coming out of the Department of Housing is that they will only house people with the highest need.

CHAIR: We have heard quite a bit about that policy. We talked to the department yesterday.

Ms DOBSON: It is just that there will be no more role models in those communities.