

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING
INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

At Broken Hill on Wednesday 6 August 2008

The Committee met at 12.30 p.m. at the Centre for Community

PRESENT

The Hon. I. W. West (Chair)

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

Dr J. Kaye

The Hon. T. J. Khan

The Hon. M. S. Veitch

RICHARD WESTON, Maari Ma Regional Director and member of Murdi Paaki Community Working Party

JOHN HARRIS, Community Facilitator

DONNA KENNEDY, Chair, Aboriginal Community Working Party

MAUREEN O'DONNELL, Chairperson, Broken Hill Local Aboriginal Land Council

JOANNE O'DONNELL, Chief Executive Officer, Broken Hill Aboriginal Land Council

MARGARET MURRAY, Principal, Broken Hill North, for the Director of Education, Broken Hill district

JILL HERBERTE, Regional Director, Department of Community Services

KERRIE STANDLEY, Aboriginal Community Justice Group Coordinator

ANTHONY KICKETT, Indigenous Education Officer, Sydney University Department of Rural Health

CHAIR: I acknowledge the Wilyakali people, on whose land we are meeting. I thank them for their custodianship of the land and acknowledge elders, past and present. These proceedings will be recorded by Hansard and the report will be posted on the committee's website.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Welcome.

CHAIR: Thank you for allowing us to be with you today. I ask Aunty Maureen to give us a welcome to country.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I am Maureen O'Donnell. I am a Paakandji person and my language group is the Wilyakali group, which is a Broken Hill language group. This is my mother's country and our country. In the community there are a lot of other different groups, but the main one here is Wilyakali. On behalf of myself and my community, I welcome you here. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for the welcome and on behalf of the committee I acknowledge that we are meeting on traditional land. We pay our respects to the traditional owners and elders past and present. The committee has done its interim report on indigenous disadvantage. It took into account a number of issues. Copies of the report are available, but the main themes that we came up with revolve around measuring outcomes, coordination of service delivery, partnerships with Aboriginal communities and questions of insufficient funding. Those basic themes are in the documents that everyone has. Today we hope the discussion will be as informal as we can possibly make it. We ask everyone to participate and to share your expertise. We need your input and expertise to enable us to do our final report, which is due on 28 November.

As a parliamentary standing committee we will present our report to the Parliament and the Hon. Paul Lynch, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who will then present it to Cabinet for consideration as to whether the recommendations will be implemented. The Government of the day in New South Wales is required to respond to our report and recommendations, either positively or negatively. Thank you again for your welcome and thank you for being here. I officially open the meeting. Perhaps the best way to commence is for participants to introduce themselves and to explain why they are here.

Ms HERBERTE: I am the regional director for the Department of Community Services from our southern region. I am here today representing our regional director for the western area who was unable to be here. I have experience working with communities from Nowra down to the South Coast and also in Wollongong. Hopefully I can talk about some of the service models we use.

Ms MURRAY: I am the principal of a local primary school. I am here representing our local school education director, Trish Webb, who cannot be here today.

Mr KICKETT: I am a member of the community working party and also employed by the University of Sydney Department of Rural Health in Broken Hill.

Mr HARRIS: I am the community facilitator with the community working party here in Broken Hill.

Ms KENNEDY: I am the chairperson of our community Aboriginal working party.

Ms STANDLEY: I am the coordinator of the Aboriginal Community Justice Group. We have a group of Aboriginal people who meet monthly. We develop ways to address local law and justice issues. I am interested in the criminal justice system.

Mrs JOANNE O'DONNELL: I am the chief executive officer at the Broken Hill Aboriginal Land Council.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I am involved in lots of things. I am the chairperson of the Broken Hill Land Council and the chair of Maari Ma Aboriginal Corporation. I am also a board member of Mutawintji and chairperson of the Wilyakali Aboriginal Corporation. I am also an elder and this is my traditional country. I have seen organisations come and go from the beginning of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. I have seen many things come and go. I have had wide experience. Not many of them worked and that is why we have none today. That is why we are coming together today—to try to get something going. I am happy to have an input. Thank you.

CHAIR: Who would like to go first?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I think some of you will have seen the "Have Your Say" sheet that is available at the back of the room. A number of areas are covered in that sheet in terms of where we are looking to direct the inquiry. Part of what I would like to ask you in a general sense and to invite comment about deals with measuring outcomes. During our inquiry it has become obvious to us at times that there have not been consistent measures of performance and, in fact, even agreed definitions. It seems to us that there is often a failure in the delivery of services because no-one effectively measures it. I invite each of those involved in undertaking or monitoring programs to let us know whether you think the programs that you are involved in are effectively monitored.

Ms HERBERTE: The issue for the Department of Community Services is that we have now started with a very strong data collection system for the first time through our client information system. We now have a strong focus on data collection and reporting. You see that in our new report. The issue that emerges is the clear over-representation of Aboriginal families in the child protection system. That is the first thing we have encountered.

In terms of performance monitoring, what you want to see is that trending down over time. But for those families in the system we need to ensure that they get culturally appropriate and high quality service delivery. That is another thing that is much more difficult to measure. We can count who is in our system and we can want that to trend down. However, at the same time at the moment we are focusing on how we can improve our service delivery. You will see that in things like the review of the joint investigative teams that we operate jointly with the police to investigate allegations of criminality and assault—particularly sexual assault.

Our job is to ensure that children and families that are reported to us get the best possible service they can from our system. That might mean that sometimes those children continue in the system for longer—that is the good result—or they are diverted back into health and other treatment services really quickly. The challenge is not only measuring the incidents and wanting that to drop but also how we measure the quality outcomes. While we have programs in place to improve quality, we do not yet have the quality indicators.

Having talked to Kylie I know that we need to be thinking long term as well as short term. When we are measuring performance, we have to be thinking where we want to be in the long term and what that might take in the short term. The classic issue is school participation—we want more kids going to school and then to see an improvement in the literacy and numeracy rates. You hope that eventually that will result in kids completing school to year 12. That will take a very long a time, so we need to do it in steps.

Ms MURRAY: I thought that might lead into me. I am psychic. There are two parts: the programs we put in place based on funding and the normal curriculum base. We are probably more rigorous in terms of measurements because of the national testing or, prior to this year, the high school testing and the basic skills testing. There is huge accountability for schools across New South Wales. They measure Aboriginal children's performance and non-Aboriginal children's performance and give statistics for how Aboriginal children go

compared to the whole of the population. Then they give us measurements for how Aboriginal students go compared to other Aboriginal students across the State. I am hoping that when the NAT plan comes out that we will get intensive feedback like that because we use that to guide our programs.

When we do our federal applications for funding or the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations whole of school funding, it has its own criteria for assessing outcomes. Usually it is pre-testing of students. It is not as rigorous as the basic skills testing in the sense that we have a set of performances, but schools can negotiate how they will measure them. The same applies to targeted funding, which is State funding we have applied for. Perhaps there needs to be consistency in how we do that monitoring and assessment with those funding runs, because sometimes we have to adjust what we are doing in education to fit in with the funding guidelines. They might not necessarily be as we normally would do. Sometimes we would be happy to be more rigorous and give more data to account for the funding. Obviously, the outcome we are looking for is bridging that gap between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: With regards to other performance measures that you have, such as attendance and retention rates, are they capable also of defining the cultural background of the student or are they overall criteria?

Ms MURRAY: The department does collect statistics for that. For me, if I go back to my school, attention-retention tends to point to individual families and is not culturally based in my particular school, but across the State's statistics I think there is a percentage that says that Aboriginal children need to attend more. It can be family based in a specific school. In high school and staying on to years 11 and 12 are the retention rates we are looking at; that is slightly on the increase. There are positive steps in that direction, but the gap is still quite wide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Mr KICKETT: In regards to the comments of Marg and Jill, I think the context around measuring outcomes sometimes can be muddled by what actually really happens holistically in regards to community progress. As Marg indicated, if there are social issues around the child's performance in the education system, whilst they might be able to provide support in the education system, if there is no whole support outside of the school system then, of course, there is potential failure and it leaves our kids in the lurch. We as a community and as parents continually question having benchmarking measures put in place. If there is success in those benchmarks being positive, then an annual funding cycle can be detrimental to how we potentially can request further funding for particular programs for our kids. So, some of those measures that are quite structured can sometimes negate and regress achievements and progress for some of our kids.

Mr HARRIS: The whole issue around measures suggests to me the need for somebody to know whether progress is being made. I guess one of the fundamental questions in my mind is who is actually the target of this information? Is it in this context the Government? Is it the broader community, the electors? Is it a funding body or a funding source? I think we need to be clear about to whom we are providing the information and, indeed, what they want to know. Tony's point about the holistic outcomes is a really significant one. I think the western mind tends to be quite analytical whereas the holistic view is often more important. It is sometimes less easier to measure, yet nonetheless it is probably the thing we should be measuring, but because we cannot, we do not even try. So, while acknowledging that we need to have outcomes, we need to have progress, we need to have some way of monitoring forward motion, I think there is also a need to be really critical about who we are doing it for, why we are doing it and whether indeed the measures we are using are the ones that are actually measuring what we want to measure.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Have you any examples where you think we are measuring the wrong thing?

Mr HARRIS: Just picking up Tony's point about whether we are looking narrowly at the education system without measuring the interaction somehow back with community and employment, health and just that interconnectedness, it is not a measure of the health success of the education system, or success or failure of the kids. It is where the measures are taken. It is more a measure on the self-image of the people in the community, of the family's circumstances of the last two, three or four generations or more. It is really hard to measure that. It is just a complexity. The way we seem to operate in government is that we are looking at the family services, education or health silos, yet at the community level it is holistic; it is all coming together. It is just a real challenge.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That theme seems to be fairly consistent throughout the inquiry, the interconnectedness of the issues and how one problem will impact on a series of other areas. You are absolutely on point.

Ms KENNEDY: When you are talking about programs, the trouble I see is that a lot of programs only run for a short period of time. To me they are bandaid projects and programs. When you keep talking about measurements, you just start to measure and it stops. It needs to be longer term before you can really say you measure something. I feel in the community they are too short; they are just bandaid projects or programs. I do not think there is enough time that you would get a really good measurement out of it.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You would be pleased to know that that also has been a very common theme over the past few months.

Ms KENNEDY: We see a lot of things presented to our community working party but, once again, you hear it is just a short-term program. A lot of them are brilliant and fantastic and they may just start to work, but then it comes to a stop. It all boils down to the dollars.

Ms STANDLEY: I am all for the dollar, but my interest lies with criminal justice and there are not enough programs available here for indigenous people. Basically, it is all mainstream. The majority of them are incarcerated because there are no other programs for them to go to, basically. It is all short term if there are any programs available, and basically there are no other options. So, we need ongoing funding for these programs to have a good measurement based around the criminal justice system.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: If somebody is binned here, where do they go?

Ms STANDLEY: To Broken Hill jail.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Do they generally stay here?

Ms STANDLEY: Sometimes. It depends on the numbers at Broken Hill jail. Sometimes they can be shifted to other areas. It just really depends on how many are incarcerated. I know I am way off track.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And women?

Ms STANDLEY: Women as well. They can, but it depends. They can house only small numbers here, but then again they go to other areas as well.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Our measurements are a bit different in Aboriginal communities and what the Government looks at. If you are talking about just the schools, for my measurement in my own mind there is not much difference to what there was years ago. I do not think there is any improvement in the schools. Kids are still getting expelled too much. I think it has got worse because you see kids getting expelled left, right and centre. It is not helping them in their education. There is not enough put into the children at school and also how to teach the kids. It always seems to be behind four walls where for Aboriginal children there may be different ways to teach the children. There are different ways you can teach and none of the ways they have been giving schooling to our kids has changed. We used to go out and camp, like go out on the country and teach them. Those sorts of things need to be taken into consideration.

The school has got to be interesting enough for our kids to go and encourage them to go to school. And if they are being naughty, they should not be just chucked out. There has got to be better ways. I do not think Aboriginal people have enough input in the way they teach our kids. So, to me I do not see much change. I do not see a lot of our kids coming out of high school with certificates and that. They seem to be still leaving school early and to me there is no change in the system. They are supposed to teach Aboriginal language and different things in the school. I do not know whether they are doing that, but to me it has not changed over the years and that is my honest opinion.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Jill, your department is involved in providing funding for various programs, is it not?

Ms HERBERTE: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: A consistent theme has been the length of time funding is made available and then a program stops and another one is put in its place that may be quite similar but slightly different. Are you able to explain why what seems to be a pattern of churning of programs goes on?

Ms HERBERTE: The Department of Community Services [DOCS] at the moment has what we are calling a funding reform agenda. What that is doing is introducing a performance monitoring framework into new funding models: the big contracts that have recently been let for our Brighter Futures early intervention program or the new contracts that are in the process of being negotiated for out-of-home care. They will set targets against which agencies are monitored and they will be renewable contracts for set periods of time. Some of the problems with funding have been just its historical nature and the fact that because something got funded many years ago it continues to be funded, but it was always called annual funding. So, history will tell you that we do not take the funding away, but the services were never quite sure coming up to the next financial year whether they were actually going to get it. So, we are trying to shift that be quite focussed on agreed periods of funding monitored against a performance with a time frame for when you would renew that funding so that it brings some certainty into it rather than what we have at the moment, which is a legacy of historical funding.

The other issue that has happened is that the Commonwealth in recent years has only funded short-term pilot projects. So, the Commonwealth has replicated funding in some areas. Say, for example, they are funding around early childhood, family support services. That was three-year non-renewable funding. So people set up quite a network of services and they could not continue. So there certainly have been some Commonwealth programs and I think the historical nature of funding has meant that always annually there is a bit of uncertainty for people. Hopefully, we can overcome that now.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I direct my final question I suppose to both Marg and Jill. There are State programs that appear to be short term. By way of example I take the schools in partnerships [SIPS] program, which is a program that in most schools is funded for three years. We know that the program is directed towards improving numeracy, literacy and retention rates amongst our Aboriginal kids. Those are the long-term objectives, yet it seems that a school may only really start to make a small inroad into the problem and then find it does not have the funding. Can either of you explain the logic of a long-term chronic problem that is funded for only a short time?

Ms MURRAY: I think it actually is illogical. I was actually saying primary school performance indicator [PSPI] funding used to be similarly submission based, which means all the Aboriginal funding we put in for our schools is submission based. It depends on the group putting in, how well they write it, and whether they hit the criteria for the funding. Then for priority school funding we did a survey of parents and it has a formula based on the socioeconomic family. So, it is standard, not arbitrary, depending on an individual.

We have been told that Department of Employment and Workplace Relations [DEWR] funding for whole-of-school funding will probably go a three-year round, so you can put in a submission for a three-year project. If you are trying to bridge the gap you have to put in something extraordinary, above what you can normally offer, and that requires ongoing funding. If we all accept that bridging the gap for Aboriginal students is of major value in Australia we consistently have to put our money behind that, and that means guaranteeing every year that it will be there, and not saying, "I am not certain whether I will be able to hire you next year because it will depend on whether I get the funding." It means job security for Aboriginal people to hide behind those projects.

Ms HERBERTE: Those decisions are not made always within a region or within a bureaucracy; they are made in other forums. The value of continuity and of longer term so that you can see the change is something that I think we have to keep promoting.

Mr HARRIS: It is interesting that we started off the discussion talking about outcomes and we have ended up talking about funding. I think that is perceived as a direct link. My perception is that throwing money at an issue is not the solution. We need to have something that often money cannot buy—the missing ingredient in the solution. Service deliverers need to talk together. I know this is something that we have here, but we need to go a bit further to ensure that we have coordinated service delivery. To ensure creativity and solutions within the minds of the people who receive the service we need to contribute more. A whole lot of non-dollar related things probably impact on the success or failure of what we are trying to do at a more fundamental level than funding. Once we know what the solutions are we then put funding in to make sure that those solutions are sustainable. I find that interesting. I think we need to make the distinction that there is a non-financial solution and there is also a financial solution to each case.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In my defence, I have been given the job of asking about key performance indicators and money questions. Others will do that, but this is my role today.

Mr HARRIS: I am not trying to attack anybody; I am just making that observation.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: It is a role that you play very well.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: If someone is talking and saying this and that, are we allowed to have an input into that and say what we believe in? I am not just going to sit here and be a dummy or listen to what other people are saying. If I disagree with them I am going to say something about that.

CHAIR: Whenever you want to say something let us know.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: So we can come in and have a say.

CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: We had programs in the school. We had Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness [ASSPA] money, which gave us special things for Aboriginal children, especially for them and their parents, and they decided what to do with that. I think it was a great disadvantage to our children when they took that funding away. We have kids here with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] and they need to be looked at to see what their situation is. What do we have to do that is different to make them happy at school and to stay at school? I think children have to be looked at and there must be more consultation with parents and children to find out the best way to work with Aboriginal children. I do not think enough time is being put into our children and I do not think there are enough Aboriginal liaison officers, or whatever they are called.

Ms KENNEDY: They are called Aboriginal education assistants, but that name has now changed to Aboriginal education officers [AEOs].

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: There is not enough of them in schools to help with assisting our children. We need to see more of them there to help. When our kids go to school most of them start off with no education whatsoever and they might start off too late. They have not got the advantage of preschools to teach them and to bring them up to the same levels as white children and they go there disadvantaged from the start. We need more of those preschools to educate our kids to get them to the proper schools. You can see the difference in the few kids who are going to those preschools. When our children are going to school we have to look at every angle—when they start and are old enough to learn—and we have to get them across that and up into school and then there should be special care and assistance to help them. So we need more Aboriginal people working with children in our schools. They are not just a number to us; they are children and they are our future. We need to look at that carefully.

Ms KENNEDY: I want to make a couple of points and I hope that I get this right. We were talking about parent school partnership initiatives, or PSPI funding, that is, if the school applies for it. If the school does not apply for it, it does not get the funding. Is that correct?

Ms MURRAY: The parent school partnership funding?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes, the parent school partnership funding. If the schools do not put in an application they do not get that funding.

Ms MURRAY: You have to apply to participate in a survey.

Ms KENNEDY: That is quite an intensive application. There have been a few comments to the effect that principals will not apply for it because it is a lot of work. The other thing I wanted to pick up on was what Auntie Maureen was saying about AEOs, or Aboriginal workers, because I was one myself. The trouble is that it is about numbers. If you do not have 30 Aboriginal kids in your school you are not entitled to one. I know schools around the State that have more than 30 Aboriginal kids in their schools and they still do not have AEOs because it boils down to funding. When you talk about programs and things like that you need an AEO. If you

have Aboriginal kids it should not have to be numbers. If you have Aboriginal students in your school you need to look at having an Aboriginal worker there. Aunty Maureen is right; you need that support for those kids.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: When you are in rural areas and in smaller towns that number should be looked at. That number could be lowered because it is too high and there might not be that many children in a school. But the children are missing out on a service that is needed badly for their school. We should not just be looking at numbers and say, "We will fund this school because it has 30 children." Rural children, country children and our children are just as important as anyone else. I think that must be taken into consideration.

Mr KICKETT: I wish to build on a point Aunty Maureen made about our kids before they get to school. I do not want to disparage our community one bit but by the time they get to school they are pretty much street learned. When they come to a theoretical learning environment suddenly they are way behind, especially if they do not attend preschool or kindy. Another point that needs to be made relates to accountability. In the past there has been a constant fear that, if the Aboriginal community does not participate, it will lose out. So we generally support a lot of the funding opportunities. However, we have also found that if there we do not achieve success the funding organisers and ourselves are in for a bit of a spanking, so there is a degree of reluctance.

Because we want to achieve direct benefits for our children we get on board and become a part of it in a constructive way. There is an ongoing fear that, if we do not get the proper funding this year, we will miss out. If we do not get on the triennial Commonwealth funding bus we might miss out and get a shorter funding period or a shorter funding window. There are a number of considerations around how we measure outcomes and, in particular, accountability. In the past, a lot of organisations attracted quite a few dollars. Unfortunately, due to financial responsibilities and management, things have come apart. That is not entirely the fault of the community; in some way people have been set up to fail. As a community we are continually mindful of that.

In respect to measuring outcomes obviously it is a measuring tool. However, sometimes it can be a tool that can cause dispersion among our community, in particular, with educators and our system. We want to work with them and with the Department of Community Services [DOCS] but we are also at loggerheads with the children.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I would like to say just one more thing to make it clear. When our kids come home with homework we, as parents, are at a loss because to us it is all new stuff. That is another important thing. You cannot talk to your children about the homework. I am sure many more parents are in that situation in our Aboriginal community because a lot of them left school without working and the parents have not had much education. So there is another part of the school system. We do not know the new lingo for reading, writing, sums and all that. It is an entirely different thing. So that part is also missing. Kids cannot talk to their parents about anything because we do not know that sort of thing because we never made a go of it.

Mrs JOANNE O'DONNELL: As a parent you use that as an indicator to show you how a program is running. If children are getting notes sent home that state they have not handed in an assignment it could affect their year 10 certificate. But when programs in schools are running successfully and funding has come through you do not see those notes. When you do receive one you then ring up the school—it is the first thing that you do—and you find out what is going on. You then find that that program has had to be paused to due to funding and it has not been delivered on time.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Mark Kickett has been working on a lot of important things in our community. He has worked right around the State. I would like to see him have a chair at this table because he has worked in different organisations and he is very knowledgeable about children in our Aboriginal community. Maybe he has something important that he would like to say.

CHAIR: Aunty Maureen, we are more than happy to speak with Mark about making a submission, or we can talk to him. A submission can be made in a number of ways. I am mindful of the important issue that has been raised by Tony and others relating to an holistic approach. I am mindful of the fact that I have fallen into the category of doing things on the basis of silos, which is a bureaucratic and terrible mistake to make. The four issues that we have raised here relate to measuring program outcomes, coordinating service delivery, delivering services in partnership with the Aboriginal community, and insufficient funding. Those issues are not meant to stand on their own as silos; we also have to look at those four issues in a holistic way. We are attempting to deal with them at this point in time as silos. We will deal now with the silo of coordinating service delivery.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I will move to the silo of coordinating service delivery. In the six months that we have been working on these things we identified a number of issues relating to coordinated service delivery. One of the issues that was referred to time and again was a lack of strategy in the way in which services are designed, leaving gaps in provision. Time and again we heard about a number of gaps in service provision in various communities. The second thing that was referred to concerned the relationship between government providers of services and non-government providers of services. On behalf of the Committee I would like to ask the group a couple of questions. I ask, first, where are the gaps in service provision in the areas for which you are responsible? How would you close those gaps? What is not being done now, and how would you close those gaps?

The next issue I would like you to think about relates to who should represent Aboriginal people when we are managing the delivery of services. What is the best way to ensure that that representation occurs? The third issue relates to making mainstream services more appropriate and more accessible to Aboriginal people? I will start with Tony and get him to give us some comments on that. Give us some opening comments now and we will come back and get more from you later.

Mr KICKETT: I think it depends on whose strategy it is and who owns it. If it is not identified by the community then, of course, the question is why it needs to be undertaken. If it is again addressed or it is an area identified by the community then, of course, there should be a way forward so that the ownership is continual—that is, with group continuity. In the past these gaps have been identified after strategies have been put in place purely because it is undertaken in the bureaucratic process. Fortunately there has to be some real input from indigenous people.

Obviously representation needs to be relevant to the community. Aunty Maureen mentioned that traditional owners are a strong part of that. She included other indigenous groups in the community as well. It has to be a real investment in the community in a way that everyone is involved, everyone is included. In the past we have seen token gestures. If one part of the community says it is not an important area as against another area then the bureaucratic processes continue to go forward until someone says they will take it up. Generally it is very divisive. It needs to be the whole of the community working together. Obviously the community knows the areas of need and can strongly identify them. If you are really genuine about coordinated services and delivery, that is a very important step in the primary process.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you want to talk about how you do that practically?

Mr KICKETT: Many of these opportunities are at a distance. Sometimes it can be quite impersonal. Someone might drop in and say we have a wonderful opportunity, "Let's take it up," and they leave town the next day. Any continual discussion is again in isolation with this silo effect. So it is around those opportunities. If service providers are genuine in their intent then that really meets with the practical opportunities they provide and the associated outcomes. That in turn results in a coordinated service.

Dr JOHN KAYE: John, do you want to comment on that?

Mr HARRIS: I would like to talk about the gaps and the whole idea of how government and non-government agencies interact. There are also issues with State Government versus Federal Government and government department versus government department. One of the convictions I have arrived at over the past 12 months or so is the need for coordination to happen in service delivery at a local community level. I understand that the State Government has regional coordination management groups where things are done at a regional level, but at a local level to have the service deliverers talking about and addressing the issues we read about in the paper each morning does not seem to happen. There is a bit of a mismatch between coordination at a regional level and delivery.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are you talking about schools, the Department of Community Services and health providers meeting on a monthly basis?

Mr HARRIS: A number of inter-agencies are good, but I do not think there is a whole-of-government approach to community service delivery. I do not think it happens. Through the Murdi Paaki Partnership Project there have been major steps forward in terms of a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach. I want to put in a plug for coordination at the community level as being very important.

Ms KENNEDY: Tony and John have expressed my thoughts.

Ms STANDLEY: I feel the same way.

Mr WESTON: Local service providers and regional service providers try; they do make attempts to work together. We have inter-agency groups and things like that. Some things do happen, but I do not get a sense that there is a vision for areas like remote far west New South Wales. There does not seem to be State Government or Commonwealth Government vision about the future of those regions. A lot of the approaches happen on the basis of people's personal relationships. It is piecemeal and can be ad hoc. There is no planned process where people are trying to get closer integration and collaboration with a goal in sight. That is one of the impediments to coordinated service delivery. We tend to stay in our silos.

There is a need to give effect to what this committee is about—that is, trying to come up with solutions to overcome indigenous disadvantage. There must be flexibility in program areas like education and health, but perhaps that requires extra resources—I do not know. Everything seems to be driven from the top down and by head office in Sydney or Canberra. It gets out to the regional or the local level and the people on the ground still have their obligation to deliver their departmental policies and objectives and they are trying to do some creative stuff on the side with very limited resources and time. Those are the areas where there could be better outcomes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Am I correct in saying that part of what you are advocating is more decentralisation in government departments and more autonomy to work with the community at the principal level, the director level and the community level?

Mr WESTON: Certainly. It allows more local or regionally driven solutions or designs for program and service delivery. We have some really good resources in things like health services and schools. These are fantastically well-resourced program areas.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But they are locked up.

Mr WESTON: They are locked in their own agendas. I am speaking as someone who wants to see improvements in Aboriginal health. I have a strong interest in improving education outcomes because they are linked. At the local and regional level we have started getting that dialogue and interaction going. I still think you have to look at the education system and the organisational chart of the New South Wales education system—it is highly structured and rigid.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Let us look into that.

Ms MURRAY: There is a huge gap at the preschool level. It is ad hoc for Aboriginal students. If I did not say anything else, I would say, "Give us more preschools that are readily accessible for Aboriginal kids." There is a massive gap. We have to start being really serious about educating these kids. I totally agree with what Richard says: We are all in our fishbowls doing our core business. There is a need for that communication at least so that we are not doing the same thing and not doing it efficiently. That tends to happen.

Ms HERBERTE: On the preschool issue, the Department of Community Services is one of a number of funders of preschool education. Again, the Commonwealth is getting into that game now. It is not very clear and hopefully through the Council of Australian Governments some of that will become clearer. We have just announced our Preschool Investment Reform Plan. It is essentially the allocation of some new money and a shifting of some old money. The intent is to give all kids aged four and above two preschool days a week prior to going to school. The additional money is being made available to support Aboriginal children going to preschool. The intent is to shift the existing preschool system to offer more places to Aboriginal children so that we can try to get that group, in particular, accessing preschool in the year before school. You have that sitting there waiting to see what COAG will do. DET is a provider of preschool education, which it was not a few years ago in some locations.

Ms MURRAY: Thirty-five.

Ms HERBERTE: The distribution of those preschools is not against any particular criteria. Some of it is quite historical. I think we are starting to see the change, but we have to be pretty open to see that change and to make it work. It is a bit like "don't watch this space; go out and see what is coming towards you and grab it". I think that is what must happen.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Is the preschool arena one of those areas that Tony identified where we have government departments that are not well coordinated? We have 50 DET preschools on the one hand, Department of Community Services preschools and all sorts—

Ms MURRAY: The Department of Community Services has the legislation.

Ms HERBERTE: We regulate them and provide funding to some community-based preschools. At the same time we also regulate long day care, which is regulated to provide exactly the same preschool programming within the framework of longer care hours. But it is something that needs better coordination and we need to see what comes out of COAG and how the State responds to that.

Ms STANDLEY: You are talking about preschool. Is that assistance for participation? Preschool is so expensive and parents cannot afford it. Is that assistance for funding to try to get kids in?

Ms HERBERTE: It is per-place funding that will make the places cheaper; it will drop the price. Preschool will be funded at a higher level for an Aboriginal child than for everyday, middle class white kids.

Ms STANDLEY: As Donna said, to apply for funding you must have numbers and to get ongoing funding the numbers must be kept up. Then you need to do promotion to take in more Aboriginal children.

Ms HERBERTE: Separately there is a Commonwealth initiative looking at child and family centres. The really big issue will be affordability. There is no point if you cannot make it absolutely accessible both in terms of getting kids there—that is, transporting them—and ensuring that it is affordable.

In terms of gaps and thinking about the holistic approach to families, early intervention services—which is a new in common use in Families New South Wales and the Department of Community Services uses it with Brighter Futures—are about supporting families, skilling families and building their strengths very early in the raising of children. That is the best level at which to apply a holistic approach. You cannot support a family with just one service type; you have to have them accessing a bit of childcare, perhaps doing to a parenting program or family support or involving the drug and alcohol service. So you have to build a service system around families and early intervention, yet it is just starting to be rolled out. I think you have to pay a lot more attention to that.

The other model—I do not know if there is one here—is schools as community centres. Schools as community centres were funded originally through the Families New South Wales model and they were like putting a community worker in the school. The one I have had the most experience with is in Narooma. That community worker built a breakfast program. So, kids came to school and it did not matter whether they had breakfast or not, they got fed. They were not hungry during the day. They developed a relationship with the local general practitioner [GP] association. So, all kids got a free medical just prior to going to school and then the GP who gave them the free medical kept that going for a few years on an annual basis. This was one worker who organised all of this in this town and got some great support from families than had been there before and for the kids then staying at school.

I have also seen playgroups run out of schools as community centres so that families and parents, who are nervous of schools because their own personal experience was pretty awful, start to become reacquainted with the school. They feel less threatened and, therefore, become better able and more confident when their kids go: they know the teachers and the teachers know them. So that actual service model of being a bit more holistic—you have to bring in other services to make it work—certainly is very successful in Narooma.

Mr KICKETT: If I can bring in one point that is talking about gaps, Aunty Maureen started to mention before about homework and stuff. A lot of our children are looked after by their grandparents. Again that is another dynamic that needs to be considered because with regards to positions that become readily available in preschool, one of the first gaps is around parental support and input, but also ownership because they need to be a strong part of that. So, you can provide the family support outside the school sector, but it is no good unless it is all inclusive. We are talking about working together. Grandparents are looking after their grandchildren more so and, obviously, are from another generation. So, we are looking at those transgenerational links that will be far more effective across these types of initiatives that can be instrumental on how well our children start to achieve.

So, it really needs to be considered with respect to what you are implementing. You mentioned the community worker as a strong example of how that was very effective. How are you going to translate that across the rest of the State, if that is the case? If you have not thought of it, why not? Marg mentioned Aboriginal teaching aides in the school system that are on an annual funding cycle—again that disconnection of continuity. You talk about gaps of coordinated services and you are continuing as a department, as a government agency, to propagate that process. Sorry, instead of propagating, continuing to do it. I am speaking generally, of course, not personally.

Ms HERBERTE: I do not disagree with you about that whole issue of local leadership around coordinating service delivery. It might be my personal view: I know there are a lot of barriers to doing that and I think why can we not break them down. Then I put on my regional director's hat and my regional director's hat says my teams need in the first instance to deliver the best child protection service they can within their pieces of legislation. They have to stick to the legislative requirements because it is quite a prescriptive process and if we go outside it we can damage the children, the families and everything. So, our core business does not actually facilitate except where you are trying to build a service system for an individual child. It does not give me much flexibility in my resources to have people go in to do other things and to build in that service network. So, that is the challenge for me.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That means, therefore, that your service is always reactive?

Ms HERBERTE: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It is always picking up the mess after it has occurred?

Ms HERBERTE: And that is what child protection is, except increasingly we have an early intervention service that we are participating in with the funding that Department of Education and Training [DET] and non-government organisations [NGOs] provide, which is called Brighter Futures. So, we are getting a bit more proactive out there. We have our staff who are responsible for managing funding, our community program officers, and our partnerships and planning staff. They can get out and be a bit more proactive around helping and leading local communities to look at what is the network of services that you actually need to support families and how you build the relationships and create the vision. But it is a challenge when we all have set pieces of core business that we must deliver in the first instance, and you would want us to deliver. You would not want me to not deliver those.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Most of these programs, like Brighter Futures, were set in place with only a certain number of children and things. Only a certain number can go into that—

Ms HERBERTE: Absolutely.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: —but there is not enough funding to cater for a larger group. So you have one little group going to this, which is costing a lot of money, but the wider group is left out. So, we need to think of things where it is going to give opportunity to all kids, to all young people for Brighter Futures, not just a handful.

Ms HERBERTE: I agree.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Because that is what is happening. If the school has to put in submissions for education, how do we then participate in having a say in how that submission goes in? Is there special funding for Aboriginal children in the schools or anything like how you teach the children?

Ms MURRAY: There is Federal Government funding through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR]. That is the whole-of-school funding that we put in. Usually the schools have a little committee with parents and staff and then we have to take it through the working party, bring down the submission for the working party. The working party has to sign off on that that they support it, which is what Tony was saying: If this program does not work, it can be taken out of the school. But the working party signs off on that and then we put it into DEEWR to be approved. At the moment that funding is on a 12 monthly only cycle and the timing of the submission does not always fit in with how we do it in schools. I put one in, say, in June and I had to have it done in these last 20 weeks, which is not the optimum time I would like to be doing anything. I have to have it all spent, all done by 21 December this year. It is just the way the

cycle goes. But they are talking about it going into a three-year cycle, which means we continue the program for three years. That will be much better and much more satisfying.

The second funding we put in for is called targeted funding. That is from the state Government. We put the submissions in, again consulting parents, Aboriginal Education Officers [AEOs], looking at our needs and where the needs are for the Aboriginal children. For instance, I put one in this year for Quick Start, which is a mathematical program working one to one with Aboriginal students. Carol, my AEO, does that with the students. She had the training last year. It is a computer-based program. I got \$5,700 to support that happening in the schools and employ a couple of AEOs to do that with children. That money has to be spent this year and it is only for 12 months. There is no guarantee I will get that money next year.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Do you get many parents coming along to have their say? That is another way we should be looking at it. How do we get the parents to support their children?

Ms MURRAY: If you could give me that answer, I would love to know.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: That is something we should be looking at because it is a wider group of people to get the parents involved as well.

Ms MURRAY: You get a hard core of really interested parents, but then what we have done is surveyed the parents if someone should be here. So my AEO rings up the parents and does a phone survey and talks to parents. We found that is positive. Parents get to have a say and talk to you. It is in an environment they are happy with and they give us their viewpoint.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I honestly thought the AEO goes out and talks to parents if there is a problem with the children.

Ms MURRAY: They do, and sometimes it is a phone call because a lot of Aboriginal parents work like other parents. So it is not always easy.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I know of some kids that were missing and the parents went to school to pick up their children and they were not even at school. No-one contacted them that their children were not at school. They dodged school but the parents thought they were still there. I thought there might have been some ways that you do connect with those parents to let them know their kids are not at school.

Ms MURRAY: If we know they are not at school, then we do: we ring and let them know. Sometimes someone will say, yes, we know they are not at school or thank you very much for letting us know. If the school knows, most schools will ring up.

CHAIR: Is there a local Aboriginal community liaison officer [ACLO]?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes there is.

CHAIR: Is the principal in touch with the ACLO? Is there any interaction?

Ms MURRAY: There is.

Ms KENNEDY: Sometimes the Aboriginal Education Officers [AEO] may liaise with the ACLOs on a regular basis as well. So they can give them the feedback if kids' attendance rates are dropping.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: There needs to be more meetings with everybody, like have a meeting for these sorts of things. We have the working party meeting once a month, but they do not cover all the people. I think we have to find better ways to communicate with the people.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are you saying you want more meetings where you have people like Margaret and Jill's getting together with Aboriginal people?

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: To talk about the ongoing issues in the community?

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: About the sort of week-to-week, month-to-month issues?

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Yes, monthly meetings. We have got a land council here as well and I was told they do not even know about us, which is very strange because we were running one of the oldest organisation in town. If you have things you want a bit of support or help for, maybe you can send letters out to the land council where we put it to the meeting, so everybody can have input to help you with what you are doing, and DOCS. I do not think DOCS attends our meetings much, do they?

Ms HERBERTE: I do not know about here. I know on the South Coast in Nowra there is an organisation called Shoalhaven Safer Aboriginal Community Partnership. We participate in that and in Wollongong we participate in the Illawarra Community Based Working Party, again which are local representative organisations. So we join in by invitation with those organisations. I am not sure what happens here.

Ms KENNEDY: Yes, Scott Dennis does go to council, Aunty Maureen.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: To here?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: But he just comes along. What I am saying is there has to be meetings where we can have input into programs in the schools and everything. They come along and might ask us for our support, but what I am saying is we should be part of seeing what the need is and putting it together.

Ms KENNEDY: That was one of the things Scott actually raised not so long ago with the working party about trying to get together with community people and look at different programs because he does come along and gives us information on any programs that are happening. Sometimes he just leaves it for us to have a discussion and maybe get back to him.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I think we have got to have more in-depth support.

(Short adjournment)

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Before the break Aunty Maureen was talking about engaging Aboriginal communities before programs are developed so that they know what is best for them. In the Committee's travels over the last few months one of the things that has come up is the difficulty that is being experienced in some places in engaging Aboriginal communities. Other issues that have come up involved engaging with elders. In some communities the elders are involved in everything and they are now saying, "Enough is enough. We cannot keep doing all this. We can do bits and pieces but we cannot do the whole lot." My questions relate to whether you have suggestions or ideas on how to engage communities.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: It is always good for different government departments to be able to say that in order to take the blame away from them and to put it on Aboriginal people. I see that as a trick. Everyone will say that. My earlier question was: What do they do to encourage Aboriginal people to come along and have a say in things? It is too easy for people to put the blame on Aboriginal people instead of working together to see how they can help those people. I cannot sit here today and give you an answer that will tell you how to do it. I think we should start talking about it with the schools and everybody else. We are expected to sit here and make a big decision straightaway, but I think that is something we have to talk about.

When we talk about a community we are a part of this community Aboriginal people are part of this community. Too often government bodies forget that we are a part of the community. What I am saying is that we should be getting together and making decisions as a group, with good representation and listening. The other important thing is that you can talk all day, but people have to listen and respect the decisions of the Aboriginal people. That is what I want to say before you go on.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Could you all give us your views if you have any suggestions or ideas about how to engage with Aboriginal communities before we start these programs so that you are involved in their development? In addition, what would be the role of elders in that?

Ms KENNEDY: The timeframe. Most of the time if anything comes up and they need to have either the input or the Aboriginal people on board, it is a last minute thing. That is one of the things that I see as an issue, especially if they have money thrown at them. They say, "You need to do this project. We need to get it out of the way and you need to go and involve the Aboriginal communities." Sometimes they do not bring the community on board until they have come up with the ideas and thought about it. They have not really talked to people at the local level. I want to make a couple of points. I am saying it relates to the timeframe but also looking at the programs and having Aboriginal people in from the beginning—not halfway into the program or whatever it could be. The timeframe is always short.

Mrs JOANNE O'DONNELL: We could reinstate the ASSPA committee. That was a fundamental way of dealing with parents and engaging with them when you were deciding what went on in a school. They had an input before a program started and they had an input on how it was going to be delivered.

Mr WESTON: I would promote the Murdi Paaki model of working parties and the Regional Assembly. I know that it is not perfect. We had a fairly big discussion at our local meeting last week when we talked about the need to provide better opportunities to people who want to get involved. We have a regular monthly meeting on the last Thursday of each month. Over the past five or six years that meeting has been pretty well attended. We have had regular attendance but there are still people in the community who cannot get to it because of work commitments and for other reasons. We have just started exploring having meetings after hours or at weekends and things like that to give people an opportunity to do that. From an indigenous point of view I like that approach because it provides people with an opportunity to come together.

It is not an incorporated body or group, so there is no agenda with funding or resources because these bodies do not hold any funds. It is really just a forum. It gives them an opportunity and it is a central point for government agencies to tap into instead of necessarily having to have endless consultations or negotiations with the whole community. By and large the representation is not bad. I still think there are some weaknesses and some gaps but, by and large, we have a lot of young people attending, elders and some of the Aboriginal corporations. Over the last few years we lost a couple but the main ones are still there. I think that is a good model. We have been through a Council of Australian Governments [COAG] trial for indigenous shared responsibility. The Australian National Audit Office highlighted some indigenous outcomes and the rest of the trials across Australia were basically flagged as failures.

It is really hard for service providers to consult ad infinitum about every little thing, but there has to be a balance. The other thing what Maureen was alluding to was the consultation process, which often is just a box-ticking exercise. Donna also said that earlier. In a lot of cases there is no genuine engagement and relationship building. Through the working party process there are relationships that are building Australia, but these things take time. There is no magic bullet for it.

From an Aboriginal point of view the other reason I like it is that it is not funded or incorporated, so nobody can take it away from the community. Only the community knows that it exists, or it does not exist, because of the community. No-one is funding it and there is no legislation covering it, so we cannot be sacked or we cannot have our funding pulled, which is good. In a number of communities where the working parties are located you get a pretty good cross-section of views.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Richard, we have been fairly general in our comments. In your view are some departments better at consulting than others? If so, which ones are good and which ones are bad? Is that dependent upon individual officers, otherwise we are talking in generalities.

Mr WESTON: I will talk about my experiences in health, in particular, in our region. Maureen is here as well and it has grown up and evolved over the last 12 or 13 years. I think there is a good Aboriginal voice in our remote cluster, or our remote area. When they started the old Far East Area Health Service 12 or 13 years ago they were scratching around working out how to engage. Over a period they became better at it and they started to listen. I think some of our programs and efforts were built on the foundation that was established. Through the COAG trial process the Commonwealth and State education departments were the lead agencies. When they started out I thought they were hopeless. I thought it would not work because they just did not engage or work with Aboriginal people very effectively. But over a period they got better at it. The Department

of Community Services is now in the process of working with the Regional Assembly around some local service level agreement strategy, and that is about getting a better relationship with the community. In my experience probably the worst would be police.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That is a surprise.

Mr WESTON: I think governments are starting to make some effort, but it is not easy to do. It is not something that just happens; sometimes it is built on the back of personalities at a local or regional level. From a working party point of view we have had to work hard to break down the barrier with the education system, with the local city council and with DOCS and so on. I do not know whether I answered your question.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Tony, do you have any views?

Mr KICKETT: You asked specifically about engaging with Aboriginal communities. This form today is very formal and structured. When was the last time that you met with our people under a gum tree to discuss what they need? If we are talking about specifics it is more than meeting us halfway. Whose halfway is it—yours or ours? I am not being disrespectful of what we want to achieve today. However, referring to the questions that you want us to consider, we have to have an ongoing relationship. If you have been married or you have had a relationship for many years you would know that such a relationship will have wonderful moments and not so wonderful moments.

We need to have that respect or that commonality and agreement in the cut and thrust of government bureaucracies, as you mentioned before, relating to those processes and to their work in navigating through them. Fortunately, in some cases we are able to speak on their behalf of a lot of our people, but we should not take that as a given. We should not abuse that privilege. We are continually mindful of that. Maureen reminded us that, as a working group, we are entitled to our service provider views and our own principles and values. However, if we are to represent the whole community it can sometimes be a harmful practice that we do not want to do.

We are constantly mindful of that, as we indicated quite clearly during the Murdi Paaki COAG trial process. That process has worked partly because we might have one of a few processes that continually benefits our community and ensures that they are a part of those consultations. Otherwise we go one on one with government departments and that tends to be very difficult. I do not know whether you are looking at other areas of engagement. I was going to move on to the next point about our involvement and partnership with indigenous elders. From a community perspective we realise that that process and the role that the elders play are critical.

I do not want to be too disrespectful of the current generation but it is quick and fast in achieving things. That is pretty much reflective of society generally, not like us fuddy-duddies who gather around the table to think things through. As a community we need to refocus and we need to be able to build the respect that our elders need and that they have to have to ensure a continual link with our future, more so than where we are at present, so we have a positive future to look forward to.

I said to Auntie Maureen in the break that I was going to raise an example and she chided me because I did not. It is about working in partnership with the schools. We have an opportunity to discuss from the university department's perspective providing a training opportunity for non-indigenous and indigenous kids that is not in the curriculum framework. It is in addition to considering pathways beyond the school system. We provide in this case a tour through Maari Ma Health and do a skills lab, which gives the kids the opportunity to do a primary health check and to learn. They suture a bit of pig fat, which they do not on daily basis. It involves practical things to achieve outside the key learning objectives at school. They are practical things that they absorb in a way that they clearly enjoy even though they are there only for a few hours. It is a quick snapshot of what they can achieve in a conducive learning environment. That is an opportunity.

However, when we met with the schools to develop this program, and even now, they continually tell us that the problem does not lie with them. They say they are giving information to the kids and they are taking it home, and due to a range of issues the parents and the community are not allowing it to progress. From where we sit as a community, we say that the perception is the other way around. Again, there has to be a common meeting ground to appreciate the range of variable factors associated with that and which contribute to it. Again, it is about developing partnerships with a degree of wanting to work that through with a good level of ownership.

I mentioned the needs assessment. As a community we need to identify and be a strong part of identifying those needs. Donna mentioned band-aids. In relation to the extended funding and implementation of programs, we do that well in relation to providing band-aids. What we do not see is the festering, gaping, pus-filled wound underneath. Without an appropriate approach to fixing that, we will continue to allow it to become worse and worse. As we see in our community, many of our people—even today—are living in public housing as far away as possible from the centre of town. That is a harsh reality. We are meeting today in the centre of town and many of our people who would probably benefit from these discussions have not been able to get here.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: We have people living in housing commission houses at the edge of town. That could interfere with children's schooling. The old housing commission houses are so darn hot—45 degrees—and they have no air coolers. We have all been fighting for a long time to get air coolers and we cannot. The kids are up all night; they have to sleep outside because it is too hot inside. Then they called for everything because they are sleeping outside and look like a mess in the street. But no-one is doing anything about putting in air-conditioning so people can live properly. That would be a benefit because the kids do not sleep at night because it is too hot in those houses. I would like to see you fellas living in them. You would see what we are talking about. That affects the kids going to school. People get irritated and wild and it causes many other health issues. People think they cannot put in air-conditioning because no-one will look after it.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Was there no State Government funding?

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Not for Broken Hill.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It went to Burke.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: They are different groups of housing. They used to be housing commission houses. I think it is now Aboriginal Housing Office property.

Mr WESTON: It is public housing.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: They will not put in air-conditioning. They are really awful. If you can do anything, please do something for those people.

Mr KICKETT: We have been formally informed by Compass Housing—which is responsible for public housing stock and management of tenancies—that there is a formula in place that indicates an average reading over a period, and Broken Hill does not fit into the range that is entitled to air coolers. Cobar and other places in New South Wales are eligible. They must be standing in the middle of Archer Street in a strong wind when they measure it. Through a process such as this we might be able to get reconsidered. As Auntie Maureen said, some of these houses experience 50 degree heat in the middle of summer.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: That is what is wrong with a lot of the funding bodies and criteria—they do not fit our people. The criteria and the funding do not suit the community. The people giving out the funding have no idea about Aboriginal people. That stops people from getting funding or housing. If an Aboriginal person is married to a white person and the Aboriginal person dies, they expect you to chuck out the white person. Never mind that they are the mother or father of Aboriginal kids. Not many people know what the funding bodies are like. These are the things that happen. They are the things the Government should be looking at—the criteria that do not suit our organisation or our people.

Mr HARRIS: I would like to go back for a minute to coordinated service delivery. While service delivery itself might be difficult to coordinate or it might take a long time get the consultation happening and the relationships built and that sort of thing, there is one aspect into which we could perhaps make major inroads in a relatively short space of time and relatively expensively. I refer to a centralised community, easily accessible information from a community perspective about the different services provided.

Only a few months back Trish Webb, the director of school education, moved into the job. She had a chat with me and she said that she was the director of school education and she had no idea what the Department of Community Services and drug and alcohol agencies do for school-aged kids. I mentioned that in another forum and they said that information is available and she should know it. Other people shot her for expressing that view. This was a heart-felt statement. We are trying to address the kids' needs and there are all these other silos of information and money and she did not know. I just suggest that there may be a centralised web base

into which you type "Broken Hill" and "youth" and up would come all the department funding options. Being a bit cynical, one could say that perhaps government does not want that. I should not say that.

CHAIR: That might be a good recommendation.

Mr WESTON: I do not think that having that information necessarily leads to better coordination of services. There are other factors that make coordination happen.

CHAIR: But it would be helpful.

Mr WESTON: Helpful to John.

Ms HERBERTE: If you picked up on the issue about local coordination and how you could generate that at one level, the information wanted is accessible because it comes through that process. That is the first step to having some local leadership around service networks.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: The position alone should be looked at. There are a lot of our people here; they should have an input too. It should come through them as well as the elders. Consultation can be done a lot of ways.

Ms HERBERTE: On consultation, I asked Kylie from our Aboriginal services branch what she thought about consultation with the Department of Community Services. She said we go out to consult with structures that look like the structures that the department wants to have in place. When we consult, we do not actually always consult with the community as it is organised now. We should be approaching the community at the community level and respect the structures that exist in the community, even if they are not the structures we would normally relate to. We go out to make an organisation that looks like a body we fund or a coordinating group rather than saying, "Hang on, in this place there are six groups and we have to talk to all six."

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You create a seventh.

Ms HERBERTE: Yes. The lesson for bureaucracies like the Department of Community Services is to ensure that we go out to talk to the community as the community is currently organised rather than trying to organise it how we would like it to be. It is a bureaucratic issue. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs does exactly the same things. It does not go out to talk as the community is organised; it goes out wanting to talk to what it wants to talk to. There is a lesson in listening and that is exactly what everyone has been saying here.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: One of the things that has struck me throughout this process is how rarely the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is mentioned and how little involvement it seems to have. People yesterday were talking about the Premier's Department and said that essentially it is the driving force. I think that is the reality. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs does not pop up very often in conversation.

Ms HERBERTE: It is where they have resources and where they have put in the regional coordinator positions. They are quite active on the coast.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Everyone might not be a part of that main body. They are leaving out important people.

Ms HERBERTE: That is the point. We do not want to do that.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Things were recommended in the Aboriginal deaths in custody report. How much of that has happened? Kids were not supposed to be given to white people. There were supposed to be family meetings and the family would decide the best place for them. I see a lot of Aboriginal kids with white people. That could have been in your policy somewhere; it has to be there.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It is in the Act.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: And that Act has been broken by giving these kids to the white families. We have had all these reports over the years. What happened to them? They are put on the shelf and stay there. You come around again—a big mob of people—and do exactly the same things and the reports are again put on the shelf and left. I have been around many years and the same things happen again and again.

Where do we get output from our input? Where do we go from here? This is just a little yarn around the table and you will go away and let all this collect a lot of dust.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That is not our intent. In terms of the deaths in custody report, my experience as a lawyer is that the arrangements for the treatment of people in custody now are tremendously different.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: How do you know that?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I was a criminal lawyer.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: You might have been, but have you seen the difference in the local community and what they still do to our people?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I live in the country.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Jails are a closed book for anyone. Once someone goes to jail, it is a closed book. You have no hope of breaking that system or making things better because they do things to the inmates to stop them. Do not talk to me about that. You might be a solicitor, but I am Aboriginal and I see a lot of my people die or get pregnant in custody. I know how the police treat them. Whether you are a lawyer or not—I have a lot of friends who are lawyers too. That much has never changed over the years. A few noticeable things might change—there might be a good padded cell—but why are our people coming out and committing the same offences or another offences to get back in there? Because they cannot live outside. Nothing has been done inside the criminal system again to help and support our people to come back into the community and be accepted. Nothing has been done like that. What has changed?

CHAIR: Auntie Maureen, we hear what you say and we have heard it many times. Clearly, what you are saying is being taken on board.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I am sorry, but these things really touch me. A lot of these people are our people we are seeing going into custody. We see them come out and go back in and people blame them, but they do not try to see what we can do to make things better for our people. That is why I sit at these tables, to try to make government people understand what it is like for our people.

CHAIR: Perhaps if we can move to the last item on the agenda, the issue of funding as the last silo. We are trying not to deal with them as silos but, rather, as a whole-person approach.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In some sense much of what we have said over the course of this afternoon has touched in one way or another on the issue of funding. I was actually looking at the heading "Insufficient funding" when I was thinking about what to say. I thought "I am not quite sure whether that is not a loaded heading." In some sense it is because the demands that the community puts on both State and Federal governments are always things that people want from all communities: indigenous and non-indigenous. It is almost taken as a given that ongoing demands are placed on governments to provide more. So, the question then becomes: What is the appropriate amount of funding, given that there can always be more that can be done? That then takes us to the question that if there is an assumption that governments do have some limits on what funding they can provide on behalf of communities, how do we discern how that money is spent? What criteria do we try to bring to the table to decide how money is allocated to do particular things within our community?

Of course, in the context of this inquiry we are examining the issue of expenditure for the disadvantage that indigenous communities face across New South Wales. The particular questions that are addressed refer to the targeting of money: how the money could be better targeted by comparing it to ways in which the money has been targeted up to this point, particularly for different initiatives that may have worked or not worked in the area. We have this dichotomy between Commonwealth and State governments: funding to deal with indigenous disadvantage coming from both the Federal Government and the State Government. Then we have also a further dichotomy between expenditure for people who live in the more built-up urbanised areas and those who are right out in the perimeter of areas. I suppose we cannot go much further west than here, so it is a very good example to talk about Broken Hill today where you are very much on the edge, in some sense, from the centre where the decisions are made regarding where the money actually is to be spent on the different programs.

A very important issue that has been touched on a few times this afternoon, and which has been a theme wherever we have visited, is expenditure on a program that runs only for a very short period of time. Of course, the people involved in that initiative or project do not have certainty about whether funding will continue. Of course, very critically important, for the Government anyway, is the way in which some measurement can be brought to bear. Measurement may not be a popular word for everyone around this table, but governments are forced to look at ways of measuring success in the expenditure of the money with which they are vested the responsibility to spend on behalf of the community.

I make those general comments as an opening and welcome anyone to add their thoughts or observations. I was speaking earlier with Kerrie. We were having a conversation about justice matters in Broken Hill. She made the point about lack of programs and initiatives in this important area of significance in Broken Hill.

Ms STANDLEY: Yes, lack of programs in the criminal justice system. Like Aunty Maureen was saying, there is not enough help here, not enough programs, for people in custody. There is overrepresentation of our people in the justice system. We have to look at ways in our community to see how we can help. I actually coordinate an Aboriginal community justice group at the moment. The group gets together to address local law and justice issues. I am a secretary basically to the justice group, so I am a linkage with the group and the community. Whatever decisions they make on justice issues, I will see if I can make some sort of connection and strategies, and implement programs about what is happening to their funding to help our group to try to better our ways with the justice issues in our community.

One of the programs we were looking at is circle sentencing. There are not enough programs for funding here for circle sentencing, which we thought Broken Hill might benefit from because there is a high population of incarceration here. There are not enough programs. When the magistrate does his sentencing, there are no programs here for indigenous people. They go straight to jail and then there is nothing. There are things put in place in jail that can assist them with training programs and all that, but that is not the same as living in a community. Like Aunty Maureen said, they reoffend and they go back in again and they do not have that positive outlook on life and living in the community. Circle sentencing is another option and they tell us that there is not enough funding here to run that program. As a justice group we think most of our indigenous clients could benefit from that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Do you have the Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment [MERIT] program?

Ms STANDLEY: We do, but that is not tapped into a lot with the indigenous clients though.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Why is that?

Ms STANDLEY: I am not sure. I do not know the statistical logistics of it. The majority of them do, but it does not work for them. It works for some and some it does not. There are a lot of reoffenders that reoffend all the time, so then they are not eligible for MERIT. So, basically it is the first offenders that go there. Most of our clients are not; they are reoffenders.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: You are right. They will do that once or twice and then they are off that. They do not get anymore chances. What Kerrie is saying is right; there is nothing there to help the young people or the older people. If they want to go to a dry-out centre, some of them go there, but they have got to go to Bourke, Orange, Bloomfield. My understanding of Bloomfield from many years ago is that it is more or less a mental place. The Aboriginal people come back from there saying it is one of the most horrible places you can go. So they have to go outside their country, which they are not happy: they miss their families and they have no contact with their families staying in other people's country. They are not happy. So, they will even come from there, break their bail conditions that they are there to dry out, and they cannot do it.

That is where they need a lot of family support. But they get out of there to come home to their families. So they are picked up again then for breach of bail because they are supposed to be up there drying out, but they cannot hack it so they come back home. So, there are all those reasons. Like you said in the first place, we are very isolated out here. We have not got the things other community towns have got. Our people have to go a long way away for different services or different help. We cannot offer them that service because we have not got the places to put them in or to take them to. They have got to go away.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: We were fortunate to hear at the briefing this morning from Richard Weston about the medical services operating here in the community. This morning was my first exposure to it. It appears to be delivering some pretty impressive results. So, it does seem to be a capacity, albeit in an isolated region, to create a model that certainly works in the context of critical health care. It seems to me that we need to explore what we can to create a model that deals with these issues of people interfacing with the criminal justice system.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: To create that model you still need funds.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Oh yes.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: And you need the facilities to do that. We would love to do that, but you have to have the funds to be able to do it and run it properly.

Ms KENNEDY: When you are talking about funding, if you do not fit in that selection criteria you cannot get funding. That is the thing. Just talking in general, I run a youth program and one of the things is that the majority of the funding that is out there is targeting kids at risk. This is my personal opinion: I think any kid is at risk. They should not be just marked and labelled all the time because that is the trouble. You see so much funding get poured into kids at risk and once again it is a bandaaid project. When there are programs that are running and surviving on very limited funds, like my program, you have kids and they are achieving and making a difference because you are not just targeting the one group; you are targeting a broad range of kids. I think with any project or funding, when they come to the criteria, if you do not fit it, or it could be one little word that might not apply to your program or project, then you cannot get it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You are talking about a rigidity that applies in the ability to make an application?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes.

Mr HARRIS: Sometimes the amount of funding is relatively small. I heard Marg earlier say she was involved in funding a program with \$5,000. You wonder about the bureaucracy that is needed to manage a program.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Absolutely. You might find as much is spent on the bureaucracy as the actual funds doled out.

Mr HARRIS: Yes. I think it would be interesting if that was reported back to the community as well. We have been talking about measuring outcomes. Obviously, the context of where you come from is that this is a government inquiry and government has a term of office. We are talking about short-term funding here because the term of office is relatively short, relatively speaking. The community goes on generation after generation. This is where we are coming back to the outcomes. I guess ultimately it is the electorate that holds government accountable, but sometimes those results and outcomes take a long time, you know, for the problem to be identified, for the solution to be worked through in partnership with formulating the model of solution and then funding that delivery, then delivering it and then measuring the outcomes. It is a long process.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I do not mean to interrupt you, but can I just say that as we have travelled around people have made similar comments. However, on the other side of the coin, certainly I have observed—perhaps others have also—that decades have passed and we are still seeing some manifest problems in communities where very little has been achieved in improving just some basic indices. Obviously, health is one. So, in some sense there is a building anxiety that what we have been doing has not been successful and how long are we going to talk about coming up with "the" way of measuring things. How many other ways are we going to try? I believe there is a degree of impatience building up. It is not at a point where it is about to break open, but people feel that the decades are slipping by and things are not moving quickly enough. For governments, you are quite right, it is term to term, three years to three years, and four years to four years, but governments themselves—whether it is a Labor government or some sort of Coalition government involving minor parties as well—are feeling some impatience and that we really need to try to work out how to address some of these issues, because what we are doing now in many respects has not been working. In many respects what we are doing now has not been working.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Interestingly, the referral for this inquiry came from a Government Minister and the terms of the inquiry potentially could be critical of the Government. The very fact that the Minister was prepared to give that referral I think speaks highly of him. I am on the opposition side but I think it speaks highly of him. At least he is prepared to see the problems exposed. I think that that in itself is a very positive outcome.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Sorry, John, I did not mean to cut you off.

Mr HARRIS: Reference was made earlier to the DAA. The DAA was here just a few weeks back trying to engage the community in a way quite similar to this, which was not overly successful. I sensed earlier that Auntie Maureen was also frustrated. How many times does the community have to feed into this process before it gets some results? I wish to make one final point. The whole notion of the inquiry is around indigenous disadvantage. For the last year and bit that I have been closely connected with the Aboriginal community it was a real eye opener for me when somebody said, "Sometimes we need to think about indigenous advantage."

Some things within the indigenous community are strong—things from which the broader community could benefit, for example, an holistic way of thinking and longer timeframes. There are other things but I just wanted to throw that in. Sometimes we should switch the other way and say, "What can Aboriginal people contribute from which white people could learn a lot? That is not to say that there are not issues that need to be addressed, because there certainly are. I just submit that as a thought.

Mr KICKETT: It is ironic that the Minister set aside this Committee to investigate issues of inequity. One of the idiosyncrasies of bureaucracy relates to who is the primary customer. Generally the primary customer is the Minister, State and Federal. Therefore the ripple effect that flows out to communities goes through quite a few layers and tiers. By the time it gets down to a grass roots level its ability to make a change is quite diluted, which leads us to wondering how it was conceived and what were the criteria. Again, it is not developed or implemented by a community. One of the strongest outcomes of the COAG trial relates to community governance, developing a degree of ownership, working with what we have, and communities working together.

Funding will always be an ongoing battle, ex officio or otherwise. It is not so much about the outcome; it is about how communities build themselves to be sustainable. They must continue to build and extend their capacity across a range of building service providers. You asked us to provide you with solutions but I, in turn, will send you away to inform the Minister that he is as much a part of the problem as he is a part of the solution. I appreciate that this is recorded in *Hansard*, so no doubt he will find out what I said.

Referring to some of the better programs that we have been developing, as Margaret Murray said earlier, it is only a band-aid solution and we fall short. One of the analogies over time is outside the terms of government. When we were struggling as a sporting nation we developed specialist programs and, within a 15-year timeframe, they were dramatically realised at the Sydney 2000 Olympics. It is not as though as a nation we cannot address the disadvantages of our indigenous people; it is a question of whether we want to. That gets down to the funding.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I wish to comment on that issue. Something that has interested me throughout this whole inquiry—we are now in the second half of the inquiry—is the difference in the way in which indigenous communities wish to be engaged when dealing with a problem. I am sure you will correct me if I am wrong. I will use the example that you have given, as it is quite a good one. A decision was ultimately made that more money should be put into sport to improve our general standard of sport across a range of sports. Institutes of sport were created at a State and a Commonwealth level and this initiative was pushed down and out through that. So it is driven from a top-down approach.

There is an acceptance at the local level that we might not necessarily agree with all aspects of what is being proposed, but we will wear the fact that it will be pushed down, and through that pushing down and drawing back up again we will be able to raise the standards. As I have got around during this inquiry I have observed that indigenous communities have a different way of looking at things. They are very concerned that at a local level they be directly involved in decision making on an ongoing basis. It seems to me that there is a different mindset. I am not saying that as a criticism but there is a different way of thinking about dealing with issues.

I think that picks up your well-made comments about dealing holistically with issues at a local community level. Governments tend to deal with issues in a different way. They deal with them through a top-down approach and they push things down and out. One of the big challenges that we face is reconciling those two models. How do we do that? By and large, the top-down model is rejected by the indigenous community as being told what to do. If you break things right down to decision making on every issue at the local level, I think the point that Richard made earlier in another context reveals that it becomes almost impossible to consult ad infinitum. We just cannot keep consulting. The question in my mind is: Where do you blend the two? How do you blend the two and what model should we use to blend the two?

Mr WESTON: Thanks.

Ms MURRAY: I agree with Maureen. We need more AEOs. The new title is Aboriginal education officer, so they are now AEOs. Tony referred earlier to getting AEOs to go out and work and build up momentum for sporting programs. Continuous funding is a must. To me, funding should be formula-based and not submission-based, as was the old ASSPA funding or PSPI funding, which stated that the criteria was being Aboriginal and that Aboriginals have the right to affirmative action to bridge the gap. I refer to transport in local communities like this. For many of my families—and I am not being critical of the locus bus company—the bus timetable is not frequent enough. The bus route is not wide enough to enable my families to come to school. Some mothers have prams and littlies and those issues must be taken into account, not just for Aboriginal families but also for low socioeconomic families. That is a real issue for those families. I would like to push for more funding for preschools.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Are you asking not only for more AEOs but also for more AEOs that are permanently employed?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I think you said that in another context.

Ms KENNEDY: Yes.

Ms MURRAY: AEOs are permanent positions based on the criteria of numbers, but there is a limited number. Federal funding is given to the Department of Education and Training. We also have other Aboriginal aides who are paid for out of DEWR funding. The aides are then employed to implement programs and they are employed on a temporary basis. If we had continuous funding and we knew we were getting it they could then seek and obtain permanent employment.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: My understanding is that in some circumstances AEOs are employed casually, which means, self-evidently during holidays when they do not get any money.

Ms MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: So there is a positive disincentive for AEOs to become involved.

Ms KENNEDY: That is happening a lot. There are limited full-time AEO positions in the State because of numbers and funding. You are limited in the number that you can have.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: There are AEOs in school but we need more. We need to bring down the numbers so that they get can more, otherwise we are burning out these AEOs, or whatever you call them. There are not enough of them in the schools because you have to have a certain number of students. If you have only a handful of kids and you do not have 30 we know that you will not get 30 because of the different schools around the community. How many do we have?

Mr WESTON: We have six primary schools.

Ms MURRAY: And two high schools.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Our people live round the town, so some might go to one school and some might go to another school. Because of the numbers some schools are being left out. But they should be treated the same. They should have a sufficient number of AEOs so that they can spend time with the kids

because we know that they need special care and help to read and write. The number should not be restricted to 30 in any one school. We need to bring down that number.

Ms KENNEDY: They say that if you have 100 Aboriginal students you are entitled to two AEOs, but that is not true.

Ms MURRAY: That does not happen.

Ms KENNEDY: They will not give you a second person. When I was in that position I was looking after 75 Aboriginal kids, and that was at a high school. A high school role for an AEO is different to the role for a primary school. You also need training to support those AEOs in the school systems.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: During the holidays many of them are not employed permanently. They work for a long time before they are made permanent. During the holidays teachers are paid but not Aboriginal workers. Imagine how they feel when they have time out during Christmas and other holidays and they are not getting any money. That has an effect on their families as well.

Ms KENNEDY: There is unemployment. By the time they get back on the unemployment list they have to go back to work.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: By that time they have probably gone without 50 feeds.

Mrs JOANNE O'DONNELL: Mark mentioned earlier that you received \$5,000, or just over, and you had to use that to employ people to deliver a program. I wish I could employ someone, or a couple of people, for \$5,000 in our community. I would find it hard to do that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Richard, do you have any comments or observations?

Mr WESTON: I have written down a few things because I want to sound coherent. We are talking about funding. Ultimately, we cannot solve every issue across every program area. Somewhere there has to be a debate, probably at a community level or at a regional level, with the community and also with government providers. But there has to be some recognition of where we should invest our money. If we put X amount of dollars into one area what will give us the biggest and most positive outcome in 10 or 15 years time? We have had some discussion about justice and jails. We bleed for young Aboriginal men going into jails, coming into contact with the justice system when they are teenagers, and graduating through the juvenile justice system and into the big joint, or into that whole system. They are then in and out of prisons for a long time with the whole range of health issues and other things that come with it. Once they are on that treadmill it is really hard to get them off. Individuals make decisions about themselves and they are able to change their lives and get out of that vicious cycle, but many others do not. They keep going until they die at a young age or whatever.

We need to think about where the Government should invest to get the best outcomes. The investment has to come in the area where it will stop young men from getting into jail in the first place. Once they are in the system it is hard to get them out. I get a chance to talk to kids or my own kids and I tell them to stay out of trouble, avoided police, do not have any contact with them. Once they are in that system it is hard to get out. That is probably one of the hardest areas to change, to make it a bit softer and to bring about rehabilitation. That is a difficult thing.

The investment should go into the preschool stage—this nought to eight age group. We should not only increase preschool numbers but also actually look at what we are doing at that age to get kids through to when they are ready to start school so when they hit school they are numerate, literate and healthy.

I have looked at evidence from America. It is now feeding Commonwealth funding programs around nurse home visiting and other initiatives. All of that literature is saying that if you invest heavily in that area to get kids literate, numerate and healthy through nought to five, by the time they are 15 or 16—or even beyond that into their 30s—they are less inclined to be in trouble with the law and the courts and they are more inclined to have a job. That is how I see Aboriginal disadvantage being overcome. It is about people being able to get a job or run a business.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Can we get a copy of that research?

Mr WESTON: I have some references. The research was done by a guy called Oldes. That program has been purchased by the Commonwealth Government to be rolled out to Aboriginal health services. It is all about engaging between health, education, the Department of Community Services, police and others to focus on the nought to five or nought to eight age group.

I spoke this morning about our programs being focused on early childhood and ante-natal stuff. They are good. But unless at the same time we are teaching kids to read and write properly, the statistical evidence tells us that it will not happen. In America—places like California and other States—they look at retention rates at schools to inform the number of prison places and prison beds they need to provide because that is how strong the correlation is. If you do not finish school you will end up somewhere in the justice system and in jail.

I do not know how you get from a Sydney or Canberra-centric, top-down approach and to some decentralisation. There has to be some political will to decentralise some of the decision-making. I would love to see the education system in our region given the freedom to be more flexible in the way it delivers education. It is now based on models set up for urban Sydney and city-based areas. It is a credit to the people who work in this environment that they are able to meet their organisation's reporting requirements or legislative requirements. In some cases they are still able to do pretty innovative stuff. If we had some will and direction from higher levels of the department, we could perhaps look at different ways of doing things and we would get better outcomes. We just need to find models.

We have this big area health service model across all areas. It is all based on population numbers. We could still meet health needs out here without having to be an area health service. It just needs another way of thinking. It would not be an area health service, but would have some degree of autonomy. Of course, there would be plenty of accountability. It could be a different way of organising services. It does not all have to be a one-size-fits-all system. New South Wales is a big State and it has different environments, demographics and population distribution. We need different thinking.

Ms HERBERTE: Being the recipient of government funding, I will refer to where I started earlier. Now that we can count and understand our work, Aboriginal communities are disproportionately represented. The challenge for the Department of Community Services is to change figures and to ensure that we disproportionately put our resources back into ensuring that is the target group for our services. That is perhaps one of the things that could come out of the report; that is how government service delivery focuses on improving its own service delivery now and does not let that get off the agenda. There are obvious ways of getting that to happen. My own personal performance agreement could say "start to ensure you are changing those figures and that balance". Of course, as a funder of some services, we need to be setting targets in terms of access to the services that the Department of Community Services funds for Aboriginal kids. Again, we must try to ensure that we get those services out in the communities.

It was interesting listen to Richard and everyone else about early intervention. Early intervention involves a range of services that have to come together. You know the outcomes you want to achieve. It is probably where you can be most flexible and local in designing service delivery. You can design outcomes centrally, but perhaps it is packaged locally, depending on what is available and the leaders. We need to think a little more about that. Some of the research referred to about the benefits of preschool are the premise of the Families New South Wales model. It is all sitting there in that original Families First Program. It is already government policy through that program.

Mr WESTON: But there is no funding.

Ms HERBERTE: That is right; that program is not rolled out; it is available funding.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is the insufficient part.

Mr WESTON: It is a good policy.

Ms HERBERTE: It is. Some of that is already there, but we need to build on it. There is a great challenge personally to work with local communities to design early intervention services—the package that you need in your place to move forward. We do have other models.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not being critical, but you made the observation that there is already a program—almost triumphantly—and then the observation was made that there is no funding. Again I

am not being critical of you, but is that a reflection of success being measured within the public service by being able to identify a program as opposed to identifying an outcome?

Ms HERBERTE: Probably. We actually have something that gave us some positive outcomes. We have seen a model work. Obviously it is right that that model is no longer funded in the way it was. The service system is there, but it is not an expanded service system. There is a model that you can measure.

CHAIR: That was a very unfair but important question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am sure Auntie Maureen wants the final word.

Mr KICKETT: I refer to your illustration of the top down system. One thing needs to be carefully considered in relation to consultation with Aboriginal communities and working from a localised perspective. The conundrum is that we have a cultural and working existence as Aboriginal people. Therefore, we have a great appreciation of the top down structure. However, as Aboriginal people in the community we have a level of balance in regard to how we engage and work with each other. It is strong in respect and understanding. Until you are able to fathom and build that level of consultation there will continue to be rhetoric and it will border on the point of being an apology for the views of the bureaucracy. I do not say that with any disrespect to anyone here. However, there must be that level of appreciation and understanding of our existence. Obviously our priorities are our children, our future and our community.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for that.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I am a great believer in funding something that is working to continue. You get the funds and do a good job, but the funds are cut away from under you. We get funds for 12 months or something. We get good things going and the funding is cut. Funding is a very important part of our existence. Many programs have been getting a lot of money, but some of them were not doing well in housing. What happens to that? Do they just wipe that money? Is it just gone? You are looking for outcomes. Do you go around and check? How carefully do you look at the services that have been funded to see what they are providing and how they are operating? Is that ever done?

Ms HERBERTE: Yes.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: How many people have access to the service?

Ms HERBERTE: We do that through our public planning teams.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Then you should have a good idea of what has been done and what is still needed. How come you are still providing the services the same way?

Ms HERBERTE: Point taken.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I am a community person and I know we have to worry about our little children up to school age and into jobs. You should know that jails are filled with our people. The majority of the people in jails in New South Wales are our people. Something should be done for them and there should be some funding to help them. We cannot forget them. If we forget them we should not call ourselves Aboriginal people. We are here for all our people and to provide services for all of them.

What has happened to the trials that have been done? What good things have happened and what bad things have happened? You have had all these trials and we do not hear what has happened. You should be able to tell us because these are called "trials". You should be able to pick up the good things and bad things.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: And assess them.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Yes, no-one is assessing to see the outcomes. Funds have been spent on buildings, but builders are still ripping off Aboriginal people. Millions of dollars have been spent but the houses fall down. Who is looking at that? The funds are not being used properly. You are not following up on things that are funded to see what is happening. It so easy to blame the Aboriginal people living in these houses, but no-one is looking at the people who were funded to build them. It is the same with everything. You need to follow up and find out what works and what did not work because you are all giving out money for different

programs, the school kids' money. How do they work? Those are the things we should know and seeing what we can do for a better future for our people and our children. To do that we have to work together.

CHAIR: Unless someone wishes to make further comment, we will conclude with those comments. I thank everyone for coming. The transcript of today's proceedings will be available on our website. If you would like a hard copy, please speak to Victoria from the secretariat. She will take your details and arrange for a copy to be sent to you. The final report we need to have completed by 28 November and tabled in the Parliament. The Minister then will proceed to take our recommendations to Cabinet for decision as to whether it is prepared to accept, reject, half accept them or tell us where to go. We wait with bated breath as to what will happen with our report. We are optimistic and confident that we can put forward recommendations that will be given proper consideration with your assistance and help.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: Can we continue to put in submissions.

CHAIR: Yes, further submissions are being taken.

Mrs MAUREEN O'DONNELL: I want to speak about indigenous land and how they are supplying money for properties and not giving us any money to run it.

CHAIR: At this time there is a time frame for submissions to mid-August, but that may be extended.

(The Committee adjourned at 3.12 p.m.)