

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AND JUSTICE

INQUIRY INTO CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH SOCIAL SUPPORT

At Sydney on Thursday 17 June 1999

The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. R. D. Dyer (Chair)

The Hon. J. F. Ryan
The Hon. J. B. Hatzistergos
The Hon. P. Breen

PETER JOHN HOMEL, Director, Crime Prevention Division, New South Wales Attorney General's Department, Level 19, Goodsell Building, Chifley Square, Sydney, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity do you appear before the Committee?

Mr HOMEL: As the Director of the Crime Prevention Division.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr HOMEL: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr HOMEL: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Could you please briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr HOMEL: I am Director of the Crime Prevention Division. It is a position I assumed at the beginning of 1995. Prior to that I was Deputy Director of the Drug and Alcohol Directorate in the Department of Health. I worked for a number of years in research and policy around a range of social issues, primarily to do with alcohol and other drugs and crime. On assuming this position I was the first director. I actually established the Crime Prevention Division.

CHAIR: Mr Homel, I do not think you have a written submission. You wish to make an oral submission to us, is that correct?

Mr HOMEL: Yes, I do. I have brought some material with me this morning which I will distribute and which I will be addressing during the morning. I thought I would take the opportunity to allow you to raise questions with me primarily.

CHAIR: I have asked you the formal questions I need to ask. I now invite you to make an opening statement of about 20 minutes or so in length, if you wish to do so.

Mr HOMEL: I suggest one of the things I can probably do is to be available to answer a range of questions in relation to this inquiry. However, I have brought some general background material which I can give you and which I will address during the presentation this morning. One thing I might address is the background to the inquiry itself. The Committee is continuing its reference on this matter. It is a matter that the Attorney General referred in the first instance, I think about mid to late last year, to the Committee. There are a number of Committee member changes, so if you wish I can give you a brief background as to why the Attorney, as I understand it, thought this was of interest and an important matter for the Committee to take up.

CHAIR: I think it would be useful to have some idea of the Attorney's motivation for making this reference to the Committee.

Mr HOMEL: In a sense it cuts to the heart of the difficulties associated with the whole

question of crime prevention. Crime prevention is a relatively new field as a discipline or as an area of endeavour. However, it embraces a broad range of concepts and activities. Much of the origins of crime prevention are in work that police and communities were involved in to try to focus on just preventing offending—to catch offenders and prevent them from re-offending. There is a sense that there are many underlying causes why people become offenders in the first place and become involved in crime. So, the tendency was for the focus to be on measures such as making it more difficult to break into premises or cars and so forth—what are generally called situational crime or environmental measures.

The Attorney thought it was important that we give due consideration to these longer term, underlying causes of crime. So, in that sense he wished to establish a venue in which the full gamut of the issues could be explored in the considered and thorough way that is required. It tends to be the poor relation of crime prevention because it tends to look at things for longer than, say, 12 months or 24 months. We are talking about generational change in many respects and we are talking about social and economic factors which are difficult to address and which are quite broad. So, his view, as I understand it, was that this is a forum in which you can explore the underlying causes and make recommendations that could be used to guide the government of the day in how to proceed with focusing on crime prevention. That is my general background. Are there specific questions about that? I did not anticipate this question before I came over, so I did not prepare that specifically.

CHAIR: As a matter of convenience we might ask you questions after you have completed your initial presentation.

Mr HOMEL: In that case what I might do, if I may, is distribute these papers that I have prepared. I have also included on there a copy of my business card for personal reference later. The first thing I have provided there is what I call a working definition of crime prevention. I have done that because you will find that crime prevention means many different things to many different people. I do not intend to read through that. I just want to highlight it and make it available to you as a background document. I have been using that. It is drawn from this book, a copy of which I have brought here and which I would commend to the Committee. It is quite accessible, and it is referenced on the bottom of that page. It is called *Turning the tide: crime, community and prevention* by Jon Bright. Jon Bright is an Englishman, as is Paul Ekblom, who has worked in this area for some time.

A couple of years ago we had the privilege of having Jon Bright working with the Crime Prevention Division for about a month or so to help us focus on and develop some of our plans and strategies around crime. Jon has a very practical and pragmatic approach to crime prevention, and you will find that the definition I have provided there reflects that utilitarian, as opposed to academic, interpretation of what crime prevention seeks to achieve. It has many crossovers with what is known as the public health area, where it will help to differentiate crime prevention strategies—for example, primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention. Essentially, those are the different levels of people's involvement in the criminal justice system. As you will see from that definition, it can be a comprehensive program of activity if you have an effective crime prevention program which deals with everything from planning and design, management of systems and environments through to underlying factors, such as educational achievement and housing. I will not dwell on that.

The next thing I have made available to the Committee is a simple statement of what are generally accepted as being the four basic approaches to crime prevention. The first are the early and developmental approaches. These are some of the areas into which you will be inquiring, but

they are not mutually exclusive. They involve things such as prenatal programs through to early childhood programs. I will talk shortly about another key document which is available to the Committee entitled "Pathways to Prevention", a document which was recently released by the Commonwealth Government under its national crime prevention program. Opportunities for social support style intervention actually occur at many points throughout people's lives. There has been a tendency to think only of early and developmental approaches up to the age of five. A proper understanding of those approaches is much more inclusive. Such approaches deal with the critical moments in a person's life. There is still a tendency to focus on young people because we are talking about developmental phases. But there is a capacity, because of this understanding and because of what this research is telling us, to think beyond young people: to think about the critical or crisis moments in a person's life where he or she could be amenable to some sort of supportive intervention.

The second general approaches are called community development approaches. Community development approaches can encompass a broad range of activities, from putting a youth worker into a community, through to organising sporting activities, through to overall comprehensive community planning which could take the form of a crime prevention plan. The community development approach is most typical of the Australian experience in crime prevention after the criminal justice enforcement approach. In Australia we have had a lot of experience with crime prevention, frequently not recognising it specifically as a crime prevention activity. Most often it has been seen in a community and social development mould and we have recognised that certain communities would benefit from the building up or strengthening of their capacity to deal with problems themselves. That has been the most typical approach that we have applied.

The other two approaches, what I have termed situational and environmental approaches, are what my colleague Jon Bright refers to frequently as the three L approaches: lights, locks and landscapes. They are about improving the physical environment so that people feel safer—people out on the street feel safer if there is light as they can see what is going on. The locks refer to security measures and the other, landscaping, is to do with informal surveillance—the notion that small groups of people on the street should be under surveillance. Neighbourhood Watch falls into that category. You will soon discover, as I am talking through these things, that it is difficult to isolate them to any single type of approach. Neighbourhood Watch, in many respects, has a community development capacity as well because it brings people together around a common issue.

The third approach I refer to the criminal justice or law enforcement approach. This is often referred to as the traditional approach to crime prevention and it is frequently referred to as primarily having crime reduction goals, in that it is about investigating and locking up offenders and preventing them from reoffending. Certainly, from a corrections point of view, the rehabilitative goal aims to try to move them out of the crime cycle while they are incarcerated. As is increasingly the case in modern policing, the community policing strategy attempts to apply what are known as problem solving approaches, which, once again, in many respects start to emulate the types of things which might be seen as community development or early intervention and developmental approaches.

Problem analysis is one of the critical and key elements of modern crime prevention, and one of the things to which this Committee might like to give some focus. I say that because in our experience in the Crime Prevention Division, when we worked with a community, a government agency or even a business about what they perceived to be a crime problem and how to prevent it, there was a tendency to rapidly move to the solution without necessarily properly analysing the problem, coming to grips with the causes of the problem and identifying opportunities and

capacities to bring about some form of change. Unless you analyse why something is happening and the way in which it is happening—I can give some examples of that in some of the work we have been doing as we go through this brief presentation—we often jump to the wrong solution, a solution which might on the surface appear to be the thing that will work but which, very often, basically addresses the symptom and not the cause. Problem-oriented policing, community policing and community development approaches are increasingly adopting this problem analysis framework. I will talk about that shortly.

One of the things I thought might be useful to talk about this morning is the document entitled "Pathways to Prevention". If copies of that document are not available for Committee members I will arrange for them to be made available. I do not know whether Committee members have had an opportunity to see this document, which comes complete with a handy two-page summary, which, I must confess, I am drawing upon heavily, although I was involved in a significant way in the development of this project. As a government officer I was involved in the national working group that completed this document. The document I have with me is a summary document. There are two other volumes which are significantly larger and cover more detail. I make a certain confession, before you work it out for yourselves, that my brother, who is a Professor of Criminology at Griffith University in Queensland, was the team leader for this project. That is part of the explanation for why I had a significant involvement in the project.

However, it is the work of my brother and his team; I do not claim any credit for what they produced. It is one of those interesting facts of life about siblings ending up in a similar field, but that is another matter. For the document entitled "Pathways to Prevention—Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches to Crime", I have provided you with my summary of some of the key points. You will notice that on the first page, after the title pages, I refer to risk and protective factors. We are very familiar with the language of risk factors in our understanding of social issues generally, but we are frequently not so familiar with the question of protective factors. By this I mean, and in fact they mean, things that actually prevent somebody or protect somebody from engaging in antisocial or criminal behaviour. You will also notice in the first point that reference is made to the likelihood of involvement in criminal activity or substance abuse and that that is influenced by the existence of risk and protective factors.

I draw attention to the close nexus between criminal activity and substance abuse. This is part of the general issue I am trying to allude to, which is that individual issues that we take as prominent actually have very many similar underlying causes. If I was addressing another committee about drug and alcohol problems in the community, I might say very similar things because many of the underlying causes and the interconnections are very strong. Those factors will be found in an individual's family, school and community environment. Potential risk factors that have been identified include family violence and disharmony, poor supervision and monitoring of children, and social or cultural discrimination. They are three very different but very closely related things. Potential protective factors range from social skills, a sense of belonging, and a positive school environment. They are simple examples of the type of protective factors that we might think should not need to be highlighted, but in fact they do need to be highlighted in the community we have today.

The key points are that individual risk and protective factors can operate cumulatively. When I referred earlier to the issue of seeking to take a problem analysis approach, we do not wish to isolate things too much because in fact one has to take close notice of the cumulative effect of one on the other if it is a risk factor or a protective factor, and their linkage or their capacity for one to cancel out the other, which can also be true. One risk factor does not predict or mean that a person will definitely become a criminal. The problem has to be approached in terms of the

interrelationship and protective factors that might work. Child abuse and neglect are of particular significance. The submission contains a wrong word, and I apologise for that. Existing programs do not adequately address key risk factors that occur in the prenatal and peri-natal periods, which is just a general point that is made in the project.

One of the other points that is made is that very few early intervention programs and services explicitly have crime prevention as an objective. Arguably, this is not necessarily a problem. Many of the programs that are currently run are aimed at keeping kids at school and at helping families who are having problems raising their children, and so forth. They are being done for the explicit reason of improving kids' educational outcomes and improving family and parenting behaviour—all of which are very good and positive things to achieve in any case. Through this research and this understanding of social support factors we have come to understand that these programs also prevent people from becoming involved in crime and can have a strong influence on preventing them from becoming involved in crime. The primary focus has been on better health, improved education and better employment outcomes.

Interventions such as home visiting, family support and parenting education can have a major impact on at-risk families and children to improve quality of life and to prevent future offending. This is a very important point and one I alluded to earlier, namely, the reference to life milestones and transition points. Everyone passes through key transition points from birth to maturity and these can include infancy, preschool, primary school and the transition years from primary school to higher education or to the work force. These are moments in people's lives which are very stressful and actually are very important in maturing and development. Very frequently we think that they just happen: well, for some people, they do not and some people do not cope as well as other people. There are ways and means to assist because in a sense we have the technology available and the understanding, if one does not like the term "technology" which is a bit cold, to actually help people to cope with these things. We do this in many different ways. We do it within the education system and in a very extensive way through the student welfare programs, for example. They are quite comprehensive and deal with everything from truancy prevention and school discipline policies to helping kids to focus on their school work in spite of problems they might have at home.

All of these things have been proven to actually impact on the potential of a young person later in life to become involved in crime or in other problematic things such as drug use, and so on. Early in life interventions can be just as critical as at other crucial life transition points. I do not want to confuse the issues, but one of the points I make is that much of the talk in recent days surrounding the Drug Summit has been around drug crime diversion. Those programs—the diversion programs—are all taking advantage of the fact that in terms of that person, he or she is at a critical life point. They are either ready or not to go into some sort of treatment program, or they are ready or not, having been confronted with a life moment where they may be going to gaol and maybe for the first time are meeting the criminal justice system. I have never had the opportunity of doing that from the other side, I am pleased to say, but I would not like to do it. I know that we design the system to actually confront people very strongly. Frequently we do not take advantage of those moments in a positive way. We tend only to focus on the negative and the sanction-based approach.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: Could you repeat that?

Mr HOMEL: We tend to not take advantage of the capacity of the personal crisis or the personal moment that the person is going through to focus on a positive change in their behaviour. We tend to focus generally on the sanctioning of their behaviour negatively, rather than actually

trying to move them away from it. Sanctioning can work and it can be a deterrent or can produce deterrence, but we do not always do that as effectively as we might. I can talk about that in some depth later. The way forward that is suggested in the report is to improve program and service delivery co-ordination and a recognition as well as an understanding that critical moments can occur at different points in a person's life, not just in infancy. It is also suggested that identifying protective factors is as important as identifying risk factors and that more attention needs to be paid to evaluation. I will not dwell on that point because it is generally true that one of the problems we have in the area of crime prevention is that very few programs have been adequately evaluated.

I am conscious of the time and I do not want to talk at great length because I would rather answer questions and address issues that the committee is perhaps interested in raising with me. I have also provided a brief overview of the Crime Prevention Division. I will not address those issues in any major way except to highlight some of the activities and I will leave the information with the committee. Page 3 states that the basic purpose is to support a co-ordinated and strategic approach to the development of initiatives that are aimed at reducing crime in New South Wales. We encourage partnerships, which is one of the terms that is typical in the crime prevention area, to provide support and advice to community-based organisations and to the community generally including government services. Frankly, many government agencies are not conscious of the capacity that they have in their general program activities to promote crime prevention. In fact, they are also not conscious of their policy decisions that sometimes promote crime or create an environment which potentially could encourage crime. It is not necessarily highest on their agenda and they do not always necessarily understand. They do not do it intentionally, but it is the unintentional thing that we often have to attend to and help them with. We also work with some private sector organisations to help them, although we are not heavily involved in that at the moment.

The Crime Prevention Division is also committed to responding to community needs and concerns about crime in New South Wales. We also provide quality advice that recognises the needs of specific communities because different communities have different needs. We encourage people to be involved at every stage of crime prevention planning. I cannot overemphasise that point. The participatory outcomes will really only be achieved if people genuinely participate in producing the results and when the decisions are their own decisions. We try to provide guidance but not strict rules about how things should be done. I might leave a lot of that material for you to consider. I will simply say that a lot of our work is focused on working with communities. Our Safer Towns and Cities Program is intended to assist local communities to analyse their problems and come up with the solutions to their crime problems. It is based on the understanding that local crime problems reflect local needs which are different from one community to another. Some crime problems straddle the whole State and nation and in fact are international. We need to recognise that we cannot solve all crime and prevent all crime at a local level, but a lot of it can be done at a local level.

Very often much of the frustration that communities experience is because they just are not given the guidance and structures to help them produce the results that they might like to achieve for their communities. Much can be resolved by bringing communities together to agree on goals and outcomes. Frequently they start off by not agreeing on the goals and outcomes but agree on what the problem is. Part of the process we use for the Safer Towns and Cities Program is to help them through a process of problem-solving and identifying the solutions that they can apply. There are limits to the capacity of a local community. We tend to focus on local government as our structure because it is the most representative, local, stable institution. Community groups tend to form around an issue, and individuals or interest drifts away. This is not a problem that is

unique to crime prevention. In a sense it is both a problem and a strength in many respects. We tend to work with local government and provide guidance on the development of crime prevention plans, particularly as we try to relate them to their social plans that local governments are obliged to develop under the Local Government Act.

We do not simply provide advice: in many areas, we have now provided funding on a competitive basis. People apply for grants to actually develop plans. The Attorney will also certify local crime prevention plans as safer community compacts, which is an accreditation process that we manage. It involves a number of other major government agencies, particularly the Police Service and the Department of Community Services. We tend to present this as a crime prevention plan that is comprehensive and engages the whole community, not just sections of the community who are the squeaky wheel, if you like. On certification, we provide the opportunity for communities to apply for specific project funding to undertake work that they put into their crime prevention plans. It is a carrot approach to local crime prevention planning. We promote that because it has been our experience and the experience of others that unless there is some structure in which the activities are being encouraged in a community, they tend to become very diffuse or not sustainable, and a lot of effort converts into frustration as it becomes more difficult for the communities to continue trying to approach and deal with these problems over time.

We have funded nearly 20 communities under our Safer Towns and Cities Program. We have certified four communities for safer community compacts. Not all of those have been funded for the purpose of developing crime prevention plans—many communities do that themselves and we actually just provide guidance and advice. In certifying, we want to see that they have actually addressed the range of sections in the community, which includes business and government agencies. They are actually providing inclusive and focused plans which have some goals that can be achieved in a reasonable period. The problem is, as always, that everybody wants to do everything at once and they get overwhelmed by the task. Part of our task is to help them identify some achievable goals. An example is one community where we worked with them—and I might conclude my remarks on this point—and that was the community of Ballina.

Ballina is a community that actually applied for and was granted the right to use the provisions of the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act. Ballina identified a particular problem with kids roaming the street at night. We worked through the process of helping to work out what the problems were at Ballina and the solutions to apply. Part of the solution was the implementation of the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act. We found that Ballina had the capacity to fund a youth service which might fill some of the gap with the kids on the streets there. We also looked at the social planning, in the way that they had organised the operation of some of their liquor outlets, for example, because it identified that one of the problems was vandalism and damage arising from what they thought were kids getting liquor illegally and then vandalising the community. In fact, when we worked through the process with the police, local community services people, community groups, local council and the Aboriginal community ultimately it became very clear that it was not actually the kids doing the damage but their parents after closing time at the pub.

The solutions they had originally planned were focused on kids. Certainly there was a need to deal with some of the problems with the kids but it was not the whole solution to their problem. They needed to work with the police and the liquor licence holders to develop responsible practices in the way they served and managed liquor and to focus on getting people home in a safe way, and things like that. Ballina is an example of a community that probably rightly identified the range of problems it had but actually started to think through the solutions which were a little bit more unorthodox or different to what it originally thought it needed. There are other examples

in several places around New South Wales. I have suggested some places the Committee might wish to follow up. It is our plan, our work and our goal to continue to promote those sorts of things. We are also working with initiatives on the four levels of crime prevention work to which I referred earlier. One area in which we are keen to see the outcomes and recommendations of the Committee is crime prevention through social support.

CHAIR: During the course of your presentation you said that very few early intervention programs and services explicitly have crime prevention as an objective. You also said that their primary focus has been better health, improved education and better employment outcomes. Is that a significant problem, or could it be that as a result of the existing programs crime prevention objectives are served in any event?

Mr HOMEL: It is certainly true that the existence of programs with effective implementation will produce crime prevention outcomes. However, I would argue that it is to the benefit of the people running the programs, and those to whom they are accountable, to properly identify the range of goals that the programs are likely to achieve. One of the problems with the early intervention programs I was talking about is that they are frequently not very well funded, supported or comprehensively planned. They tend to be one-off initiatives—a recent significant departure from that is the family first program. Those programs tend to hang out there in an isolated fashion without comprehensive support. To identify their goals and outcomes may strengthen their ability to operate over time and more effectively. The answer is yes and no.

CHAIR: You also said during your preliminary presentation that very few early intervention programs have been adequately evaluated. I do not know whether you agree with me but I would see that as a problem in a practical sense in that the central agencies of government—Treasury, the Cabinet Office and so on—need to be convinced of the efficacy of the programs. Can you hold out any hope for more evaluation?

Mr HOMEL: Yes, I can. You are absolutely right: the programs are poorly evaluated or have not been comprehensively evaluated. "Pathways to Prevention" at least moves in some direction to fixing that. It is important that the programs be evaluated. However, we frequently expect them to be subject to greater evaluation than some of our existing practices. We should potentially apply the same rule to all of our practices to try to achieve crime prevention. There is movement towards increasing the evaluation knowledge and base. I know that the families first initiative is to be comprehensively evaluated. That is an important step. This is not really a criticism because people do what they can do with the resources they have available, but frequently evaluation is viewed as being just too expensive when there is not enough money to run the programs in the first place. There is a commitment to properly evaluate Family First. The Commonwealth Government has indicated that it will fund demonstration projects or projects to be evaluated arising from the findings of this national report.

I am already in discussion with Commonwealth officers about how it can be done in New South Wales and, in fact, jointly with Queensland. Yes, I am hopeful that we will build up our knowledge. There is increasing information from overseas. We have to be careful when using overseas information because our communities, background, experience and culture is different but there are some things which are common. Properly evaluated projects frequently can translate across cultures. Some of the American and British experience is now being well documented and evaluated. We heard at the conferences that the Committee sponsored last year from some of the American examples of the evaluation that had done very thorough cost benefit analysis of these things. The early intervention developmental programs definitely stacked up well in comparison to spending more money on gaols and policing.

CHAIR: A number of references have been made to the Federal Government's "Pathways to Prevention" study, in which your brother, Professor Ross Homel, played a central role. Is that project likely to have beneficial outcomes for crime prevention in New South Wales?

Mr HOMEL: I believe so. Some of the principles I have tried to outline in my summary have actually been very influential already. The notion that we have these transition points of which we can take advantage and work with people is a bit of a window opening, if you like, for a lot of people working in crime prevention. The notion that there are not just risk factors but protective factors is an important concept which has been well documented in here. It has opened the opportunity of saying that we understand what causes and what is a risk for crime but what are the things which will actually prevent people getting involved in crime? We know some of that as well. I am aware that it has been influential in the relationship between drug issues and crime, as the recent Drug Summit addressed. Yes, I would say it has been influential. I am also hopeful that the money that the Commonwealth Government is committed to providing will help New South Wales as well.

CHAIR: The "Pathways to Prevention" document highlights the preschool years as what might be termed as a key transition point. Should we examine compulsory or universally available or applicable preschooling at a defined age such as three or four? Do you have any views on the adequacy of funding for preschooling?

Mr HOMEL: I am probably not qualified to answer that question. On my reading of the information and from my discussions with others working in that area that may well be a very good initiative. I am not aware of funding. I would rather assume that it is probably not enough but I do not know. I do not have any expertise.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The Crime Prevention Division of the Attorney General's Department is reasonably new. What sort of indices are you going to use as your criteria for what sort of job you have done in preventing crime?

Mr HOMEL: We are ranging them from very soft qualitative measures, such as the relationship and nature of complaints from local communities about their crime problems, which I am pleased to say already has changed significantly, to the harder ones where we have for the first time, in collaboration with the Bureau of Crime Statistics, collected data from a school survey about self-reported participation by young people in crime. It is our intention to repeat that survey in the next year or two regardless of what might be argued the exactness of that data. When one compares one survey point to another one can measure a trend or change in a self reported participation in crime. In between those two things we have identified a range of other indices, if you like, for measuring our performance. It is very difficult. The division itself is really a facilitating body of advocacy and promotion of ideas and so forth. We have a small fund which we deploy through the community development program and we provide seeding funding to a range of initiatives where they show promise and might not otherwise be able to succeed. To be responsible for the crime rate because we work in partnership with so many different agencies of government, particularly the police—

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I did not ask you that question to put you on the spot. To some extent your answer to that question is relevant to what this Committee would consider relevant, and that is why I asked you the question. Is one of your roles to map what impact the various government agencies, whether it be the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Community Services or the Police Service, might have on crime? Will your agency somehow or other compile the amounts of money spent by the Government now in relation to crime

prevention?

Mr HOMEL: We are in the process of doing that at the moment, yes, and I hope the results will be available fairly soon, perhaps before the end of the year, so it may be within the life of this Committee.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is that a report to the Government or will it be publicly available?

Mr HOMEL: At the moment it is to the Government, but I would hope that it would become publicly available.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: What other agencies do you think the Committee should be asking for details of their crime prevention programs?

Mr HOMEL: I would certainly be talking to the Department of Community Services, although to be fair it is in the category of running programs which have crime prevention outcomes which are not necessarily specifically designed to be crime prevention programs. Also, the Department of Education and Training and agencies such as the Premier's Department, through its strategic projects area that runs the regional co-ordination program and place managers, of which there are a number. We work very closely with them on crime prevention issues, and the police. One other, a little unorthodox, is the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, which has undertaken many initiatives pursuing crime prevention designed to improve social amenity and reduce the opportunities for crime. I can provide a fuller list for the benefit of the Committee.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is there any usefulness in your agency hosting something like an interdepartmental committee of senior officers to look at prevention of crime across a number of portfolios?

Mr HOMEL: We do that now. One of the functions of the Crime Prevention Division is to support the Premier's Council on Crime Prevention. As part of that crime prevention council we have a senior officers reference group, which includes, as its title implies, senior officers from a very broad range of government agencies. It will include everything from Urban Affairs and Planning and Transport through to the Department of Sport and Recreation and Aboriginal Affairs, as well as the more obvious ones such as Health, Education and Police.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: I was interested when you remarked that you see your task mainly as being a facilitative body which provided some seeding funding. Do you see any advantage in the role of the Crime Prevention Division becoming broader than just involving facilitation and seed funding and the division becoming somewhat of a more coercive body in terms of achieving crime prevention objectives? I refer for example to similar circumstances in which bodies have become more coercive. There is now legislation that provides penalties and enforcement in relation to protection of the environment, disability discrimination and matters of that kind. Is there any advantage in your division or some other agency having a more coercive role in terms of ensuring that government and private agencies carry out crime prevention objectives?

Mr HOMEL: If your meaning of the term "coercive" is positive, which I understand it to be—

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: That is right.

Mr HOMEL: I do. I can give an example of how we have, not so much with government agencies but working with communities, been able to strengthen our work through what might seem an unorthodox route. I have referred to the safer towns and cities and safe community compacts and so forth. They are contained in what many perceive to be a punitive piece of legislation, the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act. It is my observation that although sections 3 and 4 of the Act, relating to crime prevention planning and community compacts, are effectively voluntary, communities have recognised that because it is in this legislative form it is perhaps more significant than it would otherwise be perceived to be. It is an obtuse way of answering your question but my general answer would probably be yes.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: In what way would you see that role being fulfilled by a division such as yours or a similar agency?

Mr HOMEL: I have not given this issue a great deal of thought. There are moments of frustration when I have given it some thought but I have not done it systematically. There are various ways. You can always go a legislative or statutory path, but that is always a complex and potentially hazardous way to proceed. I have been involved in agencies which have had those sorts of bases before. Sometimes that is limiting of their capacity. There can be defined roles. One of the things that had some impact on government was including in Cabinet minutes family impact statements, for example, as well as a financial impact statements. There could be a crime prevention statement or crime impact statement. Very often there would be no result and there would be nothing to say but sometimes there would be and maybe the question would not otherwise have been asked. Crime prevention could be given stronger support as a priority issue. Certainly, I do not suggest that the Government is not giving it a high priority, because it is. But you can always ask the question: To what level has support been given?

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: Let me focus for example on one of the agencies that you identified as being significant, local government. You would be aware that some local councils choose to be involved in crime prevention and others do not. In other States all councils are obliged to prepare crime prevention strategies. The Government takes a hands-on role in supervising and seeing this implemented. Do you see that sort of approach as having benefits?

Mr HOMEL: I do but I have reservations about that as well. One of the principles I outlined in terms of our work is that to be too prescriptive, too formulaic, is to deny that we need participation and ownership at a local level to make these things meaningful. I am aware of other jurisdictions. My English colleague Jon Bright referred to one of these approaches as being like a 10-lane highway leading to a cow pasture because it was all top down. So you need to be very careful about giving adequate ownership and recognition of the local bodies, the local parties, to something like this. Something could be negotiated. There is the English example of the Crime and Disorder Act. Local government authorities are obliged to prepare crime prevention plans in consultation with local agencies—police, education and health included—as I understand it. I will check my details about that.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: That is my understanding.

Mr HOMEL: There is that obligation. There may be some merit in that. However, I say that in the knowledge that local government authorities in England have access to a higher level of service provision. They are responsible for health and education services and so forth. This is different from the situation with our local governments. So we have to be cognisant—to use a dreadful word—to understand the different structure of government here. I am not suggesting that

it might not be a bad idea; we just need to think very careful about how we might do that.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: The approach of the division at the moment is to encourage applications for funding, to assess the applications and to fund appropriate programs. It seems to me that one of the effects of that is that the best applications get funded, not necessarily those from the communities with the greatest need. In some cases communities with the greatest need may have had the best programs funded. It is not a universal rule by any stretch of the imagination, but as a general rule the division operates on the basis of advertising for a particular program, assessing the applications and funding the successful applications. It seems almost an experimental approach in terms of crime prevention as opposed to an ongoing approach which sees this as a long-term solution to problems. Is there a need to revise that approach?

Mr HOMEL: In a sense at some levels we have already done so. In terms of the type or program you are referring to, we have several categories of grant. One is innovative grants. If someone puts in a good idea we will attempt to do something with it. More recently with our safer towns and cities program we have been trying to use the funding to build infrastructure and models and practice so that there can be some diffusion of the activity rather than just holding it up as one good example. But we need to be aware of the resources we have available. We also need to be aware that money is not always the solution to these problems. I come back to the ownership question. There are some pretty good examples, particularly in the US, where communities can be almost napalmed with money and it still does not fix the underlying problems. We are trying to strike a balance within the limits of the resources specifically available to that grant program. Sometimes the winner is the best submission, if you like, rather than the most meritorious or needy program or area. We are cognisant of that and try to adjust for that. The point you are making about the need to move to a more programmatic as opposed to project-based approach is something we are aware of and trying to address as best we can.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: I have looked at a lot of the projects you fund and I think they are very well evaluated. This is an advantage of having a limited amount of funds that you want to ensure is spent properly and meeting objectives. Once you achieve that evaluation in terms of encouraging other people to participate in programs of a similar nature, is there anything the division can do? For example, at the moment you have the youth guides project. The Attorney General spoke about the programs at Maclean and Canterbury in the Parliament the other week. Once the program is finished there will be an evaluation. The reports I am getting are positive. Do you have any program to follow on after that to ensure that other communities get the benefit of the information and that they are positively encouraged to consider implementing aspects of that program?

Mr HOMEL: Yes, we do. That very program is a good example of how we are now taking action—subject to the final evaluation; there has been an interim evaluation which, you are correct, is very positive—to look at strategies for rolling that out. Not every community will need that sort of project. That is one of the other things we need to be aware of. The project I am referring to is the community safety guides project, which was trialled in the Canterbury and Maclean council areas last year. I will not go into the details of the project. I can provide them to the Committee later. We evaluated the trial project and the evaluations were positive; there were some provisos. We are currently talking with a corporate sponsor who is interested in the project. We are also looking at how we might secure some other funding for it as well. When we enter into an initiative like that we have an eye on where we might go with it. One of my project officers refers to it as an exit strategy. It is an important point because too often projects are entered into without thinking about what we do with them afterwards. I think that is the essence of the questions you are asking. We deliberately try to address that. We do not always have the

answers to it but that is an example of one we are trying to work towards.

The Hon. P. BREEN: Given the time, I will ask just one question. What would you like to see the Committee achieve during this inquiry and what course of action do you think we should follow?

Mr HOMEL: What I would like to think the Committee could achieve is to bring some coherence to an area which I think is a bit confused. There are conflicting goals and understandings about the role of social support. I am also conscious of the time. I had a nice example relayed to me the other day of how a government agency can be very negative and create problems. Centrelink is unaware sometimes of the impact of its decisions, particular around aged people, what that means for them and so forth and the way they are managed. Through this Committee's work and an examination of some of the concepts we could get some coherent understanding of the linkages and the downstream impacts of some of these decisions, negative and positive. What American researchers call collective efficacy—a dreadful term but a very interesting idea—is about communities working together, recognising the value of parenting behaviours and helping members of the family. The example given by those researchers is of feeling secure and responsible to intervene and help in a problem rather than stand back and say, "Someone ought to do something about that", and to get a broad understanding of the idea.

I know that these are very vague concepts; I am perhaps not being particularly helpful. But we can try to bring some value to the understanding that these methods really do make a difference. It really does matter what happens, particularly in the early stages of people's lives. It does matter that people get a good education and have employment opportunities. There needs to be an understanding that poor parenting behaviours are not necessarily the fault of the parents, but also relate to their experiences, understandings, stresses and circumstances. There are ways of helping to build up those areas. Schools can play a positive and important role in producing responsible citizens in our community. I do not want this to be the committee for solving the world's problems. But, in a sense, when we look at these sorts of questions, as I discussed with the previous chair of this Committee, the Committee can choose to focus on key issues that it feels need advancement. Those sorts of initiatives should be brought forward and strengthened. That is one of the reasons I drew attention to this type of research. The "Pathways to Prevention" research guides us towards these initiatives. We can look at them more intensely, get advice and information about them and perhaps get suggestions from people about how to strengthen them and bring them forward.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

ROGER BRUCE WILKINS, Director-General, The Cabinet Office, Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney, and

DIANNE FRANCES HUDSON, Program Manager, Families First, The Cabinet Office, Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Mr Wilkins, in what capacity do you appear before the Committee?

Mr WILKINS: As the Director-General of the Cabinet Office.

CHAIR: Mr Wilkins, did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr WILKINS: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr WILKINS: No, not exactly. It is a standing committee, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: This is a standing committee and a reference has been made to us by the Attorney General about crime prevention through social support.

Mr WILKINS: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr WILKINS: The Cabinet Office is presiding over the roll-out of the Families First program, which is relevant to your terms of reference.

CHAIR: It is my understanding you do not have a written submission. However, you will shortly be given the opportunity to make oral remarks to the Committee.

Mr WILKINS: We do have a written submission, which could be left with the Committee.

CHAIR: In that case, do you wish the written submission to be included as part of your evidence?

Mr WILKINS: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request.

Mr WILKINS: Yes.

CHAIR: Ms Hudson, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms HUDSON: As Program Manager for the Families First initiative.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms HUDSON: I have been employed by the Cabinet Office as the program manager of the Families First program and have a background in social sciences.

CHAIR: I take it, as referred to by Mr Wilkins, you will be speaking to a written submission that will be made available to the Committee?

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: I also take it that you agree with Mr Wilkins that the submission should be included as part of your evidence?

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to that request.

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: It is my understanding that you wish to make some oral submissions seriatim to the Committee, not exceeding approximately 20 minutes. I will ask Mr Wilkins to commence.

Mr WILKINS: I will be brief because I am not the expert on the program, Dianne is. I will ask her to speak to you about it in detail. By way of preface, it is not customary for the Cabinet Office to run programs. This is a particularly important program in terms of where the Premier stands on this issue. Historically, it has grown in a constructive way out of contemplating some of the findings of the royal commission inquiries of recent days. It is pleasing to see that it appears to have bipartisan support. The reason it is being run out of the Cabinet Office is because it essentially requires a whole-of-government approach to reconfiguring programs. It is not simply a question of pouring more money in; there is new money. But it is primarily a question of reconfiguring existing resources so that measures are taken that are more relevant to the needs of people in the community, which has required a whole-of-government co-ordinating approach.

The Cabinet Office will not have an ongoing hands-on responsibility for the program. But certainly over the next perhaps 12 to 18 months, while it is being rolled out and various decisions are being made about the reconfiguration of resources, it will play a key role. It has been universally lauded as the sort of program which government should be supporting. It is a

paradigm of what is described in policy terms as early intervention. I congratulate the Committee on its interest in it. My experience of politicians over 12 to 13 years is that they tend to be more interested in the next election than the next generation. It is laudatory that both sides of politics on this Committee are taking an interest in this type of program.

It is also a paradigm of what Mr Homel was talking about previously, which was that you do not get global solutions to global problems. These are local problems. When Dianne describes the way in which the problems are being treated on a regional basis, you will see that the specific needs of different regions are being assessed, with particular solutions to particular problems. If the Committee is interested in broadening its view of social policy and crime prevention, that is an important motif which should be taken up and considered. Broad policies enunciated out of this Parliament or out of Macquarie Street are rarely going to provide solutions to the sorts of problems that are out there, because there are particular problems out there, not universal ones.

I have mentioned that there is new money, and Dianne can talk about that. I have no doubt the initiative will be further addressed in the forthcoming budget. We do not have any remit here to talk about what may or may not be in the budget. That is a question that should be directed to the Treasurer or the Premier. As a cautionary note, I have spoken to overseas experts on this issue, many of whom attended the Drug Summit. Early intervention programs figured large in the Drug Summit and in the resolutions that came out of it. There is a great deal of support for the program universally, but there is also a degree of wishful thinking that it is a panacea. The paybacks from this sort of program are not necessarily quick.

The idea is if we can intervene at an early stage in the upbringing of children—making a modest investment, comparatively speaking—it may cause people to lead happier lives down the track and relieve the taxpayers of some of the burdens of health costs and crime prevention costs that accrue through expenditure on police, courts and prisons. That is the underlying assumption, and, as I emphasised, it is not necessarily a quick payback. We are engaged, at the same time as rolling out this program, in trying to formulate a sensible way of evaluating the outcomes from the program as well. So, it is at the cutting edge of good policy. That seems to be universally accepted, and I simply ask the Committee to look at it in a balanced and bipartisan way. We certainly wish for your support of this measure. I will let Dianne now talk to you in more detail about how it is actually being rolled out, if you like.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Wilkins. Would you like to make your preliminary oral submission, Miss Hudson?

Ms HUDSON: I will use the overhead, if you are agreeable.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms HUDSON: What I briefly want to outline are four areas: the rationale for Families First—it is important that I give you an indication of some of the research underpinning the strategy; a description of Families First and what it means for families; the outcomes we are trying to achieve by the strategy; and some detail about the actual implementation of the Families First program in three areas of New South Wales currently being progressed. It is important to say, firstly, that Families First has been designed upon evidence and what research has shown to work for families. You may be aware that over the past few years there has been a renewed interest in the influence of early childhood development, especially in the first three years of life, and on child health and development, educational attainment and economic wellbeing. Families First has been considering the first three years of children's lives and, in particular, we have been

looking at attachment theory—the work of Spitz and Bowlby, in particular, and also the work of Dr Bruce Perry, who has done a lot of work on how the brain develops.

Basically, poor attachment between young children and their primary care givers and the exposure of young children to too-traumatic parenting affects brain development. A growing body of research shows that the great majority of physical brain development occurs by the age of three and that the negative impact of stress and trauma on the brain influences the early environment of brain development, and these effects can be long lasting. The growth of the brain before birth and in the first three years of life is much more rapid and extensive than was previously thought. Social, emotional and environmental factors affect the way the brain grows to the age of three and almost any negative early stress on a child has a negative effect on the development of that child's brain. Such negative effects are now seen to be long lasting and they do not just go away if the situation changes as the child develops and grows.

So, what we are talking about is giving children a better start in life. Some of them have a poor start in life. If a child does have a poor start in life there is the chance that that baby will grow into an adult who can have a variety of, or any one of, these issues: poor physical and mental health and earlier death; lower standards of education; less opportunities in the job market; increased likelihood of drug or alcohol addiction; and greater participation in crime, which is obviously of interest to this Committee. Research also shows that prevention and earlier intervention services can improve a child's start to life. These services, targeted well and provided correctly, can reduce a child's exposure to risk factors that may adversely affect the child's health, education and welfare. Moreover, these prevention and early intervention services have the greatest impact when they are capable of addressing a broad range of issues and are provided as part of a co-ordinated network of early intervention and prevention services.

There is also a good deal of evidence to show that early intervention programs designed to reduce the risk of child neglect have an important role to play in long-term crime prevention, particularly the work of Weatherburn and others, and also the work of Sherman. For example, Sherman, in his study, "Preventing crime: what works, what doesn't, what's promising", highlights as effective measures against crime prevention the three issues shown on the overhead, which include home visits by nurses. Dr David Olds from America has also done a lot of research into the effects of home visiting in the early stages of a child's life. The other issues are pre-school and weekly home visits by teachers, and family therapy and parenting training. Research shows that those types of programs do work. This is just a summary of the research that has influenced the design of Families First, and I will move on to the actual design of what Families First is. Families First aims to increase the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention services to help families raise healthy and well-adjusted children. It is a strategy that looks at support for families with children under eight years of age. We also have a particular focus on children under three years of age because of what I have just explained to you about the research and the effects on brain development during those very early years.

I have mentioned already that research indicates that early intervention and prevention services provide a better service for families if they are co-ordinated into a network of services. So, Families First is capturing services that support families through a number of government departments. They include area health services in the New South Wales Health Department, the Department of Community Services, the Ageing and Disability Department, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Housing and also, importantly, non-government agencies that are funded by the Government to provide support services for families. You might ask what is Families First going to do differently from what other agencies currently provide. If you can visualise that Families First is like a large umbrella and the framework for that umbrella

articulates a common set of outcomes that cover a number of domains which I will go through. It also articulates the principles that should underpin the practice and planning of services and, as I have mentioned, it is also evidence-based and aims to break down traditional program structures across departments.

It also aims, importantly, to look at joint planning for families across the five government agencies I have referred to and non-government agencies. So, instead of a specific program looking at the needs of a specific group of families, this broadens families into a target group that has a range of support at different transitional points while their children are growing up. So, the framework is going to group a variety of services under the following four fields of activity, which will form the service network in a local community. The first field of activity is support for parents who are expecting or caring for a new baby. Obviously this has a focus on what types of support families need during pregnancy and after the birth of their babies. The key services we are interested in, in this field of activity, are ante-natal support, provided by a range of health professionals and doctors, and early childhood health services and community health services.

The next area of support is support for parents who are caring for young children. The focus for this area of activity is on helping parents understand what their children need, how their children should develop, and what they need to do to help their children develop as best they can, particularly during the critical first three years of their lives. The services in which we are interested in this area, which are provided by a range of government departments and non-government services, are services which include parent information; structured parent education programs which are provided by a variety of agencies, education programs which you may have heard of called parents-as-teachers programs, education programs which are transition-to-school programs for pre-age children, parent support groups and services provided by family support services, which include playgroups for children and parents. So, a variety of services are currently provided within that area.

We will introduce as part of this field of activity a new type of service which has also been proven to benefit families, that is, volunteer schemes. Volunteer schemes mean experienced parents helping less-experienced parents. Some of them exist in New South Wales at the moment but they are few and far between. Because evidence suggests that they have proved to be of benefit to families, we see it as important to expand that type of program in New South Wales. The next field of activity is existing families who need extra support. This field of activity is about supporting parents and providing services for those parents who are having a difficult time in their parenting job. For whatever reason or reasons, because of their upbringing they need professional help to assist them with their children. The types of services that we are including under this area of activity are child and family health services, mental health services, drug and alcohol services, family support services funded by government, family counselling services, specialist education and disability services.

The next area of activity is strengthening connections between communities and families, that is, bringing into focus community development. How can we help communities provide better support and connect families within communities so that you cut down the isolation of families within communities? Families First is focusing particularly on those communities where there is high need and high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. The programs that I am talking about in this area of activity, which you may have heard of, are: expanding schools as community centres and looking at what neighbourhood centres currently do, for example, neighbourhood centres that are currently funded through the Department of Community Services. We are also looking at the neighbourhood improvement programs which are currently run by the Department of Housing. What can we do to help communities take action to support their own families? Those are the

fields of activity.

What Families First is trying to do, as Roger has already alluded to, is to reorganise a series of prevention and early intervention services provided by a range of government and non-government services under these fields of activity. We are also wanting to introduce new services, specifically home visiting by early childhood health services, which has a good research base, and we are also wanting to introduce new volunteer schemes which also have a good research base. But importantly, we want to organise current services which are provided by a range of providers into what we are calling a local network—networks of early intervention and prevention services. That is important because once you co-ordinate them into a network you are better able to tell families what services they have in their community and how they can access support, and you can then jointly plan and work out where the gaps are in service delivery.

Some of the outcomes that Families First is trying to achieve are: healthier parents and children; better functioning families; children who are better prepared to learn and develop when they start school; a reduction in the mental health problems in children; improved recognition; early intervention for post-natal depression and other health problems in parents with new babies; greater parental participation in education and training; and, lastly, a reduction in juvenile and adult crime. These outcomes cover a range of services. So health services and family support services will be trying to achieve a common set of outcomes and they will be doing their bit to support families.

I deal now with the actual implementation of Families First. We are currently implementing it in three of 16 areas in New South Wales. Those areas are the mid coast, far North Coast and south-west Sydney. That is supported by existing resources in the system and an allocation of \$19 million over four years over those areas. As I have said, it requires joint regional planning across the five government agencies, not forgetting the role of non-government services and the role of other community services, which may not necessarily be funded by the Government, and also those services which may be funded by the Commonwealth. Responsibility for its implementation at an area level is the joint responsibility of the heads of five government agencies in the region. So they are now responsible as a group of people to jointly decide and plan services for families under the Families First framework. They are doing that planning in close consultation with community forums, non-government services, local government and other stakeholders in the area. This financial year was intended as a planning year mainly for Families First. The first lot of implementation plans for each area have just been endorsed by human services chief executive officers. It is important to give you an indication of what some of the planning priorities are which will happen over the next financial year in those areas.

The planning priorities are expanding home visiting by early childhood nurses and health professionals; establishing volunteer schemes in certain locations in those three areas; expanding the schools-as-community centres approach, the community development aspect of the program; testing models for Aboriginal families and families from non-English speaking backgrounds; and developing the local prevention and early intervention network, to which I have referred. At a State level the priorities at the moment are co-ordinating parenting information resources for parents across agencies. So we will have core sets of parenting resources which can be distributed through this new network that we are setting up of early intervention and prevention services. We are also developing a families web site. As Roger mentioned, we are in the process of progressing research and evaluation systems for Families First.

We are doing a training plan for staff because this requires several different professional groupings of staff to change how they are currently delivering services to families. For example,

we want early childhood nurses to move away from their centre based-service, and go into the homes. That requires giving nurses different types of skills in order to be able to do that. We are also organising a plan to roll out Families First across New South Wales over the next four years. In summary, it is important to stress that the design of Families First is unique to Australia. I hope that it will lead the way in rearranging and strengthening support to families. The important message that I think I have given to you is that it is based on evidence and what has been proven to work for families. Its implementation is in its infancy. So we need time to bed down the strategy and commence its evaluation before we actually make any fundamental changes to the approach.

CHAIR: During questions, either witness can respond to any question that might be asked. I acknowledge that I have a predisposition to supporting early intervention programs. However, I was a little troubled by something Mr Homel said this morning. His exact words were that very few such early intervention programs have been adequately evaluated. Can you give the Committee an assurance that the Families First program will receive a proper evaluation?

Ms HUDSON: There is a commitment to evaluate it. It needs to be a long-term commitment. Evaluation basically needs to happen at two levels, that is, at the area level, in trying to evaluate the program's fidelity. Have we implemented what we said we would implement? Then at a broader level, the outcomes to which I have referred need evaluation, but that must be over a longer period.

Mr WILKINS: As I said earlier, it is obviously cutting-edge stuff. It is difficult necessarily to trace out causal connections. I have talked to someone from one of the universities about this. It is difficult to exclude other factors in the causal connections because of long-term trends. We must look not at strict modelling but at a type of statistical relevance. The closer the effect is to the program, the easier it is to evaluate how well children can fit in at school, for example, than it is to evaluate what the crime trends will be in 15 years time. There are lots of other causal influences on that. We must spend money on trying to figure this out. It is important to hook into the best minds we can to determine how we should evaluate the program. It is clear to me now, having spoken to people from Yale and Oxford, that we are at the cutting edge of evaluation techniques as well. So we are building the program up while we are floating in it. But we want to evaluate the outcomes. There is no sense in pouring money into things if they do not work.

CHAIR: I hope you will pardon me for saying so, but my experience leads me to believe that central agencies of government—and you are the head of one of them—need some convincing to spend money at the front end, as it were, to prevent trouble before it happens.

Mr WILKINS: Dianne will attest to the fact that she gets asked this question by me every second day.

CHAIR: Ms Hudson, you referred earlier to areas. Are they Department of Community Services areas where these pilots or initial manifestations of Families First have occurred?

Ms HUDSON: Yes. We are basing it on the 16 Department of Community Services areas.

CHAIR: So at this stage, the trials are occurring in three such areas?

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: On the mid North Coast, the far North Coast and in south-west Sydney?

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: I take it that, subject to their being proved up, so to speak, it will be spread to other such areas throughout the State?

Ms HUDSON: Yes. We are looking at developing a roll-out plan during the next financial year.

CHAIR: You also referred during your oral presentation to five government agencies being involved. What mechanism is available at a local area level to ensure that they talk to each other and that the whole thing works effectively?

Ms HUDSON: At a local area, there is a mechanism called the regional officers group which makes up the heads of those five government agencies. That is basically the decision-making group at the local level. They meet on a regular basis.

Mr WILKINS: For the start-up period, we have regional people who are employed by us. If necessary, I would knock some heads together but, essentially, that is not a permanent fixture. For a start-up period, we have people in the regions who are employed by the Cabinet Office and who report to Dianne.

CHAIR: The Committee will be taking evidence this afternoon from three representatives of the non-government sector. What form of co-operation exists with the non-government sector? What role do they play?

Ms HUDSON: There would be a mixed understanding of Families First in the non-government sector basically because we have been targeting those three areas. At the moment, the non-government services within those areas would have quite an extensive knowledge of Families First because they have been involved at the local area level, and we have purposely targeted our efforts to make sure that local people and professionals understand the initiative. At a statewide level, I suppose non-government agencies in Sydney that are not operating in south-west Sydney would have a mixed level of knowledge about what Families First is aiming to achieve.

CHAIR: Is it your impression that the non-government sector is generally supportive of the initiative?

Ms HUDSON: It is my impression that they are, yes. There are, I suppose, sections of the non-government sector which would be more supportive than others.

Mr WILKINS: Can I just add that one of the difficult decisions that might have to be made down the track in various regions is in relation to reconfiguring resources. That might mean not only within Government agencies but also in the way that the Government funds non-government organisations. It may mean taking money from them or suggesting that they may actually have to change the way that they do the work. It will not necessarily be universally popular if you are talking about people who might be affected in that way. There might be people who think that it is a great thing and some people who do not. You might get a mixed bag.

CHAIR: It is rarely the case that any initiative is universally popular.

Mr WILKINS: That is right.

CHAIR: I am trying to anticipate any criticism that might be articulated after lunch today. Your impression is that, generally speaking, the non-government sector is supportive

Ms HUDSON: Generally speaking, yes. The peak organisations that represent certain non-government sectors have shown me their support for the initiative.

CHAIR: Ms Hudson, you made some reference to the use of volunteers in home visiting. I visited one such service that was operating out of the University of Newcastle campus some years ago. Would you agree with me that while the use of volunteers is praiseworthy and can produce sound outcomes, there are some limitations?

Ms HUDSON: There are definitely limitations in terms of what the role is with different families. We are talking about volunteer home visitors being linked to families where there are low levels of support required for those families. We are not talking about volunteers being a replacement for a professional person for families who may be a higher levels of risk.

CHAIR: If, during the course of such a visit, volunteers became aware of more than usually serious child protection issues, I take it that the protocols or instructions they might have would require them to refer that to professional agencies?

Ms HUDSON: Definitely, and the co-ordinator of the volunteer scheme will need to be a person with the appropriate qualifications in social sciences and welfare, etcetera. The co-ordinator who would be supporting the volunteers will be required to train the volunteers and also provide ongoing supervision to those volunteers so that any issues to which you have referred are picked up. However, we would hope that, as I said before, if volunteers are dealing with families who require extra help from professionals, they could also be part of a team approach. You could have a situation where a team is working with the families, including a professional who is providing certain support to that family and a volunteer who provides a different level of support to that family as part of that team process.

CHAIR: Is there any Federal involvement in Families First, or is there any desirability for that to occur?

Ms HUDSON: No, there is not. We have obviously been talking to the Federal Government about what Families First is aiming to achieve. Our interest in terms of some of the initiatives from the Federal Government are particularly around parenting information initiatives which the Federal Government tends to fund. We are looking at that and we would hope that we would not be duplicating our activities in that area in particular.

Mr WILKINS: I add that the Premier has been at the Prime Minister, if I can put it that way, to try to get some support for funding of Families First, in particular for the seven-point plan that he took to the Prime Minister's summit on drugs. That plan referred to the importance of early intervention and the Families First program. It suggested rolling that out and looking at its feasibility on an Australia-wide basis. There are programs that are a little bit like it in Western Australia and we were saying to the Prime Minister that this is perhaps worth the Commonwealth investing in it. None of the money that has come out of that summit has been earmarked by the Prime Minister for spending on those initiatives. It is basically to be spent on diversionary schemes. Some of the money that is perhaps going into education on drugs might conceivably be

relevant but not directly so. We would certainly like to see greater support nationally for Families First and for the whole concept of early intervention. There may be some capacity for the Commonwealth to rejig some of its programs and some of its spending to support this type of initiative. There is a lot of Commonwealth money going into areas associated with this, but so far there has not been a concerted approach from us, I would say: nor has there been any receptivity shown by the Commonwealth. That might be something we could pursue a bit more.

CHAIR: Does local government have a role in Families First?

Ms HUDSON: Yes it does, at a local level. Local governments are involved in the planning of the initiative.

CHAIR: So they have a substantial role at the local level?

Ms HUDSON: Yes. Their role is growing and will grow further over time.

CHAIR: But their role at the moment in that regard relates to planning, is that correct?

Ms HUDSON: Yes.

The Hon. P. BREEN: Ms Hudson, I am curious about how the non-government organisation [NGO], for example, Meals on Wheels or St Vincent de Paul, would view Families First at the ground level? How would they see it coming into their operation? Would it be supplementary to what they do, or would it be some type of umbrella organisation?

Ms HUDSON: I think it is important to recognise the principle behind Families First which is not that it is coming in but it is about trying to reorganise what is there, to improve support to families, and to add some new services on top of that. I hope you can understand my subtle differences.

The Hon. P. BREEN: You do not follow them in and knock on the door after them, or anything like that?

Ms HUDSON: Pardon?

The Hon. P. BREEN: You do not follow them into their programs, for example?

Ms HUDSON: No.

The Hon. P. BREEN: Do you suggest new programs for them?

Ms HUDSON: No. I think it is fair to say that it depends on the programs they provide, and that would be ongoing. For example Meals on Wheels, as I understand it, is a program that is specifically for the aged. Because our program is about families with children under eight, I do not see that there is a relationship between the two.

Mr WILKINS: I think it is fair to say that if you find an NGO that is carrying out some sort of service where they characteristically visit people such as younger families, etcetera, you might piggyback that service and say that we should actually get them into this area and rejig the way in which they are doing things. They could actually tell people about what is available and maybe

give them some parenting information and things of that nature. If there is a drop-in centre under a SAT program or something, you might actually get them to purvey information. You might even get somebody on the premises to try to help people who may drop in with particular problems in terms of support. Sometimes single parents can find themselves in situations like that. I guess it would be a matter of looking at the particular program that is being run and seeing how you could reconfigure that. As I said earlier, it is a question of getting local solutions at local levels because both the needs and the opportunities that present themselves are quite different in various towns and in different places around New South Wales. You would not say, "I am sorry, but we are going to take all your money away and stop you from doing what you are doing and give it to another person." I think that is not the way in which we want to proceed.

Ms HUDSON: I think the principle is that we are building on existing structures and where they need to change some of their practices, that is, to improve support to families and provide for them in different ways which makes the support more accessible.

The Hon. P. BREEN: What would you like to see this Committee examine during the inquiry? What do you hope the Committee can achieve?

Mr WILKINS: Probably what I said at the beginning—namely, to get some sort of bipartisan or all-party support and a good understanding of the science on which this is based. I do not use the word advisedly although it is science. You should get people such as Graham Vimpani to talk about brain functions and understand the premises on which this program is built. If you could get an all-party appreciation and support for this type of program, I would even be happy to listen to informed suggestions—and I am sure that the Premier would, too—on ways in which it might be improved. We need an understanding that it is not simply about more money. It is about reconfiguring existing programs, etcetera. If you want to look at it constructively and come up with some constructive suggestions, that would be good, but it is more an appreciation of what it is and what it can achieve as well as the premises upon which it is based. That would be useful in itself. It requires political support at that sort of level if it is going to have ongoing effectiveness.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: Firstly, I congratulate you on the initiatives. It is a great program. I would like to know your views on the factors, particularly in terms of parenting and families, which have led to an initiative such as this? Have you done any evaluations? There is a perception in the community that there has been some breakdown in family structures and parenting abilities in the last decade or so in particular. Have you analysed whether that is correct or incorrect? To what extent is this initiative addressing any of those perceptions?

Mr WILKINS: I will let Dianne respond but I will go first. There is certainly an impression that traditional family support and the sorts of support that existed as a result of the traditional family and community is under pressure if not breaking down in various places, certainly across the western world. Any sociology book will say that sort of thing. At that level the impression is certainly that is what is happening. Professor Reuter, who was at the Drug Summit, will confirm the impression in terms of research to which Dianne referred. The demise of traditional support mechanisms has meant, I suppose, some sort of substitution by the State. By the same token people are being put under much more pressure, but all that is impressionistic. I will let Dianne answer to what extent that is based on science. There are some studies upon which that is based.

CHAIR: I am not here to give evidence, but I suggest that child protection notification rates and juvenile crime rates are some objective indications of families being under threat or pressure?

Mr WILKINS: Yes, maybe.

Ms HUDSON: Yes, that is definitely a key factor.

Mr WILKINS: It may also just simply be more people reporting whereas before these matters were buried in secrecy. Don Weatherburn will tell you that you have got to look at real crime rates as opposed to reported crime rates, and there are lots of things that affect reporting. There certainly seems to be sufficient evidence that there are emerging problems associated with the dissolution of the traditional nuclear family, if you can put it that way.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: That is what my question was directed towards. What are the factors that are leading to that perception? For example, from time to time the Committee hears suggestions that the Family Law Act or some aspects of social security policy and matters of that kind have accelerated the demise of the family in some particular cases. Are you aware of any specific factors which may have been identified as having led to family problems as a prelude, I suppose, to the initiative that you have taken in trying to address the problems of family breakdown and the need for more family support?

Ms HUDSON: It is not just an issue about breakdown but it is also built on an assumption that all families need some level of support. We are not just trying to target families at greater risk, we are talking about a combination of a universal and targeted system of support. The research supports universal services which are non stigmatising for families. For example, through pregnancy and just after birth what should all families have access to in terms of support so they are not actually stigmatised and government agencies are not knocking on the door saying, "We think you have a problem"?

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: In the training and programs you have formulated to what extent have you addressed questions of cultural factors? Obviously cultural factors within families are very different and need to be addressed in some very sensitive ways. In what way has that been addressed?

Ms HUDSON: Broadly we have a service development strategy as part of the initiative which tries to look at the needs of certain cultural groupings. For example, in south-west Sydney certain ethnic groupings—Vietnamese and Lebanese communities, et cetera—have cultural differences that may lead us to doing something that is slightly different in those communities. We work with those communities to find out what types of support are relevant to them. That is the agenda at a broad program level to look at the application of Families First as a concept to those communities. For example, is volunteer home visiting relevant within the Vietnamese community? What are the cultural factors which would support or not support that type of approach?

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: In terms of funding and other forms of support for non government agencies that may be given as part of that initiative, how aggressive will you be in evaluating them and withdrawing support from them if you think your money or your time is not being well spent?

Mr WILKINS: That is a sort of "Have you stopped beating your wife?" type of question.

Ms HUDSON: As a principle we say that evaluation needs to be undertaken as part of every service. So we need to provide sufficient resources to enable non government services that are funded by government under this initiative to evaluate what they are doing. After that evaluation I

believe that time is needed for services to adjust what they are doing, otherwise there is no point in evaluating. They need to adjust the level or type of support they give to families in order to improve service.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: I raised that question because Mr Wilkins talked about the reconfiguration of the existing money that you had provided to those sorts of services. Are you evaluating how that money is being spent and whether it is being well spent as part of that reconfiguration, rather than necessarily making a decision now that something should be funded, and then evaluated? I was more concerned about the initial stages.

Mr WILKINS: The short answer to your question really goes to the relationship between government and non government organisations and the evaluation of the grants that are spent. There has always been a difficulty, I suppose, or there has always been a tension anyway certainly between Treasury and the organisations. Treasury always says they are not properly evaluated. It is gradually moving in a direction in which there is more accountability and there is better targeting focus by government on the sorts of objectives and outcomes that are wanted. This has been a difficult political issue for governments to grapple with because if you ever defund one of these organisations, which sometimes the Treasury would like to do, they will all come down Macquarie Street with placards and it just cannot be done.

There is a gradual cultural shift. There is greater professionalisation of these bodies and by the same score a lot of the non government organisations are becoming much more professional in their management practices and so over time there are improvements. The Cabinet Office will certainly be trying in this system not to fund a whole new organisation but may be add on modules here and there to try to make sure that we get the outcomes and the process. We expect to audit that and measure the outcomes and get some agreement. The general question you raise is a fraught one but one I think where the trend is improving but more could be done.

CHAIR: Where did the idea come from for Families First? Was it based on an overseas model or local ideas? Was it the idea of the Premier, the Cabinet Office, non-government agencies or the Department of Community Services?

Mr WILKINS: Historically and accidentally the idea came from Gill Calvert, the current Children's Commissioner. We had a brainstorming session doing work on policies and she said it would be a good idea. In the Cabinet Office we elaborated on the idea and tried it out with the social policy Ministers, the chief executive officers and the Premier and there was a good deal of enthusiasm. The program fitted neatly with emerging ideas about early intervention and, as I said, the sorts of things that Mr Homel was talking about, which go across a whole range of government services and are not restricted to prevention but are about getting local solutions to local problems. It seemed sensible to say that we do not need a lot more money and resources here, it is just a question of doing it in a different and better way and maybe taking some of the things that we devised in the 1970s and bringing them up to date. Historically that is where the idea came from but it was a convergence of a number of different ways of thinking. If Gill had come up with an idea which actually did not gel with anything else that was going on around it might have just got lost but it got picked up and the Premier ran with it.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The Committee has two versions of your budget. Committee members have been provided with a briefing called "Families First: the Support Network for Families Raising Children" On page 1 reference is made to a \$55.6 million strategy to be implemented in all areas of New South Wales over the next four years. In your evidence you refer to \$19 million worth of new money over four years.

Ms HUDSON: The \$55.6 million includes the \$19 million so it is looking at a broader strategy across New South Wales. I was referring to the \$19 million for the first three year implementation areas.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: What is the other \$26.5 million?

Ms HUDSON: That was part of the pre-election commitment.

Mr WILKINS: Is that an election document?

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I have no idea what it is.

Mr WILKINS: Neither have I. Mr Chair, I would like to see it.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It looks to be something that has been prepared by the Cabinet Office.

CHAIR: It appears to be issued from the Office of Children and Young People and it is dated April 1999. I will show it to the witness.

Mr WILKINS: I will have to take that on notice and provide advice.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I am not meaning to be difficult.

Mr WILKINS: It may well be that it is old money and new money.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It could be. Despite all of your description this morning, I am still not absolutely sure what this new money will buy. Some of the criticisms I anticipate we are likely to hear about Families First, is that the Cabinet Office is focusing more on administrative systems rather than providing services, and there is a question relating to volunteers. A criticism of one group is that there is not enough respite care services being provided—hands on services for people I imagine is what they are complaining about. In order to work that out I would like a better idea of exactly what would you expect to do with this extra \$19 million? Is it going to be program money which various departments apply for or non government agencies apply for or does that pay for your co-ordinating activities?

Ms HUDSON: No, it is money mainly for services. For example, it is based on the implementation plans of what has been identified as local priorities. It will pay, for example, in the next financial year, for increased numbers of early childhood nurses to provide more outreach in the homes. The money will pay for volunteer schemes. The money for those schemes will be administered through the Department of Community Services and non government agencies will be able to express an interest in applying to operate those services.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I am cognisant of the time. To speed this up, I take it that what will happen is that as you survey available services you might find gaps between or within services and then within the Cabinet Office you might be providing money to fill those gaps or to change services appropriately. Is that what will happen?

Ms HUDSON: Yes, the local plans identify where some of the gaps are. The money will not be held by the Cabinet Office for services; the budget holders will be the relevant government departments that administer the services or provide the services directly.

Mr WILKINS: We have only a small amount of money which is basically to set up Dianne's unit, have those people out in the regions and get some of this evaluation work done. It is a diminishing amount over a period of time. Most of the money is in DOCS and Health and places like that.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: You have probably addressed one of the critiques, that you operate only in south-western Sydney, the far North Coast and the mid North Coast. I take it that over time the program is to expand.

Mr WILKINS: Yes.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: What response do you have to the criticism that you are not providing respite care to families under stress, it seems to be for other things. Do you have an early response to that?

Ms HUDSON: Families First encapsulates a whole range of service models. If at the local area respite care was seen to be a priority need there would be opportunities to fund that.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Finally I refer to the use of volunteers. This makes sense to me according to my experience. If you are working in places that have a high level of child protection reports—perhaps dense Department of Housing populations such as Claymore, Airds, Miller and so on in south-western Sydney—where will you find your volunteers in such areas which seem already to be communities under stress? Where will you find volunteers within the areas to address the needs of a volunteer program?

Ms HUDSON: Volunteer programs will succeed only where the community wants to take on such a program. You are right, volunteers are people within the community. In some areas of New South Wales some communities will be more advanced and ready to accept that they want that type of program. In other communities we might need to do some further development work around assessing whether the community wants to do this type of program. If I have time to give you a practical example, out at Curran in south-west Sydney we have a schools as community centre. For the last three years that service has been interested in setting up a volunteer scheme. A number of barriers have been placed before it to do that because some families in that community do not feel comfortable going in to visit other families in their home. So the schools as community centre at Curran is setting up the volunteer scheme initially in a playgroup environment. Over time we would hope that as volunteers get to know the families they will feel more comfortable in providing support in other locations. So it will be different in different communities. Again, it is local solutions.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I know of collections of parents in south-western Sydney who meet for barbecues and things referring to themselves as a Families First group. Does that have anything to do with your arrangements or is it some other group that happens to have the same name. They largely seem to be dealing with people with disabilities.

Ms HUDSON: There is a service in south-west Sydney that provides services for parents with children with disabilities and it is called Families First.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: That has nothing to do with you?

Ms HUDSON: No, that is a separate service. I am not sure of its funding source but it is a disability service.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It is not another project?

Ms HUDSON: No.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: Is it the intention to oblige local councils to participate in these programs coercively—that is through legislation—or just to seek their co-operation?

Mr WILKINS: Not so far. I can imagine some sort of coercion being brought to bear on government agencies if they are protecting their patches, so to speak, but we have not encountered any problems with local governments to date.

Ms HUDSON: No.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: I am concerned that some might see this as beyond their ability to—

Mr WILKINS: Maybe but there is good reason for them in the same way that there is good reason for government to put in relatively modest investment to get a bigger payoff. If they see that early intervention begins to cut down the need for some of their services and some of the things they are involved in down the track there is a good deal of scope for persuasion in this.

CHAIR: Flowing from what Mr Ryan was saying concerning volunteers, I think it could be said that at least two of the three areas where the program is under way—the far north coast and south-west Sydney—have very high child protection notification rates and could be said to be areas where families are under stress. Has it been your experience that there is undue difficulty in securing volunteers within those areas?

Ms HUDSON: Those services will start being established from 1 July. I have given the example of south-west Sydney. In Kempsey, where the notification rates are very high, we have already done testing in terms of the feasibility of the program. We have received positive results—more than we anticipated—from families around the Kempsey community. But again we have to test some of these assumptions.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The legitimate question that is asked is whether the program is going to be adequately targeted. Sometimes the communities which will have a surfeit of volunteers may not necessarily be the communities where you want to make the most impact because of the high level of child abuse notifications.

Ms HUDSON: Exactly, and I think that what I have said in terms of the community development aspect of the program Families First is focusing on higher-need communities.

Mr WILKINS: The other point is that this is a universal program. You would perhaps be surprised where needs turn up.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

RHONDA GAIL STIEN, Chief Executive Officer, Burnside, 13 Blackwood Place, North Parramatta, and

LOUISE VOIGT, Chief Executive Officer and Director of Welfare, Barnardo's Australia, 60-64 Bay Street, Ultimo, and

LOUISE JEAN MULRONEY, Training Co-ordinator, Family Support Services Association of New South Wales, 2 Wunda Road, Concord West, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Ms Stien, what is your occupation and in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms STIEN: I am a social worker by profession and Chief Executive Officer of Burnside.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms STIEN: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms STIEN: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: You have made a written submission to the Committee. Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Ms STIEN: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: In a moment I will invite you to briefly elaborate on your submission in the form of an opening statement of 10 to 15 minutes in length. Mrs Voigt, what is your occupation and in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mrs VOIGT: I am a social worker and I am appearing as Chief Executive Officer and Director of Welfare of Barnardo's Australia.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mrs VOIGT: I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mrs VOIGT: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Would you briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mrs VOIGT: I have had experience both as a social worker running early intervention programs and also as the Chief Executive Officer of Barnardo's.

CHAIR: You have also made a written submission?

Mrs VOIGT: Yes, we have.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Mrs VOIGT: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: In a moment I will invite you, if you wish, to elaborate orally on your written submission. Ms Mulroney, what is your occupation and in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms MULRONEY: I am training co-ordinator of the Family Support Services Association of New South Wales.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms MULRONEY: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms MULRONEY: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Would you briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms MULRONEY: I am a qualified social worker and I have worked for the last 20 years in the area of family support services and the delivery of services to families.

CHAIR: You have also made a written submission?

Ms MULRONEY: That is right.

CHAIR: Do you wish your submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Ms MULRONEY: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: I assume, as with the other two witnesses, you wish to elaborate orally on your written submission?

Ms MULRONEY: Yes.

CHAIR: I say to all of you that if you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to that request. Ms Stien, would you proceed?

Ms STIEN: Most of what I wanted to say is included in our document, so I will keep my

opening remarks brief. Firstly, it is terrific to see a standing committee inquiry on this topic. It is particularly good to see the name of the inquiry include "through social support" because those of us who have been working in this field for years know the benefit of social support. The other matter that is heartening, which particularly came out of the recent conference, as we were discussing before we started, is that we are now seeing various streams coming together—juvenile justice, child welfare, academics—and developing a strong and common view about the importance of preventive services.

The serious state of the child welfare system at the moment in this State makes each of us here very concerned about what that means for the quality of our society in the future. With the number of children who are being neglected and abused at the moment and the inadequacy of the support services available for them, we will see far more serious, chronic, entrenched problems and certainly fairly serious juvenile crime issues in the next generation. Overseas research, albeit too small an amount, has strong indicators that there is value in early intervention programs and that the investment made brings results. But we cannot expect to see those results immediately. Obviously these sorts of strategies require long-term time frames.

To that extent there can often be a mismatch in the political agenda because, to a large extent, politicians have to respond to community feeling, and issues of crime create strong community feeling and calls for immediate action. There has to be a balance, weighing up the calls that the community will make for retribution with what research is saying about what programs can be effective long term in preventing crime. The main point I want to make is that the services have to be highly targeted. We must try to reach the most disadvantaged communities because that is where the major crime problems will be bred. The services have to be localised and accessible to the people who need them. They need to be run by agencies that have a track record of being able to reach those hard-to-reach families.

The services have to be fairly enduring in nature rather than quick one-off help because there are families out there who will need support of a long-term nature to rear their children. Aligned with this we look forward to seeing sound social policies that relate to young people. Young people are targeted in the media as being highly problematic, but we do not have strong and positive social policies relating to them. Each of our organisations was involved in the Invest in Families campaign, of which you have a folder. The message in that campaign is to invest. We believe that requires the State, as well as our own agencies, being prepared to invest in supporting families so that we can see the returns later and the sort of society we would all like to live in. I will leave my opening remarks to that.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mrs Voigt, would you like to make a statement?

Mrs VOIGT: Of course I support what Rhonda said, and I will not repeat most of it. Perhaps I can explain a little about what we do, because we are an old agency that has been in the game for a long while. The sorts of programs we have developed are the sorts of programs we have referred to in our submission where we think resources need to be spent. We started off as a substitute-care agency many years ago, and in the past 20 years have been working much more closely with families whose children are vulnerable to come into care or where the youth is vulnerable to homelessness. So, as Rhonda was saying, we are targeting a particular group of children and young people.

This is the group of children and young people who have the cluster of disadvantage that is associated with crime. They are highly economically disadvantaged—they are some of the poorest people in our community. They are likely to be solo female-headed households. They are likely to

be very socially isolated. That means they do not have the social contacts, particularly at times of crisis, that ordinary families can rely on—aunties, uncles, grandparents and good friends, who can, for example, take over the care of a child for a brief period while a family is in crisis. They are socially isolated. Increasingly, more than others, they are likely to experience domestic violence. They are likely to have transient de facto relationships. They are likely to be affected by alcohol and drug abuse, mental and other health problems—that cluster of all the issues that have been identified as being issues involved in later crime.

Their problems are both entrenched and structural and they have ongoing crises. That is important when we think about the sorts of programs and services needed. These are not quick-fix solutions. The nature of their problems is long term. One may be able to support them with child care in the early years, but when there is domestic violence they may dip into crisis and need a range of other services. Frequently the children fail to thrive because of developmental delay and all sorts of health issues and educational deficit. They tend to have serious behavioural difficulties. Many of them are classified by the health system as suffering from attention deficit disorder. They are difficult-to-rear children. These families live in poor housing and often have inconsistent housing. That is one of the reasons for many of the crises.

By talking about this I am trying to widen the range that some people tend to see as family support. Family support is a very wide arena of support and issues that families need addressing, from housing to individual counselling. An enormous range of agencies are already providing some of these services. Some need strengthening, and at present housing issues in this State are particularly difficult for many families. In response to this, we have developed over the years the notion of supporting the ongoing chronic problems and having a series of crisis programs within that chronicity range so a family can easily move from a chronic low-support system into a high-support system for crises. We are working with more than 5,000 children. We work throughout the Sydney metropolitan region down to the Illawarra, to the Central Coast and up to the Blue Mountains. That gives you an idea of our work in New South Wales. We also work in the Australian Capital Territory.

For us, one of the most useful ways of conceptualising ways of helping has been referred to in the literature, both in America and in Great Britain, as family centres. We call them children's family centres and they are rather like a one-stop shop, rather than going in one door for a domestic violence program, or for temporary care for your children going in another door. It is very difficult for families to find their way through a range of different organisations that may exist in the same locality, because families do not always typify their problems in terms of the solution. So, we have developed children's family centres. They have eight or 10 integrated programs. They are seen in the neighbourhoods in which they exist as places to walk into if you have a problem with your kids or your family. They are highly accessible and identifiable in the community and they are located in low-income communities. For example, we have one in Auburn, we have one in Penrith and one is being developed at Warrawong in the Illawarra. These are areas where there is a whole range of different problems.

These centres develop differently in different areas. This is important in terms of the sort of support families need. In particular communities particular sorts of problems predominate. You will understand, for example, the problems most likely to affect non-English speaking people need more addressing in Auburn than they do in another community. Typically they would include a range of programs—crisis housing, counselling, home visitation, which Family Support will be talking a good deal more about, women's groups, parenting groups, sexual assault programs and sometimes day care or some disability programs which enable them to be seen by the community as mainstream. You do not have to be odd or peculiar to go to such places. They will have youth

services and temporary family care.

I would like to focus a bit on temporary family care. It is crisis care so a child can be cared for in a fostering situation, which is not like substitute care where a child is permanently taken away but where they are temporarily able during a family crisis to be linked with a family in the community. It moves into the area also of respite care, the linking of children to another family in the community over a longer time—for example, one weekend a month—so such children have the opportunity to relate on an ongoing basis to another family group. With temporary care, if a crisis emerges and mum needs detoxification or something like that, a child can get back home very quickly.

We also run youth services. Adolescent programs are often perceived as the most difficult because frequently it is too late by the time the developmental problems of adolescence hit families who are already experiencing problems throughout the age range. The need there is programs that reach out to young people in the places where young people are—Streetwork, and programs such as this. We run these programs plus others such as post-release support programs. You might say this is for young people already involved in the criminal system, but it is their first taste of it. They have been into detention centres and if we do not do something to make sure they do not go back again, they will go back, and the recidivism rates for young people can be reduced by support when they first come out to ensure their problems are addressed and they are knitted back again into society.

We keep these sorts of services separate from our long-term substitute care services but I would like to address that issue because of the drift from long-term substitute care into juvenile justice and later criminality. The Department of Community Services substitute care program—wards—is highly unsatisfactory. The outcomes from it are extremely unsatisfactory. The latest research which looked at wards and the drift into juvenile justice showed many of these people are moved 20 and 40 times. This is not only appalling and totally destructive to said young people, it is extraordinarily expensive. Research from Victoria suggests that to move a permanent placement costs up to \$25,000. Anybody who would like to know how this occurs can question me later. Very few people know the sorts of processes that are going on with our wards now.

We have also developed, as have a number of other programs, community-based placements which give options for young people to be placed in the community. This is something we need to look at. As well as this, the whole issue of looking at research is really important. I find in New South Wales we are frequently rediscovering things we discovered 10 years ago. Families First, I would say, was one of those rediscoveries, part of something we all knew anyway. One of our problems is that practice knowledge about what works is seldom disseminated or researched properly. First, because there is not enough money around to do it and, second, there is such a constant flow-through in the major statutory organisations that corporate history, which contains knowledge about what works, is constantly being lost. The notion that managers can manage everything may have value in some places but when they have forgotten what others have learnt it is expensive for the State and very unhelpful for programs and children.

We have become involved, as have a number of other non-government agencies, in trying to make coalitions and partnerships with the universities. Currently we have a three-year research project being undertaken with the University of New South Wales, looking at a 10-year longitudinal study which will be one of the first in Australia. This is another place where we need more research—longitudinal studies—of children in the care system. We simply do not know enough about what is happening. We have some snapshot research; we do not have the longitudinal research. We are looking at a program called Looking after Children. The materials

for that program come from the United Kingdom. We have implemented these programs to which I have referred in the last two years. In addition, research is being undertaken into family support. Does home visitation work? How well does it work? If it is linked with respite care does it work better? That research is currently being undertaken with the University of New South Wales. We have an additional grant from the National Child Protection Council.

The University of Sydney is also undertaking a three-year research project into domestic violence and its relationship to child abuse. The clusters of social problems that we see which result in later crime certainly include violence in the family. Again, non-government organisations need more access to resources to do more of this research. In general, from my knowledge base, one of the biggest problems is that family support has been a neglected, unsexy sort of area. As Rhonda said earlier, some people find it politically a long-term project and, therefore, it is not easy to sell to the public. In substitute care, where a lot of children later end up murdering other children who come from that system, we simply are not directing the resources adequately. Nothing has been implemented and nothing has happened in all those years. Many of us are beginning to give up hope.

Ms MULRONEY: The Family Support Services Association is a peak body which represents approximately 140 organisations throughout New South Wales. They are non-government organisations that support families. Those 140 organisations represent a wide range of structures which include some of the large church or charitable groups, such as Burnside and Barnardo's, but the majority are made up of small community-based organisations that have been set up to provide for the needs of families in a local area. Significantly, a small majority of those organisations are in rural areas, so the spread of family support services goes right across New South Wales. Most are funded through the Department of Community Services—a State government department. As has been mentioned, Family support services are targeting some of the families which end up clustered around juvenile and adult participation in crime as the children grow up.

In 1998 family support services in New South Wales provided regular home visiting to 14,500 families. In addition, it ran groups focusing around areas of parenting and family relationships, which 12,500 adults attended. As well, it took 160,000 phone calls from members of the public making inquiries and asking for advice and information about family issues. To put that into context, in New South Wales approximately six million people are living in approximately two million households. Family support services provided services to one in 75 households in New South Wales. That was not a typical cross-section of households, because about 70 per cent of those households had children under the age of five, so that skews the sample immediately. In addition to that, they had much lower levels of income; they were much more likely to be renting and, therefore, moving regularly; they were much more likely to be sole parents—approximately 50 per cent of those households were sole parent households as opposed to approximately 20 per cent in the average New South Wales household—and they were much more likely to have had children who had already been notified to the Department of Community Services as being at risk of some form of abuse. So the statistics back up the fact that these services work closely with families with quite severe socioeconomic disadvantages.

This level of work has been done with a minimal level of government support—\$10.2 million last year, which in real terms is a lesser amount than the amount allocated last year through the Department of Community Services to support the work of non-government agencies supporting families. I was asked to flesh out what family support services do by giving as an example a day in the life of a family support worker. I am happy to do that. I make it clear though that a day in the life of a family support worker varies extremely according to the location of that family

support worker. I am thinking of some real examples. For instance, an Aboriginal family support worker who works at Dareton, a small community close to the South Australian border, obviously has a very different day from the day of a family support worker operating from Darlinghurst and who has a focus on kids and families of sex workers in the inner city, and a very different day from a Chinese speaking background worker who has a concern for families struggling as their children are growing up in an Australian context and trying to fit that within their own cultural heritage and background.

Within that framework, let me give you a bit of a sense about what a family support worker operating from a local family support service might do. Family support workers are most likely to be female and in the age group of 30 to 50. We have found that the average age is 43, that is because of life experience. People who have raised their own kids are often seen as an important tool in working with families. The family support worker is also very likely to have tertiary qualifications in the human services field. So this family support worker may start her day doing a home visit. It might be to a family where there is a mother and a couple of young kids. The mother might recently have left a relationship in which there had been violence. That mother might have decided that she needed to leave that relationship as she was starting to see the impact of the violence on her three-year old toddler. However, the decision to leave was not as easy as she had hoped and she is struggling now that she has a limited income. She has moved to a new area, does not know many people, is finding life pretty hard-going and is seriously wondering about whether she made the right decision and what she should do next.

The mother has visited her local doctor who has actually suggested that the family support service might be a good spot to start looking for child care. That is the basis on which she comes into contact with the family support service. The family support worker who visits her starts working with her in relation to child care and gives her advice about some of the financial implications, including credit card debt that she has carried with her from the previous relationship. Over the weeks that the family support worker works in this area, the mother starts thinking and talking a lot more about the implications of the relationship that she has been in; she starts to build up a level of trust; she starts to talk about the pattern of relationships that she has had in the past; and at some depth she starts to think about her future, why she is in this situation, and how much should change so that the cycle is broken for her own kids.

That is not an easy path to take, but it is one where the family support worker, from her experience, knows that there is a possibility of breaking some of those patterns and she encourages the mother to think along some different lines and to meet other people in the same situation. The family support centre is running a regular group for people who have been in domestic violence situations and the worker is keen to get this mother involved in that. After that visit the family support worker may well go back to a crowded family support service where a couple of groups are in progress—a general playgroup where people pop in with their kids and get some support and encouragement from other families in the same situation as they are—and there might also be a structured group, a You and Your Toddler group, where some input is given over an eight-week session which enables people to leave with some parenting tools.

In the afternoon the worker might have a few more home visits, which could involve an incredible range of families and family situations. As Louise mentioned earlier, families rarely deal with one issue; often they are dealing with multiple clusters of issues. Family services workers work with people by focusing on small steps towards change. They realise that family situations can be chaotic and overwhelming. Family support practice means that people break down those huge chaotic areas—those mountains of problems that families seem to be facing—and encourage them to look at making a change that will make a difference to them and their kids. Working on that change can introduce more and more changes in families. Family support

services are working on a practice base that has a good, theoretical underpinning. It is based on the fact that, when change happens in families, those families need support and encouragement. But ultimately the families have to make the changes and they have to make the decisions to change. So they have to set their own goals and work towards them.

The day of a family support worker might finish with a meeting. One example of that could be that the family support worker gets together with a couple of people working in the area who have been concerned that the programs that have been designed to help kids adapt into school have been really well attended, but by families who usually are fairly well-equipped to help their kids at any rate. They are trying to work out how to get in touch with some of the young parents who have had negative experiences of school and who might not be that far removed from having left school and who are not turning up to activities run by the school. So the principal has got together with the family support worker and other people who are concerned about this issue and they are thinking about doing some work in the shopping centre mall, as that is the place where families with young kids tend to hang out. So they are looking at doing some information and play sessions in the local shopping centre and involving the shopping centre management in that.

That gives a bit of a feel about the range of activities at a local family support service on any day of its operation. A key issue to emphasise—again something Louise mentioned earlier—was how important it is to have services that are comprehensive, that do not break families up into problem areas, or deal with a specific age group. They should actually recognise that family situations have factors that interplay off each other; that housing will impact on income and on parenting styles and skills; that services must be able to work with families at the point that they are seeking assistance in order to open up potential for change to happen in a range of other areas. It is really important that services have multiple entry points so that people can come in through playgroups, which everyone knows is a good thing to do, as well as through seeking assistance in a crisis time or coming to get access to a particular service.

In conclusion, I highlight the fact that there is a network of family support services within New South Wales that is the envy of people from other countries—from Europe and America and indeed from other States. New South Wales, with limited resources, has at least kept intact a program that was started by the Commonwealth some 20 years ago. In the early 1980s, when that family support program was handed over to the States, New South Wales was one of the few States that kept its commitment to that program. Governments of all political persuasions have kept that program going. So there is already a network of services across New South Wales. So much more could happen with more resources and more funding. It certainly has not developed as much as it could, but it is there and we want to look at existing networks and build on those networks. There is a pattern in the past of bringing in new programs, innovations, and pilot programs that go for three years and then disappear. It is tempting to introduce new and exciting programs. But we have seen that the practice that has been occurring for the last 20 years in this State has been discovered by people doing research into policy. That is wonderful and great and it augurs well for the way in which things might go in the future, as long as that basic foundation is built upon.

CHAIR: In commencing the questioning, I indicate that any one or more of the witnesses are entitled—and, indeed, encouraged—to respond to any question that any member of the Committee might ask. I commence by saying that one of our terms of reference requires us to give attention to the impact of changes in the social services support system on criminal participation rates. In addressing that term of reference, I point out that there have been some changes at the Federal level in recent years that have impacted on social support systems. I wonder whether any of us can identify any changes which might have had either a positive or a

negative effect on your clients and services, such as restructuring of child-care funding, changes to Centrelink, and increases in drug rehabilitation funding? Can any of you turn your mind to changes at a Federal level that might have impacted one way or the other on your clients and the services that are provided?

Mrs VOIGT: Certainly that is so in terms of day care. There have been a number of changes, ending with the most recent change, but there were actually quite a number of changes prior to that. Gradually and increasingly under the Labor Government at a Federal level, it was seen as a labour market policy and part of the policy of getting women out of poverty. One agrees with that in many ways. There was an impact on access for people who are never going to get a job. I am talking in general about people who will never work or probably will not work unless they are given significant levels of help, and they were excluded in many ways from day care because of the criteria which existed. You had to be working or training for work to get access, and that applied to the long day care area.

More recent changes have now come in which affect whether or not people can get access to support for their children in day care. While it is thought by State governments, many directors of day care and a lot of users of day care that it is a barrier to some of our clients, in fact there are ways of getting those children into day care. We have had to go through some quite complicated fairy dancing to find out from the Federal Government that the access was available or that access for children at risk, particularly, was there. It is reasonably generous when people can get access to it, but only a few people know how to do it. In general, I would say that there has been a reduction in the numbers of children at risk who are being regularly referred into day care unless they have contact with a family support association or Burnside that knows how to get them in.

In terms of housing, it is certainly true that policies of housing between the State and Federal Governments have had a significant impact on our clients. For clients in our crisis housing and for women in refuges who escape or flee from domestic violence, there is a decline in public housing. Governments are not building public housing any more. I know there is the thought that perhaps the private market will take it up and that it assists, but it just is not there. If a woman walks into a real estate agent's office and she is on the pension and has four kids, do you think that she is at the top of the possible or potential renters list? She is not: she is just not going to get it. Public housing is a really serious issue and it is a serious issue for young people as well.

Ms MULRONEY: Clearly, the two issues that seem to be impacting most at the moment on families reported at the grassroots level are housing and the rise in rural areas in people involved in illicit drugs. They are two areas that are hitting the grassroots more than has been noticed in the past.

The Hon. P. BREEN: Did you say "rural areas"?

Ms MULRONEY: Rural areas, yes.

CHAIR: Turning to another matter, this morning we heard from two witnesses, Mr Roger Wilkins, the Director-General of the Cabinet Office, and Ms Dianne Hudson from the Office of Children and Young People. They were giving evidence to us regarding the Families First program. The State Government clearly sees that program as crucial to early intervention with a view to addressing social problems. Could any or all of you tell us what you see as the strengths on the one hand and the weaknesses on the other of Families First?

Ms STIEN: I will address this. The Coalition to Support Vulnerable Families looked at developing a response that involved some critique of the program. In terms of the strengths and

moves that we applauded, I will go through the headings. The first was that it provides specific services that are designed to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Obviously, from our point of view, anything that has a prevention focus is positive. The initiative indicates that the current State Government has an increasing awareness of a commitment to prevention. From our point of view, we felt that that was a terrific result. The Government is showing that it has that commitment and understanding. The fact that it is a co-operative venture between government departments and the community sector is a strength in the planning of that model. The fact that it provides a range of intervention depending on the level of the need of the family shows that there is some real flexibility built into it which we also saw as a plus.

Finally, it targets higher need communities so the program was not trying to be applied statewide and the Government was targeting those areas where the highest need was found. From our point of view—which, again, represents peak organisations such as NCOSS, the Family Support Services Association, ACWA, and some of the major non-government agencies such as Barnardo's and Burnside—we felt that the lack of non-government organisation involvement in the development of the program was a weakness, particularly given that our campaign was going at the same time. We felt that there was an ideal opportunity for there to be some real co-operative work happening, but that did not occur.

There is no provision for non-government representation on the regional executive officer groups that have been established. Those groups will have responsibility for planning and operational decision making in each of the three areas, but non-government representatives are not included in those groups. Some regions may decide to invite them, but they are not part of the planning. When it is considered that there is already a network of family support services across the State and that there are in some key areas some major non-government agencies included, then this situation is a great pity.

From our point of view, our particular program took into account the tight financial climate and we felt that there were two major services required: one was early intervention and home visiting, which is included in Families First but through the early childhood nurses of health; and the second was respite care. We feel very strongly about the respite care option because it is really a pretty simple, straightforward, cheap service that is highly effective, and families say that they need it. Of course, as we all know we are seeing a breakdown in the extended family network. Respite care can really fill that gap. We are very sad that respite care has not been given sufficient attention in the Families First model.

Families First should ensure that services are targeted primarily to those who are most in need. While the areas that have been chosen are areas where there is high need, we have to make sure that the services get to the most needy families within that area. We believe that the program should have sought to build on existing models of service delivery rather than establish new models. I suppose in that regard I strongly support what Louise from Family Support Services is saying. Family Support Services are already located in those communities and are already doing home visiting. They are already trying to link into a whole range of other services and it would have been good to see them linked in with that.

We have a whole range of reservations regarding the emphasis on volunteers in the home visiting program. Those reservations arise from the fact that, firstly, we are not saying that volunteers cannot have a role because we believe that they can. However, we worry about whether sufficient numbers will be available in the really high need communities. It is possible to get volunteers on the North Shore and you can get them in the southern suburbs or parts of the Eastern Suburbs, but when you try to get volunteers at Claymore or Bidwill or other very high

stressed communities, that is really difficult. The extent to which we are expecting volunteers to work with really high risk families needs to be considered. We need to be wary about what it is we are asking volunteers to do.

Really well-run volunteer programs have to incorporate proper orientation, training, really high quality selection processes, and good quality supervision. Support means that they have to be properly linked into professional support services. We believe that volunteers work better if they are embedded in other more professional support programs rather than programs operating on their own. The other issue is that we know that this sort of work means making sustained commitments to working fairly long term in some fairly difficult and troubled families. That is a hard ask. Some volunteers could do it but many find it tough to get people who are prepared to make that sort of very substantial commitment for a period. They are our main points about the strengths and weaknesses that we saw in the Families First model. I am happy to leave this document with you if you like.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The Families First witnesses this morning were telling us that at this stage the program exists in three areas of the Department of Community Services, namely, the far North Coast, the mid North Coast and south-western Sydney. During questioning, it was put to them that there is a possible difficulty in securing volunteers in areas of high stress and socioeconomic need. As I recall it, part of the response to that questioning was that the program would endeavour to train volunteers. Have you seen any evidence of that at this stage?

Ms STIEN: No, we have not seen much of what I would call the roll-out of the Families First program.

Mrs VOIGT: It is not rolling out; it is all the bureaucrats meeting together.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: To give the program its due, I had a look at last year's budget papers and there was no indication that it was the intention that it would actually roll out this year.

Mrs VOIGT: That is correct. Everybody is meeting. I will jump in here because I am absolutely outraged about it. The money was spent on bureaucrats meeting together in very long and expensive meetings to talk about things that they never run, never have run and do not know how to run. If they had gone to one of those little family support programs, who know about actually running a family support program, that would have been better. You have got bureaucrats who have never run these programs talking together, although they can talk about co-ordination and grand plans.

CHAIR: To be fair to them, they were referring to four-year funding this morning.

Mrs VOIGT: Yes. It started small.

CHAIR: As the Hon. J. F. Ryan suggests, I suppose it is in its initial stages at the moment.

Ms STIEN: That is what makes it actually quite difficult to put in an assessment at this stage on it. It is reasonably intangible. There is a structure that has some good solid bases on it but there are some question marks about how possible that is going to be in areas of high disadvantage. If the process was more open to allow a little bit more input into it, it would certainly have the sense that there was more chance of actually doing what it is talking about,

which is reshaping the way that services are delivered to them.

Mrs VOIGT: That would help.

CHAIR: I am inclined to agree that home visitors have their limitations and their strengths as well. What I am thinking of is where they come across a family that is under great stress and there is the prospect of an outbreak of child abuse or domestic violence, for example. I would think that they need, via a training protocol, to be aware to call in professionals if things get as serious as that. Would you agree with that?

Mrs VOIGT: Absolutely. I can give you a paper that my agency wrote which was developed as we talked about child protection programs and volunteer workers. I sound as if I am anti volunteers but we all use them. Our respite foster carers are certainly volunteers. There are many good ways of using volunteers but I think if you want to know how to use volunteers well ask the non government sector because the Government does not use volunteers very often and has not got so much experience. We have been using them as home visitors and outworkers in lots of ways.

Ms MULRONEY: A number of programs that are members of ours have volunteer home visiting streams within their programs. I was interested also in looking at some best practice guidelines specifically for volunteer home visiting programs that have started to be drafted on a Federal level. They make it quite clear in one sentence which says, "It is understood that involvement of paid workers is necessary to provide more specialist and/or intensive intervention in situations where families have complex needs, particularly those which impact on the safety and well being of family members." That would be a position held by most services that there needs to be clear protocols about how to deal with that.

That is one of the key issues that often when a paid, trained, skilled worker first makes contact with a family, it can be several weeks or even months before some of the more difficult issues are revealed by those families. At that point there is some trust established that makes it very difficult to then say, "Sorry I will have to go and get someone else in here". When programs are being targeted at people who have a high level of disadvantage it should be assumed that the majority of those families will have issues that will impact on the wellbeing and safety of their children.

Mrs VOIGT: An example of that is the child that died on the north coast who died also, not only, because the volunteer that visited did not know what to look for. That was not the volunteer's fault.

CHAIR: Mrs Voigt, you laid particular stress on the utility and need for respite care?

Mrs VOIGT: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Would you develop that for us a little more as to how that might link in with our primary objective of preventing crime.

Mrs VOIGT: Housing is a program you could hook out and say that it is a critical issue for families because overcrowding leads to these sorts of things. Respite care is, in fact, contact with another family where, on a regular basis, a child who is targeted as being a child at risk is placed with that family in an ongoing way. In my organisation it is one weekend a month. That means

that the child has access to a family where there is a whole range of other options available to that child both recreational, educational, social than it will have in its own family.

There is a deal of good research now which suggests that an important "other" in a child's life can be the factor for resilience. What is suggested is that it is like an aunt or uncle or somebody who is important in that child's life in an ongoing way with whom the child has real contact. That is not just a trickle down effect from the parent which you might say, without being rude about our own programs, home visitations, actually directly impacts on the child. It is also an enormous relief to numbers of families who know that their children are safe, welcome and encouraged in another family household in their community.

Often it offers young parents a lot of support. That sort of support could well be that our respite carers become quite close to that family. They often pick the kids up on the weekend because in many cases it is not easy to walk to and many of our families do not have transport. It is a good social cohesive thing for the kids and for the family. Those are the elements which later have shown to have important aspects in terms of crime, particularly the significant "other" issue.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Your proposal for respite care is not a series of facilities operated by the Government.

Mrs VOIGT: That would be totally appalling and very destructive.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: You are talking about using ordinary families?

Mrs VOIGT: Foster carers are very difficult to recruit because it means they do not have to work. The critical thing about respite carers is that there is an enormous wealth of kindness in the community about children. The message that children are children of us all is held by a lot of the community who want to help with children but are limited in time by what they can do. The families that come forward can be young or older families and many of them have got both mother and father working and can only give that commitment. What happens is that when that child has a crisis they put themselves out to help the child.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: One of the common arguments to which you have referred is the need to provide more resources for other services. Arguments have been made along those lines by you and they are part of your submission. You refer to \$10 million for respite care services and \$10 million for family visit services. A difficulty this Committee has got to grapple with is that frequently when requests such as that go to an agency such as Treasury an argument is put to the proponent of the new suggestion that welfare is a black hole, and Treasury needs some means of measuring its effectiveness in the short or long term so that it knows that it is not paying for something that the community will simply absorb and then look for something else again.

One of the most common arguments, particularly about professionalising services which already exist in the community and in former ways, is that when the Government gets involved in professionalising the service, the normal neighbourhood things that are provided, be it meals provided by one of the neighbours to people whose family is in some sort of a crisis, meals on wheels, informal child-care arrangements made between neighbours and a family or the provision of organised youth groups, it all seems to vanish every time the Government gets involved. The theory is that it is now the Government's problem. How can we counter that black hole argument with data, facts and figures which will convince agencies such as Treasury that such proposals are worth funding?

Ms STIEN: I cannot give you the facts and figures but the first assumption I would want to challenge is the fact that that sort of neighbourhood support happens in these highly stressed communities.

Ms MULRONEY: In fact I can provide some figures on that.

Ms STIEN: Our experience would be that it does not or it is significantly less than in those communities that have families that are reasonably well functioning. Our experience in Claymore is that there is such fear and suspicion between the households. People are frightened to go out because they think they are going to be burgled while they are away. It is a real fear. In those sorts of communities there is no sense of community cohesion with people looking out and caring for each other. You actually have to go about building that cohesion, and that is where the concept of family centres and family support happening from localised family centres can start to build the sort of trust that can maybe allow that to happen. But for those sorts of communities it has to be engineered to begin with.

Ms MULRONEY: That has been backed up by some fairly recent research that has been measuring social capital in particular communities. The research has looked at social capital in five local communities and then compared that with the social capital found in families who use family support services and also volunteers who volunteer in neighbourhood centres. There are some fascinating results that come from that research. One of the clear indications is that there are some communities which are below a threshold that are not able to generate their own social capital and there needs to be some input. We have all been saying very clearly that it needs to be targeted. There is no point in throwing finances to generate social capital in to all communities because some communities are at a threshold point where they can do that themselves. But there are certainly some areas where unless that happens it will be a degenerative cycle as opposed to a generating cycle.

CHAIR: This morning Mr Peter Homel, Director of the Crime Prevention Division, Attorney General's Department, said that although he supports early intervention programs—as I do, for that matter—very few programs of that type have been in his view adequately evaluated. Would you agree with that?

Ms MULRONEY: I would definitely agree with that. These programs have been subject to, and have passed with flying colours, the level of evaluation that has been demanded of all other human services so that there is certainly clear evidence of outputs. In those programs we as an association do a comprehensive survey every year across New South Wales. We publish a book every year which says exactly where that \$10.2 million gets spent, the outcomes, the goals that families set, how they see the change happening, what they record as due to family support, et cetera. There is a whole lot of work done around that area. I would emphasise that it is at the same level as other human services endeavours. I do not think you can identify the community sector as any less evaluated than anything in the medical, health and other welfare sector. Having said that there is still room for a lot of very targeted evaluation about what exactly makes the difference?

We know things do get better in families lives when they get in touch with services but to highlight exactly what it is that makes that, how to reproduce those services, how to target services more specifically and how to be less hit and miss sometimes are areas on which we really do need to do some work. We have been doing some work. We have picked up another grant similar to the one that Barnardo's has, doing work in conjunction with the University of Sydney looking around the support needs of parents with an intellectual disability. What exactly makes a

difference for those families? The other area in which we are conducting research entirely out of our own pockets from the sales of publications—we have not got any funding for it—is how to measure the functioning of a family? How to have a before and after measure when a family comes in so we can have a sense of that. We are starting to do some of that work but it has stopped until we get our next \$10,000 that we have to generate ourselves. An amount of \$20,000 would be a fabulous beginning tool that could be useful in a lot of contexts but there is just not the money that is flowing anywhere near the sector to do that sort of work.

Mrs VOIGT: Also numbers of us are doing work. At the moment I have got a University of New South Wales industry grant and Barnardo's is putting in 50 per cent. We are looking at X number of family support clients when they first come to us and then receive home visitation. They also receive respite care. Some receive respite care and some do not. We are looking to see what the after figure looks like. We are looking at internationally verified tools to do that. That is a hugely expensive work. At the moment we have got \$40,000 from the National Child Protection Council plus some money that we had left over from the university grant which we are matching. The work is slow and painstaking but there are some other measures which can be used. For example, does respite care reduce the amount of time children go into crisis care or long-term care? For Treasury that has an enormous impact because every time a child goes into care in this State Treasury has to pay out at least to foster care and generally to operational grants or through their own Department of Community Services. We can show that it reduces by a factor of at least one third the number of times a child goes into crisis care. That is good money for Treasury. But nobody goes out and talks to us much about this. Those things we do know, as well as the good research.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: This morning in the briefing from Families First it was said that as well as funding new programs to fill gaps between agencies such as DOCS and Health—other agencies were mentioned which do not come to mind at the moment—they would be looking at how services that they offer could be reconfigured in order to better suit the needs of families. Can you think of any good examples of where services which are provided now would be better if they were reconfigured?

Mrs VOIGT: Absolutely. From my point of view the Department of Community Services people have a major role as the social police in identifying people who are abusing children. First, they are not terribly good at that and they should get better at it. Then they are supposedly doing work with families following that. If the people are not abusing children the cases can be referred out. I would suggest that the second role—a treatment role, if you like—would be better carried out in family support and a wide range of other counselling non-government organisations. I think it is more effective and cheaper to do it that way.

Ms STIEN: There is a very fine tradition in Australia of what used to be called baby health sisters. There have been several changes of name for the early childhood nurses. An initiative was to have the early childhood nurses doing the early home visiting. I have to say that I am not sure that they are the right people. Some of them would be. I suppose I would like to think that we would get more resources out of Health rather than poor old DOCS. It is pretty strained. I would like to see some of the Health budget carved off to go into this area because that is certainly a department with more resources to use. Maybe there could be a critical look at some of that role of the early childhood nurse. Perhaps we could look at different ways of doing that early intervention work.

Ms MULRONEY: From the conversations that I have had and the things that I read from Families First, when they are talking about configuring services and that area is discussed in

many ways, it is talking about coming more in line with the way the non-government sector has worked with families, more in a partnership, a collaborative role and less in the sense of experts coming in with specialised knowledge to tell people and more about how families can figure out for themselves ways of doing things better for their kids and keep on doing that themselves without needing to have experts coming in and keeping tabs and providing knowledge. That is the level of configuration the whole strategy swings around. There is more a sense of working in partnership with families. That is to be welcomed. It would require more reconfiguring of the government sector than the non-government sector at this stage.

Mrs VOIGT: One of the ways they could do that is by getting out of their offices. PANOC, delivered through Health, is a child abuse program expecting people who have been identified as possibly abusing their children to take their children along to have counselling. That is lovely in theory but the sorts of chaotic families we are talking about are highly unlikely to turn up, and repeatedly not turn up. PANOC workers would still get paid. It is a poor way of working. In some areas of Health they have put the funds into outreach services rather than utilising them in that way. Obviously, that is very sensible—whether it be health workers or NGO workers—but you have to get out there to reach your clients.

Ms STIEN: There has been a strong history within Community Services of contracting out and funding external programs. That same tradition is not in Health. It does not have the same strength of tradition. When the PANOC funds came down Health did not have a mind-set of working in partnership with the non-government sector that actually knows about this client group. Its mind-set was that it must do it itself. It requires a significant cultural change to get them to do that.

Mrs VOIGT: But it is happening. Good things are happening in some places. My children's family centre at Warrawong in the Illawarra approached the Department of Health about having a baby health centre sister located in the building, because we are targeting under fives. It is clearly very sensible. The department was very happy. Over time that worker will become very much an outreach worker. She will not be sitting in her clinic waiting for people to come to her, because she is working with a welfare team, even if they are paid by someone else.

Ms STIEN: The same thing is happening with us on the Central Coast.

Mrs VOIGT: Things like co-location and stuff.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: Mrs Voigt identified in the start of her address a somewhat typical profile of the clients of Barnardos or any agencies which is dealing with the sort of work with which Barnardos would be involved. To what extent is that profile inherited? Is it a chronic problem which flows down from family to family? Do you understand what I mean?

Mrs VOIGT: I understand what you mean. There is a good deal of research about that. There are a lot of myths about it too. It is not carried in the blood; it is carried in social structures. I know of quite a few people in Sydney who would be like the barge children, constantly moving around. The other agencies would also know of such people. They cannot find permanent accommodation so they move constantly—eight, nine, 10 times a year or more. Even if the children were incredibly bright their education would be irreparably damaged. They are also likely to have a range of de factos moving in and out of their lives. Some will be very supportive and positive; many will not be. So their emotional development becomes delayed and interfered with. You know the work on the under threes and neglect. The result is young people of 16 who were excluded from school at 10, who have been running wild and involved in a range of juvenile

justice issues. What options do they have in life? Are they likely to become the managing director of a very good company? I do not think so. I think it is about social structures.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: How do you teach values to families in that position who have not known values because they have not been brought up in a stable environment? What role do you believe agencies such as yours or government agencies have to play in breaking the chronic cycle, and to that end also preventing crime?

Mrs VOIGT: Since I do not believe that it is their values that lead to the crime, if you do something about the other things you find quite unexpected results. For example, the work of the Brotherhood of St Laurence shows quite clearly that the aspirations of the very poor and disadvantaged are that their children have a better life. That is enormously positive for any agency that is working with children with families. People do change if they have more options. If people get more secure housing, if they have social contacts which they can share with, if their children's needs are realistically looked at, they have a belief that the world is a reasonable place. That is where our values come from.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: One argument is that disadvantaged families today are better resourced and their needs are better responded to by government than 30 years ago. For example, there is free health care, a better spread of childcare services, subsidised child care, increased social security benefits and a whole range of other things. If I wanted to give a history lesson I could. Yet crime endlessly increases. I suppose that is another way of asking the same question that my colleague has just asked you. Given that increasing the security of the social service net does not appear to have had a concrete result in reducing the crime rate, how do we convince people that it is worth continuing with the same procedure?

CHAIR: Without having a debate on the Committee, could it be that housing costs are very much greater than they once were expressed as a proportion of earnings?

Ms STIEN: We have mentioned James Garbarino from the States. What he is saying is that the issue is about the disparity. If you look at what our society was 30 years ago you will see that it was a much more homogeneous society. There were not huge disparities in such a significant way between the poorest and the richest. Yes, there have always been the grades but I think we are seeing an increasing gap. The worldwide trend is that the extent of the gap is a pretty strong predictor of crime. So it is not just about government social provision itself. I suppose the major thing is that you are supporting families in such a way that children can feel a sense of nurture and they are not neglected or abused.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: That sort of answer is like trying to solve the world's problems, which I think is beyond our capacity. As the Premier has often said, education is the poor man's best weapon. From my experience in Children's Courts and through speaking to many families who have had children at risk through the juvenile justice system, some families do not recognise the value of education. I do not think you can dismiss it and say that everyone wants their children to have a better life, because a better life can mean different things to different people. It is glaringly obvious to me that people do not recognise the value of education and what opportunities it can offer. How do we get that through to people? I am talking about instilling values in people. That is something that is particularly lacking.

Ms STIEN: You cannot necessarily expect to change people's values but you can offer opportunities. Burnside provides study centres for five disadvantaged schools in south-west Sydney. Those study centres target those kids that the school identifies as at risk of leaving school

and not performing or whose home environment is such that they do not have a place where they can study. Those sorts of practical opportunities give children that extra chance. Perhaps some specialised tutoring could be provided. But we cannot necessarily expect that we are going to be able to change the attitude of the parents. It is simply an opportunity that is provided.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: I agree with that. The local council of which I am a member is pioneering a program. We have a multicultural area where children come from school and their parents cannot assist them with their homework because they speak a different language at home. The children fall further behind, lose interest in their schoolwork and their minds wander off to antisocial activities. We are developing a program which will provide support through our libraries to do exactly what you have mentioned. So opportunities are important. Is there any way that you are aware of to reach out to parents, such as a leadership program?

Mrs VOIGT: Their have been a range of different programs. Do you know the program Schoolless Communities? I am sure the Committee has taken evidence about that. Special programs have been implemented at disadvantaged schools with high absentee rates to encourage increased attendance by students. They have been quite successful but it means engaging the parents in the neighbourhood to feel comfortable with the school as an okay place to be. It also means looking at some of the reasons why children do not attend school and trying to deal with those reasons. That is a good example of one program which is targeted at better educational outcomes. In many ways you are right. We are looking at people who are often almost illiterate. In fact, we run literacy programs for many of our families. That in itself can help in a different attitude towards school for their children. That is very multi-faceted. You need to target what is to be done in each community, not merely broadly base it. Programs should be targeted at the communities where the children are likely to end up in criminality.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: Bearing in mind the concession you have now given in response to my questions, is it appropriate that more resources in this area be directed towards education?

Ms MULRONEY: In partnership activities I think that is the way to go. If programs are targeted to only the education system, as you have said, people who do not identify that as the way to help their children get a better life are probably likely to go down that black hole. If there are partnership arrangements with the school and people working at the grassroots level have a feeling about how education can be made safe and accessible for families to connect with—maybe not basing the programs in school settings and putting in place other strategies that we know can open up opportunities—then yes. Some of the key strategies to putting in new resources are to link them to partnership activities so they are not being given to just a program type or a particular government department. It is all about how to make these links so that each of the organisations can work together to bridge the gaps between the services and the families.

Mrs VOIGT: The truth is that most juvenile justice children have a long history of school exclusion. They have been pushed out of ordinary schools. At the current time the school system, whether because of lack of resources or other issues, is not coping. We are getting more school suspensions now. I have an estate worker who works on one estate where children aged eight and 10 have never been in school, they have been excluded. It is extraordinary that this is happening. You have read about it in the newspapers that school suspensions are growing. There are problems. It may be a resource issue within the schools, I do not know.

Ms STIEN: The problems are there. The children create great stresses on the school system.

Mrs VOIGT: Indeed they do. They are very difficult to manage.

CHAIR: Perhaps there is a concern that other children in the classes do not have their education disrupted.

Mrs VOIGT: Of course. But there seems to be a retreat from the notion that was certainly around 20 years ago that children who were not school attending had options to attend other places until they could be put back into school. Rosemount must be the last one left.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: Stewart House.

CHAIR: Stewart House is more of a holiday place.

Mrs VOIGT: There used to be day programs.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: There are some. There is Ajuga School and Bill Crewes operates a beaut one at Ashfield. They do exist but it would be fair to say it has been historically the view of the Department of Education that these social issues are not its purview. It provides curricula and education and these problems are best dealt with by the Department of Community Services or the police. The department has never really seen it as part of its role.

Mrs VOIGT: The problem is that children are more likely to be involved in juvenile justice if they are running around the State at age 10.

Ms STIEN: There are two sentences in our submission which answers part of that. It states:

Where there are multiple paths to juvenile offending, research evidence suggests one factor in particular has more significance than any other factors. Leitch states that child abuse should be seen as having twice the weight of other factors.

That is why our emphasis is on the whole area of family support and child abuse issues. In the context of education, children who are being abused cannot learn.

Mrs VOIGT: Our submission also makes the linkages with child protection. It is a very strong link.

Ms STIEN: It is one of the strategies but it is not the one I would put at the top of the list because of the research.

The Hon. P. BREEN: I am interested in the impact of government policies on various social support programs. I was particularly interested when Ms Mulroney said that the current network in New South Wales is the envy of the world, or one of the best in the world.

Ms MULRONEY: Certainly the level of programs, which is designed to bridge from families that are seeking low level support up to crisis support, does not appear to exist in that systematic way in other places.

The Hon. P. BREEN: It occurred to me that there may be a way in which the Families First program is seeking to capitalise on that and perhaps even exploit it. Given the amount of money that the program appears to have, it could have a significant impact on the way the existing system operates. Are you concerned about that or would you like to see its operations changed or the money channelled in a particular way?

Ms MULRONEY: The key issue is to make sure that whatever money is channelled into the system does not ignore what is already there and genuinely seeks to support the existing network, as well as finding the inevitable gaps. You are right, it is a large amount of money that is spread over three out of 17 areas in New South Wales. I think annually they have twice the amount of money than that provided for all family support services throughout the State. So it is an apparently inequitable amount of money.

The Hon. P. BREEN: It may be just the beginning and the rest of the money will go into other areas.

Ms MULRONEY: Yes. It is very difficult to make a comment at this point because it is unclear how the roll-out of that program will look on the ground. Over the last nine months the picture keeps changing. Each time we have a briefing the program looks and feels different. I can understand that, because they are learning as they go along. But there is still nothing tangible enough for us to make strong comments on it. All we can do is continue to reinforce that the services are already there. All of our research into what our members want as a key area—as far as what they think will make a significant difference to families at the grassroots level—is more hours for intensive work with families with the most complex needs in order to allow the more low key and preventive work not to be squashed.

One of the questions on the program that we have not commented on yet is the change in the way people have worked over the last five years. It is clear that one of the changes has been the increasingly complex area of family needs ending up in the non-government sector, presumably as a result of the drying up of resources in the government sector. That has meant that demands for crisis work have made it more difficult for local services to keep doing the non-flashy but very important low level preventive work such as parenting groups before things have fallen apart for families and to allow methods to be put in place to make good things happen for families. The other area to target if more money is coming into the sector is the area that requires fairly intensive work over a long period of time. If more money comes into the sector in that area, preventive work can continue to be done at the non-intensive area.

The Hon. P. BREEN: In the same vein, housing policies between State and Federal governments have had huge impacts on disadvantaged people. There has always been tension about whose responsibility the Commonwealth housing agreement is. As a consequence, in the last several years public housing in New South Wales has suffered. It seems to me that one policy has been dismantled but another has not yet been made. I am personally interested in the housing aspect because I was involved in HomeFund. I would be interested to know what you think about the current public housing situation and how it might be improved with perhaps the Families First program or in other ways so that more people are able to access public housing.

Mrs VOIGT: All I can talk about is the effects that we see on clients. New starts on public housing have almost dried up because of the agreements. From our perspective, it did not seem to be driven necessarily by the States or the Commonwealth. It was a mutually agreed process to wind back the building of public housing. That process has had sad effects on some of the most disadvantaged people in our community. Even if they have assistance, they are the last people who will be given opportunities for reasonable private rental. Therefore, public housing was the salvation for some of them. Also, public housing had improved. They were not building those ghastly public housing estates any longer. The policies and procedures had changed so that some of our clients would go into a mixed range of housing where social capitalists developed around them. Through that very contact their children had opportunities to live different lifestyles. Just when that was happening, they stopped building public housing. It has really been very difficult

for us and our clients. We have a number of crisis housing units and the waiting times to get into public housing is now way over a year for the most critical and it will get worse.

The Hon. J. P. BREEN: People are having to move into different areas where there is housing available and that is disruptive as well?

Mrs VOIGT: This has always happened. It has been a pattern with public housing but just when public housing was getting better, actually the common agreement amongst all housing experts was to no longer build public housing but I think they left out of the calculation the most serious, bottom of the group.

The Hon. J. P. BREEN: Are there any particular issues that you think this Committee ought to address and what do you think the committee ought to try to achieve as a result of these hearings?

Mrs VOIGT: Yes, I do, and I do not think it is about money. Ron knows exactly what I am going to say; it is about substitute care in the Department of Community Services because substitute care is the quickest pathway into criminality. If one takes a child away from the family I think that child is 30 times more likely to end up in juvenile justice. At the moment the organisation of substitute care in the Department of Community Services is almost a problem that cannot be dealt with. Various Ministers of both persuasions have attempted to deal with it and it has not been resolved.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: What are the alternatives?

Mrs VOIGT: The alternative was called Usher, which was the name of Father Usher, who is the head of Centacare, who wrote a report about the fact that substitute care should go to the non-government sector. Despite the substitute care program there are actually about 2,000 kids in foster care at any one time and it is from that system, foster care and residential care, which is down to a few hundred now, that the kids drift into the juvenile justice system. The recent report into juvenile justice is absolutely damning on the system and it remains untackled. In fact, the non-government sector that provides the majority of the most difficult hard to place now has been reducing over the last six years.

CHAIR: So I take it you are saying that continuity of placement is crucial?

Mrs VOIGT: Yes, and the likelihood of getting continuity is far higher in the non-government sector mainly because of organisational and managerial issues. This is one of the biggest welfare departments in the world. In the whole of Europe they do not run welfare departments of this size; they do not cover six million people. It is laughable in terms of the local authority system of the United Kingdom or Europe. In fact, they also do not in most of America, although a few of their counties do cover that. However, we would not want to have the Los Angeles substitute care system. It is appalling. It is the managerial inability to tackle this and I suppose what I would see as a lack of government will because of all the disadvantaged children in the community, they are the least heard. They have no voice and they are the most likely to end up in trouble one day. One of my ex-clients, a ward, had gone through 40 to 50 placements before he came to us and he was destroyed. He recently cut somebody 25 times and almost severed the arm. This is what is happening. These stories of wards as they hit juvenile justice system is just terrible.

The Hon. J. P. BREEN: These are children who move from family to family in foster care, are they?

Mrs VOIGT: Because the foster care is so badly organised, that is correct. I am sorry to say it so bluntly, but that is how I feel.

Ms STIEN: But it is also the extent of the abuse of children coming into care and obviously if children are left too long in very dangerous circumstances the damage to their personality development is in some cases irreversible. I have seen children coming into care at age three who have been severely sexually and physically abused from 18 months of age and those children were excluded from preschool, spend most of their lives in the school system in special classes for emotionally disturbed children and were self-mutilating in their teens. These are very troubled children who will be very troubled adults. That is what reinforces the real importance of early intervention work because the early intervention work is really not only just about providing support for those families that need it to get through, but it is also to identify very early those families where the extent of the abuse is such that those children should not stay there. For me early intervention is critical for both sides.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: With early intervention you indicated that a problem situation may be identified, for example, a child was being sexually or physically abused to the extent that the child should not stay there. Do you regard being able to examine the parents as one of the roles of early intervention?

Ms STIEN: No, that is the role of the Department of Community Services but the benefit of early intervention work is being able to be in a position of having more chance of knowing what is happening in that family. The biggest problem for these children who suffer serious personality damage is that because they are in more hard to reach families, unless the services are designed in such a way for people to actually know about it, they will not come much to attention until they are in the school system and by then it is much too late. In the end the Department of Community Services is the only one with the authority to investigate.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: We were talking about the stolen generation.

Mrs VOIGT: I am talking about the foster system.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: I can see criticisms being levelled in both directions.

Mrs VOIGT: But in the end when they come into care, the State promises those children in the court that it will provide better than it has now and it provides that by 40 moving placements.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: That was an argument put forward for the stolen generations.

Mrs VOIGT: I think it is a valid argument today. These children desperately need to come into care and the department is not taking children lightly. They are pretty desperate by the time they come in but the organisation of what we do with them then, if you wanted something without any money it is that, but the resources need to go in to support services of all sorts.

Ms MULRONEY: And it is interesting when one reflects on numbers such as 2,000 children, which is a reasonably small cohort that can be properly dealt with in that particular way and there are certainly ways of making sure that that cohort does not get larger. That is where the

more general early intervention also means that some kids will not get tipped over into that scale because there will be better support, particularly social support in terms of decreasing social isolation. That is a significant factor that makes a huge difference to the way that families raise their kids. If they have a sense that there are people around who know what they are doing with their kids and care about what they are doing with their kids, it has an incredible impact on families.

I also would not like to leave with the sense that these families are hopeless and nothing is going to change about them because I know of too many stories where people have turned around the way that they have dealt with their kids and that this sort of intervention at this level makes a significant difference in people's lives and makes kids lives better because of it. That is the sort of stuff we need to have more hard data on. Rather than just anecdotal evidence, clear research, and I would strongly push for that. As much as I get annoyed when huge amounts of money become available for research when out in the field we can hardly get more worker hours, I think we need to know that we are on the right track and the funders need to know that we are on the right track. Therefore, I would strongly ask for a different approach to research be taken.

Ms STIEN: We have not talked much about young people, yet juvenile crime is a significant issue and while we are focussing on the prevention end—and that is critical in terms of the early life experience of young people—there are better things we could probably be doing now. I would love to see some good social policy coming out about young people and social supports put in place for them. Young people face situations today that none of us have had to face in terms of the very high levels of unemployment and the drug problems that are so prevalent. We need to be very careful, given the media images of young people and the sorts of laws that we have seen come into effect with regard to young people. Again, it is a little bit of that blaming the victim stuff. While inevitably there must be good laws in terms of there being proper consequences for criminal behaviour, we also need to look at what is happening to young people in their lives and how we as a society can have a well-informed position on what we are trying to achieve for our young people.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Could you indicate to the Committee what was the outcome of the Invest in Families campaign? Did you receive any specific responses from Government, and in particular the Treasury, regarding the requests you were making?

Ms STIEN: Our Invest in Families campaign decided that we wanted to make an impact at the last State election. The Coalition adopted our position 100 per cent. But then, when I spoke to them before the weekend of our announcing the campaign and post-announcement, they had not actually done the policy, and after the weekend it did include the \$20 million for respite care and home visiting. We were very pleased that it made that impact in terms of people thinking that it was worth supporting. Even though we were not involved in the planning, we believe that the sort of push that we were making resulted in Families First. We started putting pressure on well before that time to say that governments have to take seriously the whole prevention aspect. So we do take part of the credit for Families First.

Mrs VOIGT: And some of the changes in Families First. It started off completely differently. When we started saying lots of very critical things publicly about Families First, Dianne got in there and things started to change.

Ms STIEN: We have had a little look at the things that we think have been good outcomes from it, and part of that is the new alliances that have been built. There have been alliances with the academic world and the juvenile justice field, and we have seen those linkages start to happen. For example, what happens in the child welfare field has implications in so many other fields,

which has been terrific. Although we see each other in a whole range of different forums, together we could say that this issue is so important that we really need to have a concerted campaign about it. While I think that these campaigns have their logical time when they should end—and ours has ended now because the election has finished—we will get together from time to time to discuss other issues. Because the program is already there, we are able to do that and to bring it together again fairly quickly.

Ms MULRONEY: May I make another comment about Families First. It is important to realise that Families First is only operating in three out of 17 areas. It has been frustrating when we have raised concerns about resourcing in other areas to say, "Oh, we have Families First now." For 14 of 17 areas, they will not see one bit of difference in their area at this point. There is talk about a continuing roll-out, but that has certainly not been put in any tangible form. So it is having a very limited impact. Even in total roll-out, it will have a very limited impact on most of New South Wales. The average family in New South Wales will not be aware of it and will not see it.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Evidence was given this morning by Mr Wilkins and by Ms Hudson that it is the intention to roll it out into the rest of the State. They are merely starting with the three areas where it exists at the moment.

The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS: It is identified in the paper that we were given that the strategy will be implemented in all areas of New South Wales over the next four years. Indeed, in light of the criticism that many of you have directed towards parts of Families First, particularly its initial development stages, it would be totally unreasonable to extend the program before those three areas have been properly evaluated.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Ms Voigt, earlier this afternoon you referred to recent research into the social capital of particular communities. Could you provide to the Committee Secretariat further details about that research, which would be of assistance to the Committee?

Mrs VOIGT: Yes, certainly. It has only been released in the last two months. I would be happy to do that.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.00 p.m.)