

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON LAW AND JUSTICE**

**INQUIRY INTO CRIME PREVENTION
THROUGH SOCIAL SUPPORT**

At Sydney on Wednesday 6 October 1999

The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. R. D. Dyer (Chairman)

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

NOEL HENRY BAUM, Senior Policy Officer, Local Government and Shires Associations, 215 Clarence Street Sydney, affirmed and examined:

PHYLLIS JUNE MILLER, Executive Member, Shires Association, Shorthorn Street Forbes, and

BEVERLEY GIEGERL, Executive Member Metropolitan, Local Government Association, 15 Lesley Crescent Mortdale, sworn and examined:

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

Mr BAUM: I did.

Ms MILLER: Yes.

Ms GIEGERL: Yes.

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

Mr BAUM: I certainly am.

Ms MILLER: Yes.

Ms GIEGERL: Yes.

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

Mr BAUM: I have an honours degree in social psychology. I have had 20 years experience in local government both at a local level and with the associations, primarily in social planning, community development and community service provisions.

Ms MILLER: This is my second term as a councillor. I have been a member of the Shires Association executive for two years. I am also involved in community planning and servicing, and I am the mother of five children.

Ms GIEGERL: In my work as a councillor I am fairly heavily involved at the local level as committee chair for community services. I have occupied that position for about two years. These issues are frequently on our agenda. I have been a member of the executive of the association since 1984. This is my third term on local government. I am a retired school principal, so I have a background of working with disadvantaged youth.

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. The Local Government and Shires Associations has made a very detailed submission to this inquiry. Do you wish the submission to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Mr BAUM: Yes, we do.

CHAIR: I invite your spokesperson to give a presentation to the Committee, not exceeding 20 minutes if that is possible, after which we will enter into a questioning period.

Mr BAUM: Certainly. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before the Committee. I will act as the spokesperson, as invited. Before I start, I wish to highlight the fact that the two executive members are here to offer different perspectives. Councillor Miller will offer the rural perspective on any of the questions we move to later and councillor Giegerl will respond in regard to the urban experience of councillors. That is a fairly important division when you think about local government in any context.

CHAIR: Will you indicate those councils that the metropolitan and country representatives in fact represent?

Mr BAUM: Certainly. Councillor Miller is from Forbes and councillor Giegerl is from Hurstville.

CHAIR: Please continue.

Mr BAUM: Firstly, I wish to stress that the Local Government and Shires Associations in fact represents 177 councils throughout New South Wales and has complete coverage of the local government industry. The next point I would make is that, although the Local Government and Shires Associations has clearly acknowledged that the terms of reference concern social support, one of the first things we thought was important to raise in our submission was the concern about policing and resourcing for the Police Service—especially as that affects rural areas. We need to stress to you that there is a significant concern in country New South Wales, especially in respect of rural and remote councils, that resources are not what they need to be in order to achieve real crime prevention; or to deal with the other very important aspect of crime prevention, which is the fear of crime.

We believe it is important that we recognise in any of these sorts of inquiries that crime prevention needs to be looked at in a holistic way. I am sure you have heard that innumerable times in your inquiry but you need to examine crime prevention, not only through social support or environmental modifications but also to make sure that you do not overlook the traditional policing role. We take the opportunity to express the concern of our rural constituents on the issue of police numbers and policing in the bush. The next point I suppose is to turn more specifically to the terms of reference. We have highlighted in our submission that local government has a significant involvement in planning, developing, providing and/or supporting quite a wide array of human services. We have detailed that in section 5 of our submission, on pages 5 to 7.

It is important when we look at crime prevention to recognise that many local governments have been involved in social planning since the 1970s and that this role is now mandatory under amendments passed last year. It is also important to recognise that every council provides a level of social support. So, you need to recognise that local government is a significant provider of facilities such as halls, neighbourhood centres, child care services, aged services, child health services, youth services and transport services. The point local government would make is that all of these services contribute to what we describe as community wellbeing in a general sense and therefore they provide the platform upon which

you can build credible crime prevention. They may not necessarily have a direct intervention role; but as part of an important background to a healthy society, the community which is healthy in terms of its social interaction will help with crime prevention.

Having stressed that in our submission, we would also like to point out that we do not claim to own the total network. It is important to recognise that we are only partners in that network with the non-government sector and, increasingly in some areas, with the commercial sector. In terms of this inquiry, though, it is also important to recognise that that network cannot be taken for granted. In many areas, especially in children's services—particularly in relation to services for children between the ages of 5 and 12 years ,and in relation to youth services—our members report that the system is sorely stretched. As there has not been much of an injection of funding in some of those areas for over 20 years, and as the value of the dollar injections have decreased, it cannot be presumed that the support system exists which will aid and support crime prevention initiatives.

It is very important to recognise that the network is there, and is doing a reasonable job under trying circumstances. But it is not perfect, and it cannot just substitute for crime prevention initiatives. The next point that is covered in the submission deals with crime prevention activities of councils. I need to stress that crime prevention as an articulated activity is quite new to local government. In a sense it has really only been articulated in the nineties as crime prevention. There were certainly a lot of antecedents in the general support work and the community development activities of councils. This is the home something that is relatively new to local government as an in industry.

We have some preliminary data from our own research that was conducted earlier this year. I stress that it is preliminary data. It shows that there is a reasonable but not overwhelming activity level of crime prevention initiatives in local government. Of those who responded to a survey, 78 per cent of councils indicated that they were involved in a local area command or Police Service projects or committees; 48 per cent indicated that they had their own community safety or crime prevention advisory committee; and 38 per cent indicated that their council was facilitating local campaigns or strategies to do with graffiti. This Committee should appreciate that graffiti has been on the agenda of councils for at least 30 years, maybe longer. Approximately 20 per cent of those surveyed indicated that council either had been in the process, or was in the process, of developing a crime prevention plan as a more holistic program.

I will come back to that later. The main point is that there is a reasonable amount of activity, but we should not get carried away. At the moment, it is not overwhelming. The first point that comes out of that evidence is that the major interest is in engagement with police activities. Crime prevention in fact tends to be more around what we might regard as traditional policing in some areas. Certainly those projects may be far wider than that, but there is always an element of crime prevention being very much around the crime concerns of area commands. The next point that is fairly clear from that information is that councils themselves are trying to find a way through the minefield of what is crime prevention and how to deal with what is local crime. I think that is evidenced by the number of committees that exist in local government.

In our submission we gave a fair amount of information about councils' interaction with the Crime Prevention Division of the Attorney General's Department. We did that because we thought it was important to show the variation, given that those programs are generated by councils and then—through competitive bidding, if you like—actually attract the Attorney General's Department or Crime Prevention Division funding for those programs. It

is interesting to see the level of interest that exists in local government and a variety of approaches that have been trialled.

The main point that comes out of that is that, again, councils are increasingly interested in adopting holistic approaches, planning approaches and approaches that ask what is the genuine crime problem in each locality, town or village rather than simply dealing with what is perceived to be the crime across New South Wales. The approach is much more local, much more targeted and much more an attempt to get on top of what are the unique problems for the councils and the communities that they serve. It is important to recognise that councils are certainly showing a great deal of interest in exploring models which include early intervention, diversion, environmental modification and traditional policing. They want to see how all the bits fit together rather than simply using a single model and take it around from town to village to shire in the hope that that will work.

In the seventh section of our submission, we have tried to address the questions that the Committee has put to us about the way in which the Local Government and Shires Associations encourages local government to be further involved in crime prevention initiatives. We ask a number of questions in our submission. One of the matters about which we are very concerned, not just in relation to this Committee but in relation to any central government, is that there should not be a presumption that crime prevention should be universal. That must be considered before we get to the question of whether it should be mandatory or voluntary.

It is very important to recognise that some local government areas have crime profiles that are not amenable to local government intervention. It is simply the case that the crimes are not matters that local government can deal with or there are areas in which crime rates are quite low. One needs to recognise that one cannot start with a presumption that all councils should be involved.

The next point we make arises from experience with quite a number of different central government initiatives. It is critical that crime prevention is permissive or voluntary rather than mandatory. One of the surest ways to get local government offside when it comes to an issue such as this is to try to insist that all councils should do exactly the same thing. A framework is needed which assists councils to become involved and gives them a solid and legal mandate or framework to work in, but it should not be something that is imposed on councils. Some councils simply could not cope. They would not have the resources and, as I said before, some councils do not have the need to be involved.

We have also stressed that there needs to be a sensible choice of the crime types that we would be encouraging local government to be involved in. It is very difficult to see how local government can play anything but an educative role in areas such as domestic violence or white-collar crime. I could go on to name quite a number of the issues. Our role is to encourage any central agencies looking at those types of problems to make sure that they analyse the issues to determine what is possible and what is sensible for local government to be involved in; otherwise, one runs the risk of building up unfair expectations for councils—expectations that they will simply not be able to meet.

The next point about encouraging local government involvement in crime prevention is to ensure that there are adequate central government resources, and I do not just mean funding. We also need advice, support from professional officers, communication strategies and a whole host of matters that go with resourcing and are incredibly important so

that councils do not run out and try to reinvent the wheel. They should use evidence-based crime prevention strategies and work from the knowledge of the sorts of things that have come before this Committee before—that is, what works, what is promising and what does not work. I cannot stress that too much.

People will constantly come up with ideas that do not work, that have been shown over and over again through scientific scrutiny not to work; but because they seem like a good idea, people run with them and then wonder why they do not work. There is a need for communication of information, and strong communication at that. There is also a need for communication about resources and grants that are available. Perhaps my colleagues will comment on this matter. Sometimes it is difficult for some councils to even find out about the grants that are available and this is obviously more so and the case in rural areas.

The association would also advocate that there are needs to be enhanced resources for the the general social service support system. As I said earlier, there are areas such as working with children of primary school age and working with young people in the age-group 12 to 15/17 range where resources are thin on the ground. They have not increased a great deal over the recent past, yet this is the very area, when someone comes up with a crime prevention strategy for a local area, which is identified as a funding source. People say, "Just go and use your local youth support service." One cannot just go and use something that is either not there or is incredibly poorly funded already. One of the keys in to this issue is actually investing in more money in those programs. In a general sense, that is well known; but it does not ever seem to translate to the funding programs of the line agencies that do it.

The final point I wish to make is specifically about the Crime Prevention Division. Local councils that have had the opportunity to work with the division have found it very supportive. The relationship has been good even when the division actually advises a council against going down a certain path. However, I believe there are a real questions about the capacity of the staff to respond to the increasing level of demands from local government. There is certainly a very serious question about the level of grants being adequate. The association would suggest that the grants are not adequate and would suggest that they need to be at least doubled annually, although that will probably simply show that they will need to be enhanced again at a later point.

The other matter that we would be most concerned about is the sustainability of initiatives that are funded by that division. Most funding is non-recurrent. Whilst we understand that, the truth of the matter is that many of the services required to run these sorts of crime prevention strategies are not, and are never likely to be, self-funding. Therefore, those initiatives tend not to attract local charitable or business support, and therefore there are some questions about how to get those matters funded by line agencies. I hope that is an adequate summary of our submission.

CHAIR: I note in an earlier part of the submission of the Local Government and Shires Associations reference to crime prevention and Police Service resources. Strictly speaking, that falls outside the Committee's terms of reference. I raise the matter though to ask: Are there in local councils tensions between demands for law enforcement by traditional means and what this Committee is directly interested in, which is crime prevention through social support? To put it another way: Would most councils be more concerned about traditional means of law enforcement—that is, by boosting police resources—or would it be true to say that councils would give an equal rating to crime prevention through social support?

What is your perception regarding that?

Ms MILLER: Could I speak from a rural perspective. Councils are prepared to support any strategy that is put in place for crime prevention, but without the relevant resources of the Police Service those strategies do not work. We need the support of the Police Service to get those strategies going. The biggest problem is trying to convince communities that it has now become a responsibility, or partly a responsibility, of local government. A cultural change is indicated. Communities believe they pay their taxes and therefore police officers should be doing the job and that local government should not be doing what the police are doing. It is a matter of educating communities to start thinking along the lines of coming on board and helping with social support in crime prevention.

Mr BAUM: The overall pattern is that within some councils that is definitely a real tension in that those councils have felt—as we have alluded to in other parts of our submission—that they have been almost pushed into undertaking traditional policing themselves. There is that sort of issue. There are then tensions such as that the community says someone should do something, and the community does not actually care whether it is the council or the police. Some councils will respond, but other councils have clearly articulated that they only wish to be involved in social support and crime prevention through environmental design. So I would have to say the pattern is quite diverse.

CHAIR: Mr Baum, during your oral presentation you mentioned the need for a strategy regarding communication to councils of the types of crime prevention models that work and models that do not work. Do you have any view as to who should direct such a communications strategy, for example, the associations themselves or the Attorney General's Department?

Mr BAUM: Our view would be that it should be the Crime Prevention Division, but in association with the other two bodies that are quite active in crime prevention at the local level, which are the Police Service and the Premier's Department through its regional coordination projects, which quite often also dabble in crime prevention. I think there needs to be, though, a central clearing house. Certainly, the Crime Prevention Division acts as that, but I would suggest it needs a more active communication strategy that makes it possible for this information to go out far more regularly. Certainly, the associations are prepared to play a role in that, and they have done so. We will, through things like our weekly circular, promote those sorts of initiatives. However, quite often councils need a fairly detailed set of advice, and we are not really in a position to give that.

Ms GIEGERL: If I could comment on that. I did not say in my introduction that I have been involved with a special project of the Premier's Department, the graffiti solutions project, and that subsequently I was on a much bigger graffiti solutions task force. I learned a lot through my involvement with those two bodies. A major problem was communicating the availability of what were very small pilot grants. The local newsletter of the Local Government Association was the major point of communication on that. The Premier's Department did write to each council, but sometimes the written communication goes to the general manager of the council and sometimes it goes through a mailing system and its relevance may not be recognised. That is a problem that we identified. I am not saying that we came up with a solution. However, it is a universal problem that is worth teasing out in order to come up with some strategy.

In my 12 months with the original graffiti task force, the task force managed to

produce a range of fairly strict and stringently evaluated programs and projects as well as a manual or kit giving advice to councils, a web page was developed, and information sheets were developed on council issues such as have been developed by the Department of Fair Trading. It has been a painfully slow process, basically because of limited funding and very tentative communication channels.

The evaluation model that we used involved the Attorney General's Department. I would have to say that the evaluation model of the Attorney General's Department is excellent. We have applied the same standard with the wider task force, and the Attorney General's evaluation process has been found to have a great deal to offer. On reading our submission, I was quite amazed at the number of programs that have been funded. Again that raises the question of communication. I understand that they are advertised in the press. The local government weekly newsletter tries to get them out, and maybe occasionally there are letters to general managers. However, there is a deficiency in that process in reaching people who are interested. That is an area that I would like to see improved because I believe that the way to go, if we are to address local issues with local solutions and local networks—which is what local government is all about, whether it is rural or city—is to stimulate a lot of carefully formulated local projects that can be supported and funded, perhaps as innovations, and that they be stringently evaluated and then become part of a pool of knowledge available.

So there are two levels of communication, the initial and the final, necessary to build up that pool of knowledge. I believe they are very important. I think the point raised about communication is a critical one. I say that from my long experience with those graffiti solution projects. Evaluation is very important, and what can be learned in evaluation is terribly important, but ultimately communicating what is going on is of paramount importance. This document is something of a sample of what a whole range of councils are doing. I chair that community, but much of this was news to me when I read it, and it was news to some of our community service people. Their questions were: Where did they get to here about that? Why couldn't we do this?

Communication is an area that we could really work on. I believe it to be critically important to establish the right sort of liaison and interface between local government per se, represented by the peak associations, and the various State agencies. In many instances, we can deliver, and we can suggest local solutions. We can suggest innovations, rather than having them imposed from above, but we need to be resourced and the information needs to be communicated.

CHAIR: It seems to me that what you are saying collectively is that the Local Government and Shires Associations and local councils themselves are very supportive of the initiatives being taken by the Crime Prevention Division, however the communication between the State Government and local government needs to be improved. Should that be done with the associations?

Ms GIEGERL: I believe that is the best starting point, because otherwise you get things going on all over the place that nobody gets to know about. However, I could not in all conscience exclude a local council that had a specific problem from wanting to act autonomously. But, certainly in terms of promotion and support, yes, I believe that is so. Could I comment on another aspect of communication and integration, because we have referred to the police and we have referred to the Attorney General's Department. Regarding things that councils are concerned with, if we are talking about integration and community planning, then there are a whole range of issues to be considered. Transport is one. There are so many

issues involving so many departments, I guess the challenge for all of us is to get together on integrated planning, co-ordinated planning.

If I may make a suggestion. The terminology even in the process of crime prevention through social support leaves out almost the concept of community development, and perhaps that terminology is interpreted as crime prevention through welfare agencies. In fact, local crime prevention strategies—local community safety strategies, which is the term I would prefer for council's role—somehow are left out of that title. Maybe, if we could get that connotation in, it would be of value and it would be more acceptable and recognisable by a wider range of people.

CHAIR: Last week this Committee received evidence from Canterbury City Council, which made a submission to the Committee regarding its own local government area. Among other things, that council drew the attention of the Committee to a survey that it had conducted among its ratepayers, who had been asked to identify the highest priorities of the ratepayers for council action. One of the highest priorities identified in that survey was crime prevention. Could I ask whether you believe, as a matter of general concern throughout local government areas in New South Wales, councils would see that as a high priority, or would there be a distortion in regard to a council area such as Canterbury, which perhaps has a more serious local crime problem than some local government areas might have?

Ms GEIGERL: I am in the neighbouring council. We put out a very similar survey. I do not want to play semantics here this morning but the wording, if it was about crime prevention in our area, might have referred to law and order issues. Community safety is an alternative. The community safety concerns were reflected when council provided more lighting, et cetera. Community safety was high on the rating. Over the last two or three years Hurstville council has gone down the track of employing two law enforcement officers. We have now reversed that trend because having two law enforcement officers in policeman-like uniforms in the town centre was doing nothing to address the concerns of residents in the other areas. I believe that what the community is looking for is close liaison with the police youth liaison people in the area—an upgrade, if you like, of the old Neighbourhood Watch system that has an effective network from local council, the police liaison people and Attorney General's Department representatives. The whole youth support network is the direction that Hurstville council will now take. I see danger in jumping from a one or two word response on a survey to an interpretation that we should provide quasi police forces. However, Canterbury is autonomous and it knows its community. But a lot could be done by liaison and strengthening networks. Maybe funding to support it and evaluation of the network processes would be of help.

Mr BAUM: There is emerging evidence from councils that if you survey residents and ask questions about community safety or crime they will respond. If you survey them without throwing that question in it may not come up. That is something that I have heard councils trying to grapple with. That leads me to the area we have raised—I am sure it has been raised with the Committee quite often—that we need to have two strategies. One is dealing with actual crime. The other is dealing with the fear of crime, which may not necessarily relate, as we know, to the statistics or peoples own life experience. How much this is a concern varies significantly amongst different council areas. It will vary depending on the latest media coverage locally or nationally about crime as well. It is a difficult area in which there are no simple answers. It is certainly the experience of councils that there are no simple answers.

Ms MILLER: To give a country experience of crime prevention and social support, we have a crime prevention committee in Forbes which has broad representation across the community, plus police. We also have two special constables because of our lack of police numbers. Those two people are locals. The police know them and they do not overstep the mark. They are working very well. But every time crime prevention is raised the biggest issues are doing something for youth, especially with sporting activities. Prevention is better than cure. In the bush about all you have to offer kids is sport and maybe a youth centre. That is the most important thing that keeps coming up. It is not a matter of getting out and doing something once the crime has happened but getting programs up and running. We lack resources to do that.

CHAIR: Could I deal with another area partly related to what Councillor Miller has just been referring to, the parental responsibility legislation. The association's submission to the Committee indicates correctly that to date only four councils have made use of the provisions in terms of declaring an operational area. The Committee has travelled to two of those areas, Moree and Ballina. The association's submission refers to a couple of initiatives in those areas, the Street Beat project in Moree and an identically named project in Ballina. The Committee was impressed by the initiatives that were taken at the local levels there. In Ballina especially there appeared to be evidence from crime statistics regarding common offences such as break and enter that the initiative might well be working. Why in your view have only four local government areas to date declared an operational area?

Ms MILLER: I can answer that from our perspective. We got people from Ballina down to have a look at what they were doing. We went right through about doing it in our local government area but when we sat down to work out the nuts and bolts of it we found that we did not have the police to support it. Without them at the end of the chain it just would not work. We have only two policemen on duty at a time in Forbes. We cannot have two tied up with some child that has to be taken to a safe house or whatever. We did not have the police in our local area command to cope with having it in place. It was totally impossible.

CHAIR: I note from the association's submission that the operational areas presently operating are Orange City Council, Moree Plains Shire Council, Ballina Shire Council and Coonamble Shire Council. Are you saying that in a smaller country town it is more difficult and it is more viable to do it in, say, Orange?

Ms MILLER: Three of the areas that have it have a large indigenous community so they have much larger resources for policing than a normal community such as mine that has a minimal number of indigenous people. I hate saying that but I believe that that is the reason that three of them can put it in place. We sat down with the police trying to work out whether it was feasible.

CHAIR: We have not been to Coonamble but that is a small country town. It has an indigenous population.

Ms MILLER: And they have more police per head of population. That applies in all that area out there. Forbes is of similar size to Moree. Moree has two or three times the police number that Forbes has. That is the kind of thing you are looking at.

Mr BAUM: This feedback is only anecdotal but a number of councils went down the path that Councillor Miller has described in looking at whether they wished to have

an operational area declared. In the process quite a number of councils decided that there were more appropriate things to do. The feedback I have is that it would be a different proposition from council to council. Some of them have said that they do not have enough police and they do not want them tied up with what people regard, rightly or wrongly, as a second order crime prevention matter when they have so few police. In other areas it was the process which suggested to them that there might be simpler things that they could do such as enhancing their youth services. That would not tie up police and Department of Community Services personnel with an operational area. Decisions were made, as I understand it, on a range of bases. The process is interesting around operational areas. It introduced a number of people to thinking about alternatives. Both of those things happened in the process.

Ms MILLER: That is a good point. There were representatives of DOCS at this meeting when we were looking at trying to get it going. It was a difficult process. They said, "I would not bother because we do not have the funds. Our purse is only this big and there are all these people out there." At the end of the day it is such a big thing to get operation and you are being told that the department has not got the money so why are you going to put effort and resources into trying to get it going? It was very hard, actually.

CHAIR: As the former Minister for Community Services I have had that remark made to me more than once.

Ms MILLER: We are trying not to insult anyone here.

CHAIR: What is your measuring stick for a lack of police numbers or resources in your area? Is it your perception, or the actuality, of the rate of offences going up or is it more the expressed fear of crime in a local community? How would you put a finger on what the community's concern is regarding police numbers?

Ms MILLER: Our concern is the area the police area command is covering. It is approximately 26,000 square kilometres. Police are called all over that command. If there is a disaster out at Peak Hill all the police from Forbes go there. You can be left for two or three hours without a policeman in your town—a town of 12,500 people. Because of budget restrictions people cannot be pulled in on overtime to watch the town while other police are out of town. There are all sorts of operational things in area commands that are not working. Some of it is about perceptions. Things do not happen when police officers have been called away. They may have to take people back to gaol. Instead of corrective services people doing it, police do it after court appearances, which is leaving towns without police. When things happen it can be an hour or two hours before there is a response because police are out somewhere else. If there is a murder at Condo we do not get anything investigated in our area until the investigation is finished. That could be two or three months down the track. It is really difficult because of the area they are covering.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: If we asked the Police Service why there are only two police at Forbes it would say that nothing happens at Forbes and we would not want lots of police there doing nothing and waiting for something to happen.

Ms MILLER: That is not necessarily true. The stats cannot be kept if there are no police there to get the offenders. Things are happening and police are not catching people because they are not there. The stats are wrong. Because of the way the stats are kept I do not have a lot of faith in them. Our area command is at Parkes. If police from Parkes come over to patrol in Forbes and pick people up they are charged in Parkes. Those stats go on

Parkes. Consequently, the numbers for Parkes are rising and ours are falling. There are things that are not right in our area commands. We now have a better area commander and I think things will pan out better but they are two communities of basically equal size with equal problems. Yet three times the number of police are in one town and a couple in the other. It is because one particular person could not administer the area command under two roofs, with technology the way it is today. The area should be able to administered over the 26,000 kilometres.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Apart from the geographical distances, if you had two more police—doubling the numbers—would that solve the problem?

Ms MILLER: It would help, because, as you know, two police have to work together. If they leave the police station to attend a domestic violence incident, for example, the police station closes. Emergencies are referred to Parkes, and if the Parkes police are at Lake Cargelligo, Condobolin, or Peak Hill we have a problem. It is quite difficult with only two police officers working that station.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Would you agree that the problem is the logistical distance, rather than the volume of crime? It would be unusual for a community of 12,000 people to need a fully staffed police station operating on a 24-hour basis, would it not?

Ms MILLER: Why choose one station to operate for 24 hours and not another?

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: You say that Parkes has approximately the same population?

Ms MILLER: Yes, and they were both 24-hour stations; this is a real bone of contention. With the new area commander there is a fairer distribution of police officers. There are no real guidelines and different personalities run their commands differently. They all do the best job they can within their budget, but sometimes to the detriment of outlying towns. This has been a serious problem in my town. I do not want police to be sitting in a police station waiting for a crime to occur. That police officers have to answer the telephones is rubbish—a monkey can answer a telephone! Police should be out doing police work.

Mr BAUM: In rural communities there is a general perception about the visibility of policing, and it is a logistics question. However, the Sherman report, which the Committee is aware of, states that police visibility can affect crime rates. People's perceptions about the visibility problem are foundless. Without drawing too long a bow, we should recognise that there is a relationship between the visibility of policing and crime prevention and it warrants further investigation, but without us becoming hung up on it. That is the general point which we in government, rural or local, would make.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Councillor Giegerl said that Hurstville council was about to discontinue its experiment with traditional policing. A neighbouring council, Rockdale, is proposing to use sniffer dogs on railway stations, which is more policing than police currently practice. Is that trend occurring because the political complexion of the council has changed? Or is it something that the council has come to realise over time?

Ms GIEGERL: Hurstville appointed two officers who were highly visible as law enforcement officers. That promoted the fact that council was doing something, it was a high-profile publicity program. I understand that since the appointment not one ticket has been written out. Surveys showed that people are concerned about what is happening in residential

areas, for instance where trees flourish and lighting becomes inadequate, the area becomes unsafe. All over town there have been bashings. To put two uniform police in one area of the city does not address the problem and does not involve the community. Hurstville council will change that policy. As far as the Rockdale sniffer dogs are concerned, and this is confidential, yesterday I spoke for an hour with Ike Ellis. We expressed our concerns and discovered that we are fairly like-minded about what may and may not work and what liaising is possible.

CHAIR: Your evidence is being recorded by Hansard, do you have a problem with that?

Ms GIEGERL: Not really, except that I am quoting my conversation with Commander Ellis. Rockdale will not have sniffer dogs, but it will donate a dog to the Police Service. There are implications for policing that councils must be very careful of. We do not have the infrastructure or qualifications; it is not our role to go into a policing law-enforcement approach. I predict that trend would have a very short life. I do not know how to evaluate it as stringently as some of the other programs which I have seen evaluated. I was concerned when I read about the proposal by Rockdale, but when one considers the infrastructure necessary and the implications of policing that area, it is not appropriate for a council to become involved.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Other evidence to the Committee's inquiry has highlighted the importance of intervention in early childhood and how that may impact on prevention of crime. Do you know of any area in which local government either does or could play a role in addressing those issues?

Ms MILLER: Yes, I think we can play a big role. Funding has always been a problem. In the four years that I have been a councillor at Forbes I have tried to get funding. Our budget is tight, because we have problems within our council. Eventually the Federal Government allocated some money for a youth worker. Getting to our young people and getting programs up and running is a deterrent for them becoming bored and turning to vandalism, drugs or whatever. Local government should play a bigger role in this.

Ms GIEGERL: It is a pity that Lyn George, our Community Services Officer, is not here. She is very highly regarded and very good at research. She has conducted professional research in Hurstville which formulated our community plans. She found that affordable child care is lacking, but this seems to be a recognition of early childhood as a distinct group followed by the teenage group. However, there is a great glaring gap in the provision of services to the in-between group. That means that there is a lack of access by families to support counsellors, and there is a lack of support for women and young children.

Another thing missing in a similar age group, and early childhood, is access to translated family support in non-English speaking communities. Family support needs for the five year olds and up to preadolescents are not being met. That group needs counselling for parenting difficulties and conflict situations. Council has an advocacy role in providing information. That is a critical key area for Hurstville to look at if it is really serious about helping the community. That is a preventative and inclusive role, rather than crime orientated.

Mr BAUM: It is necessary that councils play a role in untangling early intervention from early childhood intervention—both are important and I echo what Councillor Miller and Councillor Giegerl have said. However, if we are to consider how to adapt council's presence in child care towards more intervention work and try to take instruction from the

experience in the United States of America and the Sherman work, there is a lot to be done given how child care is funded and structured in Australia. There is an issue about affordability and access and there would be a whole host of issues about practice matters. The preschool and children's services areas could play a greater role, but only if we can change how it is presently done. I say the same about outside school hours services. The potential is there but there are lot of practice and intergovernmental matters that need to be ironed out first.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: Councillor Giegerl, you said that your council conducted a survey?

Ms GIEGERL: Yes, in St George, and it has been going on for six months in order to prepare for our community and social plan, which is mandatory. Lyn used a lot of focus groups through the officers of council.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: Canterbury council used a survey which was very close to bush polling. It said: Council has been involved in cleaning up street prostitution and have been very successful. The next question asked: Do you think council ought to be involved in crime prevention?

Ms GIEGERL: That is a totally different survey from the one we conducted, excluding the work carried out by Lyn George. In our ward the survey sorted out options which included airport noise and environmental issues. It showed that after eight years of focusing on development and protection of the environment along the Georges River people in the middle section were concerned about street lighting, which had not been perceived as an environmental issue. Street lighting may be a number three issue although other things are very important, but motherhood cannot be given a low rating.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: Did the questionnaire focus on crime prevention?

Ms GIEGERL: Community safety was encapsulated in street lighting. The survey I mentioned took on that focus. Overdevelopment was the number one issue. As a consequence, integrated planning and budgetary planning considered the provision of safer communities, customer service and police co-ordination.

CHAIR: I refer to operational areas and the parental responsibility Act. I regret that I am not entirely convinced by the explanation given in regard to smaller country towns that it is not an option to declare an operational area. The association's submission to the Committee referred to Moree. The Street Beat project at Moree targets Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth and is a committee-based youth service which provides a specialist youth worker and a youth transport service. I suggest that the use of police resources is minimal, at most. The Committee visited Moree and everyone, including members of the Aboriginal community, appeared to be very happy about how it was working in that location. Will you redirect your mind to it and explain why having only a certain number of police in a given country town should be a reason not to proclaim that area an operational area?

Ms MILLER: They have a specialist youth worker and a youth transport service. I am going back a couple of years to the time when I really wanted to do this. If the police took a child into custody they had to take that child to a safe house. If no-one was at the safe house or the child could not be taken to a relative the police were subsequently tied up. It also presented problems when the child was a female and the police officers were male. That was the view expressed by the police when we tried to nut out this problem. We needed

the co-operation of the police in order to implement the parental responsibility Act in our local government area. The issue was too difficult for them and for the Department of Community Services.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: In Ballina the police were almost not used at all; they were there as a sort of fall-back position. When the police confronted a child and said, "Can we give you a lift home?" the child almost never said no. Whilst there was technically a need to go to the police and to use the powers provided by the Act, that occurred only twice in a year. The police found that, whilst the Act had the necessary legal framework that enabled a youth worker to ask a child with some authority to get into a bus as it was time to go home, that provision was almost never used. I gained the impression that if the police just walked away from the child and supervised him or her for a while that would have been adequate.

Ms MILLER: I do not agree with that observation, taking into account the work that I did in this area.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The comments that you are making with regard to the scheme were probably relevant a couple of years ago when it was limited, basically, only to police collecting children.

Ms MILLER: It was.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: In Ballina the youth workers do the collecting and are involved in the interaction. The police are almost never involved. A child knows that, if he or she offers too much resistance, it may involve the police. So children generally do what the youth workers want them to do.

Ms MILLER: Who is paying for the youth workers scheme?

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: An amount of \$70,000 comes from the Attorney General's Department.

Ms MILLER: That we do not know about.

CHAIR: I respectfully suggest to you, as representatives of the Local Government and Shires Associations, that you should have another look at the parental responsibility legislation, as it is now working. I think you are looking at it against the background of the pilot programs which were run a couple of years ago in Orange and in Gosford, which were not particularly successful. However, I think I am at liberty to say that members of this Committee were quite impressed by their observations in Ballina and in Moree. Community people are interacting with the youth and police involvement is minimal.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: I also say, as a result of my experience in Ballina and Moree, that initially the police were opposed to the scheme and resisted it at every turn. But, at the end of the day, as a result of the Attorney General's money, they agreed to the scheme. Since then they are now 100 per cent behind the scheme and they have found that it has cut down their workload. People now ring up and say, "There is a fracas down at the local park", and the police ring the youth worker and say, "You go and sort it out." In that way it cuts down the work of the police. The police are now using the bus and the youth worker to an extent which was inconceivable a few years ago.

Ms MILLER: We came up against terrible stumbling blocks. It was like bashing your head against a brick wall.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I wish to qualify what the Chair said earlier about Committee members endorsing what is occurring in Ballina. I can foresee two problems. First, it is not realistic for governments to provide \$70,000 to every local government area that asks for it. That level of resourcing is unlikely to be sustainable. Second, an issue arose which was not part of the evidence given to the Committee. When I used a taxi service in the evening during my stay in Ballina, the taxidriver said to me that he was irritated by the service because it was taking fares from him. It was his perception that, on most of the nights that that service was operational, it was doing nothing other than competing with his service. A couple of other problems relating to this service must be worked out a bit down the track. I agree with the views expressed earlier by the Chair. The service has provided a unique way of enabling communities to overcome these sorts of problems, without necessarily having to rely heavily on police resources.

Mr BAUM: We made reference earlier to a number of different things that had happened, but we strongly support Street Beat, the reinvention of street work and working with kids. We do not have any problem with that. It is just not how some rural areas experience the run into operational areas.

CHAIR: I think we should let that issue rest there. I sincerely thank representatives of the Local Government and Shires Associations for such a detailed and well-researched submission.

(Short adjournment)

GARY MICHAEL MOORE, Director, Council of Social Service of New South Wales, 66, Albion Street, Surry Hills, and

MARY LOUISE CHRISTINE PERKINS, Deputy Director, Policy, Council of Social Service of New South Wales, 66, Albion Street, Surry Hills, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Mr Moore, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr MOORE: As Director, Council of Social Service 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?

Mr MOORE: Yes, I did.

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

Mr MOORE: I am.

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

Mr MOORE: I have a social work degree and a masters in management. As director of the peak body for the social and community services sector of New South Wales, both at a policy and at a program level, I have a range of experience, skills and observations to bring to the Committee.

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

Mr MOORE: Yes.

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

Ms PERKINS: As Deputy Director, Policy, Council of Social Service 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 PERKINS: Yes.

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

Ms PERKINS: Yes.

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

Ms PERKINS: I have a bachelor of arts in the social sciences and a teaching degree. I also have a master of arts in social policy, social work and sociology. I have 25 years work experience in range of government, non-government and community welfare organisations.

CHAIR: If either of 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 your request. I invite either of or both of you to make a brief oral submission to the Committee.

Mr MOORE: Firstly, we welcome this opportunity to appear before the Committee. Committee members will note that the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] participated in the October 1998 forum held by the Committee. The key overall issues and recommendations that we raised at that time remain relevant one year later. In June 1999 the Committee requested that NCOSS make a further submission specifically addressing the following issues: the impact of Federal changes to housing, child care, employment and welfare payments on the needs of at risk groups; the New South Wales Government Families First initiative; and the funding of family support services. So the Committee has a detailed NCOSS submission addressing all these matters. Ms Perkins and I will make our presentation in line with the areas suggested by the Committee in its correspondence to us last week. However, we will be happy to make any comments or attempt to answer questions on as many aspects of the inquiry's terms of reference about which Committee members are interested. First we will be looking at some overall trends. Mary will address that aspect.

Ms PERKINS: Basically, we will speak to what we have already outlined in our submission. We looked at some of the submissions that had been made earlier to this inquiry and the evidence that was there, plus our own work and observations. It is very clear to the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] that over the past 15 years of economic restructuring there have been some winners and some losers. But significantly, from our point of view, there is now a very much more unequal society. Some people have benefited from the changes. However, for many people in many communities the benefits have been minimal; in fact, in some cases the benefits have been negative.

We are stunned by the continual reports coming from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that show an increasing polarisation of wealth across the country and an increasing polarisation of access to jobs and, hence, to wealth directly or indirectly. It is significant that this has become much more severe than in 1973 when the Henderson poverty inquiry first came out with its groundbreaking work in this area. It is clear that economic polarisation does not simply mean that these people have jobs, these people do not have jobs, these people have money and these people do not have money. For the first time we are seeing evidence of generational unemployment. We are also seeing geographical locations where poverty is entrenched: if you happen to live in a particular area you are much more likely to be without a job and all the goodies that society has to offer.

If you come from a family in which your parents are unemployed you are much more likely to be unemployed as well. We also noted the research that was clearly showing a link between economic and social disadvantage and participation in crime—we refer to that in our submission. We think basically that that cannot be ignored. Within the debate in society at the moment there is a polarisation between people who are taking a very right and wrong

approach to crime and saying that it is the primary responsibility of the individual to obey the laws and people who are saying that clearly there is a broader social responsibility. The origins, the motivations and the development of an environment that has anti-social aspects of crime associated with it have other factors, including social and economic disadvantage. We need to look at those things and formulate policies which address that inequality in order to address and prevent crime.

We noted two things in particular in this area. First, economic and social stress affects not only families but also communities as a whole. We noted the work of both Weatherburn and Lind that showed that stress affected families in the sense that it disrupted the parenting process. It meant that children and young people in families were not getting the sort of parenting they needed. We also noted that the social and economic stress in terms of communities and individuals meant that people were continually being excluded from the goodies that society had to offer. They could not afford to participate. They could not afford housing. They could not afford to do the things that society thinks are more normal. What you get is subcultures developing which are alienated from mainstream society and which are more conducive to an environment of crime.

From that we can only draw your attention to our view that in order to have policies that prevent crime it is also extremely important to have policies that provide meaningful social support to reduce economic stress and economic inequality, to prevent the geographic distribution of poverty and to support families and children in the community. At the national level we note that the causal relationship between social and economic conditions and crime has been acknowledged in the national crime prevention initiative. However, the changes to the big service delivery agencies in those areas do not reflect that view; the changes in those areas have withdrawn from very needy people support that would help to prevent crime and provide a fairer, more equal society.

Mr MOORE: I turn briefly to the area of child care. We want to spend a couple of minutes summarising what is in our submission concerning the recent changes to child care and some of the things that we believe may need to be done to better influence the question about early intervention and social support. The principle changes at the Federal level, which I think Committee members would be well aware of, have been the removal of operational subsidies firstly from community based long day care and more recently from occasional care services operated by non-profit organisations. At the same time there has been a small increase in the level of child care assistance.

Our submission quotes some work; there are many other pieces of work now. We conducted our own child care hotline survey in 1997 not long after these decisions were first taken. There is little doubt that child care is becoming less affordable, particularly for low-income working families and sole parents. When you put the Federal changes together with ongoing changes in work patterns and changing demographics in different locations, there is no doubt that the pressure is on to provide affordable and quality child care. At the same time—and there is much evidence to suggest this, including some that we have noted in our submission—there is little doubt that good quality, affordable child care and preschool care is an important factor in effective child development. Of course, it also assists families in fulfilling parenting roles to an adequate level.

There are some other child care matters that we think it is important for the Committee to note. It is true that New South Wales lags behind several other States in terms of the level of preschool placements of four-year-olds. We believe that the Commonwealth

still has very poor planning practices which have in fact led to an oversupply of child care places in some locations and a significant undersupply in other locations. This is exacerbated by the normal operation of the market, particularly in the private sector which occupies about 70 per cent of the long day care market in this State.

In this regard we draw it to the Committee's attention that one New South Wales private sector child care body is aggressively attacking local government about its own subsidies of child care centres. Councils such as Baulkham Hills, Penrith, Blacktown and Liverpool in Western Sydney, all of which are significant child care providers, are being asked to drop their subsidies in the name of national competition policy at the moment. The same private sector body is attempting to push the State Government to drop its funding of non-profit child care centres. Another child care matter that the Committee needs to be aware of is that a review has just started of the child care regulations in New South Wales.

We believe that that will be a significant attempt by some parts of the private sector to downgrade standards in the name of cost reduction. At the same time the Committee would be aware that from July next year a new Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act comes into existence. In the child care area, importantly, it requires both workers and managers to report and employment screen in a much more systemic way than they have done to date and also to be brought into a case management role for vulnerable children and young people. Given those brief comments, what do we think should be looked at in the child care area? There is no doubt—and the Australian Council of Social Service has certainly argued this to the Senate inquiry and elsewhere—that there needs to be an increase in Commonwealth child care assistance levels.

The rate increases that have occurred in the past three years come nowhere near the increases in fees and costs, particularly to some of the more vulnerable family groups. We think that, as in Victoria and some other States, there should be provision of a preschool place or its equivalent for all four-year-olds in New South Wales. The New South Wales Government should continue its funding for long day care and occasional care services operated by non-profit organisations, and should not acquiesce to the current campaign being conducted by the Association of Child Care Centres to stop that occurring.

Specific information and training assistance should be made available for child care centres which provide assistance to clients under the new care and protection arrangements. As the new Act comes in from July next year, as I have indicated, there will be an upgraded role in the child care area, alongside an upgraded role in the broader substitute care child protection area. So child care centres require effective access to information and training in this regard. Finally, in relation to the affordability and access issues, further improvements to family friendly work practices in public, private and community sector work places need to be encouraged.

I shall briefly talk about other Federal initiatives with positive or negative impacts on social supports affecting early childhood or family support. Some Commonwealth positives have included recent positive parenting and child care education and promotion campaigns. Some elements of the Commonwealth's national crime and drug prevention strategies focus on prevention and early intervention in a positive manner. Turning to the other side of the coin, some negatives include the 1996 abolition of Commonwealth funding to family resource centres and the probable—I say "probable" rather than "possible" because I think it is becoming more obvious now—goods and services tax [GST] impact on many non-profit agencies. This is particularly true in the family support, neighbourhood centre, financial

counselling and community legal centre areas, all of which will not enjoy exemptions from the GST under specific exemptions of Federal Acts because they do not operate or are not funded under those Federal Acts.

At the end of the day many agencies may not come under the designation of "charitable institution" for the purposes of the legislation. So there are issues for those types of agencies in terms of GST impacts. I will not go into some other issues that emanate from the Federal level but you may want to ask some questions about them. The operation of the job network, to which Mary has alluded, is one of the greatest ways of trying to reduce poverty and income inequalities—of course giving people a market income. The job network mark 2 will now have competitive price models for its intensive assistance mode—in other words, assistance provided to the long-term unemployed and those who need significant support to obtain jobs and employment. I think everyone is sitting on the edge of the seat waiting to see what that will do to the availability of these types of services. Two other things I should mention are the erosion of social housing funds and the agenda briefly spoken about by Jocelyn Newman last week for welfare payment reforms.

I will touch on Families First. I want to read briefly from the submission because it is well summarised there. We have previously indicated our support for well-resourced State Government programs which aim to provide a variety of resources to disadvantaged families. The principle of crime prevention necessarily requires the investment of resources in a range of strategies. The Families First initiative, we believe, is one of many responses to complex social problems only too easily identified yet difficult to address. Whilst many elements of the initiative appear helpful, it is necessary to remember that it is only one small contribution rather than being the solution. In a 1996 paper—and I am not sure whether the Committee has seen a copy of this, but if not I will send a copy—entitled "Balancing prevention and protection in the best interests of children", the forum of non-government agencies argued for the development of a broader framework of support for children and families based on improved resourcing, co-ordination and commitment across a range of portfolios and services for children and families. So, Families First fits into this framework, but only as a small part of the whole.

The Families First initiative of the current Government does demonstrate an intention, refreshingly, to invest resources within families in which children are reared. The focus of this initiative is around concepts of early intervention in the lives of children whose familial and other circumstances indicate that they are at risk of being neglected or of being abused. If I can just touch on some of the components of Families First which we believe our worthy of support. The first is funding of service delivery into the homes where children reside, particularly where there are high numbers of children living in poverty. Others are the potential for strengthening parenting skills; the potential for improving the lives of some isolated and overburdened women; the potential for improving the lives of some children at risk of abuse and neglect; the potential for improving the co-ordination of service provision within localities; the potential for flexible in-service delivery, and the important recognition of the value society places in children and in those struggling with few resources to raise children. No doubt others today will be talking about various material concerning Families First and making general comments. It is still only early days. It is still being piloted in three regions and while the Government has indicated it will extend it across the State by 2003, there is not a lot to go on.

I would like to make some comments about some constraints and issues. The first of them goes to perhaps an unhelpful overemphasis on the program's intended use of volunteers. There is a growing trend in government, both at the Commonwealth and State

level, to promote a particular idea about the development of social capital that relies on shifting responsibility for communities onto individuals. We certainly think it is important to improve community capacity and relatedness in communities, but it is problematic if at the best times it is premised on an abrogation of Government responsibility, and it is particularly problematic when it involves individuals with limited resources who reside in communities with high concentrations of disadvantaged. So there is a real barometer for checklisting these types of initiatives.

I might ask Mary to make a few comments about the volunteer component and then I will come back with a few other elements.

Ms PERKINS: One of the things I want to stress about volunteers, being someone who has managed organisations with huge volunteer rosters, is that volunteers are not like employees. Volunteers come to an organisation with their own attributes and their own aspirations for being there, and often those aspirations are quite different from an employee's. You have to incorporate that into the management of an organisation. If you do not, you do not have your volunteers. You also do not have a particularly healthy organisation, because volunteers bring a certain amount of energy to the organisation, and ideas and a culture that is different from organisations that have simply employees.

Volunteers are not something for nothing, either. Volunteers require quite a lot of resourcing and you need to be able to build that into the management of your organisation. When it comes to crisis organisations or organisations dealing with people in extreme stress, volunteers should not be seen and must not be seen as a substitute for a professional service. Volunteers can be used best, probably, as peer support, especially in the family and community support organisations. If you have an expectation that volunteers will deal with all manner of crises, then you probably have a system that will not work particularly well, either for the client or for the volunteer. You need to make sure that support services and referral points are available for the volunteers so there is a way in which crises can be dealt with.

Gary spelled out our concern that Families First emphasises volunteers disproportionately. I can only point you to the research done by David Olds which points to very successful outcomes of home-visiting programs—and he is talking particularly about our nurse home-visiting program—where the staff or people visiting have been professionals. He also points out there has not been a lot of evaluation about the use of volunteers in that sort of home-visiting program. What there is indicates it is fairly problematic. I do not think you can underestimate that. From our point of view there is a big emphasis on volunteers, that volunteers will solve the resource problem. I am saying volunteers require different resources, volunteers are not necessarily the best people to be used for crisis situations or in lieu of professional support services. There is no evidence to suggest that they are.

On page 24 of our submission we outlined two major issues about volunteers and the Families First initiative that we think need to be addressed. The first is that we need rigorous guidelines for volunteers, guidelines that identified where and when volunteers should be used, which services are not appropriate to be carried out by volunteers, mechanisms for attracting volunteers and an acknowledgement that you cannot necessarily get volunteers in every service area. We need to establish and develop a volunteer program that sets targets, caseloads and a reporting mechanism—ways of making volunteers accountable to the organisation. We need training and development of volunteers and we need training and development of volunteer managers. We need supervision and support protocols for volunteers and volunteer managers. We need public and professional liability

insurance for volunteers, and that does not always come cheap. We need a valuation of individual volunteers and volunteer managers and volunteer-delivered services.

In addition to developing the guidelines about when, where and how you use volunteers, we also need to discuss and agree with Government on parameters for the use of volunteers. We have a concern that government has expectations of optimising the use of volunteers to replace professional services and that government is encouraging volunteers in the climate of reducing services. So, volunteers are taking the place of what would once have been a service that was paid for in some way. We also have a concern about the reliance on women to provide voluntary welfare services as opposed to encouraging their higher participation in civic decision-making and also the conversion of work that would once have been paid work predominantly done by women but which suddenly becomes volunteer work done by women, women out of the workplace.

There are issues about competition between agencies in relation to using volunteers which may warp the agencies' objectives and undermine the effectiveness of the service and the management. We need to sort out differences in attitude about the appropriateness of using volunteers in some service delivery areas. For example, some organisations in our sector would never use volunteers in the family violence or sexual assault matters; others would. We need to debate that and sort out the parameters, what sort of services you can use volunteers for and what services are best performed by professional people. The issue of volunteers is a hairy one and it needs to be dealt with in a way that respects the needs of the people receiving the services and the goodwill of those people wanting to contribute to their communities by volunteering. In my experience, volunteers do not take kindly to government program managers who say, "We have redefined the program and your role will now be X." They scratch their heads and say that I wanted to contribute this to the organisations, and not that. You can create a lot of bad will in the community by dealing with the volunteer issue in a managerial way that does not consider the parameters and the needs of all concerned.

Mr MOORE: If I can briefly add a couple of other points about Families First. While it is important that we have co-ordinated cross-agency approaches to things. It is difficult to work out the transparency of the funding. For example, there are concerns that with increasing home-visiting services, an element of that budget is being paid for out of the health budget, where there are some reductions in early childhood services and home visiting by community nurses from community health centres. It is important to have some transparency to know whether it is genuinely new money or whether it is a reallocation of funds from other essential services.

Another issue which I am sure the Committee will be made aware of by the Family Support Services Association, if it is not already aware, is the degree to which the existing 140 local family support services should have been used in the roll-out of Families First. A lot of the ideas and some of the core bits underneath this particular initiative have been tried and tested in some locations through family support services over the past 10 years. So, there are some issues there. The final comment is that we are all very keen to see a vigorous evaluation methodology being developed and publicly available to look at over the next couple of years.

I know we have probably gone well over time in our opening comments. We did want to say something about family support services, because the Committee was interested in that, and I would like to make a few comments at the end. If we can have a couple of more

minutes to say something about family support.

CHAIR: Yes, certainly.

Ms PERKINS: Family support services have been operating in New South Wales for more than 20 years. They are largely community-based organisations, although not always. They work at local levels and identify local needs and work with families in particular localities. There is often a lot of similarities between the things they do but there are also many differences depending on what resources are already in the community and how one maximises those resources. They allow for the diversity that exists both in need and resource levels across the State. However, their work over the past 10 years or 12 years has been hampered greatly by the fact that the core funding has not been adjusted since 1988. Over the past years in particular they have experienced significant problems meeting core expenses to do with award payments, superannuation, insurance, rental—especially as local government is now charging market rent for some properties used by community organisations—the purchase of new equipment, in particular the introduction of computer technology, and in paying for things that once used to be publicly provided but which are now on a user-pays basis, in particular the use of interpreters.

Most family support services employ very few people—usually a co-ordinator and a couple of project people, if that. Many of them are simply part-time co-ordinators. They then rely on and enlist volunteers from the community to do the rest. But in the past 10 years or so there has been an increasing shift. When the family support services first set out their primary focus was on community development type activities, on developing the things that were needed to support families in a particular area. As the crisis grew in the Department of Community Services there has been a shuffling down the line. Family support services now are increasingly dealing with the flow-on from the crisis in the Department of Community Services.

Increasingly the work of the family support services organisations has been crisis driven and one-to-one individual-type casework. I can only say again that the shift has never been reflected in any change in funding. It is more expensive to run one-to-one services than it is to provide the other type of service. The family support services organisations were funded initially on the basis of doing community development work. There has been a change in their role and in what is expected of them, but the extra funding has not been adjusted for normal increases in costs. Not only that, but it also has not been adjusted to deal with the different sort of work that they are now doing.

That leaves the family support services organisations in a very strange position in terms of trying to negotiate the change that is in front of them. They are doing much of the work that comes under the headings of the Families First initiative; however, we would argue quite strongly that they need some resourcing. They need an increase in their core funding in order to deal with some of the changes that they have had to deal with, but they also need specific assistance in order to deal with the change in direction and to be able to work with the Families First initiative.

One of the big strengths of the family support services organisations is that their clients have continuity of service. The organisation stays there and provides continuity of service whereas with the Families First initiative, much of the work is on a contract basis and there is a very severe risk to clients that they will no longer have that guarantee of

continuity of service. I think it is quite important for family support services to be able to participate and to be able to be part of the developing changes in the new programs.

Mr MOORE: Just as our final comment, we would certainly like the Committee to look at our recommendations in the submission. Obviously, we seek some favourable consideration in the Committee's final report. We emphasise that really there is still little Australian research on the outcomes of prevention. Most of what we look at and talk about is overseas-based research. For a couple of years we have been saying that we need an investment in evaluating the effects of preventive programs that are Australian and New South Wales based.

I draw the Committee's attention, in terms of looking at the nexus between social support and crime prevention, to the growing level of work that is taking place throughout Australia to provide quality-of-life indicators. Three weeks ago the Australia Institute released a major report on what is being said, the policies that are being developed and resources that are allocated. We need to go beyond simply looking at the Gross Domestic Product [GDP] paradigm; we need to look at other measures for quality of life and sustainability indicators. Various works are taking place on this at the moment throughout Australia. It is important in this type of issue to look at research that can inform policy direction and resource allocation, and that is an important new area.

We would also say that the Committee will need to form a view of the effectiveness of current New South Wales Government initiatives in terms of what can be approved and what is missing. At the Federal level, particularly in an area such as child care but also in the other areas that I have not addressed in any detail this morning, there are some big implications that need to be more effectively tackled. We hope the Committee would see its role as championing early intervention and prevention activities and would be saying something in its final report about a way to raise budget priorities.

The New South Wales Council of Social Service [NCOSS] has not been able to obtain the figures and therefore has not been able to properly compile them; however, our estimate is that in human services departments, no more than 5 per cent or 10 per cent of the budget is spent on early intervention or preventive measures. We would also point out that there is an argument beginning to emerge about looking at an approach to social auditing to ascertain how human services funding or social support funding is planned and allocated. It may well be that the Committee wants to have a look at that particular issue vis-a-vis its final report.

In conclusion, I wish to cite some figures that have become available very recently. Committee members may have read this morning's *Sydney Morning Herald* which suggests that at any one time now in the Department of Community Services there are about 4,000 unallocated cases coming out of the 83 community service centres. I can tell the Committee from the figures that have just become available that by the end of September this year, in the first quarter alone of the 1999 financial year, there are now 1,200 more payments for foster carers being made than there had been for the whole of 1998-99. There are 5,200 Standard Age Related Fostering Allowance [SARFA] payments being made at a time when in June the New South Wales Treasury cut \$11 million from the State budget for contingency funding for foster and substitute care.

The same department that has the principal but not the sole responsibility in these areas now has 430 unfunded disability clients with a recurrent deficit of \$20 million a

year which impacts upon the money that is available. The statistic that shocked even us three months ago when it came out from the Community Services Commission report shows that 35 per cent of young people in substitute care who find their way into the juvenile justice system have had 21 placements or more in their lives beforehand.

CHAIR: I indicate that in relation to any questions that I or my colleagues ask, either or both of you may respond as you choose. I commence with the changes to Commonwealth policy which is an aspect of the submission that NCOSS has made to this Committee. I begin with child care funding changes, the most prominent of which would be the decision to cease the operation of the subsidy for community-based longer day care centres. Could you comment for the benefit of the Committee on how these changes might have impacts on the ability of child care centres to contribute to early intervention for at-risk children? In responding, could you identify, in all fairness to the Committee, where the Commonwealth changes have had any positive impacts in other child care sectors?

Mr MOORE: The primary impact, of course, has been on the non-profit sector which is about 30 per cent of the market in New South Wales as far as longer day care goes. Having said that, I should also point out that the way that supply and demand operates means that those centres, by and large, have had to significantly increase their fees. There is a lot of evidence that the private sector has simply gone along with that increased fee level. The reason why the affordability side is decreasing relates to significant increases.

One of the key issues identified by child care operators is that they contribute a capacity for child development. I think we all know there has been recent public discussion of what should be the role of child care and preschool. Put simply, the problem that many non-profit and for profit organisations face in the current arrangement is one of cost containment. Where do major costs come from? They come from staff—the training of staff, the retention of staff and the operation of staff. They are caught in a catch-22 situation because in one sense they need sufficient staff-to-child ratios to form an effective caring and developmental environment. That is the crux of the matter.

It means that for more and more child care centres—private as well as non-profit organisations—increased resources are going into the care side and less of their capacity goes into childhood or education development. I guess that is the frankest way I can answer your question. In the preschool area, the situation is slightly different because there is a State responsibility to which I have alluded in my submission and NCOSS has held that position over the past couple of years. We think it needs to be acted upon but it has not been acted upon. Irrespective of whether preschools are provided through educational facilities, private providers or non-profit providers, New South Wales simply has a big gap compared to most of the other States. We think it is important, if this State is looking at this particular issue from the point of view of childhood development, that investment should be made on that particular basis.

CHAIR: Will you agree with me that child care in specific instances can play a useful role in preventing the abuse of children?

Mr MOORE: There is no doubt that good quality child care can do that, both in terms of providing families with necessary respite in some circumstances and in terms of the actual development of the child, if the quality is there and if the arrangements are okay. In some respects, it helps to heighten awareness of some parenting responsibilities rather than have them going in the other direction. I must say through my personal experience, as

the father of a one-year-old child who is in family day care, there is no doubt that the provision of quality child care heightens awareness of the responsibility.

CHAIR: Regarding child care, can you tell the Committee what the trends are regarding the provision of places for 0 to 2 year old children? In identifying that, I am adverting inferentially to the greater cost of providing those places.

Mr MOORE: In long day care, there is certainly a squeeze on those places because of the cost size. It is very interesting that there is some transference into family day care. There is also a shortage of family day care in New South Wales too. The child development specialists will all say that 0 to 3 years of age is one of the primary times. It would appear from available figures and from talking to the operators that the 0 to 2 years of age category is being squeezed.

The availability of family day carers in the 0 to 2 years of age category is another set of issues. In our minds it relates to the cost and affordability issues of running the scheme as well. There are some Commonwealth Government responsibilities in terms of the lack of flexibility of child care assistance payments within the system and that needs to be looked at. The general proposition is that the 0 to 2 years of age category is doing it tougher.

CHAIR: Reference has been made to a malapportionment of child care places partly due to market forces in the private sector. What can be done about that? Does that involve a change of Commonwealth Government policy? Again, to be fair, is it true that there is a malapportionment of preschool places as well which is very longstanding?

Mr MOORE: I will answer the second question first. Yes, there is a malapportionment compared to need. There should be a redistribution of preschool places and I think that is the other matter that should be taken into account at a State level. Quite clearly, we should be thinking about not only adequacy but also distribution. The problem in the planning exercise is that when the Commonwealth Government reduces its leverage over child care policy by simply deciding that it will be a level playing field and that it will pay child care assistance to any parent who meets the criteria, it means that the parents can purchase anywhere in the market. The Commonwealth Government will run into the problems usually associated with markets, that is, there is not a perfect match between supply and demand.

Part of the problem is that the Commonwealth Government has relinquished some of its leverage. If it is not funding either the private or the non-profit sector, it will have difficulty in influencing where centres are located. The Commonwealth Government can do all the planning in the world—and it is currently trying to re-establish in terms of needs-based planning—but the view that we have taken is that there is a case for the Commonwealth Government to reinstate payments for children from low income families on an affordability basis, irrespective of whether they are in the non-profit or the for profit sector. We believe the New South Wales Government could look at this in tandem with what it currently does. To our mind, there are very few other ways to exert leverage in relation to location if the choice is just left to the market.

CHAIR: Another aspect of Commonwealth policy change that was given significant prominence in the NCOSS submission related to housing and finance. You choose to describe this as a housing crisis in New South Wales, and you indicate that the public housing waiting list is now 98,000. You point to a shift from the acquisition of housing stock to the provision of other forms of housing assistance. What do you feel ought to happen in

that regard? Do you feel that those changes have social impacts that are harmful?

Ms PERKINS: Those changes are changes that have happened over a number of successive Commonwealth-State housing agreements. As we spell out in the submission, the most significant change of recent times is the change in the agreement from talking not about the provision of housing but about the provision of housing assistance. That flagged a shift from the provision of bricks and mortar to the provision of rent assistance. At one level, I can see why governments find that attractive: they can spread their dollars further by providing rent assistance. But, again, that takes some of the levers away because one cannot then look at where the housing is needed, and at what cost.

The provision of rent assistance, without supplementary legislation that controls rent levels, poses a very real risk of not helping the disadvantaged people in the long run because rental assistance by itself could lead to a further upward spiral in rents. There is a very big crisis in New South Wales—and I do not think it is disputable in this State—in affordable housing. I refer to the affordability of housing not just for low-income people but for people right through the middle income brackets in this State, and in this city in particular. It is so expensive that it skews the standard of living of everybody but the very rich.

This is a difficult issue for any State government to tackle on its own because the policies impacting and affecting the price and distribution of housing are policies that are implemented at both Commonwealth and State level. It is extremely important that at the State government level the government look at provisions in land and tenant legislation in order to try to deliberately bring about positive measures to address the potentially negative impacts of increasing the use of rent assistance to house low-income people. One needs also to look at the planning mechanisms because one of the things that is very clear to us is that, with 20 years of gentrification of what used to be working-class, inner-city areas, there is a shift of low-income people to urban areas and in fact country areas, where there are less resources and less services. Now, we are getting a very clear geographic aspect on where the poverty is in the State.

There are planning mechanisms that one can use to try to protect, preserve and encourage the growth and maintenance of housing at affordable prices for people on low incomes, and to try to prevent that sort of geographic apartheid that is developing in poverty in New South Wales, which is being led to a large extent by housing costs as well as by employment opportunities. At the Commonwealth level, one can only look at issues to do with taxation and at policies to do with the Commonwealth-State housing agreements. From our point of view, it would be far better if that money marked for rent assistance was put into the acquisition of housing stock.

Mr MOORE: I would make the point that the potential impacts of the proposed changes to business tax and capital gains tax on availability of lower cost housing in a market like Sydney could be quite serious. I guess there are two messages. The Commonwealth tax changes, we think, will have negative impacts in terms of housing affordability for those on lower incomes. As we have said in our submission, we think it is about time that the State Government looked at the possibility of land tax exemptions in relation to investment properties, so that one can have some guarantee of rent levels that people on lower incomes can afford.

Ms PERKINS: The other issue to which I would like to draw attention is that we constantly get reports back from our member organisations about the Department of Housing

selling off or considering selling off its well-located stock.

CHAIR: To their own tenants?

Ms PERKINS: No, selling on the open market. When we approach the department on that matter, various arguments have been raised. One is that the department is replacing the stock. If it is, that housing will be in cheaper areas, which increases the geographic divide between the rich and poor in the city. Alternatively, the department also raises a whole lot of economic arguments about why this would be a good thing—if it is in fact selling off its stock, because we cannot get the department to say that it is definitely doing that, even though we get reports about different properties being put on the open market. For example, recently a street of three-bedroom cottages in Maroubra were put on the market. That sort of policy, while at one level having the economic advantage of spreading resources more thinly, actually increases the level of social disadvantage in the city and probably is not in the long-term interests of the State.

CHAIR: Could you comment on the impact of Commonwealth employment policy?

Mr MOORE: The first thing to say is that, after seven years of economic growth, we still have, as Mary has alluded to, significant unemployment in a range of locations in Sydney and in rural New South Wales. From our perspective, the benefits of that growth have not trickled down far enough, or to enough people. At the Commonwealth level that implies, in our view, a lack of appropriate intervention in both regional policy and labour market policy levels, to try to better distribute the benefits of that economic growth to communities like the Fairfields, Liverpools and Campbelltowns of Sydney as well as the Northern Rivers of New South Wales, et cetera. There are, of course, concomitant debates at the State level about responsibilities beyond attracting business investment to the State and the distribution of jobs. On the supply of jobs, we would say that the Commonwealth Government currently is not doing enough to encourage job creation in communities that are significantly disadvantaged.

In terms of assistance for the unemployed, what figures are publicly available about the job network—and I must emphasise "what figures are publicly available", because there are not a lot—would tend to suggest that, at one level, for the shorter-term unemployed, there is a pretty strong churning effect going on. A lot of people are getting through the network. For the medium to longer-term unemployed, things are not nearly as successful. Obviously, in some communities, there has been a reduction in choice, rather than an increase in the choice of provider, as the job network was supposed to provide. One only has to count the providers in certain towns and parts of Sydney to know that.

It is interesting that the Commonwealth is being forced to make Employment National, which has 20 per cent of the job network market, operate on an uneconomic basis to provide services in parts of rural New South Wales and parts of south-western Sydney for which otherwise the market model does not allow. We think we have lost a lot in vocational training. With the reforms to the existing labour market programs that the Commonwealth made in 1996-97 came the loss of a whole lot of targeted vocational training run by private and non-profit providers operating at the local community level. At the same time, New South Wales TAFE suffered some fairly heavy cuts to its labour market programs.

In fact, the loss of vocational training capacity at a local and regional level has

come, in our view, through Commonwealth changes to the programs. That shift is particularly difficult to understand, particularly at a time when we have a growth economy and structural reforms going on, with new job opportunities coming up. One would think that governments would want to invest at the local and regional level. That is one of the comments I would make on Commonwealth impacts. Once again the groups of people that we talk about as needing social support, the disadvantaged communities, figure prominently in the group of clients that do not get a service.

Ms PERKINS: On the issue of employment, I am not aware of anything specifically addressing the needs of unemployed people who come from families in which there has been generational unemployment. That is a new and emerging need, and it must be specifically addressed.

CHAIR: I want to come to where NCOSS stands regarding Families First. Earlier in the Committee's inquiry evidence was given by a witness who would be very well known to Mr Moore as well as to me. That witness engaged in quite a frontal assault on Families First, suggesting that it was funding for bureaucrats meeting together. What she said worried me. However, after the Committee went to Ballina and spoke to a local Families First co-ordinator and saw a schedule seeking to identify gaps in services and containing proposals on how those gaps might be filled, I felt much more comfortable about and supportive of Families First. Is it your position that you are generally supportive of the program, however you have substantial reservations regarding what in your perception might be an over-use of volunteers?

Mr MOORE: I think that is fair comment. We have been supportive in principle of the program since its inception. It is good to see, in the three regions in which it is being rolled out at the moment, a reasonable degree of consultation with local community infrastructures. We mention in the submission some of the shortcomings. We are particularly concerned about, as we have emphasised, the overuse of volunteers in critical areas. I must admit that at times we become very cynical about comments made by a number of State government agencies that are involved in this program that this is about social capital building, that this wonderful new program is revolutionising the way things are going. Let us get real. It is a \$19 million program, originally over three years but increased slightly, to cover the State. It is only one part of a raft of reforms that this organisation constantly talks about and puts up in pre-budget submissions.

I refer to the paper of the forum of non-government agencies [FONGA], a paper I will make available to the Committee. So we should not get carried away about its importance. However, we are certainly not here to bag that paper; suffice to say it has nothing to offer. Those responsible for running the program, we think, have to be a bit more open and transparent, particularly at the central agency level. As I said, it is critical that we have proper and independent evaluations of what is being funded and of approaches that are being built in now, rather than have in a couple of years time quick-and-dirty consultants coming in and saying, "Oh, yes, some outcomes might be alright or not alright." That is particularly so of the rhetoric. This matter is so important that we should properly analyse it at the right time.

CHAIR: One aspect of the schedule to which I have referred that I found to be impressive was the reference to early childhood visiting programs provided by professional early childhood nurses. Would that allay your concerns? Is a large part of your concern that volunteers might be used in roles to which they are not suited?

Mr MOORE: It is certainly true, as Mary has indicated, that that is a key issue. What evidence is available—and we have quoted the study in our submission—tends to suggest that the use of non-skilled people in those areas could lead to problems. Beneath the rhetoric of Families First, those things have to be got out and laid out properly. One of our comments is that had the government taken the New South Wales family support network into a more genuine partnership at the beginning of the process, we may not have had some of the criticisms of the system and some of the risks that many people see in it.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I go back to the question of the use of volunteers. I want to put to you a contra view for your discussion, because I suspect that underlying your criticism of the use of volunteers is a philosophical position rather than anything one has yet observed in practice because volunteers are yet to be used. Some might say that volunteers have been very successfully used in areas such as rescue, paramedical, firefighting and environment protection roles. Volunteers are expected to give fairly significant commitments regarding their time and are required to undergo serious and sophisticated training and are required to use sophisticated equipment. Anything they do wrong could cost someone's life or result in a disaster.

There is no question about the use of volunteers in areas such as firefighting yet in the social area we seem to say that it is not possible to use volunteers for these things even though many of the people that they will be working with are not trained much above TAFE level. In some cases they are working with people who are unskilled but waged. Is there some good reason why the community will question the use of volunteers in the social area more than it will in those other areas that I outlined earlier?

Ms PERKINS: I do not think it is a question of using volunteers. Our sector uses volunteers a tremendous amount. Most of the organisations that I have ever worked for have been based on volunteers and certainly have their origins with them. The issue is what you get volunteers to do. I guess that what we are saying to government is that within our sector there is huge experience of the use of volunteers and why people volunteer to work in social security areas, what they mean to the organisation, what the limitations are in different sorts of areas, and what the strengths are. There are indeed some very good strengths. Volunteer work is not a replacement for what would be a professional, paid job any more than you would have the entire New South Wales Fire Brigades replaced with a volunteer service.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: In rural areas it almost exclusively is.

Ms PERKINS: With a much smaller population base. Volunteers do not do everything you want them to do. They do not replace skilled professional jobs. They are also not available equally across the State. The areas that have most access—to largely women who are unemployed but with skills to offer—are not necessarily the areas where you need to have your community service run.

Mr MOORE: There is a view taken in human services that some of the types of work that we are talking about are not simply one off arrangements; they involve significant psychological counselling and capacities to deal with people in an ongoing way to make links to other services et cetera. The literature in our sector is full of the importance of volunteers doing some things but the view is that people with appropriate skills and experience, particularly for people in emotional and psychological crisis require training to work effectively. This is a debate that could be taken more broadly but that is certainly what is put to us. I re-

emphasise what Mary was saying: we are not here saying that volunteers should not be appropriately used, but equally we are not saying that you can, for a range of quite difficult tasks and functions over a long period, simply say, "We will get people as volunteers available, skill them up and they can readily do the work."

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: On page 31 of your submission you refer to the CSGP scheme. I guess it is mainly through things such as family support services. You have repeated in your oral evidence that funding has remained static since 1988. I am sure my colleague on my right would say that the Government had a commitment during its last term to increase CSGP funding by \$10 million over four years. Has that not substantially addressed the issues that you were referring to?

Mr MOORE: It has not. The growth in demand for service, particularly in family support services, has far outstripped what ended up being a small application of increase. We are not saying that that was not welcomed at the time.

CHAIR: You are still grateful.

Mr MOORE: The issue is that the increasing level and complexity of demand of clients has outstripped the funding. The department or the Government adopted a pro rata approach to the application of those funds to all CGSP funded organisations. In fairness, it could do very little else. The increased resources simply do not match the increased demand side. Last year in the pre State budget submission family support services asked for an additional \$30 million over three years, compared with \$10 million over four years so—

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: We have discussed this in general terms. Has anybody done more sophisticated research that might better define what is required?

Mr MOORE: Yes. I do not know whether you already have it but the Family Support Services Association now conducts an annual census of clients which includes, beside a client break-up and the presentation of problems, indices of unmet need and turn-away rates in key areas. So I would talk to the FSSA about that information.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: You have said that it is not yet clear whether the funding of Families First would eventually flow on to Family Support Services. I was not aware that there was any suggestion that that would occur. Are you?

Ms PERKINS: They are free to tender for some of the services.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: So to the extent that they will tender for the services you would expect that that might occur? That would be where you will check whether that occurs or not?

Mr MOORE: Yes.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Recommendation No. 20 of your submission says that respite care can be clearly identified as one of the major differences which could be addressed within Families First. There is no text in support. Do you have some sort of support for that recommendation?

Mr MOORE: Yes. Do you have a submission from Barnardo's or Burnside on this issue?

CHAIR: We have had representatives of both organisations give evidence.

Mr MOORE: If you like I will forward that to you as well. It is also in the document I referred to. There is some argument about respite.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: In regard to the very lengthy discussion that we had about your submission and Mr Dyer's questioning with regard to child care funding, I thought I should come back on the Commonwealth's behalf and say that it would probably argue that to some extent the previous funding given to community-based services and existing funding given by local government organisations to some of their community based services is untargeted in that it funds the long day care service but there is no suggestion as to whether the people rolling up at the long day care service are wealthy people with a couple of four-wheel drives whereas the people who might be more needy are individuals who could be using the funding right across the spectrum. Is it not fair to say—I do not say that this occurred at the Commonwealth level—that it would be a sounder policy to target funding to individuals rather than provide base funding to child care services that may be being used by well-heeled clients because they know the services are good, they get in early by reserving the places, and so on? Even with regard to your recommendation about the provision of pre-schools to four-year-Olds, might it not be sounder to direct that recommendation to targeting very needy families with income support or a grant to help them access a service rather than funding the service?

Mr MOORE: What evidence we have seen suggests that non-profit and local government long day care services tend to be located proportionately more in lower to middle level socio-economic areas than private ones do. About 70 per cent of the market is private and 30 per cent non-profit local government. I suspect that it is a long debate as to historically why that has been the case but it was true—it is probably now not true—that non-profit community-based and local government services were offering fees at a lower rate to a broader range of lower to middle income clients than private sector ones. You would expect that in terms of private sector ones cross-subsidising their operating costs from the higher and middle ends to the lower ends. I am not denying that private sector child care centres do not have lower income people. All the evidence shows that since the Commonwealth changes the non-profit centres have moved up their prices—they have to do that to survive—and the private sector has also moved up its prices. They can cash it in off the market. It is quite easy.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: An unfortunate coincidence of two factors occurred at the time. A significant salary increase was given to staff. I have no doubt that if we asked the Commonwealth the same question it would say that everybody put their fees up to cope with the increased salaries.

Mr MOORE: The work that was done out of the larger non-profit providers such as Lady Gowrie, Sydney day et cetera suggested that that was a minor, not a major, consideration. It was certainly a consideration. Before the Senate inquiry at the time that view was put. I am not aware that anyone has done a national or State survey looking at all the cost contributors to child care affordability. But if you talk to the providers they will tell you. I guess one of the issues is that although there are requirements under licensing and national standards—this is one of the other areas of importance—the non-profit sector has higher ratios of staff and has tended to take the child development function, particularly in the 0-2s, and has

tended to have more 0-2s than the private sector proportionally as well. So then you get to the argument about why governments should fund or not. Our argument is that there is some investment not only to guarantee that low income people get affordable child care but that within the system you drive, rather than simply minimum standards, better attributes.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Has not the 0-2 gap been in the system for a very long period? Would it be appropriate if governments were going to get back into specifically subsidising the services to target a subsidy for those who are prepared to provide them, because it is more expensive if only for the fact that the number of staff required to look after each child is significantly higher in the 0-2s than it is for the 3-5s?

Mr MOORE: I do not have an argument about 0-2s; I do have an argument to make sure that in low income or disadvantaged communities they get their rightful share.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: I have a very general question. There is an indisputable gap—an increasing gap—between those that have and those that have not. There is an erosion of housing for people who are disadvantaged and of employment opportunities. It occurs to me that there ought to be a rethink about our position on whether we want to recognise people who are disadvantaged and people generally as having certain fundamental rights—economic rights as well as political and civil rights. I have a personal interest in promoting that aspect of our society. We are the only country in the common law world that does not have a bill of fundamental rights and responsibilities. Do you have a view about that? Do you think that the current social situation of many people finding themselves on the edge would be improved by a charter or a bill of fundamental rights?

Ms PERKINS: I do not have an argument about there being social, economic and civil rights. One of the things that we are going to pay a price for as a society for many years to come is the divide that now exists between those who have and those who do not, and the generational nature of that divide. That is extremely serious and if we could start to spell out a fair way of distributing society's goodies that included some commitment to economic rights as well as the civil and political stuff that would be very good. I am not sure whether you want us to enter into the debate about whether we have a bill of rights that spells out all those things but I think all those things should be clear.

Mr MOORE: I started to allude to it in the comments at the end but one of the problems that we have is that we look at progress simply in terms of economic growth and we measure it in terms of GDP. That is our benchmark. We do not have publicly understandable, politically acceptable measures of the quality of life. Shortly Tony Vinson will give the results of his 20-year investigation into the communities on which he compiled indices in the 1970s. It will disappoint all of us if those communities have not improved. The eight or 10 indices that go into that measurement, together with public discourse and government policy making, as well as benchmarks other than the 3 per cent or 4 per cent, would be equally applicable to both the Commonwealth and the State.

CHAIR: What is the view of NCOSS regarding the role and effectiveness of the crime prevention division of the Attorney General's Department which funds various programs throughout the State?

Mr MOORE: In this area we have some contact but not as much as we would like. We have been impressed with some of the approaches taken over the past 12 months. It was good to see the linking of local crime prevention plans and strategies to the

implementation of the parental responsibility legislation. This was referred to by representatives from the Local Government and Shires Associations. At the end of the day we have to do more than run one-off projects; we have to ensure that the lessons gleaned from those projects find their way into mainstream funding and regulation. It is important that the work of the bureau is properly and independently evaluated in the not too distant future. We are supportive of the intent but probably do not know enough about it. Shortly we will mount a program into a community-based perspective of the sectors involved in a number of key projects promoted by the crime prevention bureau. We need a proper evaluation but it will come to nought if in three or four years time there are simply more pilot projects.

CHAIR: Is the lack of appropriate evaluation a significant problem?

Mr MOORE: Yes. People have raised that with us and that is why I have made those comments.

TOINETTE LEE MILNE, Manager, Community Development and Partnership, Department of Community Services, 164-174 Liverpool Road, Ashfield, and

JULIA ANGELA TAPERELL, Senior Project Officer, Policy and Strategic Development Directorate, Department of Community Services, 164-174 Liverpool Road, Ashfield, affirmed and examined:

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

Ms MILNE: As representing the Department of Community Services.

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

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

Ms MILNE: I am.

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

Ms MILNE: In the Department of Community Services I am responsible for our Community Services Grants program; Families First—the new program announced by the Government; the Supported Accommodation Assistance program, which supports homeless people; and concessions which are in place to assist people in the community who are disadvantaged. I have been in the Department of Community Services for approximately two years. Prior to that I worked in local government in management policy and service planning, which also had responsibility for community services.

CHAIR: I understand that a written submission is not at present available. However, it is in the course of preparation. Is that position?

Ms MILNE: That is my understanding of the situation. Unfortunately, it has not yet arrived.

CHAIR: Will you give the Committee an estimate as to when that submission might be available?

Ms MILNE: I thought that it would have arrived by now. I would say, at the latest, early next week.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is the submission in the post or is it going via the Minister's office?

Ms MILNE: It has to go through a series of approvals in both my department and in the Minister's office.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: So it is just going through the channels? It has not yet been posted?

Ms MILNE: That is correct; it is not in the mail.

CHAIR: When the submission ultimately is received by the Committee is it your wish that that submission be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Ms MILNE: Yes, it is.

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

Ms TAPERELL: As an employee of the department.

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

Ms TAPERELL: Yes, I did.

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

Ms TAPERELL: 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 TAPERELL: I have a bachelor of arts degree and a diploma of social work from the University of Sydney and a master of social work from the University of New South Wales. I have worked in the Department of Community Services for five years. Prior to working in the department I worked in Queensland Health, New South Wales Health, the Family Court of Australia and the Department of Corrective Services. Since joining the Department of Community Services I have worked mainly in the policy area which deals with the out-of-home care of children, the department's role in various pieces of legislation, including the Children (Parental Responsibility) Act and the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act, and I am presently working in the community partners team in the Policy and Strategic Development Directorate.

CHAIR: If either of 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. I invite either or both of you to make a preliminary oral presentation to the Committee.

Ms MILNE: The oral presentation will be based on questions that have been sent to me as being the matters about which I should speak. I will use the overhead to assist me in answering these questions. The first slide shows overall trends in relation to child abuse and neglect notifications over the past 10 years and how that impacts on families and on crime levels. Because of the way in which data has been collected over the past 10 years, it is impossible for the department to give an overall trend. It is impossible to compare apples with apples over that 10 years. Notifications have increased. I have given you data for the last 12 months to mid 1998. In that time there were more than 64,000 reports of child abuse and neglect. You can see the percentages by referring to the age groups. By far the highest number of reports were for children under the age of five years. Reports for children under the age of 11 years were the next highest percentage. If you combine those two figures it represents more than 50 per cent of overall reports. I qualify that by saying that these are reports of abuse and neglect; they are not actually substantiations.

CHAIR: Do these notifications relate to a one-year period?

Ms MILNE: That is right.

CHAIR: Which year?

Ms MILNE: Mid 1997 to mid 1998. I reiterate that these are reports. The department does not qualify all reports as being notifications of child abuse and neglect.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: What would be the difference? What is the difference between a report and a notification?

Ms MILNE: You will see that 41,000 notifications related to family issues or carer issues. A complaint might be, for example, that a child has not been provided with lunch. Another might be a request from a parent about how to look after a child in some way. Or someone might have seen a parent hit a child in a supermarket. Twenty-four per cent of the 64,000 notifications that I talked about earlier were notifications of abuse or neglect. The Department of Community Services has a domestic violence line. In March 1999 it received 1,000 calls. Four hundred and twenty two of those calls involved 863 children. So the lesson to be learned from that is that when a call is made often more than one child is involved.

Ms TAPERELL: There is a link between the incidence of domestic violence and the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Even if a child witnesses domestic violence he or she can still be seen to be at risk and to have suffered some emotional impact simply by witnessing domestic violence in the home.

Ms MILNE: The next slide relates to the common reasons for neglect. The most significant reasons are drug or alcohol addicted parents or carers, carers or parents who suffer from a mental illness, carers or parents who are intellectually disabled or who were a victim of childhood abuse. Those are the primary factors. We call them the high-risk factors.

There is a secondary list of factors that predispose a child to risk, that is, the young age of a mother, domestic violence, lack of parenting knowledge, economic disadvantage, lack of social support, insecure attachment of a child to a mother, and a previous record of child abuse in the family. In Australia the evidence is that it is single-parent families.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: That is peculiar to Australia, is it?

Ms TAPERELL: The other factors we have put up have been reinforced by overseas research as well as Australian research to indicate that those are predictive factors. We do not have access to sufficient overseas research on single-parent families to know if it is also a factor in other countries to the extent that it is in Australia.

Ms MILNE: In other words we are saying that it could be but we do not have the evidence. We do not have a slide relating to the Federal Government's changes affecting early childhood support and its initiatives so perhaps we will talk about that later. The next slide relates to the predictors of juvenile crime, which is the third dot point. The evidence shows that generally juvenile offending is not violent. It is more likely to be directed at property, it is not organised and when it is drug related it is predominantly cannabis. Juvenile crime in Australia has not risen significantly during the 1980s and 1990s. Another point is that juvenile crime is transient. In other words, children who commit crime—it might be shoplifting—might do it once and never do it again. It is not indicative that they would go on to a life of crime.

Ms TAPERELL: The majority of teenagers do not commit serious crimes. The number of teenagers involved in serious crime is a very small percentage of all teenagers.

Ms MILNE: I want to make the link back to neglect and delinquency. The New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research suggests that an increase of 1,000 neglected children would result in an extra 256 juveniles involved in crime. Families First is a new Government program designed to achieve early intervention and prevention. It means that we can intervene in a child's life or a family at an early stage to prevent child abuse and neglect and other problems that will occur because of that.

The Government has committed \$55.6 million over four years. It is a co-ordinated network of services and support for raising children aged nought to eight years. It is designed to achieve healthier children, better functioning families, children ready for school, a reduction in conditions leading to mental health problems in children, early intervention for postnatal depression, parental participation in education and training, family friendly communities, a reduction in conditions leading to child abuse and neglect, and a reduction in juvenile crime. I shall give you a case study of what Families First might look like.

Marie is a young pregnant woman with no partner or family members close by. She does not receive any antenatal service. Marie has a baby, Susan. Susan and Marie are visited by an early childhood nurse three times in the first year of the child's life. The early childhood nurse refers Marie and baby Susan to the volunteer home visiting service. Valerie, the volunteer home visiting person, visits one morning each week and advises and gives assistance to Marie. Marie takes Susan to a playgroup on Valerie's advice, and Valerie encourages Marie to refer Susan to a speech therapist as she is not speaking well. By the time Susan gets to preschool at three years of age and school at five she can begin school on a level playing field with other kids. She is confident and well prepared for school. That is the aim of Families First. I want to talk about family responsibility. Julia is probably the best

person to talk about this.

Ms TAPERELL: In implementing four operational areas under the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act we found that there were certain critical events to making this effective in a local community. The first was the establishment of local operational committees and local protocols between police, the Department of Community Services, the council and other local agencies. We needed to do community education about the operation of the Act so that the local communities understood what the Act aimed to do and did not aim to do.

Another critical event was the establishment of youth and community support initiatives—the Attorney General's Department made special funds available to encourage complementary youth services and youth activities to work in conjunction with the operation of the Act—and the recruitment, screening and training of approved persons. If young persons are removed under the Act we could place them with people who we are assured will look after those young persons properly and those young persons will be in safe hands. We learnt some lessons from the implementation of the Act in terms of working together across departments—police, the Department of Community Services, the Attorney General's Department and local councils. We learnt about why some councils want their local police to have more powers in relation to young people.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: The slide does not say that. It says, "Uptake of the police powers by local councils".

Ms TAPERELL: Not all councils applied for the Act. They had to apply for this particular part of the Act that gave their local police the power to remove young people from public places.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: So we are talking about the powers of the police, not councils?

Ms TAPERELL: Yes, but the application has to be made by the local council. The application then goes to the Attorney General who refers it to the Minister for Police and the Minister for Community Services to see if they support the application. Some councils were undertaking crime prevention planning, but not all of them were asking for their local police to have these extra powers.

CHAIR: I assume you are referring to an application by the relevant local government authority to proclaim an operation area under the legislation.

Ms TAPERELL: That is correct. We found that there are benefits in consulting the local community but there are also dilemmas in doing that because it is very difficult to be sure that we have consulted everyone. There are some difficulties about working out ways to consult young people directly. Very often the people we are speaking to are service providers but they are not the young people themselves. Also, in some communities it was difficult to engage the local Aboriginal community. It is important to ensure that you get a fair representation of the local community in any consultation about what will work for them.

We found that communities often have perceptions of crime in their local area that are not borne out by the statistics. Some areas have a low incidence of youth crime, but

the community's perception is that that is a major problem, whereas another area that might have a high incidence of crime is not applying for this operational area. We had to work with the perceptions that people had. Those perceptions are very real for those people, even if they are not borne out by quantitative data.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: In terms of the uptake of police powers by local councils, do you have an idea how many councils have applied?

Ms TAPERELL: Four.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Only four have applied?

Ms TAPERELL: To date, four.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: That is why there are only four, because only four have applied?

Ms TAPERELL: That is right.

Ms MILNE: Orange, Ballina, Moree and Coonamble.

Ms TAPERELL: Several other councils made preliminary inquiries but halfway through the process, when we did some consultation and some education, they realised that the Act would not deliver for them the answer to their local problem.

CHAIR: How can they say that if they have not tried it?

Ms TAPERELL: If, for example, they were saying the problem was young men in their twenties hanging around hotels late at night and causing a public nuisance, this Act would not be the answer, because this Act only applied to young people up to the age of 16. On the basis of that information some councils did not proceed to apply for an operational area, but they were encouraged to proceed with a local crime prevention plan, but their plans might have addressed a different set of issues. For example, they might have decided that better street lighting was what they needed, not police powers to remove teenagers from public places, or they may have decided they would prefer to have some funding to run some community activities on weekends when there is not a lot for young people to do, and not ask for an operational area.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Do we know how many councils asked in the first place?

Ms MILNE: No.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Was it a significant number, or just a couple?

Ms MILNE: You would have to ask the Attorney General's Department that question.

Ms TAPERELL: We also learned there were real benefits in taking a problem-solving approach to crime prevention at a local level. Local communities are capable of finding

their own solutions to their local problems.

CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to continue with your presentation or would you prefer to answer questions?

Ms MILNE: No, we would prefer to answer questions, is that is all right.

CHAIR: If I or any other member of the Committee asks you a question, either or both of you are at liberty to respond as you choose. Could I focus, first of all, on the extent of neglect and what can be done about it. I preface my question by saying that Dr Don Weatherburn, the Director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, has given very clear evidence to this Committee on a previous occasion that neglect of a child is a very strong indicator of future offending behaviour. In fact, neglect is a much stronger predictor of such behaviour than is abuse. I noticed in the overheads that you put up just a moment ago that in 1997-98 there was 64,000 notifications.

Ms MILNE: No, reports.

CHAIR: I wrote down that in 1997-98 there were 64,000 notifications and between July 1997 and March 1998 there were 48,000 child protection reports. I read that. Is that correct or incorrect?

Ms TAPERELL: No, it is not correct. The 64,000 relates to total reports, but only a proportion of those have been classified as notifications.

CHAIR: Do you say 48,000 are notifications?

Ms MILNE: One would have to look at the slide. I do not have it; it has been taken. I think it did say 48,000.

CHAIR: The slide has been taken to be photocopied. It will be returned in a moment.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: What you are saying is correct. That is what was written down.

CHAIR: That is what was written down. I am not making things up.

Ms MILNE: No, I understand. I think it said there were 64,000 reports and then at the bottom of the first slide—it was my mistake, I actually said these were notifications—it said they were not notifications, they were reports. Not all reports become notifications.

CHAIR: I understand the distinction between the two. However, I am nearly certain the slides indicated 64,000 notifications and 48,000 child protection reports. That was the description that was given.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: That is correct.

Ms TAPERELL: Two slides were put up. The first slide applies to a 12-month period, but the second slide is actually based on nine months' data.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The slide has just arrived.

Ms TAPERELL: If I may explain. The 64,645 is the total number of reports of concern about a child. This would be when people phone a DOCS office and say "I am concerned about a child." They do not always say, "I am making a notification." Then our officers decide how they will classify the report. Some of those reports would not justify being classified as a formal notification.

CHAIR: Pardon me, I have another document here which was shown previously. It has tag "2" on it. Yes, you are showing it now. It has a heading "Notifications versus reports for the period July 1997 to March 1998." It shows 48,700 child protection reports.

Ms TAPERELL: Yes, and of those approximately 24 per cent would be counted as notifications. In other words, the other 76 per cent were concerns about a child but we did not necessarily treat them as notifications. The point we are trying to make is we think intervention with these generalised concerns is the key to early intervention around neglect. By the time it is so serious that there is abuse it may have gone past this. These reports of concern about family or carer issues are usually the precursor or often are a precursor to a more serious report which we treat as a notification. We are saying that a lot of our efforts have to be directed at investigating notifications but there is this other 76 per cent of reports that we get that really probably give us a better picture of how extensive the neglect is or the generalised concerns about a family that is not coping very well with its parenting.

Ms MILNE: I am sorry about that confusion. It was my fault initially.

CHAIR: As I said right at the beginning, if I could focus on neglect. I think I would be correct in saying that neglect would appear to some extent among 76 per cent or 41,000?

Ms MILNE: That is correct.

CHAIR: In reports from July 1997 to March 1998?

Ms MILNE: Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR: As recently as this morning in the *Sydney Morning Herald* there is a report about unallocated cases in the department. Are you familiar with the press report to which I refer?

Ms MILNE: I am familiar with the press report, yes.

CHAIR: Would I be correct in assuming that among those unallocated cases, neglect cases are more likely to appear than what would be perceived as more serious levels of abuse?

Ms MILNE: I think that would be a correct assumption to make, yes.

CHAIR: Given what I said earlier about Dr Weatherburn's evidence about the propensity of neglected children to engage in offending behaviour in the future, can the department do something about investigating or give some assurance about investigating neglect cases as distinct from abuse cases?

Ms MILNE: I think the department in its implementation of the Families First program, the implementation of the Schools as Community Centres program—which I have not talk about yet—and also in its response to the Drug Summit has been looking at putting resources into the prevention and early intervention area of children and young people who are reported to the department.

CHAIR: What would you say the usual reasons for neglect of a child are, in the department's experience?

Ms MILNE: I think we listed them in one of the slides, but they would be things like unmarried mother, drug and alcohol addicted, lack of family support.

CHAIR: Would socioeconomic disadvantage be one?

Ms MILNE: Socioeconomic disadvantage would be one. I think we said there were actually primary indicators and secondary indicators. Another one is remoteness, so, lack of connectivity to other people and communities.

CHAIR: How important a contributor is the breakdown of the family structure to neglect?

Ms MILNE: I think we said that research in Australia is showing that one of the indicators is single-parent families. That is an indicator that children could be abused. That is a risk factor for children's abuse and neglect.

CHAIR: This morning a witness gave evidence regarding the impacts of various changes in child care funding, particularly affecting the operational subsidies in community-based child care. Without necessarily focusing on community-based child care, how important would the department regard access to child care as a measure to prevent abuse and/or neglect?

Ms MILNE: I think the department sees access to child care as being absolutely vital. If I can talk about the Schools as Community Centres project for a moment, that is a project that has four government departments working together. They are the departments of housing, community services, education and training and health. It is aimed at reaching families with children in the 0 to 5 year range, so before they go to school. I have been out and had a look at one of these projects that is running at Coonamble and have spoken to a local principal at Gulargambone who said to me that a child who has not gone through the Schools as Community Centres project is probably three years behind the other children by the end of first-year of school. Whereas, when children who have had the advantage of the Schools as Community Centres project get to school they are on a level playing field with other kids, and they maintain that level. The project is very much about child care, it is one of the strategies used to make children and their parents understand the importance of schooling and education, and it prepares children and parents for that time in their lives. We believe that child care is essential to a child's development as a whole. It is

probably more so for disadvantaged parents.

CHAIR: Are you saying that unless a child has a child care experience or participates in the Schools as Community Centres project, that child could be said to be socially isolated and prone to neglect?

Ms MILNE: It would depend on their socioeconomic status. It would depend on all those other factors being in place but certainly it is a possibility, yes.

CHAIR: What is your perception of the department's performance regarding the reports or notifications alleging neglect? Do you think that is given a sufficiently high priority?

Ms MILNE: If a child under 1 year old is notified to the department, that child is given priority. That is what we call priority one for the district officers in the department. The department responds to the most serious cases within its resources.

CHAIR: Some reports or notifications regarding neglect would not on their face be regarded as serious cases, would they, compared to other notifications of a child being severely abused?

Ms MILNE: That is correct. That is why the department and the Government are putting more emphasis on programs such as Families First, Schools as Community Centres, the Drug Summit response that the Department of Community Services [DOC] is responsible for, its child care response, its community service grants program and family support. The department is providing a much bigger response to prevention and early intervention than it ever has previously.

CHAIR: If a child is reported regarding neglect and happens to be over 12 months old, it may well be that that child is given a much lower priority?

Ms MILNE: Than an abused child?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms MILNE: It would depend on the situation. The neglect could place a child at absolutely imminent risk. It would be left to the judgement of the professionals who are assessing those cases as to the imminent risk of the child.

CHAIR: You said earlier in response to a question I asked that it was a reasonable assumption on my part that of the unallocated cases, many would be cases involving neglect.

Ms MILNE: In my opinion, I would say that is probably correct; but what I am saying is that it would depend on the professional who is actually assessing that case. In some cases the neglect category could be cases of imminent risk and the child's life could be in danger rather than its being a case of abuse.

CHAIR: But if it is unallocated, am I correct in assuming that no-one is assessing it?

Ms MILNE: What I am saying is that if we are looking at abuse versus neglect, most of the cases where a child's life is at imminent risk would be cases of abuse. But there are a number of cases where a child's life is at risk and it would be neglect. While the first assumption is that most of the unallocated cases probably would be cases of neglect, there would still be a proportion of neglect cases that are not allocated but are dealt with because of the imminent risk to the child.

CHAIR: I turn now to the Families First program. Will you tell me how, in your view, that program assists the department's work?

Ms MILNE: First of all let me just say that the Families First strategy is based on research. It shows that a child's experience in the first three years of its life has a profound effect on its later life, and that includes its health, education, employment prospects and possible participation in crime. It is a network of services. It is about improving the chances of children in later life.

DOCs role in Families First needs to be explained. Families First actually has four tiers. The first tier, as I said in relation to the case study, is a professional home visiting nursing service that eventually provides up to three home visits a year for every new mother in New South Wales. The second tier is a volunteer home visiting service. These will be services that are funded by the Department of Community Services. There is a network of volunteers to work with young mothers to assist them, particularly in the areas we have spoken about, such as neglect. They may not have parenting skills, family or friends to assist them. They may just need someone to tell them that it is not okay to get up in the morning and, if there is no milk, just give the baby something else. That is the volunteer level or the second tier.

The third tier is a more professional service where there will actually be intervention in the home. If it looks as though there are some serious problems in the home related to neglect, they would be some referrals given to intensive services. The fourth tier is centred on building communities to create a community connectiveness so that, eventually and hopefully, families and parents will not become isolated when they feel they are managing on their own.

CHAIR: This Committee fairly recently visited Ballina. Among other things that happened, the Committee spoke to the Families First coordinator in the far north coast region, which is one of the three areas where Families First is being trialled. I have not brought a schedule with me, but it indicated various departments' roles. Where gaps appeared, and indication of what is intended to be done to fill those gaps was given. The indications given was that they would be an introduction of early tottered visiting home by professional childhood nurses.

Ms MILNE: Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR: You see that as an important contributor to picking up indications of neglect and abuse, I assume?

Ms MILNE: Very much so, yes.

CHAIR: This morning we obtained evidence from the New South Wales Council of Social Service [NCOSS] partly about the Families First Program. I think it is fair to say that the council is generally supportive of the program but has misgivings, to say the least, about what is perceived to be a possible overuse of volunteers. What do you have to say about the proper role of volunteers in home visiting services?

Ms MILNE: I can understand what NCOSS is saying, but the role we see is that the service provides parenting advice, support and social contact for parents and carers. This would be for people who have no other support. They do not have a mother or a friend to rely on and they need someone to have a chat to when things are difficult. One of the examples I have noted here is that a volunteer may hold the baby so that the mother can wash her hair or have a chat with the carer about the best way to get a toddler to go to sleep. They will not be working with families that require intensive support.

There has been a specification developed by the department around what the volunteer home visiting services are to be. They will be managed professionally. A professional service will take over managing the volunteer home visiting program. They will absolutely not be working with families that require intensive support.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Are you referring to a manual that has been prepared?

Ms MILNE: The department has prepared a service specification for the volunteer home visiting program for Families First. At the moment we are at the stage of expressions of interest in the three areas.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It might be helpful if the Committee had a copy of that so that we can see what is in it.

Ms MILNE: Yes, certainly.

CHAIR: What you are saying—I assume—is, in effect, that in your view, volunteers have limits. If, for example, serious child protection issues appeared, your view would be that professionals should be brought in?

Ms MILNE: That is correct.

CHAIR: How would the volunteer in your case study have been trained to recommend speech therapy for the child in question?

Ms MILNE: Part of the package asking services to lodge an expression of interest is intended to ask them how they would train these volunteer home visitors. Part of that package is to find out how they would train volunteers to recognise a developmental problem with children that they would be able to recognise an early stage.

CHAIR: I turn briefly to the Parental Responsibility Act. This Committee has visited both Ballina and Moree where operational areas have been declared. Both those areas seem to be quite happy with the experiment, if I can use that term, in that they have a Street Beat type of program in operation which is staffed by non-police personnel to encourage children to get off the street and to make sure that those children are safe. As you said earlier, only four local government areas have proclaimed operational areas. In your view, why has

there not been a more widespread utilisation of the legislation, particularly in country areas of the State?

Ms MILNE: I would say—and I think Julia alluded to this earlier—that one of the reasons is that this Act will not address the identified crime problem or the local crime problem. In some cases, as she said, it is about 20-year-old youths hanging out at the pub. It is not about children who are under 16 years of age.

CHAIR: It seems surprising to me, though, that in the towns, other than the four people in question, there would not be people under 16 years of age who might be creating a problem.

Ms MILNE: I cannot say. I would probably suggest that that is a question that the Attorney General's Department would need to answer.

CHAIR: We are talking about Ballina, Moree, Orange and Coonamble. I know that you are here to assist the Committee but are you really suggesting to the Committee that there would be no other towns in New South Wales that would benefit from a Street Beat Program?

Ms TAPERELL: There may be. We, the Attorney General's Department and the police have all agreed that we will try to encourage councils to do a crime prevention plan first. That is the first step; they need to develop a full crime prevention plan. If in that process the local community thinks that an operational area will be a strategy that will work for them, then we know that is based on their survey of their own local needs.

Ms MILNE: Could I say that it is not that we are suggesting that those would be the only four. We are saying that those are the only four at the moment. The Attorney General's Department would have the information on whether there were others who wanted to so declare.

CHAIR: Could I put it to you that your department is the social agency, so to speak, representing the government. I am entitled to ask what your view is as to the utility of this legislation in towns other than the four in question.

Ms MILNE: Whether or not I think it would be successful to address their crime problems?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms TAPERELL: We would say it may be if the local community understands what the Act can deliver and sees it as an answer to its problems. We would be encouraging local communities to think about what they believe will work, because then those communities will give the system wider support locally, rather than have it imposed upon them as an answer. It may be that local communities find another strategy will be more effective for them, but if the local community believes it will work for them then probably it will.

CHAIR: I understand what you are saying. However, your department has 700 or 800 district officers around the State, and many of those officers work with young people. Therefore it is not unreasonable for me to ask what is the department's view regarding this

legislation. Obviously, the department was consulted when the legislation was being worked up prior to its enactment. Irrespective of what local communities might think, what does your department think, given that you have all these district officers all over the place dealing with a case load? You must have a view.

Ms TAPERELL: Our experience is that in the four areas where it has been implemented we needed to put in a local project officer to work full time on preparing for the implementation. Also, we had to set aside one position in our central office to co-ordinate those activities because we needed to undertake community education and build up relationships with other local agencies, and under the Act we needed to recruit approved persons, train them and screen them. So there was quite a lot of extra work for DOCS in preparing for that implementation and we were not actually funded for any of that work. DOCS had to find that funding from within its own resources. Subsequently, we did receive some funding from the Attorney General's Department to assist us, but any of these new initiatives require, at least in the developmental and early stages, additional resources of people to focus on the tasks that need to be covered to ensure that something works successfully.

Ms MILNE: I think you are asking me whether the department thinks this is a good answer. Is that correct?

CHAIR: I used the word "utility". Do you think this is a useful initiative?

Ms MILNE: I think what Julia is saying, and what the department would say, is that if local governments have thought the initiative through and have a crime prevention plan, where it is an essential element that they understand what this program can deliver, yes, we do believe it is a useful initiative. But we would say that local government needs to work through the initiative so that it is not expecting the Act to address another problem that the Act will not address.

Ms TAPERELL: We have also found that in the four areas in which we have implemented it the results have been similar to those obtained in the United States of America. Those findings indicate that curfews alone, or police removal of young people alone, is not an effective crime prevention strategy. But maybe initiatives such as those under the parental responsibility Act, when linked with supportive activities, some funding of youth recreational facilities and a range of other youth initiatives, are effective.

Ms MILNE: Which is why we say you need the crime prevention plan.

CHAIR: Pardon me for saying so, but we are not talking about police removal of young people. Community workers are conducting these Street Beat programs, not police.

Ms TAPERELL: Yes. But under the Act police are given powers to remove. So, what we are saying is that police powers alone would not be so effective. It is a combination of things.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The Committee today received evidence from a person representing a rural local government area. That witness said that the local government body consulted the local community before certain modifications were made, for example, funding from the Attorney General's Department. It consulted the community with regard to the utility of the Act in that community. One of the agencies consulted was DOCS. I do not think I am

misreporting them in saying that they considered DOCS officers in that particular country town had a fairly disparaging view of the use of the Act. Are you sure that there are not within your organisation people who, when consulted at this initiative stage, are not pouring cold water on the event, so that the Act never gets off the ground?

Ms MILNE: I do not think we could guarantee that that is not happening. What we can say is that, from the central office point of view and from the department's response to the parental responsibility Act, in the four areas in which the Act has been implemented as part of a local crime prevention plan, that has been successful.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: What information are you giving to DOCS officers about how they might help a community? Are you instructing DOCS officers in rural areas to be supportive of the initial stages, or at least giving them information on how they might be helpful? It could well be that it is your officers who are killing off the scheme on the ground because they do not have sufficient training or an inadequate understanding of how it operates in other districts. Do you concede that could be happening and that it has not yet been addressed?

Ms TAPERELL: We have joint protocols with the police which have been issued to all our areas, and all of our area managers have those. They can also contact the central office to consult us when it seems likely that a community in their area might be making an application.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I think you indicated in your earlier evidence, when you were telling the Committee about your qualifications, that you had some familiarity with the Community Services Grants Program.

Ms MILNE: That is correct.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Earlier today the Committee received information from NCOSS which basically indicated that funds allocated to the Community Services Grants Program have been static, although eventually NCOSS witnesses conceded that some additional funds had been granted in the past four years for existing services. They said that existing services such as family support services are still very stressed in regard to finding resources to cover new oncosts that they have had to meet since their programs were initially established, such as superannuation and wage costs, by the fact that local governments are tending to charge market rates for rents on premises, and by the fact that they need to purchase interpreter services that previously may have been given free of charge. Though they are not operating in the same scheme that may have been established 10 years ago, little effort has been made to determine what their real costs are and to ensure that there are adequate resources to maintain the same standard of service. Are you able to tell the Committee whether any investigation has been made as to whether those allegations are true and whether any effort has been made to do something about it, for existing services in particular?

Ms MILNE: In this year, 1999-2000, DOCS is funding family support services to the tune of \$17 million; that is 173 family support services in New South Wales. The Families First program is a \$55 million program over four years. It has key elements that revolve around family support services, including volunteer home visiting and intensive support services, or what we call the tiers two and three part of Families First.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I have been aware of the fact that the family support services, as an organisation, have been howling long and loud about the inadequacy of their resources to meet current service standards. Doubtless, they might be able to apply for new money to do new things that they do not currently do. Has any effort been made to determine whether they have been adequately resourced to do what they are doing now?

Ms MILNE: Might I say that it is not part of the functions of Families First to be doing new things. It is part of the functions of Families First to be doing things that we do now differently. For instance, the way that some family support services implement their programs may change under the Families First framework. The other thing is that over the past 12 months we have been doing some work with the Family Support Services Association to try to identify where stress and strain have been put on Family Support Services Association members, and some work has commenced in my area looking at trying to unpack some of what Family Support Services delivers.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: And?

Ms MILNE: It is only in the very preliminary stages.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: So the department has yet to really assess whether there is any truth or otherwise to the claims of NCOSS that they have new costs to meet and that, if they were to be compensated in some way for that, then that was to come later. The question was also raised with the Committee as to what extent family support services will benefit from Family First. At least they will have to do something different to qualify for money from Families First, I take it.

Ms MILNE: Yes.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It will not be enough for them to say: We are running a good service in the Blue Mountains, or wherever it may be, but we would like to do something more on this; there are more people on our waiting list than we can cater for. They could not simply make an application to Families First addressing that deficit. That would not be an adequate submission.

Ms MILNE: It may be in some cases, because it may be that the way they deliver the service now is exactly the way they should be delivering it. Families First has for each area a plan that identifies the services need in that area, and the plan actually outlines what those services are. It may be that in some areas that is exactly what Family Support Services are doing now. So it may be a case of wanting more money to do more of that.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: When do those applications start?

Ms MILNE: The expressions of interest are already out for some of those programs. It is expected that the three areas will be operational in the first half of next year. They are the far north coast, the mid-north coast, and south-west Sydney.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: So family support services that are not in the three indicated areas obviously will have to wait a bit of time before you can catch up with their problems.

Ms MILNE: The next three areas have been announced.

CHAIR: Would you put on the record what those areas are?

Ms MILNE: They are inner west, Orana far west and Hunter.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: So anything outside those six areas will be waiting for some time.

Ms MILNE: As I have said, it is to be implemented over four years.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I go back to the issue of reports of child neglect and those that eventually become notifications. DOCS has some sort of a procedure whereby when someone makes a report of that nature it is classified in some way. Is that correct?

Ms MILNE: Yes.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Each report is classified according to criteria, is it not?

Ms MILNE: Yes.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Is it possible briefly to explain the categories into which those reports would be classified? The Chairman, a former Minister, might be entirely familiar with this, but I must say I am not.

Ms MILNE: I do not know that either of us is qualified to give you an answer on that. Could I take the question on notice and obtain those classifications?

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Certainly. The budget papers suggest—and the figures that you have given today probably back up that suggestion—that the number of reports of abuse and neglect have increased significantly recently, from a figure of about 58,000 to be now 64,000. I note that at the same time the staffing of the department has not increased by anything other than modest numbers. Is it possible that there are increasing numbers of unallocated cases resulting from those increasing reports of neglect?

Ms MILNE: I would have to say yes, it is possible. But, once again, I would not be able to answer that question. I do not have any information.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Does the Department of Community Services keep statistics relating to child abuse reports by whatever category that they are classified and some details as to how many of them become what are referred to as unallocated cases?

Ms MILNE: From my understanding, unallocated cases are reported to area managers, so I would assume that information is available, but I would have to—

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Would you be prepared to make that information available to the Committee for the period you have reported to us as to what that amounts to for each area?

Ms MILNE: I would have to take that on notice. I am sorry—

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It is okay; you are allowed to take them on notice. I go

back to our hypothetical about the speech therapy. Valerie encourages Marie to refer Susan to a speech therapist as she is not speaking well. You would be aware that as soon as she is referred to a public speech therapist she will go on a very long waiting list. If her speech impediment is sufficient to be recognised by a volunteer it is highly likely that it is a fairly significant one. She is likely to get an opportunity to visit a speech therapist about once every two months if she is lucky and she will require some assistance in between. Is there any proposal within Families First for people who are so recommended under Families First for services such as speech therapy? How are we going to meet the obvious deficit that all this extra attention on families will throw up and indicate?

Ms MILNE: One of the premises behind Families First is that there is better co-ordination of services. Where DOCS has to interact with Health, Education or Ageing and Disability it will be more seamless for families. Without Valerie being there to tell Marie that Susan may have a problem—she is getting something that she would not have got otherwise.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: When Susan fronts up to put herself on a waiting list presumably there will be not only a group of people who knew about it and were referred under the conditions that exist now but a whole heap of new people that are referred as a result of the increased activity that comes about as a result of Families First. What chances are there of expanding services that are already under stress such as, particularly, speech therapy? I understand that the waiting list is at least six months. You do not have much chance of arriving at school in the condition which you described confident and ready to start school if you have been referred at age three, go to the end of a waiting list and by the age of five have received only two sessions, have you?

Ms MILNE: I do not know the waiting list for speech therapy.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: It is pretty significant. I have a few letters upstairs from constituents that indicate that it is. Are there opportunities for Families First funding to be expanded or allocated to provide services which are recommended to people if the demand is increased or exacerbated as a result of the activities of Families First?

Ms MILNE: The Health Department has a major role to play in Families First. Over the first year of operation Families First will be evaluated very closely. Some of these things will come out in the evaluation. I cannot see at this stage whether that will mean that the framework of Families First which is being developed at the moment will change because that will depend on the research and what the evaluation shows.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: On preschool education, it was put to the Committee today that the level of preschool education funding in New South Wales is not as high as it is in some other States. In Victoria parents are virtually guaranteed a place for every four-year-old. Has the department considered expanding preschool places so that every child would have been to preschool prior to going to school?

Ms MILNE: I am not qualified to speak about child care. Probably the best thing would be for me to take the question on notice. The department has recently announced a program to look at universal child care for New South Wales. But it is not necessarily preschool. I am getting confused and I should stop and take the question on notice. But in New South Wales we have always determined that parents should have a choice.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: A choice between what?

Ms MILNE: Between sending a child to preschool and not sending a child to preschool.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: Mr Ryan asked about whether DOCS kept statistics on juvenile crime and I think you took that question on notice. Can you tell me—

Ms MILNE: I do not remember getting a question on that?

CHAIR: Could I interpose by indicating that juvenile statistics would be held within the Department of Juvenile Justice rather than DOCS.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: I misunderstood, Mr Ryan. I apologise. One of the slides stated that juvenile crime in Australia has not risen significantly during the 1980s and 1990s. Has that come to you through your own department or are you quoting that from somewhere else?

Ms TAPERELL: That is from research undertaken by the New South Wales bureau of criminology and other research around Australia.

The Hon. P. J. BREEN: Assuming that juvenile crime has not risen, are you aware that the parental responsibility Act—certainly in the two areas in which I have seen it operating, Ballina and Moree—has resulted in a reduction? I think you indicated that police powers under the Act were a potential problem. My experience is that the powers are rarely used and the police rely on the community group in the middle. As I understand it, in Ballina and Moree the crime statistics for juveniles have been reduced by up to 40 per cent. Were you aware of that?

Ms TAPERELL: Yes.

CHAIR: Ms Milne, I understood that earlier you stated that you would submit a document regarding child care services. Am I correct in thinking that? If so, is such a document available?

Ms MILNE: No, what I said was that I would take the question on notice. I am not qualified to answer the question on child care and I would need to get that information from elsewhere in the department.

CHAIR: The Committee is grateful for your attendance to give evidence. Thank you very much. We look forward to receipt of the written submission.

(The witnesses withdrew)

ELIZABETH STARR, Senior Education Officer, Department of Education and Training Early Learning Unit, 3A Smalls Road, Ryde, affirmed and examined:

HELEN KERR-ROUBICEK, Manager of Student Counselling and Welfare, Department of Education and Training, 3A Smalls Road, Ryde, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Ms Starr, in what capacity do you appear before the Committee?

Ms STARR: I am a member of the early learning team and I am co-ordinating the Parents as Teachers program.

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

Ms STARR: Yes, I did.

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

Ms STARR: Yes, I am.

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

Ms STARR: I have a background of early childhood education and have been working as co-ordinator of the Schools as Community Centres program and the Parents as Teachers program, which have as a focus community development.

CHAIR: I understand that at this point the Committee does not have a written submission from you. However, the department may be preparing one which will come here in due course?

Ms STARR: Yes.

CHAIR: That being the case, when the submission arrives here is it your wish that the submission be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Ms STARR: Yes.

CHAIR: Ms Kerr-Roubicek, in what capacity do you appear before the Committee?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: As manager of student counselling and welfare.

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

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: I did.

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

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: I am.

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

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: I manage the school counselling service and the unit which has responsibility for a range of student welfare areas in the department, including child protection, student leadership, and anti-discrimination. I think that those areas are very relevant to this inquiry.

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 would be willing to accede to your request. I invite you to make a brief oral submission.

Ms STARR: I will present information about the Parents as Teachers program. The first two pages of the information pack give an overview of the program, its background, aims, outcomes and the services it provides. The following pages address some of the issues raised in the document sent to us by the Committee concerning Parents as Teachers and the evaluations that have occurred, adaptations to the program, links with other agencies, funding and working with Aboriginal communities.

As the overhead shows the Parents as Teachers program was established in 1991 in St Louis, Missouri, and has worked there very effectively. It is a well-regarded program in the United States of America and currently operates from more than 2,000 programs in 48 States, not always under the heading "Parents as Teachers", but is often incorporated within another community-based program.

The program has four essential components. It offers parents of children aged from zero to three years home or personal visits on a regular basis; it offers parents access to group meetings at which they obtain information on child development; it provides parents with written information on child development; and because it brings young parents together it also provides resources and a social support network.

The program aims at increasing parents' competence and knowledge, and confidence as parents, to give additional information on how children develop and how to stimulate their development. The program aims at developing stronger relationships between a parent and a child. The program aims at developing a partnership with a school, because each program is established within a school environment. The program aims at detecting any developmental problems that occur as early as possible. The next overhead refers to what has occurred in New South Wales. In 1989 the Committee of Review of New South Wales Schools conducted a review of education. Chapter 6 of the review was dedicated to early childhood education. A number of recommendations came from the Carrick review, two of which have directly affected the Early Learning Unit in which I work.

The Parents as Teachers program was established as a result of the review followed shortly afterwards by the Schools as Community Centres program. The review highlighted the importance of the first three years of a child's development and the Parents as Teachers program attempted to address those needs and to ascertain how schools could support parents. In 1991 the Government established a pilot program and three sites were

nominated: Manly Village; Sadlier at Liverpool; and Tolland in Wagga Wagga. Each program was established within a public school. At each site we set up a parent resource centre with rooms available for meetings, a resource library or toy library, or whatever was appropriate for the community.

Initially at each site there were two parenting consultants working administrative hours. Each consultant worked with approximately 40 parents. In 1995 it was decided to expand the program. The Department of Education at that time was divided into ten regions. A program was established at public schools in each of the ten regions: Ballina, which has moved to Tweed Heads South; Bowen, at Orange; Punchbowl; Madang Avenue, Whalan; Wallsend South, which has since been relocated to Hamilton in the Hunter; and Warilla. These locations have all been identified as disadvantaged areas and were targeted for the program. With the extension of the program it was decided to have one parenting consultant at each site. The consultants had teaching qualifications and their employment conditions came under the Teaching Service Act. Each consultant was required to work with approximately 35 to 37 families in providing regular home visits. That number was reduced so that the consultant could do more work in running groups for whoever was interested in obtaining information on child development.

The key features of the program which make it successful and different from others include an emphasis on the importance of the first three years for learning and development. The program is available to all families, it does not target a specific community group. Many parents will volunteer or self-refer to the program, which also accepts referrals from the Department of Health or the Department Community Services for parents who are seen to have a higher level of need.

The program offers ongoing and regular contact with families as early as possible after the birth of the child, ideally within the first six weeks of life. Visits are offered on a regular basis for the first three years. The program is preventative in nature, it is not based on crisis management. As a result of ongoing contact with the family obviously there will be a continuing observation and monitoring of each child's development. If problems occur the parenting consultant is able to refer parents to the appropriate organisation.

The curriculum, and I use the term loosely, that we provide to parents is very solid and is research based. It is constantly updated by the Missouri organisation, with which we are affiliated. At present the curriculum is being rewritten and research into brain development has been incorporated into the program. That will certainly enhance the information that we will be able to give to families next year.

Another important feature of the program is that parents are receiving information on their child's development when appropriate. When a baby is six months old, parents attend a talk on toilet training, which would be inappropriate. The information given to parents is timely so that their questions can be addressed. Referring to the terms of reference of this Committee a lot of emphasis is given to early literacy, behaviour management and social skills—which are all important in determining outcomes for children later in life.

We are providing regular contact through not only home visits but also group meetings and playgroups. Many parents who have been isolated or feel isolated whether for social or family reasons have a network available to them. There is flexibility in the way that the program can be delivered and some parents may opt for home visits and others for group meetings. We accommodate their needs accordingly. The program is not only for mothers; we try to make

it available to fathers as well. The parenting consultants are required to be flexible in their working hours so that they can accommodate working parents. The model and information that is provided is accessible to families from non-English speaking backgrounds. Material has been developed specifically for young or teenage parents and information is printed at two different literacy levels. The curriculum is being revised so that it is more pictorial, which will help people who have little literacy skills.

A key feature of the program is that it provides an opportunity to develop a social network so that families can become more reliant on their community rather than services. It is important that the program be located in a school so that a positive relationship can be established with a school and, hopefully, that relationship will continue onto the involvement of the parents once the child enters the school system. Fundamental to all this, of course, is the inter-agency collaboration that occurs. While the program is funded and administered by the Department Education and Training, there is much collaboration with other government departments and non-government organisations in the community. Each site has a community advisory committee made up of members of those organisations.

CHAIR: Ms Kerr-Roubicek would you like to make an oral presentation?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: I wish to talk about school counselling and the broader context.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: There is only one controversial aspect about parents as teachers and that is the extent to which the program has spread. With \$650,000 you are reaching 12 sites with about 30-odd families involved at each site at any one time.

Ms STARR: Only 10 sites. Approximately 30 or 40 families received home visits but we reach many more families through group meetings. Probably between 100 and 200 other families receive information through group meetings and playgroups at each site; all up about 1,200 or 1,500 people receive some benefit from the program.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Has there been any study of a community in which your program has functioned for some time as to how many children are involved in the whole target, and how many are involved in Families First at each of its various stages?

Ms STARR: No, we do not have that information available.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I have not heard any criticism about the program not being valuable. I have heard that it tends to be very expensive in relation to that number of families which can be reached at one stage. Another criticism I have heard is that it tends to be available to people who already have a fair appreciation for education. You are non-discriminatory between whether a person is disadvantaged or not. I have been told that the program is a good exemplar of middle-class welfare.

Ms STARR: When the program first started we were keen to replicate the Missouri model, but as time passed we have reached out more into the community to make it more relevant to our environment and to engage more families with specific needs. Certainly that is a criticism, and perhaps we are reaching families which are highly motivated. However, that is not always the case in the communities. We are receiving more referrals now from early childhood nurses, the Department of Community Services and family support organisations. We are trying to engage families with higher needs.

With any new program it takes time for its credibility to become established in the community. Over time we have reached more families with needs which would benefit from the program. In trying to broaden our scope we have been mindful of the success of the Schools as Community Centres program. As co-ordinator of that also I understand how we can reach out further into the community through some of the work that the parenting consultants are doing. To that end I include adaptations of what has been happening so that we can reach more families. The parenting consultant in Madang Avenue will now be working with the playgroup association and with already established groups in the community, providing some input to parents establishing groups on child development and to those supporting the organisation in that area.

The parenting consultant at Sadlier will be going to a local caravan park and running groups there for the transient population. However, in many cases people remain in these parks for a long time. We also have a parenting consultant working with an adolescent post-natal education program. We are always encouraging parenting consultants to look at other opportunities in the community so that they can share their knowledge and information with a broader number of families than just 30 or 50. We are having more of an impact. We are also aware that we must not reinvent the wheel; we must look at what already exists and try to tap into those other groups and support services and support them in some of the work that they are doing.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: When you originally commenced did you start with 10 sites?

Ms STARR: No, originally we started with three.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: When did that number increase to 10?

Ms STARR: In 1995.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: So it has pretty well stayed static since then?

Ms STARR: Yes.

CHAIR: In one of the documents that you have presented to the Committee, you have stated "Areas identified as disadvantaged are targeted."

Ms STARR: Yes.

CHAIR: Is that always the case? If it is, how do you get a control group to compare results?

Ms STARR: The pilot program actually targeted three different environments; a rural environment in Wagga Wagga; an area identified as disadvantaged at Liverpool; and Manly was seen to be a bit more representative of a middle-class environment. With the expansion came the decision to target. Evaluation has always been a problem, not only because it is such a small group but also because of the issue of getting a control. In New South Wales we have never embarked on a comprehensive evaluation of the program; we have relied more on the evaluation that has been done by the program operating in Missouri.

CHAIR: Is there a mix of socioeconomic backgrounds in Missouri?

Ms STARR: Yes. The program is quite extraordinary; it is very impressive.

CHAIR: I suppose it is true to say that, without the benefit of a control group locally—except perhaps Manly Village initially—you are not really in a position to say how successful it is, although I assume that anecdotally, or in your bones, you feel that it is helping?

Ms STARR: Anecdotally you can say that it is successful. Our retention rate has always been quite high. Initially, in the first three years, the retention rate was around 86 per cent. Parents would leave and would ring us and say, "Could you still send us the information?" We did some minor research into children's language development during the pilot phase. We looked at language development of children at the age of two years. Obtaining accurate information is difficult when children are so young. That evaluation showed that the children in the program were definitely on a par with their peers. Perhaps more significant was the fact that parenting consultants identified some children as exhibiting language problems. Those children were identified again through the process of evaluation. So we had already picked up children and we had referred them on when this evaluation occurred. The program was seen as providing preventive mechanisms.

CHAIR: What is the frequency of home or personal visits?

Ms STARR: The Missouri model recommends that you visit a family regularly every month so that you maintain an ongoing relationship with that family. We have endeavoured to visit families every four to six weeks. Over a period of three years we are saying that we would like to offer families approximately 24 visits. In the real world that is not always possible because some people's needs vary over time. So we try to individualise and if parents have higher needs we offer more frequent visits. Some parents at different times may be receiving weekly visits; at other times we may see them only every two months. But it is the ongoing contact that is still important to the program.

CHAIR: You made reference earlier to parents who self-refer to the program.

Ms STARR: Yes.

CHAIR: How do they come to hear about the program?

Ms STARR: We actively advertise the program. We make it known to the community that the program exists. Parents and consultants would be talking to prospective parents at anti-natal classes; they would have pamphlets with all the early childhood nurses in their area; families would be told about the program; they would elect to participate if they were interested in the program; and they would be referred directly to the program. Over time families hear about the program through word of mouth and friends are telling friends. Quite often friends are photocopying information and they are doing the work for us.

CHAIR: This Committee has heard that poverty or economic stress is a major predictor of child neglect. I think you would agree that the Parents as Teachers program cannot alleviate poverty. How can the program work successfully within families that have acute financial problems? It may be a difficult question.

Mr STARR: It is difficult. All parents have needs. If they have concerns about their children and somebody can come into the home and provide support about issues relating to parenting, that is one less worry that they have to contend with. They often receive positive support in relation to their children. Often they are getting positive feedback on their parenting and they are gaining in confidence. That carries over to the way in which they then relate to their children. Whilst it does not necessarily relieve their poverty, it may enhance their self-esteem and that may carry over into other aspects of their lives and what they are then able to do.

CHAIR: Ms Kerr-Roubicek, would you like to make an initial presentation?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: I will refer first to school counselling services and put that into context. There are three main ways in which schools can assist in protecting people from developing delinquent or criminal behaviour, or in protecting them from becoming victims of such behaviour. I am trying to make the complex world of the school a bit more manageable by talking about the school counselling service. The three areas that occurred to me are: what is taught in a curriculum and how it is taught; the human environment that is offered to students; and the success of a school in making links and helping students to make links between home and school so that a school is relevant to students' and parents' aspirations and achievement is recognised and valued. School counsellors are but one part of the network of support offered and they work across all those three areas.

I come back to the first issue—what schools teach in their curriculum and how they teach it. With reference to this Committee's brief, a lot of evidence suggests that the best thing we can do is to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of the children and young people who attend our schools. A wide range of evidence now indicates that that is the most positive change in outcome that we can make. Elizabeth referred earlier to the fact that, from those early visits, the department is focusing on literacy, in particular, as a vital outcome. An area that you may not be so familiar with is the area of teaching and social skills. This is an area that has changed more dramatically since I was at school than some of the other aspects of school life. It is an important aspect if what we are to offer through school is: more options, more choices, and more capacity to operate more powerfully in the world. That is another thing that we can offer to young people that would assist in the area of crime prevention.

I have with me a primary school syllabus produced by the Board of Studies entitled "Personal Development, Health and Physical Education" [PDHPE], which has just been released by the Minister. It now means that there is a syllabus, which is commonly referred to as PDHPE, from kindergarten to year 10, which all students study. Social skills, communication skills, listening skills, assertiveness skills, learning respect for each other, learning to respect self, being able to make decisions in an informed way, looking at the effects of decisions, are all embedded within that syllabus. The syllabus has existed formally for a few years now for years 7 to 10 and we have had a draft syllabus for primary schools. That is part of a core curriculum that all students now study.

All students now have an opportunity to study part of that formal curriculum. They have time to learn about their own growth and development, about understanding their feelings, about communicating and, significantly for my area—particularly as we work closely with people in PDHPE—about abuse in relationships, how to identify abuse in relationships, what is responsibility in relationships, how to manage relationships, how to build positive relationships and how to maintain them. That is an important aspect that can be followed

through from kindergarten to year 10. Then there are other opportunities as well in years 11 and 12. The work of school counsellors in primary schools is concerned mostly with assisting students' learning. In particular we focus on literacy and numeracy and getting into a good learning pattern in primary schools.

So the work of school counsellors in primary schools is focused on educational and learning outcomes and, in secondary schools, counsellors spend a lot of time with students who self-refer, who want to talk over issues themselves and who are concerned about social, student and welfare issues. Part of the important role of counsellors is to reinforce how important it is for a school to pick up on individual patterns of development of students; and to advise and consult with staff on teaching and learning programs that best meet the needs of individual students. A lot of that work in primary schools would occur as part of a learning support team. The school counsellor, who is a member of a student welfare team, brings to the team that kind of psychological expertise. In primary schools we are looking to early identification of difficulties and we then establish appropriate and ongoing support in partnership with parents.

Schools create different environments. There are lots of different words for this, for example, a school climate. Some people talk about the ethos of a school. In the student welfare policy it is called "positive climate and good discipline". It contains all that stuff about what a school is like, what the rules are, whether students feel welcome and whether the school is fair, and whether students know who to go to if they feel confused about something or they want support. In some ways it is very much influenced by the network of relationships in the school. Schools are now much more conscious of the impact that that environment has on the way students learn and how much they learn. So it is very important. It is within that kind of context that discipline sits.

The department has provided strong guidelines for schools, strong messages and a strong framework for them to develop their own school policies on issues like bullying, harassment and violence. We know that we have to build communities that are low in their tolerance of those issues if we are to assist young people to understand those messages. That certainly works. If schools take that seriously and build it into their school discipline policies and if every kid has a copy of the policy, parents know what the rules are, and people follow through with those kinds of rules, we can sort things out together, we can problem solve, we can learn skills to assist us in conflict resolution and we will be able to focus on programs like peer mediation to work things out. We do not expect that there will not be conflict, but we do expect that we will be able to work things out, that people have different views, and that we are actually looking at diversity.

Counsellors are an important link for schools on those issues. For instance, they might directly counsel victims of crime or work on antibullying programs in a school intervention sense. They might be advising the school on issues related to personal safety. They might be running groups. They might be working with parents to help them work out what they want to do on a particular issue. In terms of a school's links with the community and with parents, counsellors play a particularly important role because they usually work in more than one school and they are seen as being a little independent from the school.

Parents have access to counsellors at any time in terms of making an appointment. Counsellors will spend time making an assessment, if that is what parents want or the teachers ask for, and will report to the parents about the learning assessment, the psychological assessment, that has been done. They also make links into community services

and resources such as those we have been hearing about today. Do you want me to provide some details about the school counselling service, such as how many counsellors there are and how we distribute them?

CHAIR: It might be useful, if you can do it fairly succinctly.

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: School counsellors form part of the network of student welfare support. There are 678 school counsellor positions and 94 district guidance officer positions in the system. Counsellors provide support to students, families and schools. They are experienced teachers with post-graduate training in school counselling, and they complement and enhance the work of teachers by strengthening the student welfare provisions. They provide direct counselling and psychological assessment of students with particular needs. They are appointed to one centre school where they are a member of the staff, and they provide services to other nearby schools.

District guidance officers are experienced school counsellors appointed at the level of head teacher to a centre school. They have a half allocation of direct counselling; the other half is supervision of a group of counsellors. All students, their parents and care givers, and teachers have access to a school counsellor, and district guidance officers develop a needs-based allocation of a school counsellor in consultation with principals within the district, the district superintendent, and the Co-ordinator for student counselling and welfare. School counsellors participate in the work of student welfare committees. They respond as part of a team to schools experiencing major critical incidents such as the death of a principal or something violent that may have happened in the school.

They counsel students individually and in groups. They assess students' needs using psychological and educational tests, rating scales and observation, and they report the results to parents and teachers. They refer students or their families to other agencies. They provide advice to review committees concerning the education of students with special needs. They are also involved in situations where students have received suspensions or where there has been a drug-related incident associated with suspension. That is probably enough to give you an overview.

CHAIR: You have identified the number of counsellors throughout the State. I take it that the overall figure relates to both primary schools and secondary schools?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: Yes. They work in a model that is kindergarten to year 12. We believe it is important that school counsellors have a breadth of understanding of the transition from primary to secondary.

CHAIR: You also referred to a counsellor being located in a centre school. Presumably that means that that is where the counsellor is based and he or she serves a number of other schools?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: That is right.

CHAIR: Typically, how many other schools does a counsellor serve?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: It depends on the size of the school but it might be one

high school and one primary school, if they are fairly large schools. If they are in the country it might be four or five small schools and one high school.

CHAIR: If a counsellor was appointed to service three high schools with 1,000 students each, would that not be beyond the counsellor?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: Yes. That will not happen. In some cases the numbers would indicate that a counsellor might be situated in one high school. However, to keep that K-12 model going we would be much more likely, if it was feasible, to place two counsellors in there—perhaps one counsellor two days a week and one counsellor three days a week, and give them primary schools as well. So the school has two counsellors, which can be an advantage as well, particularly if one is male and one is female. They would have feeder schools that relate to that high school.

CHAIR: Am I correct in assuming that typically a counsellor would service both secondary and primary students?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: Yes.

CHAIR: That works well, does it?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: It does work well, particularly in the transition from primary school to high school. We are starting to take a lot more notice of the things that can go wrong in that transition between primary and secondary. Counsellors have been the few people in the system previously who have known what that transition was about, known the primary schools and known the changes that the students make going into a high school. They have been very active in transition programs in the past. They are still involved in those programs but lots of other people are also involved now.

CHAIR: Leaving aside transition and dealing with the two extremes of young primary children and older secondary students, I suppose that the problems are somewhat different. I understood you to say earlier that, for example, secondary students typically self refer. That would not be the case with primary students, would it?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: No, and not all secondary students self refer either. There are issues about whether adolescents will ask to speak to someone for help for a whole lot of reasons which we are very conscious of and which we seek to address. If staff are concerned about students they may make a referral, but obviously as students get older they are more actively involved in negotiating the process of talking with a counsellor.

CHAIR: Can you give some typical examples of problems encountered by a counsellor in a primary school? What sort of matters would he or she have to deal with?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: The focus in primary school will usually be on concerns that teachers have about learning or behaviour. If a child is not progressing in the way that the teachers expect or the child may have been progressing smoothly and suddenly something appears to have gone wrong and the teacher cannot, with his or her normal range of supports and the normal things that he or she does to work out what is going on, the teacher might suggest that the principal talk to the parents about making a referral to the counsellor for an assessment. As a result of that assessment the counsellor would make recommendations for follow-up and would usually be involved in the implementation of those

recommendations in terms of talking with the teacher or with the parents.

That would be the most common matter dealt with by counsellors. Often counsellors are a catalyst for assessing the needs of groups of students and looking at what prevention or early intervention programs might be picked up by the school. As counsellors work across schools and into the community—with the Department of Community Services, Health and a range of other local services—often they know the community resources better than school teachers do, so they can pick up and link what the school is doing with what is happening outside. They may see that an issue is developing or the school might identify an issue and ask the counsellor, who has particular expertise, to come in and work with the school on how to address the issue.

CHAIR: So typically a school counsellor, in his or her daily life, would have links with other Government agencies such as the Department of Community Services?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: Yes. The counsellor in the system is the person nominated in our child protection procedures to be the link person on child protection cases, the person who will attend case conferences, protection planning meetings or whatever as the link between the principal and the Department of Community Services.

CHAIR: Are there any links with non-government agencies?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: Yes, there are, and they are very much community based. The particular work that the counsellor does will vary according to the local community. While some priorities are established and counsellors will follow the department's priorities or policies for a specific time, the school will determine its priorities each year and the counsellors negotiate their work role for the year with the principal at the beginning of each year. The counsellor can work in a range of ways. The principal and the school community might want the counsellor to play a particular role in behaviour support in a particular year and that might be the focus of the counsellor's work in the time that is unallocated to other required work.

CHAIR: Does the Department of Education and Training have links with Families First?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: The department has a very general link but at this stage the main link has been around parents as teachers and schools as community centres. Do you want to ask Elizabeth anything more about that?

CHAIR: Yes. Does the department have a role, albeit perhaps a lesser one than DOCS and Health?

Ms STARR: It would appear that it is a lesser role, and I can only talk to the two programs that I am co-ordinating. I have mentioned this to the Committee previously in terms of Schools as Community Centres. We are working very closely with Families First because it has adopted the Schools as Community Centres model at that fourth level of community development as a model that could be replicated in other areas across the State. That seems to be the case in south-west Sydney where our facilitator at Curran is working closely with the local management team, and also in Kempsey as well. With Parents as Teachers we have relocated the program from Ballina to Tweed Heads South Public School. As Families First is already established in that area, in the establishment of Parents as

Teachers we are again working with the local planning committee so that we will not be duplicating roles in terms of establishing this new program. We are working together with Families First at that site as well.

CHAIR: I have a final question about Parents as Teachers—and it is not meant to be facetious. Would it be appropriate to conduct Parents as Teachers introductory courses in the maternity wards of public hospitals?

Ms STARR: Absolutely, yes. It would be a wonderful idea. In fact the new curriculum—

CHAIR: I thought the mothers might be otherwise preoccupied.

Ms STARR: They might but I know what my priority is. That is an issue in terms of the priorities and what mothers are focusing on prior to a birth. It appears that the earlier you engage a family the more likely you are to hold on to that family. That has been the case with teenage parents in the United States of America. If you are able to engage them prior to the birth of the child you are more likely to keep that engagement after the child has been born. Some parents are interested in obtaining developmental information. The new curriculum that has been developed by Missouri has an antenatal component to address that need.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Ms Kerr-Roubicek, you said that there is a relationship with literacy as a predictor for involvement in the juvenile justice system. I am inclined to agree with you, but I have just noticed that other material before the Committee does not mention literacy as a predictor. Is there some research to support that?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: I think there is a range of research but I do not have it to hand. I would need to seek that out for you. Would you like me to do that?

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: I would be grateful because I think it will be an important part of our report. I am lucky in the sense that I am sending my children to a private school so at least I am familiar with the role of school counsellors. I am very familiar with the intensive reading program, which is absolutely magical. However, two aspects of that program concern me. First, for the south-west Sydney area—and I do not know how many thousands of students would be involved there—only 48 places a year are available for kids to get involved in that intensive program. I understand that that is only a small proportion of the kids who actually apply. If we are serious about dealing with literacy, should we not be expanding that program significantly?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: This is an area that I do not have responsibility for, and Elizabeth does not either. When the Committee receives the department's submission there will be much more detail about what the department is doing in that area. If you have further questions after you receive the submission I suggest that you call someone from that area.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: The exclusions pick up children who have a deficit in their reading performance, but I understand they are specifically excluded if they have a behavioural problem. What happens to the kids who clearly have a literacy problem and a behavioural problem and who do not even attend school? Clearly, they are likely to be the

children who are most at risk and whom the Department of Education and Training could most assist by making sure they did not arrive in the juvenile justice system.

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: The department does have wide-ranging behavioural support initiatives as well. The program you are referring to is only one of a raft of literacy programs. I think the impression you have from the way your school is offering behavioural support is perhaps a little distorted. But again I would suggest that that be referred to the areas in the department that are responsible for behaviour as well as literacy.

The Hon. J. F. RYAN: Obviously many of the programs you referred to and for which you said the curriculum was available—for example, the human development programs, and so on—will only be of use to kids who attend school. As we know, it is not unusual that a large number of kids truant. What are the current benchmarks which indicate how schools are performing with regard to truancy and containing it?

Ms KERR-ROUBICEK: I can only make a very general comment on that too, because it is in another area of responsibility, but the department is certainly taking attendance very seriously and is looking at truancy in a targeted way. You are absolutely right: if we cannot get students to school and keep them there, whatever range of programs we are offering will not be the slightest use to them. So, it is an extremely high priority for us and we are addressing it, but for more detail I would have to refer you back to the department.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.17 p.m.)