

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AND JUSTICE**

**INQUIRY INTO CRIME PREVENTION  
THROUGH SOCIAL SUPPORT**

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**At Sydney on Thursday 3 February 2000**

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**The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.**

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**PRESENT**

The Hon. R. D. Dyer (Chair)

The Hon. P. J. Breen

The Hon. J. Hatzistergos

The Hon. J. F. Ryan

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans

**TERRENCE JULIAN O'MARA**, General Manager, Diocesan Services, Anglicare New South Wales, 18 Parkes Street, Parramatta, and

**GARRY MARTIN McMAHON**, Manager, Anglicare New South Wales, 130 O'Connell Street, North Parramatta, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** Mr O'Mara, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Mr O'MARA:** As General Manager and as the person responsible for Life After Prison ministries within Anglicare.

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

**Mr O'MARA:** Yes.

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

**Mr O'MARA:** Yes.

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

**Mr O'MARA:** My formal qualifications are that I was admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in 1976. I retired as Assistant Director-General of the Department of Community Services in late 1997 and commenced employment immediately with Anglicare. I bring to the Committee some experience of the delivery of community services, as well as a passionate interest in the subject.

**CHAIR:** Anglicare has made two written submissions. Is it your wish that those submissions be included as part of your sworn evidence?

**Mr O'MARA:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Reverend McMahon, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Reverend McMAHON:** As the Manager responsible for the operations, planning and ministry of Life After Prison ministries.

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

**Reverend McMAHON:** Yes, I did.

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

**Reverend McMAHON:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** Would you please briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant

to the terms of reference of this inquiry?

**Reverend McMAHON:** I am a registered minister with the church and I am a manager with formal qualifications. I have been in the capacity of managing the ministry for Anglicare for a period of three years. Prior to that I had 20 years experience in business and management.

**CHAIR:** You heard me suggest to Mr O'Mara that Anglicare has made two submissions to this inquiry. I take it that you also are happy for those to be included as part of your sworn evidence.

**Reverend McMAHON:** Yes, I am in agreement.

**CHAIR:** At this stage I invite both of you in the order that you choose to make some preliminary observations to the Committee regarding the work of Anglicare in this prison welfare area and to make any preliminary comments you choose that are relevant to our terms of reference.

**Mr O'MARA:** I would like to tender some basic documents. One is a copy of the last published annual report for Anglicare which will give you an idea of our structure and functions. Included in that is a copy of all of the overhead slides that will be used today as a reference for the Committee members. I will make some introductory remarks and then conclude with a summation which will tie together the views that we have expressed in the submissions to the Committee. I will also refer to the recommendations made to the select committee on the population increase in prisons.

First, let me say that Anglicare is an organ of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney and, as such, has as its core proposition a mission statement which describes its work as being focused on just one thing: bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to individuals and families in the way described in the overhead slides. The purpose of that is to draw your attention to the fact that this is uncompromisingly a Christian ministry. At the same time, the fact that it is a Christian ministry does not mean that its objectives and method of operating are in any sense out of sync with the objectives of the Corrective Services Commission or the Government in addressing these kinds of issues.

The basis of our submissions are that the church provides an enormously strong social infrastructure which can be called to assist in this whole process if a degree of partnership and joint venture can be developed. The mission statement for the Life After Prison ministries operates interdenominationally. Life After Prison ministries began several years ago as a lay ecumenical ministry not tied to any particular church administration. A number of years ago an approach was made to most of the major denominations to assist in the management of this excellent program. Anglicare found itself in a position to do that. It now manages and administers the Life After Prison ministries in a way that involves input from all the other major denominations.

The committee of management or the steering committee for Life After Prison ministries is made up of chaplains, L.A.P. personnel and men in prison at this point, as well as senior personnel such as myself from Anglicare's management. The objective is to reduce recidivism. It happens that within church circles the language is in gospel-centred terms. In terms of the practical work on the ground there is no inconsistency between the reduction of recidivism and a Christian ministry. The objectives of this ministry are: to provide a ministry to people in prison; to ensure their successful integration into the community; and to re-establish their potential as productive, contributing and continuing members of the community.

It is also a ministry to the families of people in prison, since our work reveals that it is impossible, with any logic, to separate the treatment of the person in prison from what happens to the families as a result of their incarceration. The second theme of the ministry to families is to ensure the maintenance

of effective family relationships. It seems to me, based on my practical experience in community services over a long time, that the failure to make an investment in the families of such people maximises the potential for a return to prison in the long run. That is not to say that this kind of approach is suitable for everybody. It is certainly a ministry that is open to everybody, but it is a question of whether or not particular individuals wish to go this way. Life After Prison ministries can be described as a bridge-building exercise between people in prison and communities outside that are willing to “be there” for them. It is as simple and as uncomplicated as that.

I have been involved in community services at a time when men left prison with a Globite bag, their old clothes, a few bucks and a rail warrant to go somewhere, and almost no chance of making it. It seems to me that if we recognise what happens to people when they go to prison—their families collapse within about two years—the chances of them having any personal or social infrastructure to make it possible for them to change their directions are almost nil. When we started to rework the Life After Prison ministries some time ago, we asked people in prison what they thought were the elements that made it possible for a man to change the direction in which his life was going. The result was the general propositions shown on the overheads.

These are the general characteristics that a collection of people with experience have identified as likely to make it possible for them to succeed. First, the people in prison must accept responsibility for what they have done and also accept that what they did was wrong or they must demonstrate a consistent belief as to their innocence. It is also important in the eyes of these experienced people, including men in prison, that the people for whom this program might work are those who actually wish to change their lives; they do not wish to go back “inside” and they demonstrate a desire to be integrated into the wider community. All of this is to be found within the hearts and minds of people in prison, not imposed on them, in some systemic way, outside. They have to accept that they cannot do it alone.

The advice of men in prison was that these people could be using prohibited drugs. We have a particular view about that which I will return to later. They must demonstrate a desire to move away from their formerly negative environments. Again, these are characteristics of the people in prison, and there are many in prison with them. They also have to want to go this way. The Life After Prison ministries program, linked as it is to parish communities of whatever denomination, does not offer much if people have no interest in going in this particular way. However, for those who have an interest in going this way it offers a great deal.

The purpose of our making the submission was to generate constructive and creative discussion on these issues. We believe that unless we make an investment in the wellbeing of people who are in prison, the chances of them returning to prison are actively maximised. Our aim is to create a planned approach to prison reform which openly addresses a number of key issues. The first of those is the need for serious work on the real purpose of incarceration. Is it simply punitive? If so, we should re-establish Devil's Island and stop mucking around. If it is essentially remedial or rehabilitative, then we have other things to do to support people in managing the problems that occur when they end up in prison.

We must ask the question: Is it really the intention of society to inflict similar punishment on the partners and children of people in prison, despite their innocence? Is the pursuit of a policy of case management realistic in the prevailing environment in corrective services if we are to expect Corrective Services to handle this problem alone? Is reducing recidivism a realistic objective without significant investment in those issues and services which make it a possibility? Is it possible to ensure that these issues are addressed from an holistic point of view and a whole-of-government perspective rather than continuing with the traditional assumption that solving this problem is entirely a matter for the Minister or the Department of Corrective Services?

The challenge for our community is simply this: To identify the most cost-effective means of assistance from government through appropriate portfolios, whichever ones they are, to provide family support services to the families of women and men in prison in such a way as to integrate them with the case management strategies operating within the department. Our belief is that there is nowhere for us to go without a formal study of the special needs of women in prison. There is nowhere for us to go—you and I—without a particular regard to their families and their social prognosis. If we fail to do that we make an investment in those children to repeat their parents' experience.

There is a strong need for a formal study of the special needs of the families of those people in prison. We must identify those factors which create an environment for people in prison which is likely to develop in them an improved attitude to life after prison. Anglicare is on about holistic change. It is not on about fiddling with just employment, housing or whatever; it is on about showing people that it is possible, if they follow their own path, to come to terms with a different way of living. We believe that there is no other way to do that. We believe that we can do it better if we all do it together. The experience of the Life After Prison ministry is particular. Reverend McMahon will address you on the particular elements of it and we hope to be able to answer your questions effectively.

**CHAIR:** Reverend McMahon, would you like to make a statement?

**Reverend McMAHON:** I bring to the attention of the Committee the mission statement of Life After Prison, which is specifically the mission statement that fits within the context of Anglicare, and that is to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to people in prison and to support their return to genuine membership of the wider community. It is important to be upfront about who we are but, at the same time, we must be able to say that our objective is about recidivism and about reintegration of people into the wider community. There are three key objectives of the ministry, as we operate it.

The first is ensuring the successful return of people in prison to society, re-establishing their potential as productive and contributing members of it. The second is ensuring the continuation of effective family relationships. The third is demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ to people in prison and their families in partnership with the local church. These three objectives are all interrelated; none of them are effective without the others. The family will survive only if we are able to provide the connection to the community and the connection to the community is done with the help of the wide network of churches.

I will make some brief comments about the actual model and how it has been developed. The model was developed three years ago when Anglicare assumed responsibility for this community ministry. At that stage we needed to be able to establish a mode of operation and an effective ministry that would be accountable and would produce results, keeping recidivism very much in the forefront. As we did this we developed a consultative process which involved men in prison, chaplains, other ministries, other agencies and staff from Corrective Services. Throughout that process we developed a relationship-based model.

Clearly, the triangular diagram that I am showing you at the moment demonstrates that our aim is to connect the church community to the family or friends of the inmates and also to the person in gaol. By building up a relationship connection between those three disparate parts of the model, we are able to move ahead. But the important aspect I want to get across is that the model is relationship-based and it is about dealing with issues in people's lives which sees families and relationships being torn apart by the impact of prison.

We come across some key issues in the operation of this ministry. Family support is absolutely

essential. For those people who do not have a family connection or a family network it is difficult to reintegrate them into society. We have had some success, but the success of that program has been far lower than for those people who have a family connection. We believe that recidivism is proportionally connected to the degree of support that is made available. That, in turn, is based on the family. The old networks we have found must be reduced. We endeavour to get people away from their old criminal networks. The values of the person in prison must change, whether it be by a Christian program or some other program. The whole thing about not going back to prison is looking at the core values, the core beliefs as to why they are there and what is preventing them from leading normal lives, as society would dictate.

Support must commence very early in the process. We believe that chaplaincy in the prisons is essential to a pathway which starts right at the beginning of the prison sentence. That pathway must go well beyond the walls of the gaol for many years and out into the community. The support must continue indefinitely. It must go for as long as it can to enable a person to be fully integrated. For some people that means a life with new friends and a new community—having a life which is nothing like the life that they had before they went to prison. Churches are strategic and are well placed in being able to provide this. Today we will talk a bit more about the network of churches—the fact that there are thousands of churches across Australia of all denominations with many talented people who have networks which can be used and can be resourced if they are appropriately driven.

Finally, we believe that the basis to looking at the core value changes of people in prison is about care, commitment and concern. It has to be driven by love—something that is more than evident to us. In addressing this Committee today I refer to some key elements. Crime prevention should not be limited to include programs designed to prevent first-time offending behaviour. Families affected by crime have particular needs which, if addressed, will have an impact on criminal participation rates. Support for families is essential if the existing cycles are to be broken. Programs for such families are best provided at local level by non-government care agencies. The Christian church is in a strategic position to provide long-term assistance which changes lives and produces significant outcomes. Society's failure to address and resource the plight of women in prison and those who are partners of men in prison is a strong contributing factor to recidivism. The key to an effective Christian ministry is the availability of chaplains, sufficient in number to provide support and encouragement to people in prison. Finally, we seek to stress the need for better planning for service delivery and the provision of more appropriate care for all people who are affected by crime.

**CHAIR:** In commencing the questioning period I indicate that any question that any Committee member puts to you may be responded to by either or both of you as you may choose. I also point out that some visiting members of the Standing Committee on Law and Justice who are present are also members of the Select Committee on Increase in Prisoner Population, other than the Hon. J. F. Ryan, who happens to be both Deputy Chair of this Committee and Chair of that Committee. I ask Committee members to confine themselves to the crossover, so to speak, between the terms of reference for the standing committee and the terms of reference for the select committee which, in effect, deal with crime prevention through social support or, to put it another way, the post-release policies of the Department of Corrective Services. I will commence by asking a question. Reverend McMahon, you referred earlier to the availability of chaplains in prisons. I have a note to the effect that a statement is made in the executive summary of the main Anglicare submission as follows:

The key to effective Christian ministry is the availability of chaplains sufficient in number to actually provide support and encouragement to people in prison. Additional subsidies are essential.

I take it that there is an implication that, in your view, there may not be sufficient chaplains available within the prison system. What is your agency's perception of that matter?

**Reverend McMAHON:** That is definitely the case. There is an insufficient number of chaplains within the prison system right across New South Wales. That applies to all Christian denominations that we are speaking about. Some prisons have no chaplains. Other prisons would have one chaplain for 350 to 400 people. That is a large number of people to provide any adequate level of care. I guess that a similar situation applies to psychologists and some of the professional staff who work within the corrective services system. Very often the number of inmates makes it difficult for those inmates to be individually seen, even during the whole length of their sentence. This equates directly to the chaplaincy as well. Chaplains work very hard indeed and they often find it necessary to target people in order to prioritise their workload.

**Mr O'MARA:** It is quite directly a resource issue. The support and encouragement that we have received in this work from key people in Corrective Services has been strong. At the same time there are limits on their resources. I think it really hinges on what the purpose of incarceration is—a matter that we have attempted to address. If our aim is to produce a reduction in the number of people who return we must provide the means for them to change that direction. We think chaplaincy is the key to that. There are not enough of them in any denomination.

**CHAIR:** What resistance, if any, have you found in your experience among church and parish communities to be involved with prisoners and prisoner rehabilitation programs?

**Reverend McMAHON:** It would be dishonest not to acknowledge that working with people in gaol is difficult, and it is perceived as being difficult. So it is never easy to convince the church to step out and to be prepared to work with these people. Having said that, when we designed the model that I spoke about a short time ago, we had very much in mind the issue of helping the church to understand its role in that process.

The process we have developed very much revolves around the family. We found it very successful to be able to approach a church and say to the church: There is a family living in your suburb or your community or town and this family is struggling to make ends meet. It so happens they have a person in gaol but the family badly needs the support of the community. The Christian community is very effective at doing that. When we present it that way to the church very few churches will not run with that idea and we help them to understand that as time goes on we will help them with the issues of the person in gaol as he gets ready for release.

**CHAIR:** You may be aware that another committee of the Parliament, the Standing Committee on Social Issues, released a report in 1997. That dealt with needs of children of imprisoned parents. That report identified various gaps, gaps in supports and services available to prisoners. That is three years ago. Could you identify for the Committee in general terms what significant gaps you believe may exist in supports for families and children of prisoners?

**Mr O'MARA:** If I can comment on that, based on some experience in government circles. I do not think any government agency actually recognises the families of people in prison as a specific target population for their services at all. There are families of people in prison who become customers of one government agency or other as a result of other things. The Department of Community Services is one of those, as is Health, School Education and the like. But there is no other agency that actually focuses on that particular target group, therefore there is no sophisticated approach to analysing what the needs of such families are and no real understanding of how best they can be responded to.

The research that I have seen over the years reinforces the notion that more than two-thirds of first offenders do not re-offend. However, we end up with a diminishing number of people that represents

a small population, the recycled people who end up out of touch with social order, if you like. It seems to me that the various agencies that traditionally have relationships with families such as this—Community Services, Housing, Health, School Education, Police, Juvenile Justice, plus a range of others, need the leadership of government to encourage a specific focus on this particular group.

The dearth of services and support available to the women of the menfolk in prisons and their families is just appalling. It is to do with the lack of recognition of them as a particular need group rather than a rejection of their “standing”. So, they fit where they fit in the ordinary circumstances but they need more than that.

**CHAIR:** Does your agency have any statistics on prisoners and families helped through Anglicare's activities and can you tell us now, or subsequently if necessary, how many prisoners and families of prisoners may be helped by Anglicare at any one time?

**Reverend McMAHON:** In any one year we assess in the order of 120 to 150 people for long-term assistance, and approximately 80 per cent of those receive care. The family component of that received very much longer care simply because they are more successful and we found that something like 74 per cent of all families succeed in long-term care. It is something like 55 per cent to 58 per cent for single people. So, of the 150 maximum, more than half would be families—perhaps 60 per cent.

**Mr O'MARA:** The work that we do with this is very much in collaboration with other agencies such as Prison Fellowship and in particular an organisation called Kairos, a Greek word meaning time. Kairos is a powerful agent for change inside prisons and I would hope there are other submissions around from Kairos directly. They provide the means for people to discover a different way of living, and it is in partnership with them that we are able to build the bridge between the person in prison and the community that is willing to be there for them.

The answer to your earlier question about whether church communities resist involvement with people in prison is that they have the perception of people in prison that we generally get from the media, as if people in prison have red eyes, pointy ears and are all round generally horrible people. The reality is my experience in this work leads me to examine what would happen to me—a white, married, Catholic Rotarian—if I went to gaol. My whole life would collapse. The available evidence is that it is only relationships that make it possible for me to climb back out of the pit.

**CHAIR:** The statement is made in Anglicare's submission that the community grants program supports a small number of community organisations attempting to provide support to ex-offenders and their families. Could you comment for the benefit of the Committee on Anglicare's perception of the adequacy or perhaps shortcomings of the program? Are more resources needed or desirable?

**Reverend McMAHON:** The four organisations that received direct subsidy—CRC Justice Support, Children of Prisoners, Prisoners Aid, and Glebe House—have been receiving that for a number of years. As I understand it, the way in which that funding is made available is on an annual turnover basis. It is not put out to tender. There was some discussion on that point at a meeting Corrective Services held last year. It was decided to continue that process to not go out to tender. If it did go out to tender I think there may be other agencies out there that could fill some of the gaps. But about Anglicare, Terry, would you like to comment?

**Mr O'MARA:** I would hasten to say, Mr Chairman, our purpose in making a submission is not to enter the race for resources. We believe the role that church agencies and other community organisations can play in supporting this whole approach to reducing recidivism and so on is of critical importance. Anglicare's contribution to this ministry so far in the past three years has been something



under \$600,000. At the same time, it relies on the contribution of other organisations such as the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the like, to sustain what we do. While subsidies are paid for chaplaincies in prisons, we would think there are far too few of those. The fact remains we would not wish to compete with those agencies who currently receive funding from Corrective Services. We believe there is insufficient money available to Corrective Services to widen that option. Were there additional funds, we have much to offer. We would wish to work with those agencies and the department to figure out how it is that we change the circumstances of people in prison so they do not return.

**Reverend McMAHON:** In fact, in our submission we made some suggestions about the possibility of government subsidy being available directly to the end users or the providers of the care in the community. We were not thinking of Anglicare at that stage.

**CHAIR:** Anglicare's submissions also state that a very high percentage of people released from prison have addiction problems which sometimes have not been attended to successfully while incarcerated. Could you comment to the Committee what your view is regarding treatment programs in prison?

**Reverend McMAHON:** I would like to make it clear that I am wearing a second hat here. That is, I am president of the Blacktown Alcohol and Other Drugs Family Services, known as BADFS. My comments come partly out of the information I have through being involved with that association as well as our own work. Certainly we find a very high percentage of our clients who have a current drug addiction or will have had a drug addiction in the very recent past. Even those clients who have had little use or very restricted use in gaol fall prey very easily to addiction once they come outside. It ties back in with coping mechanisms, for support. It is not about a process which simply says: if we give you the right treatment or the right medicine you will overcome this problem. It is an holistic thing. We need to look at people who are addicted and they need to address the problem right at the beginning of their sentence, and treatment needs to go well beyond the gaol sentence. Corrective Services does not have the resources, it would seem, to have complete rehabilitation and detoxification units in the gaols. There are wings within certain gaols dedicated to people who have an addiction problem but they are not able to adequately service that, and one area where they cannot is in counselling. When addicts attempt to do something about their biological addiction they need to receive psychological counselling, otherwise the chances of failure are very high indeed. Likewise, as I said before, what happens inside must connect to the ongoing treatment outside.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** I was going to ask you about drug and alcohol programs, and one aspect I wanted to look at in your submission is something you have not specifically commented on yet. But, in the significance of drug and alcohol problems, would you be prepared to comment whether they are significant contributors to recidivism by prisoners? One common view would be that it is drug and alcohol problems that have got people in prisons and unless those things are dealt with they are more likely to return. Is that a view you share or are there other issues that are more significant?

**Reverend McMAHON:** Certainly there are other issues but that is a view we hold to from our experience. A very high percentage of the time if the people we try to help end up re-offending, it relates to their addiction and not being able to receive adequate care and deal with the core issues underneath. The answer is yes.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** You refer also to the role the drug and alcohol problems play in the families of people who are in prison. On page 6 of your submission you say that substance abuse is a common factor in many families trying to cope with the stress of one of its members being imprisoned or recently released. Would you like to comment further whether that has a relationship with prisoner

rehabilitation as well, anything your agency has been able to do specifically with a family and substance abuse?

**Reverend McMAHON:** Recognising that Corrective Services has a mandate, we would like to think, to rehabilitate, but certainly to accommodate and look after someone within their care for a given period of time, and recognising that Corrective Services does not have a mandate for treatment or for care of the family, if there was some way there could be a better connection between family and inmate in areas such as drug addiction, it would go a long way towards overcoming the sorts of problems that lead to recidivism. Very often if the inmate is able to get help the family is not dealing with it for a whole range of reasons, not least of which is the cost or availability of services, the needs of mothers caring for children, the stigma that goes with having someone in gaol and having addiction problems. We have experiences of families where both the father who is in gaol and the mother are addicted. I am thinking of one family with three little children under 10. When the father comes out of gaol, yet again they go straight into serving their behaviour, their desire to use drugs, and it is only a matter of weeks before both of them are charged and he ends up back inside. It is a very difficult problem.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** At a later part of your submission you refer to other programs that might be needed. You refer to the breakdown in prisoners' ability to relate to families, and some of them do not have that in the first place. You referred to the fact that it is important to give prisoners some knowledge about how families work. Have you any examples of practical programs that do that? It sounds to me a fairly difficult thing to educate someone about family living in a prison. How are you able to achieve that?

**Reverend McMAHON:** It must start early in the piece. A short while ago Mr O'Mara mentioned the Kairos ministry program. Kairos is a ministry that goes into the gaol and over a period of 3½ days deals with core values and the things in their lives that need to be looked at in a very inward-focused way, for them to be able to understand what the possibilities are. The Kairos program does effect very significant change. At the ITC at Long Bay, something like 70 per cent of the people who have been through the Kairos program have remained with that program for a long period. The Governor at Long Bay and the staff will talk about these people becoming very much more compliant because they have been through that program and made to address the issues of God and spirituality, which we see as very important, and the issues of why I am here and why can I not make a success of my life, what do I need to change to overcome what has brought me into gaol. That is just the beginning.

The Life After Prison Ministry is a program in itself. It is not just about bridging and linking to churches but about linking into programs within churches, including Alcoholics Anonymous [AA], Drug and Alcohol Counselling [DA], Gamblers Anonymous [GA] and so forth, and also about linking into programs that deal with those issues that are holding the prisoners back. This is what I said before. When it comes to drug addiction, it becomes a very long process. It becomes a chain of programs over a very long period, supported by a network of people who gather around the prisoner and hold them very tightly into that community until they are able to survive on their own.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** Is Kairos a separate program of Anglicare or another program altogether?

**Mr O'MARA:** Kairos is a completely independent, non-funded, ecumenical lay ministry. We work very closely with it, but it is entirely separate. So we have no control.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** I am interested in the delivery of programs. You have said that the programs are important and you have illustrated their significance. I am interested in exactly how you go about delivering a program to a prisoner which teaches them how to have a successful family life. Is there individual counselling? Are there classes or focus groups? I am not quite sure what it is you

do that delivers this program.

**Mr O'MARA:** It is unfortunate that persons move as often as they do during their period in gaol. Nevertheless, the relationship focus creates a possibility for the chaplain to work with someone and attend to their spiritual wellbeing. This is not about recruitment to a particular denomination: it is a focus on spiritual wellbeing. That introduces, through training programs that Anglicare provides in parenting for men, for example, notions about how relationships can work in ways that are different from the experience of many of the people in prison.

Many of the prisoners believe that conflict is always or best resolved by violence so they punch somebody out rather than listen to the other person's point of view. They think that sex and love are the same and they think that sex is a functional activity anyway, devoid of any cohesion in an emotional relationship. That means, ultimately—if that is their unshakeable view about how relationships work—that their children learn the same values, or the same lack of them, in the long run. There are a whole lot of coincident things occurring. This spiritual journey of a person in prison in the hands of the chaplain may end up in a certain denominational allegiance, but it may well not. It certainly will open up opportunities for different views about how relationships work and shift the means by which a person makes decisions about what is important to them.

At the end of the day, your question about whether drugs are important is fundamental to the issue because if our focus is not addressing what happens to people when they leave prison, then the time and the opportunities while they are in prison are lost. At the end of it, I suppose the traditional culture of corrective services is that success is defined by whether the person is still in the prison and still alive by the time their term is done. Unless we make investments during that period of incarceration about drug and alcohol dependence, et cetera, we just do not change what is possible for them. It is a tragedy.

**Reverend McMAHON:** Terry O'Mara mentioned a moment ago a fathering course which is one of the courses that we conduct in prisons. We find, through that course, that there are men in gaol who really have no idea what being a father is all about, let alone being able to deal with the issues of having been in gaol for five years and returning to a family with children. The prisoners have expectations that their kiddies are going to come running to them at the front door and throw their arms around the former inmate's neck and that their partner is going to hand over management of the family when they get home.

The very first thing that we tell them in that program is that if they have those sorts of expectations, the relationship with their family will last less than 24 hours, so it is about teaching people to again have a new life in an entirely different frame of mind. That takes a lot of work and a lot of time. In relation to the drug issues, there are Alcoholics Anonymous, DA and GA programs in gaol but very often they are run by the inmates. We feel that it should be possible for professionals from outside to be able to bring in counselling services, DA services and those sorts of programs which would be so beneficial.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** But that is not possible?

**Reverend McMAHON:** It is not readily possible at the moment, no.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** That brings me to other questions I want to ask you. As people who go into prisons and who are not part of the prison system, I thought you would be in an interesting position to observe. The general purpose of imprisonment is to deprive people of their liberty. It seems to me that you would be useful people to ask whether there are aspects of the manner in which deprivation of liberty is carried out that are unnecessary in order to achieve that objective, which actually damage people and which eventually cost the Government loads of resources in undoing that damage. Are you able to make observations about the prisons system itself and things that perhaps we ought to stop

doing that are not necessary; that perhaps have been part of the tradition of how we have thought about prisons; and that, if stopped, would obviate problems we should not necessarily have now?

**Reverend McMAHON:** It comes down to a fundamental change in attitude. If we recognise that by putting people in prison for a punitive reason, we are purely locking them up to keep them out of society, what we are creating is an environment where we are producing a problem for society and one day society will have to deal with that problem. Ninety-eight per cent of people who go to gaol end up back in the community, so if we have the approach that the purpose of gaol is punishment and correction rather than rehabilitation and dealing with problems as well as preparation to integrate people back into society, then we have a major problem.

The attitude of people in society, and certainly people who work within the gaol system, sometimes is very much the attitude that the prisoners are there only for that purpose. Our observation is that deprivation alone is a real punishment, that is, being taken away and losing one's freedom. Some people would say that going to gaol for 12 months is not a very long term and that some people should get ten years. I would like to say to those people, "Have you tried spending one year in gaol? Have you tried living in a concrete room ten feet by eight feet, and have you really experienced that?" In saying those things, we are not getting emotive and we are not saying that punishment should be less. What we are saying is that the punishment fits the crime, but the rehabilitation must fit the situation. Without dealing with those core issues that treat imprisonment as a rehabilitative centre, we are never going to be successful.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** Would you like to make some comment about the success rate of your program? Do you often see the clients with whom you are able to interact returning to prison? Is that common? If so, over what sort of period does that happen?

**Rev. McMAHON:** We believe that we have had a relative success rate. The model I have described has been in operation throughout 1998 and 1999, so this is the third year of operation of that model. We are only aware of three people, I think, who have gone back to prison since being through that program. The Kairos program has similar numbers. Something in the order of between 150 and 200 people have gone through that program. The number of people who have gone back to gaol has been very small. I wonder if we should be measuring success in terms of people who are going back to gaol. I wonder whether what we should be doing is looking at recidivism as a whole society issue and recognise that sometimes people will trip up and what we need to do is provide opportunities to have that reason for change—that core value reason—and the family. The reason why family is important is that love, relationship, care and commitment are all things that are missing in gaol and missing in the criminal network in society.

**The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** Are there any non religious or State programs related to the type of work that you are doing, or are yours and Kairos the only programs of that type?

**Rev. McMAHON:** Ourselves, Kairos and the Prison Fellowship are the major Christian programs in gaols. There are individual churches—Salvation Army and so forth—that periodically do a number of very good works in gaols. In terms of organisations that are non church, non-Christian organisations, we recognise the good work of CRC Justice Support, Prisoners Aid Association and Children of Prisoners, but they are very much focused on a particular need of their clients. What we would say is that we are about changing people and changing attitudes or values and that that is all based on trust and relationship. No, we believe that we are the only organisation that has the model that is all about doing what I have just described.

**The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** I understand that you have been good at identifying

this and I understand that you have groups in the community related to churches that could give practical help to families of incarcerated people but, in a sense, Alcoholics Anonymous is only good for some alcoholics. You basically have stated—I am not sure how you phrased it—both in your written submission and today, that you regard acts of religious belief as one of the three parts of the triangle of your method. If people are not able to accept that part of the triangle but say that they want the family support and any counselling skills and education that they can get and are not too fussed on the religious part, are you able to help them, or does that make your program inappropriate, shall we say?

**Reverend McMAHON:** We need to draw the line here. We do not say to our clients that the first thing they must do is accept religious beliefs. We are not about that. That triangle shows the church community with inmates in one quarter and a family in the other. We say that the church community is building relationships between the community who are going to support both the family and the inmate and a relationship between that the inmate and the family. Christian beliefs and Christian values may well flow out of that, and often do

When people are made to look at the core values in their lives and are made to look at the things that have led to their ending up in the situation they are in and think about what they need to do about it, they very often come to a Christian belief. But, no, we do not specify that people have to be Christian or take a faith on board before we do anything. We are about working through the change process of people's lives and usually that is before they have any understanding of what Christianity is about.

**The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** A lot of people, though, are reluctant to take a good look inside themselves. They often prefer to deal with practical realities as they come along and would rather change incrementally within context, using whatever coping skills they can have, than have some crisis after which they either crack up or adopt some higher plane. People say that if the prisoners could all read and write and have some skill to make them employable, their lives would be fixed, or a high percentage of those lives would be fixed. Presumably the spiritual values are not quite addressed so, essentially, they are very much a practically based rehabilitative program.

I and other members of this committee would like to say that if we are looking to put resources into the long-term reduction of recidivism and prevention of crime, we have to put the money somewhere. So should we put the money into literacy programs, programs such as the ones you run, or other things? I can see there is loads of scope for both at the moment, but do you think there is any limitation in the fact that it is more difficult to be universal with your packages, as it were?

**Reverend McMAHON:** I do not believe it is difficult to be universal. I believe, though, that we use our process to discover those people who are going to have the best outcomes through the program and we are very up-front about saying to our clients, "We feel that we can do this, this, and this for you", or, "Maybe now is not the right time for us to be talking to you and there are other agencies." We are not about saying that we are universal in anyway.

But having said that, I wish to pick up your point about what particular things are important. Sure, literacy is important. Relationship skills are important. Dealing with drugs and alcohol is important. Vocational aspects are important. Finding accommodation and getting set up in a community are important. All sorts of other factors are important but I would say to you that the most important factor of all is having a community of love, acceptance and forgiveness.

Putting aside the Christian view for a moment, if a person comes out of an environment where they have been incarcerated for many years and have experienced a degree of institutionalisation, if they do not experience a degree of love, acceptance and forgiveness there is very little likelihood that they will get any value out of those other programs.

The resources should be going into the families and to the networks that are supporting them, not into Life After Prison ministry or Anglicare specifically but into the areas that will develop family relationships and keep them together during the sentence. That will help them to survive probably the most difficult experience they will ever have in their entire lives.

**Mr O'MARA:** I will pick up on that and develop it one step further. There is an enormous difference between religious obedience and spiritual wellbeing, it has to do with being in touch with the "core" itself, at the risk of being metaphysical. Unless a person comes to a decision about changing the mess that their life is in, doing peripheral things like skills training and so on are unlikely to be helpful. It may be that some people do not accept the Christian church, they may have another faith tradition that they wish to go forward with, and we encourage them to re-establish some reliable value base for a future life, regardless of their theological position.

Probably at this time it would be premature for us to express a view about how to deploy resources; we are not here about resources, we are here about the plight of women in prison and the women of men in prison and the investment that needs to be made in them if they are ever going to break the cycle. At the same time there are those who seem to assume that any association with any church means that a person is a marginal thinker. Churches offer an enormously powerful social framework in which value-based change in a "whole of life" sense can be achieved. One of the things that struck me about the Kairos program—since I am not responsible for it, I can praise it—is that at one of its closing ceremonies a man was obviously sceptical and his observation at the end of the Kairos experience was, "I am not too sure about this, but I think I will give it a go".

We cannot ask much more of someone with that kind of life experience. Ultimately, this will depend on society's view of why we send people to prison. If we believe it is important to change people's attitudes about life in respect of other people's property and wellbeing during the process, we have to do something about D and A and about an investment in their attitudes about fundamental values, otherwise they will come out of prison, get back on drugs, resume their former level of drug taking and probably kill themselves. Anecdotal evidence is that that is a common outcome. Our belief is that churches are not marginal wobbly thinkers; churches are powerful engines for social change and a framework of existing values that will support people on a path to changing their life. We believe we offer something in that regard, but we are not the whole answer. We certainly offer something to a lot of people.

**The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS:** I am intrigued as to why you believe that Christian values are so important in carrying out functions such as this?

**Mr O'MARA:** We are a Christian organisation and I suppose it is a habit of language. We think it is just as important for a Buddhist or a Muslim or someone with any faith tradition to have a spiritually correct focus. However, we belong to a Christian organisation and Australia is, at this time, still affected by strong Christian traditions. We do not propose that the way we happened to go about it is the whole answer for everyone, neither do we propose to offer much of the solution to someone committed to Islam. However, we are an agency which offers a service which is designed to build a bridge between someone in prison and a parish community, a social organ in a socialised sense which is willing to be there for them. Clearly, on this side of the world, that is an Anglican, Roman Catholic, Church of Christ or Uniting Church, because that is the world in which we work.

**Reverend McMAHON:** For more than 200 years Australia has been under the tyranny of a penal colony. Today's practices are not necessarily very different from those of 200 years ago. In fact, there has been little production of effective, accountable outcomes. We believe that is because the programs

provided to people in prison have not addressed core values, I keep mentioning the word "core"; but if we do not get the person to address the very deepest issues within their lives, of course no other program will get them to change. They will take things on board only when it suits them. Christian values plug into the very core value of a person and make a person look at their own identity, what they want to be, what they should be, whether or not they believe in a Christian god. It is about looking at who you are and where you want to go.

**The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS:** How important is it in your program to develop a prisoner's sense of self-esteem?

**Mr O'MARA:** Critical.

**Reverend McMAHON:** Absolutely. Without a value of self-worth it is very difficult, if not impossible, for someone to deal with the way they want to go, what they want to do, to change their life. Someone wallowing in depression or a drug-induced psychosis will find it very difficult until they deal with those issues.

**Mr O'MARA:** I support that view. I was not trying to be cute when I said "critical". I do not know how else to describe it. If someone has low self-esteem he or she does not have the confidence to change and very often does not develop competence to achieve change. They resort to, maybe, criminal behaviour to build self-esteem that, whilst ever false that may be it has the illusion of power. Or they may become drug dependent, because they live in a fantasy world whilst on drugs, and so on. They are all coping mechanisms related to a sense of personal inadequacy. That is why bullies behave the way that they do.

At the same time, unless we make investments through this way or any other way which re-establishes someone's sense of self-worth, we align that with spiritual wellbeing, not religious observance. Unless we do those sorts of things a person will not get the wherewithal to introduce the changes that will mean that their lifestyle becomes viable and they will continue in this awful cycle.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**MICHAEL JOHN STRUTT**, Computer Programmer-Analyst, 1/428 Parramatta Road, Petersham,

**BRETT ANTHONY COLLINS**, Social Worker, 19 Buckland Street, Chippendale,

**VICTORIA POTEPA**, retired, 16 Smythe Street, Merrylands, and

**IAN FRASER**, Hoist Driver, 27 Railway Street, Petersham, affirmed and examined:

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

**Mr STRUTT:** As a spokesperson for the organisation Justice Action.

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

**Mr STRUTT:** Yes, I did.

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

**Mr STRUTT:** Yes, I am.

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

**Mr STRUTT:** I have worked with prisoners' issues directly with Justice Action for more than 12 months and also in association with other organisations in Australia and New South Wales. I have also been involved in prisoners' issues in Sri Lanka and India.

**CHAIR:** Justice Action has provided a written submission. I take it that you are happy to have that incorporated as part of your sworn evidence?

**Mr STRUTT:** Yes, I am.

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

**Mr COLLINS:** As a spokesperson for Justice Action.

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

**Mr COLLINS:** Yes, I did.

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

**Mr COLLINS:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** Please briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

**Mr COLLINS:** Yes, I am an ex-prisoner, I spent almost 10 years in prison. I have been working



in the area of prisons and justice issues for about three decades. I hold the position of National Co-ordinator for International Prison Watch. I am the Managing Director of Breakout Design and Print, which resources the organisation Justice Action. I am also a criminologist with a post-graduate diploma from the University of Sydney Law School.

**CHAIR:** I take it you are prepared and willing to have your written submission incorporated as part of your sworn evidence?

**MR COLLINS:** Yes, I am.

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

**MS POTEPA:** I have been a volunteer seeing prisoners for the last 18 years or so. In that capacity I have seen families and others, and I have helped them sometimes in their resettlement or other problems they have had through the family. I was with the CRC; that is where I started. But, unfortunately, now they do not want any volunteers; they reckon they cannot afford us. Through all these years I have been paying out of my own pocket for whatever I have done; I have never had one cent remuneration. Today I am here of my own free will.

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

**MS POTEPA:** Yes, just five minutes ago.

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

**MS POTEPA:** To a certain extent, yes.

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

**MS POTEPA:** As I said before, my qualification is purely voluntary. I have never been through any course or induction. I have had experience through working with them and seeing their problems.

**CHAIR:** I take it you are willing to have the Justice Action submission incorporated as part of your sworn evidence?

**MS POTEPA:** Yes, I am. I am friendly with them.

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

**Mr FRASER:** I am the company secretary of Breakout Accommodation Services, Breakout Leasehold Housing Association and Leichhardt-Marrickville Youth Project Incorporated. I am a member of the Prisoners Action Group, and I have been involved in prisoners' struggles for more than 30 years.

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

**Mr FRASER:** Yes.

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

**Mr FRASER:** To a certain extent.

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

**Mr FRASER:** I have served a total of about 10 years in child welfare institutions and prisons in this State and other States. I have been involved in prisoners' struggles for more than 30 years. In fact, I ran test cases in the prison system in the 1970s. I have been the company secretary of Glebe House Ltd in the past. I have worked in housing or accommodation with ex-prisoners for a total of about 15 or 16 years, voluntary work.

**CHAIR:** I assume that, along with your colleagues, you are willing to have the Justice Action written submission included as part of your sworn evidence?

**Mr FRASER:** Yes. We also have our own submissions. Will they be incorporated?

**MS POTEPA:** I also have my own submission.

**CHAIR:** If you tender the submission, we will incorporate it as part of the evidence. I understand that Mr Collins and Mr Strutt would like to make a brief preliminary submission not exceeding about 10 minutes in length. The Committee members are very anxious to ask as many questions as we can.

**MR COLLINS:** Firstly I would like to hand up some material which has already been referred to. The package includes an accreditation statement of some of Justice Action's achievements. There is also a response to the particular requests that you had. The third item relates to a particular issue, computers in prisons, which is a leaflet. There is also Ian Fraser's submission and Vicki Potempa's submission. The package also includes a submission about the expansion of the prison system and a copy of the magazine *Framed*.

We are here in the capacity of community members, a community of the prisoners themselves. We are concerned, and have been concerned for a long time, that the prison community as such has been distanced and removed from the service delivery or group of those people who are listened to in the area of justice, particularly in prisons. We have some basic positions we wish to push to you, and at the same time as responding to your specific questions we would like to ensure that you understand where we are coming from. Certainly we would not like our material to be added to the pile of other material and for you not to understand where we are coming from and what is our position in relation to the prison community itself. We are unpaid, unfunded community group members who are here because of the goodwill we offer, as members of the greater community and also of the prison community.

We have included in our material a copy of the magazine *Framed*, which is the only magazine to go into New South Wales prisons. It goes also into prisons throughout Australia but not in the same quantity. It goes to one in 12 prisons in New South Wales through their inmate development committees and their libraries. It is then passed through the formal internal mail, so it has a substantial impact. It carries a lot of material, and quite often quite critical material. It goes in on the basis of it being fair comment, and if it names a prison officer we give the prison officer the opportunity to respond to the material. It has that degree of censorship, but in fact in practice it does not have a problem.

We have also included in the material some of Justice Action's achievements, and we would like

to present to you as directly as possible that we carry the trust of the prisoners themselves and their families, and we say that really carefully. To support that, we make the point that we have presented on behalf of prisoners in Australia to the Senate on the issue of voting, we have presented at the Drug Summit in different sorts of ways, once again for prisoners of New South Wales. We hold the position of national co-ordinator for International Prison Watch, presenting to the United Nations. We have networks and allegiances to all the other groups in the field. They recognise our position as the prisoners' representative. As I have said, we are unfunded, so we come from the position of no-one pulling our strings, except the interests of the prisoners themselves as we see them.

We are most concerned—and we say this really carefully—because we see ourselves as being constantly sidelined, as the prisoners themselves. In fact, in some ways we stand beside the prisoners. In any decisions that are being made, they are not listening to what we are saying. In fact, we are the untapped goodwill of the community. We are the untapped goodwill that is prepared to ensure that the things that people say they are doing—that is, preparing people for release, ensuring that they are better able to fit back into the community—those things can happen. The prisoners come to us and look for our support.

We are unfunded to do any support, but we do the work anyway. We pay out of our own pockets. People like Vicki, who is a retired person, and Ian, who is unpaid, and Michael—we pay out of our own pockets in order for the things to happen for which other people are getting a substantial amount of money. We are resentful of it and prisoners are resentful of it—not just for the fact that we have to pay for it ourselves, but because there is unacknowledged goodwill that is happening in which we are sidelined. People are not listening to us, because we are unpaid. That is what it comes down to. As well, we are not able to do the work that we should be doing. We make those points very clearly.

At any discussions, such as the Drug Summit, the funded organisations were admitted and invited. We were rejected, despite the fact that we were acknowledged as being the prisoners' representative. What could be more wrong than that, and what could be structurally more incorrect than that, when you have the people who would make the decisions themselves, whether or not they are going to be taking drugs—the people most affected by the decisions of the drug-taking who have the greatest to lose in not being represented through their own representatives? That is what we were left with. But people who were funded were in fact up there and able to present their material. We would look to this Committee to acknowledge the importance of prisoners themselves being involved, through their direct representatives, they themselves through the inmate development committees, or through the ex-prisoner organisations that are here and trusted by them to represent their interests. As such we are unacknowledged and we are blocked at every stage.

For example, we would look to the computer project as something that we see as extremely important. There is a leaflet included in the material that has been distributed called "Computers in Prisons", which deals with why they are an issue. We look to this Committee to make a statement about the computers in prisons and the importance of them. That material is presented there and it raises those issues. We see that as the sort of involvement which the external prison community and the community generally can do, at no cost. Yet, when it comes to putting computers into prisons we get blocked, and unreasonably blocked.

We are prepared to put a computer into every cell inside the prison system. We have sufficient goodwill to do that. At the moment we have an organisation, which has as its patron the Governor himself, which is offering to us computers which we can put into the gaols, and yet we are blocked. That is totally unreasonable. That is where we are at. We would look to this Committee to make a comment about it. That is the sort of goodwill we are offering. We are bringing this from government departments, from corporations passing through this particular organisation. This is untouched goodwill

for which you are not being charged, but it is unfairly blocked.

We would put that the reason for it being blocked is that there is a management interest in keeping prisoners down. There is a management interest in ensuring that they sit in their cells and that the least noise to come from them, the better. There is a conflict between the management interest of the Department of Corrective Services and the public interest in ensuring that when they get back on the streets they can be more functional, they can use their time better, and they can defend themselves in front of the courts better.

We find once again the blocking of that community goodwill in visits. Up to two years ago we had community visits where we walked as a group, along with a number of other community groups, did tours through the gaols and talked to the prisoners, and were able to be the sounding board for their problems. We did that without any difficulty whatsoever. There was never a security issue. Yet, it was blocked. It was blocked because of the unreasonable attitude of the Senior Assistant Commissioner at that time, Mr Ron Woodham. We have had a continual blocking at the level of this man, who has discredited, through his own history, openly acknowledged and known, and yet we have nobody who is confronting him and confronting the attitudes that are there.

We would say to you, when the community is unable to go into the gaols, that is a very serious issue. When the prisoners-only community cannot walk into the gaols and there is no reason for preventing that occurring, we say to you that that is a very wrong situation, and that is what is occurring at the moment.

**CHAIR:** Mr Collins, I will have to ask you to wind up in a couple of minutes so that we can hear from Mr Strutt.

**MR COLLINS:** No problem. We see a continual defensiveness in the department. The rejection of this community goodwill must be confronted by parts within the Government itself. We would put to the Committee that we should ensure that the money currently being used in after-care, money currently going to CRC Justice Support to the tune of about \$1 million each year from a number of other areas, should be left in the control of prisoners themselves, as a majority interest on some sort of distribution committee, for them to distribute.

The overriding principle should be that prisoners should be able to control the services that are delivered for their purposes. It would be a very simple consumer control, one that is basic to any capitalist society. We have a long history of being able to run a business that currently turns over \$2 million a year. We have been maintaining that business for 15 years. We have the ability to control that and assist prisoners in the control of their own resources. Now I will pass over to Michael Strutt.

**Mr STRUTT:** It seems to me that the original outlines of the inquiry at the time the submission was being made was directed at the idea of early intervention in the families of prisoners, identifying them as high-risk groups for possible future criminalisation, and discussing strategies that might mitigate that sort of problem. It has occurred to me that there are quite a few dangers in that approach. While that might be considered one of the most hopeful approaches that criminologists have offered us to reduce the level of recidivism, there are a number of dangers in it, particularly given the culture of our prisons, how they operate and how many of our other institutions operate. Those matters would have to be kept in mind when introducing it in an Australian setting.

In Holland, prisons have within them the concept of a case management approach. On reception, a prisoner is often assigned to a particular officer, who will follow that person's progression through the prison system, trying to integrate their prison experience with what will eventually be their out-of-

prison experience. It works very well, but of course it works within a culture that is very different from the one that exists in Australian prisons. Here, it seems to me, various institutions have put discipline, management, security and things like that far ahead of the interests of the prison community. They are certainly lip-service measures towards anti-recidivism and prisoner support. I do not think our culture offers much hope for our prisoners.

I heard some of the submissions made earlier by the Anglicare people. I think there is a place for organisations like that in helping prisoners to rehabilitate and to reintegrate in society, but we do need to keep in mind that we are part of a changing society. For instance, one of our fastest growing prison populations at the moment is of South-east Asians who are overwhelmingly Buddhist. The values promoted by Anglicare, while no doubt wholesome and appropriate, might not necessarily be digestible by all peoples in our societies. The only way in which I think we can address this constructively is by constantly throwing the question back onto the prisoners themselves, their families and the communities that they come from. The solutions have got to evolve from those people.

There is no one who would like to see prisoners reintegrated with society more than the families and communities of prisoners, with the possible exception of the prisoners themselves of course. They are the people who can most clearly see how that can be done. That is why a lot of mechanisms have to be put in place to make sure that the system is being driven by the communities, and not for instance by the prison administration's concerns. Would you want children being enrolled in early intervention programs that are evaluated and fed back into say the classification of the imprisoned father, when really the concerns of the prison administration are driving the life of the family, rather than the concerns of prisoners' families and communities being incorporated into the institution?

What needs to be avoided is the institutionalisation of families and communities of prisoners. Rather, we need increased familiarisation of community aspects of those who have been institutionalised, which is the object that I believe we should be looking towards. As I have said before, the best way is to involve the families and the prisoners themselves, and empowering them as much as possible. This obviously means they need to be able to put forward their own views in a way that will not be tempered by something that does not really apply to the issue, for instance, the idea that they might be seen as troublemakers if they apply for certain types of courses or refuse other sorts of courses. All of those sorts of things need to be taken into account. That is really the main emphasis of my submission.

**CHAIR:** Ms Potempa, are you able to comment on the funding of post release programs for prisoners through the Department of Corrective Services community grants program? Do prisoners or their families have input to the programs that are funded? Are the projects that are funded effective?

**Ms POTEPA:** To be candid, I cannot answer that question because that is not what I was doing with the prisoners. I am a good linguist, and I speak several languages, but my work was with those who have been left completely without anyone to see. I only know that some prisoners said when they were released from long-term imprisonment they were running around trying to get accommodation, and they were told, "You have to have a bank account" and so on. All these little bits and pieces did not click together, and they found difficulty in trying to find accommodation through the Department of Housing, et cetera.

A few years ago I was at Norma Parker. Women used to ask me, "What can I do about getting accommodation?" I used to refer them to CRC. The CRC said it was somehow swamped with these questions and did not have enough accommodation to refer them to. How could you expect a woman like me to be able to do that when I am a retiree with a very small pension? I cannot afford to go round with all these people. If I was given the means, the transport and all that, I would have done it. But I

cannot do it.

**CHAIR:** Mr Fraser, could you comment on the accommodation options that are available to prisoners upon their release? Who provides the accommodation places? How do prisoners know that certain services are available? In your belief, is housing, or the lack of it, a significant factor in reoffending?

**Mr FRASER:** Before I move to that, I should explain that Vicki is a volunteer visitor. She visits people who do not get visits. There are blokes who sit in there for five or 10 years and don't get a visit. Vicki has gone out of her way. It costs her money to do it. So she is making a significant contribution to the prison community.

In relation to housing, there is not much housing available for ex-prisoners. What housing there is is hard to get into. They now require interviews before you get there. When I was company secretary of Glebe House it was open house; we never closed the door on anybody. One time we had more than 30 people in the place: they were sleeping on mattresses on the floor, kids from welfare homes, et cetera. We never turned anyone out. These days, Glebe House is run in a different way: everybody has a single room, and it is much more tightly controlled.

There are different options in housing. The Judge Rainbow Memorial Lodge may suit some people, but it won't suit others. There are different views on running those organisations, and I think they are differently funded. The CRC, on the other hand, receives an enormous amount of funding. I have been very critical of it in my submission. I believe it is wasteful in two areas: one, the amount of money it has been receiving; and, two, the number of prisoners that it has actually helped, according to the report of CRC Justice Support. I think it actually helped 42 people in relation to accommodation. CRC receives hundreds of thousands of dollars to do this.

In contrast, the company that I run has been going for 13 years. I have put in 15 years of voluntary housing work, two years with Glebe House Ltd. For the past 13 years I have had a portfolio of 11 properties. We do not receive one cent in funding. We pick up all the funding ourselves. It has been difficult because of that, particularly when someone smashes a place up, or there is unpaid rent. Sometimes we have got to have a fundraiser; sometimes I have got to put my hand in my own pocket and pay the Department of Housing the rent that is due.

The housing providers range from purely voluntary organisations like ours. I would argue that we provide a better service because we are ex-prisoners; we know the score and they can't bullshit us. I must say that in the 13 years that I have been running this company I have only gone to paperwork once for an eviction. That was because the RTA demanded the property back from the Department of Housing, and the Department of Housing asked me for it. I had no choice but to give the person notice to get out. I have not done an eviction through the tribunal or anything like that.

I have personal agreements with the people I house: here's the rent card, here's the key, pay the rent, and shake their hand. If they don't do the right thing, the house falls over. Unfortunately, the lack of funding has had some impact on us recently; because of my injuries, I have not been able to do some of the work that I am often called on to do. Junkie clean-outs are the worst thing I have ever seen in my life. You go into a house with wall to wall needles. I have done a few of those. They are not nice.

On the other hand, you have organisations like the CRC, which gets hundreds of thousands of dollars and as far as I am concerned doesn't do a thing. A woman got out recently. She was one of our crew back in 1984. She has just finished 10 years. She went down to see the CRC very recently. It did not do her any good. In the seventies there used to be an organisation called the Prisoners Aid Association. It did nothing then, and still does nothing, yet it is on the public purse. The reason that

group and the CRC are on the public purse is that they are non-critical; they won't attack the government and they won't attack the Minister for Corrective Services for what goes on in the prison system. They want nice, quiet people who won't buck the system. They are the people who get the funding. They get the money. Anyone who is critical is cut out of the action. That is us. I am glad to say I am here, I won't go away, and I am always going to be critical of the administration. That is the way it is with Corrective Services; it is the sort of organisation that you can always raise a complaint against.

Is housing, or lack of housing, a significant factor in reoffending? I do not have the fancy statistics that CRC Justice Support will trot out, but I must say that in my 15 years of voluntary housing work I think it has made a significant difference. I personally have suffered long periods of unemployment, partly through being stigmatised as an ex-prisoner and also because some of my political stands have been a bit vehement and people have not taken that too well. I must say that the proof is in the pudding. If you provide these people with housing, you give them a chance. If you put a roof over their heads, they are a chance of staying out of gaol.

As I said, I have suffered long periods of unemployment but, because I have had a roof over my head, I have survived. I think this issue must be addressed right at the beginning. The day they walk out the prison gate, you have to give them a roof over their head. I have been through it. I got out of gaol after 6½ years with \$60—\$30 from the department and \$30 put in by my parents, and that was it. I went down and got the dole. That night I had a few beers and partied on, and the money was gone. You wonder why people are out there kicking doors in! I used to see blokes get out of Glebe House and they had no money, but there was a camaraderie there; we looked after people. The first night they would get out we would have a bit of a party, booze up and get some women in. Well, they were ex-prisoners! But it is a bit different now.

Housing is probably the most crucial thing that you can provide to keep somebody out of jail. If you do not start with that, then you are wasting your time. The proposal to build a new prison at Kempsey or Port Macquarie is a waste of money. If that \$40 million or \$50 million was directed at community housing projects for ex-prisoner groups, I am sure the recidivism rate would drop. It is far more important to provide housing options for ex-prisoners than anything else. All the rest is peripheral. It is like reading and writing. If a kid cannot read and write, forget all the other stuff, the curriculum does not matter.

**CHAIR:** I ask either Mr Collins or Mr Strutt, in the submission from Justice Action there is reference to a 1997 report made by the upper House Standing Committee on Social Issues into the children of imprisoned persons. In your view, have there been any changes or improvements since that report was released, and what gaps still remain that need to be filled?

**Mr STRUTT:** It is a little hard for me to date some of the changes because of the way they percolate through the parliamentary and bureaucratic processes. It is difficult to say which ones may have flowed from that report and which ones have been incidental.

**CHAIR:** What do you believe is not present?

**Mr STRUTT:** A few things that seem to me to have changed for the worst over the last couple of years like the de facto criminalisation of prison visitors. There seems to be a very strong assumption within Corrective Services that anyone who wants to visit a prisoner is likely to be a criminal or a drug smuggler. For example, in the 1997-98 year there were 15,000 drug sniffer dog searches of prison visitors with a total of 75 hits.

They discovered 75 people trying to bring in contraband. That is any type of contraband, whether it be marijuana or a person who had a hip flask he had forgotten about, those sorts of things. Nearly everybody is being treated within the drug regimen. It is as if they are presumed to be criminals, when all they are trying to do is maintain their family ties. There is also a lot of arbitrariness in the way that prison visitors are either banned or allowed to visit prisoners. I believe that there is hope for improvement on that.

Recently an Inspector-General has been appointed. Perhaps that will allow for an independent review of a lot of internal decisions that are made in those areas. Although it is early days, I believe it offers hope for reform of some of those unilateral decisions. It seems to me a lot of the decisions that are made regarding prison visitors are actually extensions of conditions within the gaol, as if it is some sort of unofficial disciplinary procedure that is being carried out against prisoners' visitors.

Even if it is not disciplinary, sometimes a prisoner puts his hand up and says, "Hey, I need heroin rehabilitation." They say, "But you have been in gaol for two years. Why do you need heroin rehabilitation?" Then there are cell searches, urine tests, all the visitors are searched. Also, the report recommended that biometric scanning, the fingerprinting of visitors, particularly of under-age persons, be discontinued as a matter of urgency. It has been expanded and the sniffer dog searches, which at the time of the release of this report were only conducted at adult prisons, have now been extended to juvenile institutions as well.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** What do you mean by "this report"?

**Mr STRUTT:** The 1997 report. There is another thing that seems to have come in over the last couple of years. Previously there were various arrangements by the families of prisoners to provide food during visits, especially at remote prisons. That seems to have been largely outlawed now and replaced by monopoly caterers. I am not sure how the contracts are provided, but basically the caterers provide a very small range of overpriced food, which is often not suitable for children and people who are visiting prisons. People often find that they have to terminate their visits early because the children need to be fed and there is nothing suitable at an affordable price.

**MR COLLINS:** We have written careful responses to the questions you have raised. Both Mr Fraser and Ms Potempa have made precise responses to the questions. There are some issues that probably have not been touched upon. For example, what we are saying overall is that the prisoner community has not been taken fully into account, and it should be. We are talking about after-care or the prevention of crime through social support. We offer things that are maybe implicit in what we are saying—for example, mentoring, which happens all the time. Ian Fraser talked about accommodation. Part of that process is mentoring, which does not exist in the equivalent funded organisations, the bureaucracies which do not have the prison experience.

Another point that should not be missed but has not been presented in oral evidence is in our answers in the material. Mr Fraser made the point that the money that is currently being passed through Corrective Services could be better passed through the Department of Community Services. That is not in contradiction to its basic interest, which is security. There is an opportunity for Community Services to have management and control of prisoners and not be in conflict with prisoners. It can try to work with prisoners in their social welfare and take their interests into account.

**CHAIR:** How does Justice Action consult with prisoners before advocating policies? What do you do if prisoners disagree with a policy position you reach?

**MR COLLINS:** The prison movement has been in existence now for decades. Our positions have been arrived at over long periods of debate. For example, we are not looking for new gaols. We are



looking for a lesser use of imprisonment, which to some people initially seemed to be controversial. That has now been discussed and worked through over the years. Clearly, we do not want a new gaol to replace the old women's gaol at Mulawa.

How do we do it? We do it through a process of debate at all levels. We have arrived at positions through debates that have occurred over a period. We are in constant contact with individual prisoners. We feed back to prisoners our views and get responses from them through letters, phone calls and families. The interaction is constant.

Every day we receive phone calls from prisoners all over Australia and at every opportunity we have visits and go to the gaols to talk with them. We believe that we are totally responsive to prisoners and their families. We do not take an antagonistic position towards them. If there is uncertainty we try to leave the final decision making with the individuals at the time of the problem or the interaction.

**Mr STRUTT:** One thing that has changed over the last couple of years is that a lot of organisations, Justice Action included, had good access to prisoners by way of gaol visits via Corrective Services. About a year and a half ago Corrective Services has been narrowing down on the ability to survey prisoners, although it made an exception for the Drug Summit. It has been harder to get permission to send questionnaires or surveys into prisons. It has been much harder to get permission to do walk throughs and interviews than in the past. There are still channels of communication, such as mail and telephone, and practically the first stop for the vast number of people when they get out is Justice Action.

**The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** We heard from Ian Fraser that housing was the most important step to stop recidivism. The previous witnesses said that the spiritual dimension was the most important.

**Ms POTEPA:** How about my Muslim people and the others that I see? How about the humanists?

**The Hon. P. J. BREEN:** And the atheists?

**Ms POTEPA:** Yes, and the atheists.

**The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** We are here to find out what will keep people out of gaol. We cannot make a case for fewer people in gaol unless we can work out how to keep them out of gaol. What do you think are the critical areas? How would you allocate the money?

**Ms POTEPA:** In the area of commonsense. For example, when I first started they had remission of sentences. I knew a chap who was a murderer. He found Jesus Christ and turned to him. At the end of eight years he got a remission on his sentence and he went on his jolly old way. Another one did not go for Christ. He was in for the same thing for 14 years. Yet he turned into a very good ex-prisoner. I see him very often. He has no problem with anybody, and even with all the problems he had he started working. It is not a real response to becoming a better person. First of all, it is commonsense: explaining to them that what they have done is wrong and asking them what they are going to do in future to correct that wrong.

**The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** I am not asking you to bash religion.

**Ms POTEPA:** I am not bashing religion.

**The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS:** I am asking where should we put the resources?

**Ms POTEPA:** What I am telling you is commonsense.

**MR COLLINS:** We are not asking for more money. We are talking about accepting first of all that prisoners are part of the general community. We should not put them away in a cell and ignore them. That is the worst thing of all. It costs no money at all to acknowledge the fact that they are still members of our community. In many cases they are voting citizens. As such, they are entitled to access to the community and, if nothing else, the community is entitled to access to them.

When families are cut away from them you are doing wrong. That happens frequently in many subtle ways. You should be listening to them constantly because they are entitled to be listened to. They will be back in the community again. They are entitled to acknowledgment and dignity because that is a human right. Apart from anything else, that is acknowledged in the Declaration of Human Rights. These things do not cost a cent.

Unfortunately, there is the antagonistic management interest of the Corrective Services. It requires a direction from government or support from a higher sphere that says, "We will acknowledge you and we will ensure that you are fully recognised." You have to listen to people and you have to allow access for us to do it. You should also at least give us some basic return on the cost of things that we are paying for.

We are turning out the only magazine that goes into prisons, which is an acknowledgment to prisoners, and we have to pay for it. That is wrong. We expect somewhere along the way, and we will demand it, that there should be prisoner control of prisoner resources and welfare resources.

**The Hon. P. J. BREEN:** What do you mean when you say you have to pay for it?

**MR COLLINS:** We have to pay something like \$3,000 an issue. The advertising does not cover it. We are always looking for more advertising, but it does not cover it. That is the sort of cost that is borne by our organisation. Additional resources have to be put in.

**The Hon. J. HATZISTERGOS:** Do you want the Government to fund that?

**MR COLLINS:** We would expect that there would be funding for after care in a similar sort of way that at the moment is being funnelled into CRC Justice Support. At the moment about \$1 million is going there. For example, two positions were being put aside for ex-prisoners which, in fact, were not taken by ex-prisoners. That organisation rejects access by ex-prisoners, such as myself, as members.

We say that the money currently being allocated, not more money, should be given to the people to whom it is to be applied. They should have control of that money. It should not be allowed to go into the hands of bureaucrats to decide where it should go and to give their friends the jobs. It should go towards jobs for ex-prisoners and to work that can best be done by men like Ian Fraser, who currently do the work for nothing. It should go to people like him to do the job better. It should be controlled by prisoners, the consumers, to decide how the service is being delivered. At the moment no-one listens to the people about how the service is being delivered. That has to change.

**Mr STRUTT:** Having a lot of the funding for non-recidivism and rehabilitation projects coming directly from Corrective Services seems to offer a bit of potential for a conflict of interests. Corrective Services has its own considerations. They are mostly to do with security management and things like that. I do not think that it is in the interests of the department to reduce prison numbers. That will only reduce its budget and its power. Any funding for recidivism programs should not be entirely in the

hands of Corrective Services because of the possible conflict. At the annual general meeting of the CRC the point was made that a lot of its efforts this year were directed towards fighting Corrective Services to maintain its funding level. It seems to me that probably the funding should be delinked from the department.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** Your submission refers to the issue of prisoner rehabilitation and to the drug and alcohol problem. I notice that some of the material that you have given us states:

A survey of New South Wales prisoners conducted before the Drug Summit indicated that around 88 per cent were using illicit drugs before they were gaoled.

I imagine that you have some information to the effect that a large number of prisoners are still using drugs.

**Mr STRUTT:** Yes. Other surveys—not just those conducted by us—indicate that of the current injecting drug users in prison, 20 per cent started while in prison.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** This is a hard question but I ask it because I think the community expects us to have some sort of dialogue. You made some criticism of the new procedures introduced by the Department of Corrective Services and said that they appear to be more rigorous in checking over visitors to prisons. Obviously, the sole reason that that occurs is that there is an attempt to reduce the level of drugs going into gaols. What possible realistic ways are there to control the entry of drugs into prisons other than security?

**Mr STRUTT:** The most realistic way is to attack the demand rather than the supply. You have to create conditions in gaol so that to not take drugs becomes a preferred option to taking drugs. It must become a meaningless existence. Even minimising the blood-borne disease risk, research indicates that at least 10 to 15 per cent of those in gaols who are infected with hepatitis C get it not from drug use; they get it inadvertently. Basically, there is not the level of control over your life in gaol to make taking control, if you like, of your own psyche, or your own mind, worthwhile. That is what needs to be changed.

With regard to the supply side too, which cannot be ignored, I suggest that the current methods of intervention must be assessed with regard to their financial and social costs and their effectiveness. Although Corrective Services constantly maintains its rhetoric—we saw that at the Drug Summit—that visitors bring drugs into gaols, there have been no studies confirming that whatsoever. The anecdotal evidence that we get from prisoners is that there is another major way that drugs get into gaols. It has nothing to do with visitors. As long as the focus is allowed to be maintained on visitors, I suggest that the real issue is not being addressed and visitors are being penalised.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** Do you mean that people other than visitors might be supplying drugs?

**Mr STRUTT:** Yes. As a matter of fact, that might be the main way that drugs get into gaols.

**The Hon. P. J. BREEN:** Do people throw things over the walls of the gaols?

**Mr STRUTT:** I could tell you some wonderful stories about the innovative ways that prisoners do it. But I do not think that that is the main channel either.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** One of the things mentioned in the submission is the lack of facilities for child visitors, for example, play areas, child-minding, or toilets. You said that often a visit is ended

because a child must use a toilet. Could you expand a bit more on that?

**Mr STRUTT:** I am not sure of the details. But just to outline it, I think it is due largely to security procedures if a child needs to go to the toilet.

**Mr FRASER:** They kick you out. It happened to me. I took my son there for a visit—he was only little at the time—and he wanted to go to the toilet. I said, "Go and piss on the wall." He did and the prison authorities blew up. They came running out and said something about terminating the visit. The only way you can go to the toilet is to terminate the visit and leave the visiting area. They do not provide toilets in the visiting area.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** Is that still the case?

**Mr FRASER:** Yes.

**Ms POTEPA:** Not at all prisons; only at maximum security prisons.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** One other issue that we have not discussed in detail relates to mental health programs in prisons. Would you care to make some comment? How effective has the mental health care for prisoners been within prisons and afterwards? How big a contributor is that to recidivism?

**Mr STRUTT:** I will be completely up front and say that a lot of information about mental health programs within prisons is hard to come by, so far as I can tell. A lot of it is not properly evaluated. So you cannot really say, "Has this improved the person?" or, "Has this failed to improve the person?" I have been able to find out though that the mental health programs often seem to be subverted by prison administration issues. For instance, the sex offender programs in the Malabar special programs unit are often geared towards child sex offenders because they are perceived as being the most problematic. But due to administration—I assume resourcing problems—all sex offenders, regardless of their criminal profile, tend to be housed in the same area and they are offered the same courses.

I do not know how much knowledge of prison culture I should assume. But imagine, say, an old armed robber who has had one sex assault against a prostitute being categorised with what he calls rock spiders. It does not really give a good prognosis for any constructive approach. Another big problem relates to resources and the environment. A lot of these programs presume a doctor-patient relationship that cannot be maintained and established in prisons, partly because prisoners generally have no choice over their practitioners, but mainly because of the restrictions on hours and things and details like transfers to other prisons in the middle of courses.

An example is the EMDA therapy—eye movement desensitisation activity—that was run in Mulawa a few years ago. It is usually for women who have suffered traumatic experiences in childhood. Their criminal behaviour is often attributed to that. They suppress the memories of those experiences. EMDA is designed to bring up those memories and to allow them to confront those memories. These people are subjected to that program and then they are abandoned in their cells without support and all those horrible memories start coming back. If they have behavioural problems the screws just say, "Throw them into segregation row", because they are screaming in the middle of the night. On the one hand the doctors have their agenda and, on the other hand, the prison administration has its agenda. Unfortunately, they do not always work together very well.

**Mr COLLINS:** It is hard not to address the drug issue at the same time. We all recognise that, with the closing of a lot of mental health hospitals, there was a move into prisons at the same time. Some people were moved in there. When you have a degree of segregation, as you have inside the gaols, people are left by themselves to cope as best they can. Quite often they internalise all their

problems and end up with a great number of suicides or an enormous amount of trauma. They also end up taking a lot of medication as sedation is a way out of gaol. So from a miserable situation you end up with a great deal of medication occurring in prisons as a matter of course.

We are concerned about the directions we get from prisoners. Do we confront the overmedication of prisoners when they find themselves in such an intolerable situation that they want to find a way out? They want some medication that allows them to zonk out as it is the easiest way out. Or would we prefer them to be confronted and for them to demand attention so that they are able, when they get out, to survive better on the outside without an overmedicated life? That is a constant problem for us. We see it all the time when people are released. They have a dependency on some sort of supportive drug. That is a mental health issue.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** I thought another point in your submission was interesting. You referred to some of the post-release and life-skills programs. You said:

Those with little criminal history and good external social support are the most likely to gain access to courses that they are less likely to need.

I guess that that raises the issue of the more serious prison offender. Are there gaps in the service provision of those courses? If so, where?

**Mr STRUTT:** Obviously the most serious ones are the ones with the longest sentences—the ones who will need the greater services later in society. What I was referring to was not necessarily those who had serious charges. As a matter of fact, often they are the ones with the most minor charges. They ended up in prison because the magistrate, in his wisdom, decided not to release them because the necessary social support network was not available. They ended up in prison because they do not fit the Anglican model of somebody who needs only to be shown the right Christian values in order to find his or her way in society. Because they do not fit that model they are rendered as ineligible for a lot of the courses, which are underresourced. They have to be triaged some way. Unfortunately the triage seems to mean that some people who do not need a course are far more likely to get it.

**Mr FRASER:** The long-term prisoner really has the greatest need. They are denied access to computers and laptop computers until they have a lower classification. I argue that it should be the other way round. The persons doing 10 or 20 years need the computers and books so that they can do something decent with their time. They should not be denied the books, magazines and computers. I spent 6½ years pushing a broom around a yard. I did nothing for my whole sentence.

**Mr STRUTT:** Sex offenders in particular are amongst what are called serious offenders. They have a lot of trouble getting access to rehabilitation courses, work releases or even family visits.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** My final question—and this will amuse my colleagues—is to ask you to comment on the impact of recent Federal Government policy changes to released prisoners. Two changes mentioned to the Committee have been removing the advance of social security payments upon release and the impact of the jobs network upon skills-share programs for released prisoners. Are there any other changes that may have had an impact on prisoners?

**Mr STRUTT:** It is early days to say exactly how that will affect people. One thing that we have had reported by people who have been released lately is that they do not seem to feel that they are out of pocket so much, but they feel that they have to do a lot more running round to get it. They get a bit of a payment when they are released and then they have to apply in one office, fill out more forms and go to another office to get a payment. It may sound trivial but when you have parole reporting requirements, basically you have to start your life from scratch again. You experience a disoriented

culture shock; you are in a fog having just been released from gaol. It can be a bit of an inconvenience. But, to be honest, within the framework of the various challenges of the newly released we have not as yet seen that as being a significant problem. It is a minor cause for complaint.

**Mr COLLINS:** We were surprised as a person who had served nine years of a substantial sentence talked with us over the last few days about the problems that she had had. She was given \$320 a week after a period of nine years. A fortnight later she got \$100 as a way of sustaining herself over that period. She said that if she had worked hard and was on Austudy she would have got \$50 or \$60 less per week. I was quite concerned. I thought that there might have been some way of working with her. After nine years one would assume that she would have built up a number of skills, that she would have been on her toes, and that she would have had access to courses. She was left with a labouring job, without the skills to allow her to launch herself in to a new activity of some sort. That is outrageous. Think about what nine years represents. It would have to be about \$700,000, paid for by the taxpayers. As a result she was a more fragile person than she was when she went into prison.

**CHAIR:** Are any of you aware of the visitor centres that operate in Britain? If so, do you think they would be a useful option in New South Wales? Do you know what I am referring to?

**Mr COLLINS:** No.

**CHAIR:** As I understand it, they are organisations based just outside the prison. Workers within them act as advocates for the visitors. They provide food and toilets for the visitors, including facilities for changing babies. The visitor advocates, I am advised, have succeeded in limiting searches and in facilitating dialogue between visitors, guards and inmates respectively. Do you think that that sort of model would be useful?

**Mr STRUTT:** That sounds wonderful. How is it set up in England? Is it a government-funded organisation or a community group, do you know?

**CHAIR:** I am not myself aware of all the details. However, whoever funds it, assuming we get over that problem, do you think that model is a good one?

**Mr STRUTT:** Yes.

**Mr COLLINS:** I can say something about that, actually. A visitors house currently operates at Long Bay, close to the front of the gaol. It is underutilised, most visitors are not aware of it. It should not be inside the gaol, because people are always in a hurry to get to their visits. Potentially it is a place to sell art work. It is staffed by volunteers and it is very little used. Certainly it is a resource we can put to much better use. It is supplying services that are not otherwise available, to ensure it comes in through a credible place. Although there are good volunteers there it does not have the credibility of the movement itself. So once again it comes down to peer support to do the job a lot better than it does through a funded organisation which is staffed by a bureaucracy that is not responsive to the prisoners' interests.

**CHAIR:** What supports are available to prisoners with intellectual disabilities following their release?

**Mr COLLINS:** I am not aware of any at all. We often have people who just wander through. In the past few weeks we had somebody who came out after a six-month period with grave problems. All we could offer was some degree of mentoring and we made sure there was some measure of housing there. He spent a substantial amount of time in the mental hospital area and had just been let out. He continued to be on some sort of medication. There was certainly very little support. At no time did

anybody say to him: see so-and-so, come back and see us on a regular basis and go to a place other than where there were those people who had coercive control over him, which would be parole officers themselves. Once again, there is a contradiction of control and social welfare in a person's hands.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** About six or seven months ago a constituent of mine who had apparently suffered an injury in prison came to me. As a result of the injury he suffered an intellectual disability. His particular concern was he was not able to get through a lot of form filling that was required to apply for a Department of Housing house and Commonwealth benefits, and it took some time for me to find someone. The person did not want continuing support for his intellectual disability, all the wanted was someone to help him through the form filling so he could start life. Is that a common problem?

**Mr COLLINS:** Yes.

**The Hon. J. F. RYAN:** I must say I was surprised at the resistance by the people employed by the Department of Corrective Services to carry out this function.

**Mr COLLINS:** It is very frequent, actually. For example, to not have a bank account or any form of identification that is suitable to open a bank account before one is released from gaol is outrageous, totally unacceptable. How could you not identify a person who has been in gaol for nine years? The woman that we were talking about earlier had no ID in order to start other activities. That is an impossible situation. All that activity should go through as a matter of course, and certainly identification is one of them. People have been talking about this for years and years but no-one has bothered, because no-one has been listening to prisoners and making sure their concerns are being responded to.

**Mr STRUTT:** And contact with the sort of support services you mentioned. It is not as if they are released by surprise. They know a long time before that they are going to be released.

**Mr FRASER:** Getting the 100 points for bank accounts is quite difficult. In fact, I was talking to someone last week about it.

**Mr COLLINS:** It is much more important to see that problem as symptomatic of the whole issue, which is listening to what prisoners have to say and ensuring that the service providers are responsive to their overall needs.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**(The Committee adjourned at 4.20 p.m.)**