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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3

INQUIRY INTO REPARATIONS FOR THE STOLEN GENERATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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At Walgett on Thursday 18 February.2016

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The Committee met at 8.31 a.m.

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PRESENT

Ms J. Barham (Chair)

The Hon. B. Franklin
The Hon. C. Houssos
The Hon. S. Mitchell
The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. S. Moselmane
Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile

VIRGINIA ROBINSON, Secretary, Dharriwaa Elders Group, sworn and examined:

WENDY SPENCER, Project Manager, Dharriwaa Elders Group, affirmed and examined:

Ms ROBINSON: On behalf of the traditional custodians who are the Gamilaraay people we welcome you to the lands on which this Committee is sitting and hearing evidence from Aboriginal people today. I ask that we pay our respects to elders past and present of the Gamilaraay nation, or Goomeroi nation, as it is known, which is a wider area. I ask that we pay our respects to all Aboriginal people and I certainly extend that to all Aboriginal people. I hope today is a very insightful day for everyone. I hope you take away lots of knowledge, which is what you came for, and that you are able to understand and follow the witnesses and indeed just consider members of the public that are here today also. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for that welcome. We so appreciate that. I too would like to acknowledge that we are on the Gamilaraay lands and pay respect to elders past and present and to all Aboriginal people, particularly to all from the stolen generations. This inquiry is examining a number of important issues for members of the stolen generations including implementation of the New South Wales Government's response to the Bringing Them Home report and potential policies and legislation to help make reparations to members of the stolen generation and their descendants.

Given the importance of this inquiry we encourage people to come forward to share their story. The closing date for submissions has been extended to 10 March, so if anyone is interested or knows of anyone that is interested please encourage them to make a submission. Information is available from the Committee secretariat staff. To date the Committee has had seven hearings—three in Sydney, one each in Wagga, Kempsey, Grafton and yesterday we were in Broken Hill. We will also be holding a hearing in Nowra on 2 March. Today we hear from a number of witnesses including the Dharriwaa Elders Group, representatives from the language and culture nest, health and medical services and other community members.

In accordance with broadcasting guidelines, members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, but people in the gallery should not be the focus of attention. Media must take responsibility for what they publish. All witnesses are reminded that comments they make to the media or others after they complete their evidence may not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decides to take action for defamation. As the hearing proceeds it may raise questions that you might not feel comfortable answering without further information in front of you or with time to consult with other people. Those questions may be taken on notice. Any messages should be delivered to Committee members via the secretariat. Mobile phones need to be turned off or switched to silent. Would you like to start the process with a presentation then we will proceed to some questions?

Ms SPENCER: On behalf of the Dharriwaa Elders Group of which I am the project manager, I thank the Committee very much for coming to Walgett. We think this is a very significant day. It is very timely that you are here. It is unfortunately too late for the two survivors of children's homes that were some of our founding members, including our founding chairperson, George Rose, who was at Kinchela, who we dearly miss. But have no doubt that this issue is one of the core issues for our organisation and always has been since 1998-99 when it first started. It was actually started by Walgett Aboriginal elders themselves as a local initiative to support elders and to help them in their community development and cultural leadership activities.

It is very timely that you are here because community concern here has been mounting about the extent of our needs for social and emotional wellbeing services and facilities. That includes mental health, cognitive disability, foetal alcohol spectrum disorders [FASD] and other concerns that we have—health issues, drug and alcohol, loss and grief issues, mounting concerns of the general wellbeing of the community. We need to do something about that, so with the Aboriginal Medical Service [AMS] at the end of last year we hosted community meetings. We have been developing a plan which at the moment is called Moving Forward to Healthy Communities, which Christine Corby from Walgett AMS and I would like to meet with you later to discuss.

It is a whole suite of proposals that has been developed, including local initiatives—well, they are all local initiatives—to assist Walgett and the surrounding communities. They include the need for two facilities—one in town, one out of town—at a sort of ballpark figure of around $17 million to set up a wellbeing centre with some onsite mental health staff and others available by VoIP and, you know, sort of telecommuting programs in the schools, therapeutic and health staff in the schools and reaching into the schools from the

wellbeing centre. Youth programs, support for elders, cultural connection, family reconnection activities, advocacy, general support for Walgett's Aboriginal leadership to be able to advise government about how to do it and what is needed. We talk about a partnership. We often hear government talking about working in partnership with Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal leadership of Walgett knows how to do this and has been doing this through the Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party, of which Dharriwaa Elders Group is a member. That leadership body needs support. Anyway we look forward to talking to you further about that plan in more detail because we think that is what you will need to look at to really address this issue in our community and communities like ours.

We think an important part of reparations for the stolen generations will include addressing social and emotional wellbeing and justice reinvestment is very important. That is a big component of the plan that we will be taking to you. This will require a large commitment to health, rather than prisons and police. In our submission to you we talked about establishing a commission, just as the New South Wales Government's response from 1977 recommended. We have referred to it as the "entity" in our submission but "commission" is a good word for it too, to identify, apologise to and memorialise every individual Aboriginal person stolen from their families and communities. You will note or remember that elders want personal and local apologies made to those families and a local memorial. They want Walgett children to understand how their families were impacted and they want all professionals and agencies that come to Walgett to receive training in the issue. We come across ignorance daily. One of our jobs is often to educate the people who we engage with and it becomes tiring.

They want monetary compensation for the families and economic development for the community and a stolen generation's healthcare card similar to a veterans' card. Hopefully you have been looking at how people's health has been impacted by this issue so I don't need to go into why. Organisations are needed that support elders and assist them in their important contributions in putting back together families and communities. They want resourcing of family unions, strengthening of elders networking and advocacy, and realistically seeking their advice for local solutions. That means resourcing them to actually provide the advice and providing them with secretariat and other advocacy resources that they need to be able to engage with you and your agencies. Supporting elders centres as community interfaces with archives and collecting institutions. We find ourselves taking an increasing role and we have developed a number of initiatives, particularly with the State Library of NSW but also in the past we have done some work with the State Archives. That is an important part in helping people reunite with their families and understand the history of where they come from, their cultural connections.

Supporting cultural heritage work of organisations like ours, helping families and communities re-engage with themselves, their community, country and protecting and managing those places on country is important to them. Reviving language, knowledge and other cultural knowledge—we have been working on that for a number of years. We have a large database, which we call our cultural values database. We use that as a key resource to then teach elders, mentor elders from the ones who have now passed on who have been recorded and have taken us to places and told us why these places are significant and why they want their future generations to know about them and look after them. We need to pass that on now to elders in the future and in school programs and to future generations. That is the sort of work that organisations like Dharriwaa do and we believe it is a model that other communities might find useful. Thank you.

CHAIR: Are you happy to take questions now?

Ms SPENCER: If anyone has questions, yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Thank you for coming today. I want to find out a little bit more about some of the healing work that has been done in the local area.

Ms SPENCER: We do what we can when there is a government program that provides us with funding to do it. At the moment Dharriwaa Elders Group only receives a small amount of funding to employ one part-time Aboriginal worker, who works from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., to sort of keep the elders centre open and provide an elders daycare service and some social support. That is through the Federal Government's HACC—it used to be called HACC but is the Commonwealth Home Support Programme [CHSP] now. That is the only funding we receive. Everything else that has been sort of Aboriginal heritage, cultural support, healing support has been wiped. We were unsuccessful with the Indigenous Advancement Strategy et cetera. But in the past—if you look at our website, which I encourage you to do, we are about taking families and young people whenever we can to places that are important to the elders on country and for the elders to tell them about their memories

and why these places are important, what happened there, and which families come from this place. So connecting with country, learning environmental culturally significant foods and medicines and about the sort of environmental side of cultural heritage as well is very important.

Healing is often just allowing elders to come together and spend some quiet time together and share support. Maybe they have got issues going on in their family. They are often the ones who are dealing with many issues with large extended families who are sometimes relying on them financially and otherwise. We think it is a healing activity for them to sort of come together and be supported in that.

Ms ROBINSON: It is also the centre. The elders centre is a very important place for Aboriginal elders because it is comfortable and they are very safe at the centre.

Ms SPENCER: Language activities have been important for healing too but they have come to a halt here. We are looking forward to hearing how the OCHRE policy and the language and culture nests actually support our community. We don't think it has been rolled out in Walgett at all. We were expecting that we might be the language and culture nest, but alas no. I am not quite sure why that was the case. Anyway, they decided to set up a new one in Lightning Ridge and so far a teacher, who you will be meeting later, is sort of, you know, struggling to develop that with inadequate resourcing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask a couple of questions about some of the recommendations in your submission. You talk about the need for pro bono legal advice and counselling services. Can you tell the Committee a little more about who is available in the community at the moment in terms of both free legal advice and counselling services, particularly for those who were part of the stolen generation and who were survivors and their subsequent generations?

Ms SPENCER: Legal Aid NSW comes here about once a month and delivers civil law advice. That is only a recent thing. They have been trying to do it for a long time. Before we had to reach out and try to organise for them to come up when there were specific issues that we needed help with.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When you say "come up", from where do they come?

Ms SPENCER: From Dubbo. That is where their office is. They have to do an outreach when they come to us. There is an Aboriginal Legal Service office here, but I think they are mostly only able to concentrate on criminal cases. So we cannot really access them at all for this other sort of business.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I imagine that the demand for the service once a month would be pretty high. The waiting list would be long.

Ms SPENCER: I believe so. I am not privy to the numbers of people who use them. They deal with a range of civil issues. It might be family court matters or housing issues. Housing is a huge issue here. Trying to get housing for people or suitable and maintained housing is a big issue. We are very lucky in that we have been able to seek out and obtain pro bono support from the Ashurst legal firm, Gilbert and Tobin, Legal Aid NSW and the Environmental Defender's Office. We shop around because they are all very busy. When we have an issue, we approach whichever one we think is likely to be able to lend their support at that time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are counselling services available locally?

Ms SPENCER: Counselling is offered to a limited extent by the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service. I believe the Committee is talking to them later today, so I will leave it to them to talk about their needs. But I know that the services they are able to offer definitely need to be ramped up enormously. A couple of non-government organisations offer particularly targeted programs in town. I think Interrelate offers a family counselling service, which is about family court and child protection matters. I am not sure what Mission Australia is doing at the moment. There is also Centrecare New England North West.

Ms ROBINSON: Counselling services come in spits and spurts. At the moment the latest thing is the out-of-hours service that does counselling, but that is not always available at the hospital. At this time there is someone there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is just a bit patchy.

Ms ROBINSON: Yes.

Ms SPENCER: And there is no case management. We believe that people need case-managed holistic care so that they can navigate these patchy services that might be available, perhaps even using Skype in the future. Hopefully they will be more accessible that way, but also when they are able to come through town.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have a representative coming from the health service later and I will ask her this question as well. One thing that came up yesterday in Broken Hill was concern about some of the elders and their children and grandchildren with regard to alcohol and drugs and the lack of rehabilitation services. I think the closest one for them was in Brewarrina, but the closest one for females where their children could be accessed was in Sydney. Obviously there are issues with distance. Is that also a problem in Walgett in terms of access to rehabilitation?

Ms SPENCER: Absolutely. That is one of the things we are trying to address, which I hope the Committee will support when we talk about this plan with members. We need a special purpose-built detoxification unit in our hospital. It cannot be part of the hospital; it has to be a separate part built on to the hospital. At the moment they cannot detox in the hospital itself because it is not safe for the other patients. They cannot just be in a normal ward. They need specialist nurses to be in attendance when they are detoxing. It needs to be part of the hospital because it is a medical issue. They need to have access to doctors because apparently they can have heart attacks and stuff like that. The out-of-town cultural work farm we are planning will be able to house men returning from jail or rehabilitation.

It is mostly men, but sometimes it will be women returning. Before they are plonked back into the community they will be able to make a request to the magistrate to spend some time there. It will be a voluntary facility. It will have rehab programs, including counselling. The elders and everybody else think it is a good idea that families are able to come out to them and have family counselling to learn new lifestyles and new ways of living before they return to the community. It will be a crime prevention as well as a health and wellbeing initiative. They will be learning how to work, how to have regular routines, and how to cook and eat nutritious food. These are things that many of us take for granted. People need to learn how to budget, how to live a different life from the one they are living now. Alcohol and other drugs must be addressed.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you very much for coming in today and for your submission. It is one of the best submissions that I have seen so far from any of the towns or locations.

Ms SPENCER: Thank you.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You have done a lot of good work. You have made about 40 recommendations. The submission is very thorough. We would need to spend a couple of days going through each one of them. I hope our Committee will study them carefully and adopt them. I do not think they are negative; they are all positive recommendations. The first recommendation says that there needs to be clarity about the definition of a stolen generation person, and you have emphasised the need to add a reference to "undue influence", and not only "taken away by a policeman". Can you explain how the undue influence part of it works?

Ms ROBINSON: We are looking at the definition used in the original inquiry, and that was what they included in their definition. It is about people being taken away. But in some cases they might say, "Oh well, they said to take their child away." In a different circumstance they might not have said that. I refer you to the definition used in the original stolen generation inquiry and the "Bringing them home" report. That is what we looked at when we were considering the definition. The most important thing about our definition is that it refers to the generations; it is the people who were affected by that policy today and now. Often children are not aware that this happened, but this has been a big influence on their lives to date.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You recommend the establishment of a standing commission similar to the truth and reparation commission established in South Africa.

Ms SPENCER: This commission would also need to consider compensation claims and undertake research about who are the stolen generation, who needs an apology and all the other business that will need to be done, hopefully coming out of your inquiry, to address the need that you have uncovered. There will be an ongoing need to address your recommendations, I hope. A body like that will need to be set up to do that. It will be finally recognising the hurts, the wrongs and damages done to Aboriginal communities. So it is a bit like that

truth and reconciliation-type body. It will be part of the healing process. People's stories will be heard. They will be able to tell their stories and they will be acknowledged by the wider community.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you for that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will follow on from that, and again I would like to reiterate some of Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile's comments about the fantastic submission that you made. One of the points that you make is about the need for these formal apology ceremonies locally and also for there to be a personal apology. Obviously there has been a Federal apology but one of the things we are looking at is the need for an acknowledgment. And the thing that you really talk about is that there needs to be more of an acknowledgment from that. Could you explain a little about what those formal apology ceremonies would involve and how you think they would work?

Ms SPENCER: This was something the elders were really strong on. They were unaware of most of the other apologies. They knew about Kevin Rudd's apology but that was about it. They didn't know about Bob Carr's apology and the various agencies that apologised. That did not reach the people here in Walgett who needed that apology.

And they want to know that someone actually knew that their family member was taken away and you won't get that unless that research is done and they are acknowledged somehow, as an individual their name is acknowledged, and the family is apologised to. So I guess they saw that as a better way really, that is a way of REALLY apologising. Then, that there be a local ceremony, because the local agencies that Aboriginal people deal with here in Walgett are often very much unaware of this issue. They might have read about the issue or they might have done a little one-day course in cultural awareness in Sydney or Dubbo before they come to Walgett.

That's another thing: We think there needs to be locally delivered community induction and cultural awareness programs. We are very capable of doing that here and people get to really learn about this community—and all communities are very different. So they might have done a short little course but mostly we find this general ignorance. They don't realise how this issue has affected people here. And so the elders thought that a local ceremony with the agencies that work here, being part of that apology, is a very important ingredient in an apology.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: You have clearly articulated a strong submission with a number of concerns about the need for services, mental health services and other services, that you need in the area. I am just trying to grapple with the size of the need of the people in this region. What numbers are there that you have—if you do have any as an organisation—in regard to those who identify as the stolen generation and the children who are affected by it and so that way we can understand the extent of the damage and transgenerational damage as well.

Ms SPENCER: We don't fully understand the extent ourselves. We would like support to do that research, to be able to provide that to you. The children don't understand so we don't actually know the numbers. But just yesterday we were having a preparation session with elders who are going to be in later sessions with you and we wrote up on the board all the names that they remembered of people taken away, just in their families. We only had nine or 10 people there and just in 10 minutes, rapidly writing up names, we came up with 43 names. Now, that's not all the people who would have been taken and it is only in living memory—there would be previous generations as well. And, of course, with family dislocation there unfortunately would be some who had never reunited with their families, who we don't even know about yet either. So we looked at those names and we said, "Now, do we think that most of the families in Walgett are represented?" You know, like the family groups in these names. And everyone agreed, "Yes, we think so." So we think that everyone in Walgett is related to someone who was taken away.

CHAIR: And what is the Aboriginal population in Walgett?

Ms SPENCER: Good question. We think it's about 70 per cent of around 3,000—whatever that is. But for this plan and these facilities, we understand that we are really going to need to work across perhaps the local area command of the police. So that would be, you know, providing these communities want to be a part of it. But we thought that that was a sort of local regional grouping that would be appropriate—Coonamble, Goodooga, Lightning Ridge, Collarenebri, Walgett, that sort of area or catchment—to be able to work with police, have a call-out team that goes with the police for an issue, a mental health, drug and alcohol sort of

call-out, but also for these facilities and programs that we think are badly needed. So sorry, I can't give you those numbers.

CHAIR: That is fine. As I said, you can provide ongoing information. I am just mindful that we have got a limited amount of time here today. There might be other questions. I know that Mr Franklin has one.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Just one. To follow the Hon. Courtney Houssos's question, in your recommendations, in (c) (iv), you talk about a memorial, which obviously is something permanent that flows on after an apology. We have heard the discussion about the need for a memorial by people giving evidence earlier. Could you talk personally—both of you if you would like to—on the importance of a memorial and why you think it is an important part of the reparation process?

Ms ROBINSON: Why it's important?

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Yes

Ms ROBINSON: We have just spoken about the younger generation who haven't been aware that these things have gone on, all of them. You know, there might be one or two who understand what went on. But for something that is physically visible, with the names of people who were taken away, is a good thing in terms of educating people and young people and indeed, not just Aboriginal people, non-Aboriginal people as well. I see that as not being cheeky, it's not a bold thing to do, it's a good thing to do, that it be put out there so people will know that these things happened: Look, this is what the Government of this country has done. You know, to see our vision for why we want this memorial plaque.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: And do you think that would be helpful in the healing process?

Ms ROBINSON: Oh indeed, very helpful yes. It would give me a good feeling, to see that.

Ms SPENCER: Virginia humbly talks about a plaque—it could be more than a plaque, but a plaque would be good.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Yes, I note your suggestions.

Ms ROBINSON: A wall, you know, that sort of memorial thing.

Ms SPENCER: At least, a plaque would be good, yes.

Ms ROBINSON: Yes, you have one for the Anzacs, you know.

Ms SPENCER: In fact, we have the perfect location. We are working with Indigenous Community Volunteers at the moment to design a memorial garden in the Walgett cemetery and we don't have any funds to actually build it but we thought we'd prepare the design anyway, get it approved by council and then see what happens.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: One more question following up on some of your evidence from before, about rehabilitation for those who come out of the criminal justice system. I note in one of your other recommendations you speak to that exact issue and of course, we have heard much about intergeneration trauma causing some of the younger generations to go into the criminal justice system. What ideas and strategies—and you can take this on notice if you need to—might we be able to pursue for healing and rehabilitation for those intergenerational survivors of the stolen generation within the criminal justice system itself? What can we do in the prisons?

Ms SPENCER: I would love to take that on notice.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Please do.

Ms SPENCER: And provide you with a good answer to that.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Because we have talked a lot about what we can do outside but, to me, we should be looking at where the trauma is greatest and often that can be in those sorts of institutions.

Ms SPENCER: Because I need to consult before preparing that answer to you but in the plan that we are developing now, that we would also like to take to you very soon, if we are lucky we might be able to submit it before your extended deadline but we do say that education programs need to be offered to people in jails and juvenile detention centres and they need to complete those education programs satisfactorily. We also know that we want culture and language taught as well. We have often said that in previous submissions to different bodies. But the rest of our answers we would love to provide.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Thank you very much.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: And on that, Ms Spencer, the issue you raised earlier about the level of ignorance out there of understanding the stolen generation and the issues that concern them, the educational aspect of this you would extend to other non-Indigenous government departments and so forth. How would you do that? What would you suggest?

Ms SPENCER: We offer, now, a program for agencies coming to Walgett, for their professionals. We have produced a video resource that we recommend. It is saying to professionals who come here, "Thank you for coming. We really need you to work with us. We would like to welcome you. This is some information about our community." We call it a yarning circle, when we do it physically, we take people out to a lovely location and we have elders who we yarn with on a sort of scripted basis that we have worked out in workshops previously about the sorts of things that we think people need to know about their historical things, their cultural things, information about family relationships, information about how the Aboriginal community of Walgett works today and how to engage with it, and their leaders.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Following on from that, I am aware that some communities do that, particularly relating to family violence and that it is run by the elders to help the community. Are they things that you run with the community, not just across the stolen generation healing, but other things?

Ms SPENCER: We would love to. We have never been asked to. We have a brochure on our website saying this is what we do and these are the services that we can provide to different agencies.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I am not talking about agencies; the members of your community.

Ms SPENCER: Yes. Well, we would do that if we had funding to do it, absolutely.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do you have any links with the Aboriginal land council? Is there an active one in your area?

Ms SPENCER: There very much is. They are a member of the Walgett-Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party, as we are, and as the Aboriginal Medical Service is and the Walgett Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [AECG]. We get together once a month, but we also get together in other ways because they have legislation that can protect country and land and water. So when the elders are concerned about a particular issue, we get together with the land council and resolve it together.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Has the land council helped you in any way, such as financially?

Ms SPENCER: No.

CHAIR: I want to ask about the local involvement with local decision-making in the OCHRE program. Are you aware of that and is it being rolled out in this area?

Ms SPENCER: We are aware of the OCHRE and Local Decision Making project. The community working party just met recently with Sam Jeffries to help us understand how we could engage with Local Decision-Making and help us understand what that could mean for our community development. We have also been engaged in discussions with the NSW Ombudsman or Deputy Ombudsman—the office—about the OCHRE rollout. The New South Wales Government seems to be incredibly underresourcing Aboriginal matters generally and we receive no support from the New South Wales Government in our cultural development activities. We were lucky to obtain one small project, I think about $11,000 or $12,000, this year through the

North West Local Land Service, and it is called the North West Sustainability Group, or something. Sometimes we are lucky enough to obtain small funds to do a little project through an agency like that, but there is very little opportunity for organisations like ours to actually operate. For example, I am a volunteer sitting here talking to you now.

CHAIR: We appreciate it. Thank you. Are there outstanding land claims here, which means that land is not available to allow economic development to happen?

Ms SPENCER: That is correct. There are many outstanding land claims that the land council has been trying to pursue. There is a backlog of them, I understand, and Walgett has never benefited from the Indigenous Land Corporation, for example. We hope to address that when we take our plan to them because we need some land outside of town, preferably in a culturally significant area to house the cultural work farm rehabilitation facility. The NSW Aboriginal Land Council has not been able to purchase a pastoral property in the Walgett area either, so for some reason Walgett has missed out on those land opportunities.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Does that mean that the land council does not have an office?

Ms SPENCER: They do have an office, yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Rented offices?

Ms SPENCER: No, they own their building, and they manage two or three reserves. They manage quite a bit of Aboriginal housing at Namoi Village, Gingie Village and in town, but it is best if you talk to the land council about that. I could get something wrong.

CHAIR: For the information of people who are here, there is another New South Wales upper House inquiry at the moment that is looking at Aboriginal economic development. We are seeing projects like yours put forward, which is so embedded in the economic situation.

Ms SPENCER: It is certainly an economic development project, yes.

CHAIR: So it is a question whether it is government or, as OCHRE is trying to present, a way of government to work with communities and deliver empowerment and opportunities through those processes. I wondered about the engagement. Unfortunately, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service [AMS] has cancelled on us, so we have a bit more time. That is disappointing because we were hoping that it would be able to deliver some of the associated background information, as you had said.

Ms SPENCER: Can I say for the record that I do not want to speak for the land council.

CHAIR: Absolutely. Because we do not have representatives here with us or the AMS, again, it is a difficult situation with some of these issues without giving them the opportunity to come forward or to make a written representation.

Ms SPENCER: Yes.

CHAIR: There is still time to receive information from them. It would be helpful for us if some of these questions were answered.

Ms SPENCER: Yes. The Aboriginal Medical Service has been working very closely with the elders group. We are calling another community meeting on 4 March for the community and service providers to check the draft plan that we have developed after a series of committee meetings and different consultations with service providers. Christine Corby, the CEO of the Aboriginal Medical Service, and I will be looking forward to meeting with you to discuss our plan in the future, if that is going to be possible. We could meet with you in your offices at Parliament House to talk further about the AMS and Dharriwaa Elders Group's plan, which will, hopefully, be endorsed by the community working party as well as the land council and the AECG—

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You could table it now for our benefit.

Ms SPENCER: Not to take away, no. I just wanted to indicate to you—

CHAIR: It is not ready to table.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It is only a draft?

Ms SPENCER: Yes. It still has to go before a community meeting to be endorsed.

CHAIR: When you finalise it we would very much appreciate receiving it. If you are able to be in Sydney then we will be happy to meet. Correction; I made a mistake. It is Ms Donna Stanley who is not coming.

Ms SPENCER: From the NSW Health department?

CHAIR: Yes, not AMS.

Ms SPENCER: She has cancelled?

CHAIR: She has cancelled, yes.

Ms SPENCER: I am really pleased that you are able to speak with the Aboriginal Medical Service.

CHAIR: Me too.

Ms ROBINSON: Are you getting a feel for the submission that we have made—a good feeling about that?

CHAIR: Very much.

Ms ROBINSON: I would just like to know.

CHAIR: It is consistent with a lot of what we are hearing in other regions. We are getting a really good message about the needs of Aboriginal communities, particularly in relation to the impacts of the stolen generation. It has been important for us to travel around and get that consistent message about what is needed and that is partly why it is great to see such a well-developed plan being done in this community that addresses all those issues and puts forward something that many people are talking about—a holistic approach.

Ms SPENCER: Can I interject? We find our monthly meetings being taken up quite a bit with confirming Aboriginal people's identity—to provide a document for them that the elders agree upon and pass a motion saying yes these people are Aboriginal, for housing or for other purposes in government agencies. It takes up a lot of our time and for an organisation made up of volunteers running on the smell of an oily rag we would like some support for that activity because it seems to be important. People cannot get houses without it and other services, education and other programs seem to rely on this little document that comes out of the Dharriwaa Elders Group. So I would ask you to look into how organisations like ours can receive some sort of support for supplying that important information.

CHAIR: Are you saying there has been an increase in the bureaucracy around that in recent times since the changes to the level of proof?

Ms SPENCER: It has increased. I am not sure what has brought about that increase.

CHAIR: There is a level of proof distinction from facts.

Ms SPENCER: Sometimes it is quite difficult, made harder by the fact that families were split up and dislocated and often it is only the elders with the long memories who can actually help these poor people find out where they belong and identify them as Aboriginal. It is becoming harder.

Ms ROBINSON: Just on that, talking about confirming someone's Aboriginality, it goes to their identity. I can't remember a lot that was in the OCHRE document about culture and language nests but they do need to be married because your language is your identity. I speak my language and I'm very proud of that. That makes me very assured, it makes me very bold, I know who I am and where I come from, I know my language.

But there is no pathway when they use these forms to confirm Aboriginality, to say, "You are Gamilaraay, you are Yuwaalayaay, you are Yuwaalaraay."

Ms SPENCER: Your meat is, et cetera.

Ms ROBINSON: Yes, your meat, your totem. We say "your meat". There's nothing there to truly cement that identity. Taking that responsibility from elders—and as Wendy said, we get a lot of people there; there's a lot of confirmations of Aboriginalities that we do, that we pass at our monthly meeting. It is just that: the organisation, the seal of approval, the stamp, and there's nothing on these Aboriginality forms to give you your identity as an Aboriginal person, other than the fact that someone knows you are an Aborigine or knows your family.

Ms SPENCER: It is tied up with all that family reunion, identity, bringing people together, activity. Researching, family histories, oral history recording, et cetera, et cetera, it is all tied up in what we do at Dharriwaa Elders Group, and an important part of it is also this actually recognising people.

Ms ROBINSON: While I think language and culture may be good—and, as I said to you, I can't remember a lot of what was in the OCHRE document about language—that rightly should sit somewhere with Aboriginal elders. We are the older people, we know the people.

Ms SPENCER: Not with departments, not with the education department, not with FACS.

Ms ROBINSON: That is such an important thing; you don't feel fulfilled enough, that even though you've confirmed someone's identity you haven't done it properly, and that's been taken from the elders. I'm not sure how and why that decision was made.

CHAIR: One of the points in your submission is about the funding of Aboriginal elders groups because of those distinct functions that they have within a community and are the ones that maybe hold the knowledge. That is an important thing. I think what you have done today is bring forward a practical example of where that happens, and the Aboriginality issue is an important one where it does get caught up in bureaucracy. I might put a question on notice to ask you some more about that particular issue.

Ms ROBINSON: Madam Chair, I hope you understand my point.

CHAIR: I think I do, I hope I do. I work with my elders group in Bundjalung nation.

Ms SPENCER: It also ties in with helping agencies like the local land services and other environmental agencies understand what they are working with as well. They need that advice. The Office of Environment and Heritage also need it; they are suddenly realising they need to do cultural values mapping after elders telling them that is important for so many years. But where is this knowledge going to come from? If it is not maintained in local communities then where is it, and what is the good of an employee of a government agency being the one who takes agency of this when it is actually in the communities where the knowledge is, and then there has to be this education process between the agency and the community? Why not support the capacity of the community to be able to advise government as it sees the need as we all proceed down the track of improving our lives and communities?

CHAIR: Thank you so much for your presentation and for being with us today and for your welcome. It is important for us to hear this localised information. We will have a little break and then we will move into a panel session because we have a number of other people here with us. That will be an informative process.

Ms ROBINSON: Madam Chair, I feel good that you think it's important what we have put forward.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: We all do.

CHAIR: That is why we are here, because we knew that it was important to come to your country and see you.

Ms SPENCER: We hope we have done this moment justice. I know we are going to think of a lot of things we should have said afterwards.

CHAIR: You can continue the conversation and the input because your submission was very well received by all members. The fact you presented solutions and opportunities is important for us—that is the pathway forward: to be working together on ways to do things better. Your input is really valuable, thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

Roundtable Discussion

TED RUSSELL
CLEM DODD
KATHY SULLIVAN
GLORIA NEAN
GEORGE FERNANDO
LEWIS BEALE
GAIL KENNEDY
VIRGINIA ROBINSON
HELEN FERNANDO
ROSE SIMPSON
KIM SULLIVAN

CHAIR: Thank you, everyone, for being with us. I will start by asking you all to state your name. I also want to acknowledge how grateful we are to have you come along today and be present with us. I particularly want to acknowledge Kathy for being with us, knowing that she has had a difficult week, with her recent loss.

Ms KATHY SULLIVAN: My name is Kathy Sullivan. I come from Walgett. My mum has come from Brewarrina. I have come to talk about my mum where she's been stolen. She came from Brewarrina mission. They took them and she had a little girl who was taken. That's the story she told me. She came out and she told me where they put her when she came out. They put her at the station to work. She came back to Walgett again and the mission. She ended up getting around and she went out to Canberra. I am sorry for what they done to her. That's what they done to my boys. It was very sad, you know. She had seven children and they are all deceased. I am the only one left.

CHAIR: We do not have the broadcast facilities we normally have, which is making it difficult as it is hard to hear. I ask everyone at the table to introduce themselves.

Mr RUSSELL: I am Ted Russell.

Mr DODD: My name is Clem Dodd.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make a statement?

Mr DODD: I found out that my aunty had a nephew and my sister had been taken before I was born. I only found my nephew there last year. He is about 70-odd, and he did not even know he had a family and not even his sons. I only just met them last year. That is what I just come around to tell you. She never came back, my sister. She just died in Cootamundra probably. I never met her. I did not even know about her. My other sister came back. She was telling us about it.

CHAIR: They were both at Cootamundra?

Mr DODD: Yes, Cootamundra—both of them. That is what happened.

Mr RUSSELL: I would like to say something about my mum. First of all, I am here to talk about my mum and her first child, Barry Richards but he has passed away. He was taken as a baby straight out of Tumut Hospital. I am a Ngunnawal person; I come from Yass. My family—my mum and six of us kids—came out to Walgett on the old train. It took us a week to get to Walgett in them days. We had an old depot truck that came from Gingie mission and picked us up from the railway station there. So I lost all my culture and that from my family back in the Ngunnawal clan and that. I do not know much about the Ngunnawal clan. They are all my family. Since moving to Walgett with my mum and my sisters and brothers, she said all the time to me and the whole family, "You've got a brother somewhere, but I don't know whereabouts." It took a long time after. I was working on the silos here and I came home one lunch time—this was around the middle of the 1980s—and she was sitting at the phone booth crying outside at our shack over at Namoi. I asked her what she was crying for and she said, "I've just found my long-lost son, your brother." This was some 46 years after.

With all that, that is in the back of my mind all the time. Not a day goes by when I do not have a tear in my eyes because of all the wrong-doings, including what happened to my mum, because she was in

Cootamundra girls home and all that, you know. And then having a baby in Tumut that she didn't know where he was going or whether she would ever see him again. I think he only lasted about two years; she didn't really get to know him. I would have spent four years with him, because he came out here and he said to me, "Brother, I lost one mum. Now I've lost another mum. That's two mums." You see, there were two old ladies who were French. All that time he didn't know his family. He only knew these two old ladies who adopted him out of the orphanage in Sydney.

My brother, he grew up as a Frenchman. He told me that he had lost his two mothers. He did not drink but he got drunk over at Namoi when he came up for my mum's funeral—his mum's funeral. One of the boys over there gave him an ouzo drink and he didn't drink. When he went back to Sydney he bought a bottle of ouzo. When he went to sleep with a gutful of ouzo—that is spirits—and he choked on his vomit. I know all of these things; I don't even have to write them down. They are in the back of my mind all the time. I have a tear in my eye, thinking about my family. I want my family to be compensated for my mum and my brothers. That is us every day. That is how we bloody live. I lost a boy in custody—the same thing. It is no good. Our family are dying often. We go to funerals often. We travel often to funerals. What more do we have to do to prove to this Government that we can survive and look after our kids?

My wife and I carers for DOCS kids now. I look after DOCS kids and my own grandkids. I make sure they go to school. That is everyday life. That helps to ease the pain of what happened to my immediate family. These kids are helping us to think straight. Looking after them takes our minds off what happened to the family. It is hard every day. We get no money to do this all the time. We have to ask family for money if we want to travel to Sydney or down to the doctors. We are lucky that we have family who can help us. I am traumatised by it all. I have had a gutful of how this Government is treating our families, especially the stolen generation.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Russell. That is why we are here. We are here to hear your stories and we hope that we can make a difference. We are grateful that the Link-Up counsellors, Nicole and John, are here. We know that this is an emotional time. If you need support from them, they are here for you. We thank them for being with us while we undertake this inquiry. We have been joined by Ms Nean. Thank you for coming along. Would you like to make a statement about why you have come here?

Ms NEAN: I provided a book with all my details in it. I decided to come along today to represent myself because I was taken away when I was two years old. My mother and father could not get to me. I was sent to Texas. I did not even know my parents when they came to get me. People were really cruel to me. My brother was sent to Bega.

CHAIR: Was this an adoption? Rather than being taken to a home, you were immediately adopted when you were taken at the age of two. Is that right?

Ms NEAN: Not sure.

CHAIR: That is interesting for us. We have had not heard of many people being removed and taken to homes. Mr Russell, I think that was your situation too. But adoption was still a form of forced removal of the stolen generation. We are interested in anything you can tell us about how that happened and the timing of it.

Ms NEAN: We were taken to the hospital up here, Walgett District Hospital, and taken from there. My brother was sent to Bega and I was sent to Texas. We both had a rough life. He had a hearing problem. When he went to school he could not hear. He tried to get an education but he had bad ears. He was sent to different hospitals for treatment. We were bashed around, not with sticks but with hands. We were bashed with belts. They were cruel to us. The welfare took us away. We went from one station to another. The welfare did not want us there so they gave our mother and father the chance to have us back. Then they took us again because they were not happy. They took us about three or four times to different places to see if we could get any satisfaction. We ended up back in Texas. When I was ready to come home I did not even know my mother and father. I was only two years old when I was taken and I did not know them. I did not want to go back to them. I did not know them.

CHAIR: When did you come back?

Ms NEAN: I came back when I was eight years old. My daughter knows the rest.

CHAIR: That is fine but we will need to have her name if she wishes to speak because all of this gets recorded and anything you say we need to have attributed to you. Mr Beale has joined us as well. Could you just state your name?

Mr BEALE: My name is Lewis Beale. I worked around Walgett for most of my life. From what I can gather from my dad, he was taken away to Kinchela Boys' Home when he was nine years of age. He stayed there for about 10 years. Sometimes I think he was a bit stressed out because none of his people ever got in touch with him. He said he was not allowed to talk about any of his people and was not allowed to talk about any of his culture. His language was taken away from him. There was a brother and a sister he had that I found out about later on. He never talked about them, because when he was taken away he was never given a chance to meet any of his people again and the brother and sister that he did not know. I found out their names later on. There was a brother taken away possibly at the same time or maybe a bit earlier because he was older. He was taken away to the Kinchela Boys' Home too. His name was Lewis Beale.

They did not want to talk much about it. My uncle never spoke about it at all. My dad said that sometimes it was a bit chaotic in there. If there was a slice of bread on the table and they put their hand up there to get it then they would be whacked across the knuckles with a knife. Basically he did not want to talk about anything much. The only good that came out of it was that he was apprenticed out to a Dr Lancaster in Singleton and he stayed there until he was about 18. Then he came back to Walgett. He said he had a good time there; the people were good to him. With that, he said he had no animosity towards anyone. But, like he said, all his language was taken away.

Sometimes they were mistreated but he did not say how. I think you can draw your own conclusions from that. Basically that is what I have to say. When he came home he said he could not go back to the way he used to live. He had to change his life. He did not know his culture. My mum used to say to him, "Where are the rest of your people?" And his reply was, "Florrie, you've got me and that's all you need to know." I think it was a reflection on the fact that, coming from Kinchela Boys' Home, everything was taken away from him. That is basically all I can tell you.

CHAIR: So, just to clarify, he did not reconnect with his family when he returned?

Mr BEALE: He only reconnected with one sister. His brother used to come and see him now and again but they were not close—they were apart. It reflected on my father's family as well because we are apart. We used to be a very close family but as we got older we drifted away. The relationships are strained and this is probably one of the reasons why. You cannot go back and say, "That happened or this happened." What can you do? You just have to try to move on and do the best you can.

CHAIR: Just so everyone knows, we have visited the Kinchela Boys' Home and we have met with the group of men who are now trying to resolve some of those issues and who have regular reunions. So we have all had that experience of going there, meeting with them and speaking with them. So we are very familiar with that.

Mr BEALE: When they had the first reunion at the Kinchela Boys' Home my dad's family did not know anything about it. We did not know a thing. The word got out later on and they had various other ones after. But as we have gotten older we have found it harder to get down there. I have a couple of brothers who are on dialysis and we are all getting older. I am closer to 80 now than I am to 70. That is life. I felt sorry for my dad in lots of ways. I worked with him for 19 years on a property and we got on fairly well together. I tried to get several things out of him but he would not talk. He just clammed up and lost it. Basically that is all I can tell you.

CHAIR: Thank you. We might come back to Ms Kennedy.

Ms GAIL KENNEDY: My name is Gail Kennedy. I am Gloria's daughter. I have some papers here about her brother Clarence Nean and what happened to him, and a book about what happened to her. She does not know much. It is all written in this book. Do you want to have a look at it?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: We will pass it around.

CHAIR: Thank you. That is wonderful to have. I understand that Clarence's background was well-documented and was part of the deaths in custody report as well. So these are some of the stories we are hearing

about the impact of the stolen generations on people's lives, families and communities. We can make copies of these so we all have the chance to read them.

Ms GAIL KENNEDY: Yes.

CHAIR: It will just be for the Committee—they are not being tabled; they are just for our reference.

Ms GAIL KENNEDY: Yes, that is good.

CHAIR: That is fantastic, thank you. Obviously a lot of time and energy has gone into compiling all of that so I thank you. I acknowledge that we have also been joined by Mr George Fernando. I invite him to make a presentation.

Mr FERNANDO: Good morning, my name is George Fernando. I am 81 years of age. I come here when I was five years old; my mum and dad picked me up and brought me home with them. Took us to Brewarrina, me and my mum and dad, and put us down in the mission down there. The big mission up here, they brought me and mum and dad up here. I am here on behalf of my mother, who was one of the stolen generation. She was sent away, come back. She got married to my dad out there at Dungalear; my grandfather come from there. I have aunties, all of them sent away just because their skin was a little bit burnt. They took these women away; they come back with children and so come down from wherever they have been apprenticed out.

My mum was also apprenticed out, to Collarenebri. My grandmother was apprenticed out up here. My father had three sisters taken away and they tried to bring the three sisters back from down there, wherever they were sent. The welfare officers used to come around when we were kids but we had spies out. Women would take us out of the house and bury us in the sand until they would leave. When the floods were up, mum used to swim across the river with us on her back. It cooled us down a lot. With all we had we had spies out to watch these people who could come and steal children. We reckoned they sold them. We were thought of as animals. We had no rights; they would not let us keep our language. The old people could not keep their language; the mission wanted to teach us French. We couldn't keep no culture; we couldn't have no corroborees, no nothing like that. All of the things that these people are talking about, out here, where I live now.

I still live there; I was brought there when I was five year old. I left my grandfather and my mother's country. There is a lot we talk about. We all suffer from the depression. The mission managers used to make us have cold showers. Even though we lived by the river and had the river running alongside us, we still had to go and have a wash with a big old bar of soap. All of these sorts of things happened. They took women away from out there. They did not want to stay; they wanted to come back. They would walk back then they would come back with a baby in their arms and things like this. Even my uncles and them that was sent away to the homes, they would come back and tell us about how they were raped and everything like this, in the showers and they were cold showers. They could not have no warm showers; they didn't have no towels to dry themselves. They could not get themselves dry and they stood there shivering. A lot of this stuff has come back to us as related by all of those people.

Our mums and dads had done these things and been sent away as the stolen generation. When my mother come back she had three sisters. She had to rear them up; they were also sent away. She fought so hard to bring them back. They were brought back. She reared them up afterwards. They were on Gingie Mission ever since the thing was built there. Now we think the Government should help us live in peace. I remember the time we lived there in humpies. My mum and dad come there and we lived in a tent. Times were hard; we had weevilly flour. We were not allowed to go away from there.

Mr BEALE: You had to report.

Mr FERNANDO: Then you had to report to the bloke, the mission manager, either going away or coming back. They were so hard on us. They would give you one pair of khaki trousers—I think Mr Russell went through that part of it when his mum come down from Cowra or somewhere. Aboriginal people all supported one another in our way to look into the future, trying to get a future for ourselves. We still haven't got a future for ourselves. I cannot see no future for our Aboriginal children, the younger generation that is coming up.

CHAIR: That is why it is so important for us to hear your ideas and the ideas of your local community.

Mr FERNANDO: Our local community; you could argue the point with the shire for a young bloke to get a bit of bitumen to fill a hole in on my road out there. The Ministers come out there last year, I think, and they showed them down to the bottom end there where the good part is and they said, "Let them walk on the rough part." This is where our children are going to travel. I wish people could come and look at our community. There should be a representative, someone to take the Aboriginal story. One bloke said to me, "Aboriginal people don't need air conditioning in all their houses." Why don't they understand our way of living when they don't want to support us in anything? They reckon they built nice houses; now even a dog wouldn't use them. You can't get money for repair and maintenance or anything.

Mr RUSSELL: You get a wild storm and the roof will blow off.

Mr FERNANDO: You get wild storms there, when my aunty's roof blew off. We are under sufferance every day of the week. Even with the shire, you can't get nothing out of Walgett shire. They don't like me; no-one likes me at the shire because I speak out to them.

CHAIR: You are with a group of people who probably think that speaking out is commendable. We are pleased you do.

Mr FERNANDO: It's a free country, you know. Now they can't jail you; they used to be able to jail you if you spoke out to the mission manager. If you stood up to him, they would jail you.

CHAIR: Were you jailed?

Mr FERNANDO: No, I wasn't jailed. All of my uncles and aunties—I know a lot of people that are in jail. They would go up there for three months for fighting a point with the mission manager, or if they went off the mission without his permission. That happened all through the missions.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you for appearing before the Committee and telling a small part of your story. The Committee has heard a lot and it was certainly traumatic. We can never understand or fully comprehend the trauma that you and your families have gone through. This inquiry is also about looking at ways to support you, particularly those who have been taken, and your children and help the community. What sort of reparation do you think is appropriate for this Committee to recommend to the Government to help you with some of the issue you would like us to take back to the Government?

Mr FERNANDO: I, for one, would like you to take back nothing and put some more money into each and every community. That is where the money needs to be. Nobody has given us money. I suppose, yeah, some of them need to be compensated for their family, their mums and their dads. Some of them, most of them, got $10,000 I think in compensation. If you have got families of seven, eight or 10, what is that in this day and age? A million dollars wouldn't even affect their sorrow of what they went through, what their families went through. They had no communication with their children after they were taken away. You couldn't even get the mission nannies or the welfare officer, whatever they are called. They were supposed to be there to support families in the peak.

It would be good, you know, and do things for us. No, if you were a little bit of colour or anything, and they said they were there, that isn't what they told us. They come there to breed the aboriginality out of the Aborigines. That's what they told me. They told my mamma that, you know, and my father. My grandfather, they was there and even when they took them out to the property they had to get on their hands and knees and scrub the floors for these white people, wash their clothes with their hands, milk their cows, shear all their sheep, cut the sheep up. They were displaced for a lousy sixpence. They were just children sitting out here. That is why they call it the lousy sixpence.

CHAIR: Did they receive that payment or was that part of the stolen wages?

Mr FERNANDO: That's the $10,000. That's supposed to be their money. Who am I to say anything? I just want to tell you now the best place you can support is to put money—and don't put it through the shires. The administration of the shires takes up most of the money. Most of it should be sent to the Aboriginal people. I don't know how much money they get every year to support Aboriginal people but there is none. You can go from here as far down as Broken Hill. I've travelled that area and I am a man that travels mostly all over Australia. That is because I don't get no education. All I learned was to read and write and count to 10. To speak

out, my mother taught me to speak out whenever. She was a Christian. She always carried her *Bible* with her, even in the middle of the night. Forget about me, I mean the compensation I need is for the future of our generation. That's where I think it is most needed for. I want to see that happen. We can at least be thought of in the constitution, yes. Someone needs to support that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What about a healing centre where elderly people can go?

Mr FERNANDO: We've got one here, the Old Foundation. That young man up there, Ted, I think most of the Aboriginal people in Broome are placed before the board of that Old Foundation to be repaired and maintained now. It is an icon; it's the local thing in the main street, but that's it. That's the way Aboriginal people look at it. The Old Foundation, if you have never been up there, go and have a look at it.

CHAIR: Do you say there is an actual building?

Mr FERNANDO: Yes.

CHAIR: Where is that?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Just up the road.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that a healing centre?

Mr FERNANDO: Please go and have a look. The recommendation is we need the finance to get that done. I am on the board of the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation. They put that in their care. Now they want to take it off it so they can transfer it over to our local people.

CHAIR: From Murdi Paaki?

Mr FERNANDO: They put a caveat on it.

CHAIR: Who put the caveat on it?

Mr FERNANDO: The Government.

CHAIR: And transferred it to Murdi Paaki?

Mr FERNANDO: Yes it was transferred to Murdi Paaki and now they're trying to give it to local people. They won't even lift the caveat on it. These sorts of things, there is property right through up at Collarenebri, here in Walgett. I have been arguing the point and everything, but no. They have even got our Aboriginal people working in the community Prime Minister and Cabinet building. They're telling us lies now. They tell us, "The white man has done that all his life", you know. They have been telling us lies, "Do this, and do that." When are they going to wake up? We are awake to them all the time. That's why I say to you I can't see a future for our future generations that are coming along.

CHAIR: Mr Russell, do you want to make a comment?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes, I back Uncle George all the way. Everything what he said is true. I was reared up with George, my family and his family all lived together at Gingie Mission and we stayed there. I was 15, I think, when I walked off Gingie Mission and I went back home to my family. I lost my culture so I picked up Uncle George's culture. Uncle George gave me permission to welcome to country here, you know, and that's something I am proud of today. I am really proud.

CHAIR: Are you able to explain the significance of it not being your country? Will you verbalise it so that the Committee has it on record?

Mr RUSSELL: It's wrong for me to come to Uncle George's country, you know, but we had no choice; we were sent here. I'd go home, I'd go and see family, you know, if I'm down for a funeral. I go into Canberra. My oldest brother died in Tumut and he's buried at Brungle Mission. My mum is Wiradjuri and my father is Ngunnawal. My heart is here in Walgett. You can never take Walgett away from me. I'm here for the long haul. I married a Gingie girl. We've been married for the last 46 years.

CHAIR: Well done.

Mr RUSSELL: On my next birthday I will be 70 so, you know, someone has got to step up and speak about family ties and that. I think Uncle George said it all for us, for all the families.

Mr FERNANDO: There is one more comment I would like to make before you kick me outside. Our rivers, our kids cannot swim in them. That is our country and river where we go fishing. They are dammed up so much we cannot hear the water. Out where I live I had to sink a bore there because our kids had no water. They think more of the cotton than you and me. The same thing with Narran Lake. That was a place you could swim and there is no water now, the lake is dry out there. We have no water at all. The birds that come from overseas, I do not know where they are going to live now because the lake is gone. These are the things that happen.

Mr DODD: They got a dam up there on Cubbie Station that is bigger than Sydney Harbour.

Mr FERNANDO: Yes. The problem that we are all facing down here is cotton cockies complaining, but how much money do we give out to the cotton cockies.

CHAIR: The issue was raised yesterday in Broken Hill and we are aware that it is a real concern to Aboriginal people, the management of the land.

Mr FERNANDO: And the water.

CHAIR: You are saying there is not enough fresh water for the health of your community?

Mr FERNANDO: Right down the river.

Mr DODD: For anybody.

Mr FERNANDO: In the Pilliga, along the Namoi, they are sinking gas holes up there. We do not want gas in the water. It will kill people from here to Menindee and into Victoria. We used to see them with water. We are aware of the waters and we are aware that we are the last people that the Government will listen to.

Mr DODD: Coal seam gas.

Mr FERNANDO: We are Aboriginal people and we know what's good for our land. The land is our mother. You care for the land, look after the land. You have to remember there were a lot of years of cotton. That has been handed down culturally, generation to generation. I talk too much; I think you got to get rid of me.

CHAIR: No, you can stay. There might be some more questions for you.

Mr RUSSELL: One more question about the coal seam gas and all that. I do not know if anyone knows it but the families around Walgett do—but they built the cemetery in Walgett bigger. I think there is one fellow there now where they cleared it. That is something I have caught on because I got my son and mother and my family here and I said to my wife—

Mr DODD: It is getting bigger.

Mr TONKIN: They opened the cemetery right up.

CHAIR: They have allowed for expansion, you mean?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes.

Mr DODD: Yes.

CHAIR: And are you saying that there is not—

Mr BEALE: The water.

Mr DODD: There is no water in the Namoi. It is only a puddle when you get a bit of rain.

Mr RUSSELL: If you have a look at it it has all this green muck on top of it.

Mr BEALE: What rain you do get the cotton farmers take most of it out. Going back to what George is saying, many years ago when they opened it up for people to work on the land and when they had nowhere else to go they come in on the Namoi River and that was the only source of survival, fishing. Today we cannot do that because the cotton has wrecked it. I tell you straight out, cotton has caused our river to be like it is. Quite frankly, down the river, whether you are black, white or brindle, they don't care whether you die or not, they only think about the dollars. Something should be done so the Government can take a little more control and stop them from taking more trees out. That is the main thing, they're taking too many trees out and we got no oxygen. You got to bite the bullet and say, no. There is one property out here at Walgett where there is 14 miles of no trees and that to me is not successful. That is why we don't get the rainfall we used to.

Mr DODD: You can see from Coonamble, you can see from one main road to the other.

Mr BEALE: Yes.

Mr DODD: That has been cleared.

Mr BEALE: It doesn't matter which way we go, the Aboriginal people have been snookered by the advent of cotton. When they come in from the property into town they are snookered because the advent of cotton has stopped their livelihood, the fishing on the river and such. If someone could take that back to the Government and put that on the table in front of them maybe somebody will listen.

CHAIR: Thank you. I understood that there was Aboriginal representation on the local land service, is that not the case?

Mr FERNANDO: I used to be one of the members of Landcare years ago until they broke it up. I haven't had a meeting at all with the mob since they broke it up and I am not up there now. I went down and had a meeting with the mob up there. That is something they should not have done.

CHAIR: That is interesting information. We will follow that up.

Mr FERNANDO: We had five or six years of looking at the land.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

CHAIR: Mr Russell has some information he wants to present.

Mr RUSSELL: I would like to see your Committee drive over to Namoi. I am a member of our local land council there. I would like you to come and have a look at our roads and buildings. I have worked on the buildings. The roofs on some of the houses are falling in and the houses are squeaky. There were shoddy builders and they did shoddy work. Our road is not very good to ride on. Over the years I have spent a lot of money trying to fix my car to take my kids to doctors and to Sydney. I travel to Sydney with my kids and to Dubbo and all around. All the wear and tear on my car comes from our bitumen roads. It is similar to Gingie.

Mr DODD: They are the same.

CHAIR: Thank you for the invitation. Although we would love to visit, I am not sure we will be able to organise it. We invite you to document the issues you are raising and to provide photographs. You can submit statements about the things that are important to you and why. This Committee is focusing on what we can deliver in response to the stolen generations. If those things are important to you, we can certainly receive the information. If we cannot make it out there today, we can have ongoing contact.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I want to know a little more about your brother and how you were able to make contact with him, or how he made contact with you.

Mr RUSSELL: I know exactly how my mum made contact. He had a motorbike accident on the Great Western Highway in Sydney. He lived in the Tregear area of Sydney, around Mount Druitt. He lived there for years. He was a motorbike rider and he loved his motorbike. He rode to work one day and his son he said, "Dad, I'm getting a ride home with a friend." He said, "Oh well, I'll come along shortly." I presume they worked at the same place, or he might have been just down the road on the Great Western Highway. When he arrived near his home a car cleaned him up on the highway. He fractured his face and all that. His wife went through his things while he was laid up in Westmead Hospital. In those days they gave them a little brown suitcase with all their paperwork in it. When they went through it they found his mother's name—Gooligong. But there was no forwarding address. He left two boys and a girl when he passed away.

What happened then was that when his wife went through his suitcase on top of the wardrobe at their home she found the name "Gooligong" on it—Rachel Gooligong. She went to the Department of Community Services in Mount Druitt and a bloke by the name of Tommy Hill said, "I think there's a Rachel Gooligong at Walgett". He knew her as Rachel Russell, which was her married name. They got in touch with the Department of Community Services here. That is what I said earlier, my mum was crying at the old telephone booth over at Namoi where we lived. We still live there today. I came home for lunch and she said, "He's in Sydney." I think they gave her a contact number. I said, "Wait there. I'll go back to work and get permission. We'll go now." We left, and his wife picked us up at Penrith and showed us into their home. That was our first reunion. That was 12 o'clock at night. We stayed there for about four days, I think. It went from there.

During that time he told me a lot of stuff about himself, being a Frenchman and growing up. We used to drive past where he worked all the time. It was on the Great Western Highway. In all our trips to Sydney he was just off the road building doors and that stuff for homes. When mum passed away, he came out to her funeral. He said to me, "I lost one mum and now I've lost my birth mum—my original mum." I did not wake up to it clearly because we were all grieving in my backyard. He offered me 10 grand to go to the opal fields. I said, "I don't want anyone's money. No, that's for your family." When he went home he rang me and said, "We're coming up for the Easter long weekend." I said, "Good. We'll go fishing." Our river was flushed out. In the early 1980s the river started going down. My oldest brother in Tumut would come and I would fill a big esky for him to take back. All his kids and aunties and uncles lived down at Brungle mission.

In the next couple of weeks I got all these papers. He died just after that. Everything was put into a big envelope. That is how I came to have all these documents. It is not clear how it was delivered to me. I know I got it from the post office. I was expecting him and his son-in-law on the long weekend to go fishing. His son-in-law was Greek and his wife was a white lady. I got a lot of contact numbers for her. She moved to Gundagai. I had been to visit the family in Tumut and Brungle because I go that way all the time to see my other brother. When he passed away, it sort of dropped off a bit. She had a little house on one of those hobby farms. She rang and said, "I've moved down around Lithgow somewhere now." She gave me all these numbers for the kids. She gave me her mobile number first and the numbers for the kids. I have an appointment to have a family reunion, but that is not properly organised yet. That was a couple of years ago.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Thank you for that.

CHAIR: Mr Russell, the point you just made about the reunion and understanding your history and getting all the documents together, is that a really important thing for Stolen Generation families and communities to have the opportunity to find out?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes.

CHAIR: And yesterday in Broken Hill I was able to get this book, I don't know if you have seen it, where that sort of reunion has happened and people have come together so they can document as much as they can who they are, where they come from and where they all ended up. Would that be of great value for all of you to be able to settle some of that loss?

Mr RUSSELL: Of course, yes. See, I said we'll have to have a barbecue. They live out at Windsor, Richmond. I haven't got no money to travel out there just to have a reunion. That's already organised, but we can't make a proper time to do it all.

CHAIR: And you are aware that was one of the recommendations from the "Bringing Them Home" report, that funds be made available to facilitate those reunions and get-togethers?

Mr RUSSELL: Yes. Well, we've got a car but it's barely going. Like I said, the roads over home, you spend money on shocks, motors and all that, and we can't afford that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But also you see value in having that written down in that book, the history has not been lost, you have it written down in the book.

Mr RUSSELL: My family, I'm searching every day for my family. My mum's Gooligong and I haven't even met Evonne (the tennis player) yet and she's the most famous person in Australia.

CHAIR: That's right.

Mr RUSSELL: I haven't had an opportunity yet to shake her hand, you know. And one day I hope to come across her, you know, and meet someone.

CHAIR: I hope so.

Ms FERNANDO: I just came into this meeting. I didn't even know it was on.

CHAIR: We just need you to be near a microphone.

Ms FERNANDO: Are you just looking at the lost generation or the generation that was taken away?

CHAIR: Our inquiry is looking into reparations for the Stolen Generations and we are looking at the intergenerational issues and traumas that have arisen from stolen generations.

Ms FERNANDO: Yes well my issue was, I was taken off the mission here. Is that the same? To be put on a property and left with £3 a week for three years, and only able to come home and see my family once every three months. Is this the same things that you are looking at here?

CHAIR: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Get her name on the record. Do we have her name?

Ms FERNANDO: When I went back looking for the books that the managers had there, they were all destroyed. I had to sign in to go and see my family and out again. So I know they paid me some money, but you know, for the years that was lost—

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Could you just say your name for the record?

Ms FERNANDO: My name is Barbara Helen Fernando, but I'm known as Helen. And the property that I was on out here at Gingie at Kalamos and our home was the aboriginal mission station. We lived under the Welfare government there. I was one of the first black children from the mission to come into town school and I couldn't afford my books. I was a young girl. We weren't allowed to roam around then and so I was put out on the property for £3 a week.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How old were you when you were put on the property?

Ms FERNANDO: I was about 14 going on 15.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Were you like a domestic or servant then, working?

Ms FERNANDO: Domestic, you know, I also fed all the children. One little girl, she had polio, Anne, and there were three other children. I was a domestic and cook for seven days a week. And the Government, they paid me. I left there. When I left there I had a £173 and I thought I was rich, but you know, they took me away and they took me away from my family all this time. And I was only allowed back there for two hours and I would have to get off the mission again and go back to the property before I came of age. This is what we lived under. You know, I am a survivor, I know that now. But I would just like to come and tell you my story.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Did you get back to your mother finally?

Ms FERNANDO: Yes, this is my eldest brother here.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That is your brother?

Ms FERNANDO: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: And your mother?

Ms FERNANDO: Yes, we lost our mother. But I didn't have much time with her.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And how old were you when you left working as a domestic?

Ms FERNANDO: I was going on 18 years old when I left there, I was there for three years. My issue was, I was only allowed every two or three months to see my family for two hours. I signed that book to go in and I signed it to come out. And now the books are lost from the station. It was called the Aboriginal mission station then.

CHAIR: When did you try to get the information?

Ms FERNANDO: When they told me, you know, that I can apply for them and they'll pay me, what they stole—

CHAIR: You went through the New South Wales Stolen Wages Tribunal?

Ms FERNANDO: Yes, my son did it for me.

CHAIR: And you got the $11,000?

Ms FERNANDO: Yes, that was years ago.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: They told you that your papers were destroyed or lost?

Ms FERNANDO: The papers were destroyed. Where we signed the book at the manager's station, you know, this is proof that we were out there doing this work, but they couldn't find them.

CHAIR: Can you explain how it was that you got taken from your family?

Ms FERNANDO: I wasn't paid and I had to go out there. I had no choice because I couldn't afford my books in town. We had the mission school out there. I was in sixth class for two years and I was the first Aboriginal child to come in to the big school in here, on the bus. But you had to buy your own books, whereas the Government provided for us out there. We only had three or four subjects—it was arithmetic, history, not history, social studies and spelling and that, you know? It was a different thing when you got in here you had different subjects and things to do.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Could I ask a question?

CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: My question is to the people today in front of us. I know George that this is relevant to you and Lewis as well and there may well be others who weren't members of the Stolen Generations, but your parents were perhaps or your brothers and sisters might have been. I would just like to know, from whoever would like to speak, what impact that has had on you personally.

Ms Kim SULLIVAN: It's a nightmare to grow up and see your little cousins taken away—

CHAIR: Could you first say your name before you speak?

Ms Kim SULLIVAN: Kim Sullivan. And I'm here just to talk on what I remember myself when my five little cousins was taken away. I've seen them that day and I haven't seen them since. I got Link-Up, when I was 29, to go find them for me. They found so many of them but two of the youngest ones who were my age, they couldn't find because there was no record to say that they might have been registered in some kind of way, like as a baby. And only last week I finally got a call from that one little cousin who is left. They took five and only one was left. I never seen any of them since.

It's the most saddest and the cruellest thing, to wake up to see, you know, with your own little family there with you one day and the next day they are gone and you never ever see them ever again. That was the most horrible thing that I could ever, ever go through in my life because I still dream about my little cousins. I dream about them all the time. It's a nightmare because they are dead now and there is only one left and I don't know how I am going to get him back home here to Walgett. I don't know, because I've only spoke to him last week for the first time since he's been taken away. And it is very hard for me because I'm a very emotional person and I can't hold this sort of stuff in without crying because it's cruel. It's cruel to see a young family go through this.

And my own grandmother went out to try and stop the welfare officers from taking these little kids that day—no word of a lie—and she went out with a stick and she screamed, she said, "You leave them little kids alone" and then later on, after that, my father—real father, he passed on—he grabbed my grandmother and he said, "You keep it up, you'll go yourself. They'll lock you up, now stop it. You've got other little grandkids here." But that's the only thing that stood out. And it's cruel. Believe me, it's cruel. Because I think about my little cousins all the time and what they could have been through when they was taken away. They could have been through hell, I don't know, when they could have lived a good, decent life here, with us. And why were they taken away? I don't know. I honestly don't know, but I really want to get in contact bad with this boy as close, as much as I can.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Did that happen here in Walgett?

Ms Kim SULLIVAN: It happened over at Namoi Reserve. I was only a little kid and I still—I must have been used to play around with the kids because for me to hold in my brain all this time, and I still dream about it today. Them little kids getting covered in the car and my poor mother, the next couple of days after, standing on the corner up here and them poor little kids in the car, they waving like that. That was cruel. That was very, very cruel for someone to do that to another human being. And for someone like me to sit back and hold it in all these—I am 53 years old and I carried that all that time. It's cruel and it hurts, it really does hurt, no lie. Especially when you love your mob. And I love my family and they was just taken away like I don't know what. And it is just so cruel for me, I don't know. But it's not a very nice thing for someone to live through. It's not.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: It is horrible.

Ms KIM SULLIVAN: It's horrible. I would hate to put myself in their shoes. I'm suffering enough. Can you imagine what they would've went through for us, to be back with us, and we couldn't get them back. When I got Link-Up to find them, they finally found them all, but the two other youngest boys, on account of they said that they might not have been registered as babies, they couldn't find them, and only last week, one rings me, and I've been looking since I was 29-year-old, and I am 53 now. I go through a terrible lot at night, just over the little cousins. I really and truly do, no lie. I feel for them very bad.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Thank you very much for sharing with us.

Ms KIM SULLIVAN: Can I go outside now?

CHAIR: Thank you. Kim, the Link-Up counsellors are here to support you also, if you would like some help. Thank you for today.

Mr FERNANDO: Can I speak?

CHAIR: Ms Simpson is with us. Do you want to make a statement? You have not spoken yet.

Ms SIMPSON: My name is Missy Rose Simpson. I was born in Brewarrina and I married a man from Walgett. We took our family combined—we had six children together, so we went to Wagga Wagga for the kids

to get a better education, and it was under the Department of Housing resettlement program for Aboriginal families, and three years ago we moved back to Walgett. I come today because I know that my grandmother, my mother's mother, Dora Sullivan, was taken away to Cootamundra girls home, and my dad's mother, Linda Fernando, was taken away, too. Just the experience with—because we had a lot of time with Nanna Dora and, you know, listening to her over the years, when she was taken from Brewarrina, three of her brothers just took off to Queensland and one of them came back to see nan after being away for 40 years and, like, in this time, I know that she could not talk about what had happened at Cootamundra, and, you know, the effect. She just kept it all to herself. I was fortunate enough to go back to Cootamundra when they had a return there for some of the ladies that were taken away and put there, so I took—I went with my mum's youngest sister. She lived with me in Walgett, and that was something that just sort of hit home to me, because I knew how cold the winters were in Wagga from me taking my children to sports days, and I thought how cold was it here for them, you know.

We walked around the home, the big building that they had there at Cootamundra. We also got to talk to a lot of the other ladies, the older ladies, you know, that was making this first journey back. One of the things that brought me here today, you know, was my grandmother. One of those brothers, Uncle Fred, came back from Queensland and we got to—mum rang all of us and said, "Come and meet nan's brother", and he had six months with her before he passed. We found out that his eldest daughter was Justine Saunders, the Aboriginal actress, and one of her other sisters married Johnathan Thurston's dad, and my grandson, who made the under 20s in the football for New South Wales, the Aboriginal side, was going to Queensland. I said, "When you get to meet Johnathan Thurston", I said, "You've got to let him know that I'm from Brewarrina." So Nate did that and he said, "Nan, I wish we wasn't there to play football, because we were just following each other around trying to get more family information", and that type of thing. So, yes, as I said, I am just here for my grandmother.

I know that where she lived—after she married my grandfather, Harry Sullivan, they lived on the old mission out at Bre, and she would walk the nine miles into Bre every day to go to work at the cafe. She was the cleaner for the Pippos family, and they were a Greek family that had gone into Bre and built the cafe up. Yeah, nan cleaned for them for 30-odd years, and their big son, Angelo, he'd tell me, you know, when I'd go with my school friends into the cafe, "Missy, if you're not good today, I'll let nanna know." The stories that mum had shared with us of pop cutting a canoe out of the tree and he would meet nan in the evening, and he would row that nine miles to get her home, save her walking. She said that she knew to—she had to wear her old clothes to walk in because the dust and that used to make her dirty. I'd say, "Well, how would you get clean to get changed?" She said, "Oh, sometimes they'd have a sprinkler on in the park", or she'd go past the river and wash herself, wash the dust off and get into her work clothes.

CHAIR: It is beautiful to hear your story, but what you have said, you are saying it is really important to try to find out as much information to bring everyone back together and understand all the connections. Is it important that it be supported in recognition?

Ms SIMPSON: It most certainly is important because I want to leave something for my grandchildren and for the future, the next generation so that they're not doing what I'm doing, and that's urgent.

CHAIR: Can you explain why it is so important to know where you are from and who your mob is? Can you say what that means to you and how important it is that you pass it on?

Ms SIMPSON: I feel for me personally and after going to the Cootamundra Girls Home and experiencing what those ladies and grannies went through, I said I would never have to go through that for my children and my grandchildren. I could give them a true story of how hard it was because we didn't have houses, we lived on the river bank and the river was our bath tub every morning. My brother used to race me across the river. I would always beat him but he'd tell everyone that he won the race. Summer time it was beautiful, but at winter time, getting in the cold water and going back looking for the camp fire hoping that we'd get warm. So yes, for the future generations.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Rose and I had a bit of a chat outside about the Foundation building and we were talking about eventually improving that building and maybe expanding it to be a healing centre of some form. Can you elaborate on that discussion for the record?

Ms SIMPSON: I was just explaining that the Foundation was there—it was the first stop almost for the families—and the history that it's got behind it; it's such a beautiful place to be redone for the children that are

coming through schools and the teachers to be able to see if we have the stories and photos and stuff, the history on the walls, what happened here and what had taken place, have tea and coffee, cold drinks.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: With a monument of some form. Would a memorial be suitable for that place?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes, most certainly—the knowledge.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: George, you are nodding your head in agreement.

Mr FERNANDO: That's the number one priority. To be sitting down with the new generation and leaving that message there. For all the people like Perkins and all them, this is where it started. My old cousin and uncle, George Rose, he started from here and went to Moree and Brewarrina. That happened here in this place here in the RSL. As I said earlier, a monument down there—that thing up there is an icon for us and for the rest of the community for the future generations to be so proud of and still standing there or to be honoured to be able to walk into the thing, saying my grandfather and grandmother walked in through here.

The medical service down here, I've been the chair of that for eight or 10 years and I still sit on it there to make something that we haven't had in the past generations, in years. In the mission they used to put eyedrops in our eyes, those brown drops, and feed us all this malt and stuff like that. We weren't sick; we were healthy, and yet they were putting all this stuff into our eyes and into our ears and everything. Everybody's ears and nose were running. That was part of their job; they thought they were nurses or something. We weren't told any different. But the young ladies were talking about taking them little kids away. I can remember them little kids being taken away too and the sorrow that brings to not only the family but the whole Aboriginal community. I mean we all feel sorrow, the aching for those little children, to see them being treated that way.

Aboriginal people love children—any children—and they take them into their homes and that and under their wing they share their little bit of bread and whatever they had, the food, everything was shared; nothing was hidden from one another. This is as true as I'm sitting here.

Ms SIMPSON: I want to share also that after we lost my dad that my mum was pregnant with her last child, so we were frightened because we were on the mission out at Bre, and my eldest brother paid for dad's funeral—he had to go in the shearing sheds. I asked him why he was going to work and he said he had to help pay for dad's funeral. But we were more frightened of the welfare coming to the mission, seeing mum with the two eldest but there were nine of us still at home. So I would carry three of my little sisters and brothers and we'd go down to the river and there was a gully there where we said they don't know this place so we can hide here if they come looking for us. I was just painting my little brothers and sisters up with mud for the mud to protect them from the sun and from getting burnt. It was so close; we could have been all picked up and taken away. Then a couple of months later mum's sister came down and helped her out by taking half of us because she was due. My youngest brother was born two months after my dad had passed away.

Ms FERNANDO: It's happening today. I see a lady out there in Armidale. I went up there. Essie Gordon, she never drank, she never smoked; the only problem was the kids were running around barefooted up there in the wintertime in Armidale. The Housing Commission come to Essie to check the house if there's some renovation—they see a couple of holes in the wall. That afternoon they rang DOCS and my daughter was about to be going to school and then going to uni and she come around to us and, not known to us, she had six children. The police put them all in the van. I even went to court because she had no family. She was relocated from Brewarrina from an abusive husband and that's what happened to her out there. That happened about eight years ago when I was there with my daughter. This new Minister he was the Minister up there. We tried to go camping with him. He was in Armidale, that new Minister they just put in. It is happening today and it's widespread. For that darling woman to go through that in the past. I went back to court with her for support because she had no family.

CHAIR: Were the children returned?

Ms FERNANDO: They didn't return the children, not even the one on the breast.

CHAIR: We have heard, in a number of our hearings, about people feeling that the current situation with the removal of children is a problem. But we have also heard that there is more that could be done to support Aboriginal families before—

Ms FERNANDO: Before it happens.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms FERNANDO: It is like young mothers—when they relocate them. They are not fitting into these families. Every Aboriginal community is a different community. Blackfellas are not all the same all over—I don't care where you go, it is different. But now they are relocating them here and there; putting the mobs together—Brewarrina, Walgett, Orange and down that way, Cowra. They are relocating people. They are not getting on. They are making missions again.

CHAIR: Are you saying that they are relocating because of family violence or for housing reasons?

Ms FERNANDO: Most of it is from family violence, I would say, and the school. A lot of the people are seen going to the school.

Ms SIMPSON: Dubbo was good. You know, it was a real thing.

Ms FERNANDO: We know it all; we lived through it.

CHAIR: How much of this do you think is because of the past? Are the problems today because of the past—the forced removals and the trauma and those things? Could that be different if Government recognised that history and tried to support people before they got into problem situations again today? That is what some people have said and I am wondering whether that resonates with you or whether there is some other way that you think it could be done better? Is there some other way that people could be supported, because of the past situation?

Ms FERNANDO: They are not looking at it. Even our own service provider is here. They are getting people in here like our school. They are bringing people in from other towns to work here. They do not know this community. They do not know our people. They don't where they are coming from. I worked there for 10 years in the school. After my kids grew up I said, "Gee, them kids are coming in here." There were the teachers. I used to take the teachers out to the mission. When they walked through that gate they come into your world. Come out and see their world; see how they live. This is it. They get a change like that. You have to know where that child comes from to relate to him. They should do that with education. I think I have been through the mill, you know; I had seven children myself. I had five little girls. I was very lucky with my children. They always found jobs and were working and things. I travel around to see them, now, on the government passes that they give me. I have seen a lot of heartache, and it is so sad. We have even seen it here today because of folk coming into our community that we don't like. But what can we do?

CHAIR: We are keen to hear what you think might be the solutions, or better actions that can be taken to address some of those things. So if you have ideas, those are what we are here to hear, as well.

Mr BEALE: Supporting people is a great thing to try to do sometimes. The young people are having children younger today. We see it a lot here. The younger children are not following suit to what their mums and dads did. They seem to be going down different paths. I think a lot of that is done through illicit drugs. They haven't got the ability to try and rectify their mistakes. If we can get someone to support them to rectify some of those things then there may be a better way that you can find to try to help them through it.

CHAIR: We have heard that healing centres are important to provide that whole-of-community support for anyone who is in trouble, and to understand community.

Mr BEALE: Yes.

Ms FERNANDO: To understand where they are coming from.

CHAIR: Yes, where they are coming from. Is that the sort of thing? I think the proposal we have in our submissions is about doing a whole-of-community thing, from the elders group—to do a healing centre that looks after the whole community. Is that what you are thinking works?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Could that community centre just up the road be the healing centre?

Ms FERNANDO: The Aboriginal Foundation.

Mr BEALE: It could be a good thing. It would go a long way towards helping them to heal their problems.

Ms FERNANDO: There are not too many going to the elders. There are not many young people listening to old people.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do you hold meetings up there already?

Mr BEALE: Not at the moment, that I know of. They do not hold any meetings there, do they, Gail?

Ms FERNANDO: At the Old Foundation, no. It has been damaged.

Mr BEALE: It has to be refurnished. It needs renovation.

CHAIR: Does it have a certificate on it that says it is not useable or something?

Mr BEALE: No, it is not useable at the moment—not that I know of. With the healing part, when someone dies in your family these days they celebrate. But when I was a kid growing up it was different. They mourned for years after. It might be three or four years. They would see one another for the first time in ages. They would sit down and have a damn good old cry. But today they go out and they celebrate.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What changed it, Lewis?

Mr BEALE: The way they mourn death. They celebrate now; they do not mourn it like they used to.

CHAIR: How do you mean "celebrate"? Can you explain what that difference is?

Ms FERNANDO: "What changed it?" you say. The Government changed it by giving them free money. Years ago people had to work for their money. Now, as soon as they leave school they are on the thing here.

Mr BEALE: All they want to do now is to go out and celebrate and get drunk.

Ms FERNANDO: That is right.

Mr BEALE: Years ago, they didn't do that.

Ms ROBINSON: I can remember my grandmother going for months and months in her mourning. Now the mourning is all over in one day after a wake or a party here and there, and the person is forgotten. It was never like that. When you mourned, it ran its course. And people were back to the place they were in before that death occurred—even the death of a significant person. That is what Lewis is referring to. Nowadays that does not happen, and people are still left trying to heal.

CHAIR: Is that because of loss of culture, identity and connection? Is that something that is attributable to the breakdown in—

Ms ROBINSON: It is modernity—modern ways of living now. It is because of all that—yes.

Mr BEALE: It has changed our way of life.

Ms ROBINSON: There is a loss—not of responsibility for children—of connection with children sometimes. It is something that they are not all that interested in. They are just sad, very sad, about losing a member of their family. They do not understand. I don't know if we can say that it is an effect of the stolen generation. It obviously has lots of inroads into everything for Aboriginal people. I just wanted to clarify that. I think there was a comment made that not a lot of people go to the elders. There are not a lot of elders left. A lot of them have passed on or moved on. And it gets very hot for people to come out. Certainly, the elders do

deliver. A healing centre would be something that they can deliver. They have been on about it for years. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you all for coming along today. It has been really valuable to hear from you. We have asked some questions or sought information and some people have taken that on notice. So we will be in contact to get additional information. It has been very important for us to travel around and to hear from people exactly how it is on the ground in your local community, and to hear about solutions and things that you would like to be considered. That is very valuable. Thank you so much for your time.

Mr BEALE: You are welcome.

Ms SIMPSON: At the end, after you have finished with the communities, will there be a report?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms FERNANDO: Who will get that report?

CHAIR: We have one more trip. We are going to Nowra to do the South Coast on 2 or 3 March. Then we are hoping by the end of May to have a report and some recommendations. We are a committee of the parliament, made up of all different political parties. This report goes to the parliament. Then there is six months for the Government to respond—whether they support or agree with our recommendations. It is a very public process. We have tried to shine some light and hopefully we will be able to progress some recommendations with respect to things we have heard from the community about trying to make the future a bit better than the past and empower local communities. As I have mentioned today, the Government has been on this path of trying to empower Aboriginal communities through the OCHRE process and local decision-making. These are opportunities that I think are important for local communities to pick up on, because they are done with good intentions to empower and support.

Mr BEALE: Can I tack on one thing that I had forgotten when I was making my earlier speech? When my dad came back from Singleton where he was pensioned out, and after he got married and he had some children, he kept us away from the town because he was always afraid that someone might come and pick us up and take us away. I did not go to school until late in life. That way I found it very hard to learn. Quite frankly, I started working at about nine years of age to help the family out. That was one of the things—he kept us away because he did not want us to get sent away like he was. It was always a thing in the back of his mind. It was very hurtful for him. That is all I have to say.

CHAIR: That is an important point. We have heard before about the fear and the lost opportunities that happen because of the fear. That is very relevant.

(Roundtable discussion concluded)

(Luncheon adjournment)

RHONDA ASHBY, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay Language and Culture Nest,

MARY KENNEDY, Community member, and

BRENDA MCBRIDE, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay Language and Culture Nest, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Welcome. Do you have anything to add about the capacity in which you appear?

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: I am from Lightning Ridge. I was born in Coonamble and then lived in Walgett before we moved to Lightning Ridge. I teach schoolkids bush medicine, bush food and Indigenous knowledge. I take them out to the scrub. My mother was a member of the stolen generation.

CHAIR: I am sorry to hear that.

Ms ASHBY: Yaama ganu. Hello, everyone. I work for the Department of Education. I am a teacher with the Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay Language and Culture Nest.

CHAIR: Would you like to make a statement?

Ms ASHBY: I have left my notes behind, so I am going to speak from the heart.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Me too.

CHAIR: Would you start by telling us about the work that the language nest is doing and how that is operating in the community?

Ms ASHBY: It is a new position with the Department of Education. There are five positions in the State, including mine, for the five language groups. Baakantji, Bundjalung, Wiradjuri, the Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay one, which I work underneath, and Gumbaynggirr on the North Coast are the five language groups that the language nests are set up for. I have been in the position for not quite two years. I am employed in this position as a teacher with the department to work alongside teachers and community members on the curriculum. We work on cultural and language programs within the school.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: I sometimes work with Rhonda. If she is taking a bunch of kids on country I go along with her. I used to work at the school. I do not any more. I take kids back on country and teach them how to survive in the bush—what to eat and what not to eat. It is about going back to grassroots and learning where your family come from. That is the way I feel. That is what I like to share with the kids. My mum was taken away, but my two aunties showed me, which I was grateful for. Now I am passing it on to my kids and their kids. Hopefully, it will come out good for them. To survive in this vast area you have to know that there are certain fruits in certain seasons. Aboriginal people used to have only two seasons. White people have four seasons. We had summer and winter. You had to work out what time the fruit and other food was available.

Ms ASHBY: My father was part of the stolen generation. We did not know that until after his passing. I always thought my father was a hard man. He was very strict. He never said the word "love" to us, but we knew that he loved us. Now, looking back, I think love was not expressed to him by his mother. His family was not around to express that love. He had a very cruel life. He was adopted into a non-indigenous family. The way he expressed love to us was to give us lollies. He was a famous jockey in this area. He developed a love for horses. That was how he was able to express his love: through those horses. He was a humble and respectful man. He was all about family; he was very protective of his family. If I had known he was part of the stolen generation, affected by that government policy, maybe I would have had a better understanding of him. I remember when I was a young girl, because he was so strict, I said to myself, "When I have kids I will make sure I tell my kids that I love them every day."

A lot of us in this room are on that healing journey. The trauma of that generation has filtered through to us. Working in the education system is a way for us to make positive tracks, to educate kids about our history. The stolen generation is a part of the curriculum that teachers have to teach. They will not touch it. It is a very sensitive area. I think if we can develop a package—

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You said they will not teach it. Do you mean the teachers?

Ms ASHBY: They will touch on it, but a lot of them will push it away and say, "We are not going to teach that." It is part of the core curriculum. Some teachers will approach Aboriginal education workers in the school system to teach it, but some of our mob do not know how to teach it either. We need a package of resources for teachers, to be put together with the department and with the appropriate Aboriginal people. Cultural programs like the one Aunty mentioned, taking kids out on country and teaching them some of the old ways, are part of the healing journey for us.

Not long ago we had a women's camp. One of the ladies not much older than me was taken from her family when she was a young girl. She was supposed to be here with us today. The first time she spoke about being taken away was at that camp. That camp, being part of that women's gathering with all the elders and aunties, was a good support mechanism for sharing our stories about the stolen generation, our past.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: When the teachers first come out from university to outback towns they hardly know anything. I would like to see a cultural awareness day three times a year in the schools, to get people out on country, to teach them how we used to survive and how we were educated. I remember counting sticks on the ground or writing in the dirt. A lot of new teachers do not know about that. We need to get them out on country, to make sure they have that cultural awareness.

Our town, Lightning Ridge, is a multicultural town. The 54 different nationalities out there at Lightning Ridge. When I was teaching language class we had two little girls there. One was from Nepal and the other was from Croatia. Those two girls got up and spoke the Gamilaraay and the Yuwaalaraay languages fluently—just a few little things. So they were picking up the languages and yet others are not. It is about sharing. We have no language class at the school any more—that has all gone.

Ms ASHBY: I think since the apology from the Government back in 2008, the number of children who are being taken away today has increased. What is happening?

CHAIR: That issue has come up a number of times. We have taken evidence about that and we are certainly considering that as an issue. One of the points of reparation is for the wrongdoing not to be repeated. So that has been a point that has come up, and we have put some questions on that to government.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: I am a regional foster parent. I have been a foster parent since my son was four years old, and he is turning 40 this year. He has a wife and three kids of his own and he just took on two foster kids. I have had 300 kids through my house. You do not want to give them back—and I can see why people want to keep them—but you have to give them back. The only reason I took them on was that something really bad happened. The police station used to say, "Could you come down at this time and get this kid?" The kid used to go back to the parents the next morning, and seeing that hurts you. Parents should be at home not out drinking. They should be at home looking after their kids. I had babies I did not want to give back because I knew they were going back to certain things. I had not only Indigenous kids but also non-indigenous kids. I felt like saying, "Why don't those parents wake up to themselves?" Parents need to look after their kids.

Like I said, my mum was taken when she was just 11 or 14 years old. She came back to Walgett with a child. She was about 28 or 29 when she came back to Walgett. She went right down to Queanbeyan. She went to the Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls Training Home. During the time she was in Sydney, when the war broke out, she had a child. My elder sister is half Indigenous and half American. I was going through my mum's papers. I got in touch with the stolen generations mob and they said they could not find anything. I even gave them her number. I looked it up on the internet and found her number—it was 744. They said at first there were no records. I ended up receiving a really thick file on my mum.

In read in the file that she had had a baby somewhere along the line, a boy. I do not even know where he is buried or what happened to him. Things like that play on our minds, because we have a brother somewhere out there and we do not even know where he is buried or whatever. I know there was a funeral. It hurts a lot of people. My elder sister said, "Yes, we knew about him." I said, "Well, why didn't you tell me? I had to read about it." Things like that are really bad. It should have been fixed up a long time ago for a lot of people. Like Ms Ashby said, with the healing camps we go through we break down all the time. But later on we feel a bit better afterwards. So we are carrying a lot on our shoulders with our people and our family.

Ms ASHBY: Working in the position I am in, my language makes me strong, my culture makes me strong, my people make me strong and my family makes me strong. I remember my grandmother putting herself in a cupboard speaking language. She was taken from down Bega way to the mission over in Brewarrina. I did not know any of this. It was not recorded. It was the elders who remembered—the old people at those places. I think about back then and where I am today. I think that was telling me I would be a part of this language journey and revitalising our language and our culture. I think that is what we need to do. I think the answer is in our communities: we need to do it from a community base, with the support of government—not with the Government dictating to us and telling us what to do. We need to be part of the decision-making process. Is there an Aboriginal person on this Committee today?

CHAIR: No.

Ms ASHBY: That is what I am talking about. It is about being part of the decision-making process.

CHAIR: I would just say that we are fortunate to have an Indigenous cadet who is with us.

Ms ASHBY: That is good.

CHAIR: Ron has been at the Parliament learning about how government works. He is studying law and has come along with us today. There is a commitment to that, and the language nest program is about the Government trying to empower local communities and revitalise culture and language. Are you able to tell us about that broken link from the stolen generations? Why is that revitalisation necessary and what does it mean to Aboriginal people that that link was broken?

Ms ASHBY: Let me put a question back to the Committee. What is your main core business as human beings?

CHAIR: Caring.

Ms ASHBY: For who?

CHAIR: For everyone around me and the world I live in.

Ms ASHBY: My core business is my family and that is what this is all about—our families' identity and our culture that was stripped from us. If only we can bring some of that back into place. A lot of our mob are ashamed of our culture and ashamed of speaking our language. I want to see our mob being proud. We are the oldest living culture on this planet, and that is something to be damned proud about. In New South Wales we still have men going through initiation. I would like to see a build-up of women and children there and have that family unit there practising our culture—and going through the initiation process and being proud of who we are. So that is core business: our families. Then our communities become strong and healthy and then our society becomes strong and healthy.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Years ago there was no sickness whatsoever, not until modern-day food came along. People used to live off the land. They had their berries, their greens, meat and everything. Then preservatives came in. Indigenous people now have a short lifespan. It has declined. We lose them at 60 years of age.

Ms ASHBY: Yes, life expectancy is an issue. We will be lucky to get our superannuation.

CHAIR: I think some of the Committee members would really like to ask you some questions now.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for coming, and in particular for what Ms Ashby just said about families being strong and communities being strong. I think that resonated really strongly with all of us. Ms Ashby, you said when you made your opening comments that you work at the school. Is that in Lightning Ridge or here in Walgett? Where are you based?

Ms ASHBY: I am based at Lightning Ridge Central School. I am actually out in the community working at a place called the Goondee, which is an Aboriginal museum. So I go into the school twice a week. There are four schools I visit: Goodooga Central School, Collarenebri Central School, Walgett Community College and Lightning Ridge. Those are the four schools that are in this nest.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And how many students in this nest are you able to work with?

Ms ASHBY: The language is being taught in those schools. I think in the last tally we had close to 300 or 350 students, and that is non-indigenous students as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That was going to be my other question. One of the things we have talked about, and this goes back to what Auntie Brenda just said in terms of what is being taught or not being taught in schools, is the history. It is important that the true history is told—not just for the Indigenous kids but also for the non-indigenous kids as well—so that the next generation appreciates what happened and make sure that these things do not happen again and have some sort of understanding. I think the language and culture aspect is really important for all schoolkids to understand, and there should not be a separation.

Ms ASHBY: Absolutely. Just on that point, I remember when I first went out to teach as a qualified secondary teacher Uncle Roy Barker said to me, "When you go in there you go in there and you tell the truth—the bloody truth and nothing but the bloody truth." I was wondering where he was going with that. His words came across very strongly. He was talking about telling the true history of Aboriginal people.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think your point that you teach the language to not just the Aboriginal kids but also the non-Aboriginal kids is really important.

Ms ASHBY: It is a big movement.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think that is a step in the right direction in terms of what we need to be looking at as a Committee. So that is why I wanted to find out how widely it is taught.

Ms ASHBY: We haven't got a place. We couldn't get a room in the school for the Nest. We had to rent something outside.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: We did have one. We had a big building.

Ms ASHBY: Yes, it was taken off us.

CHAIR: Explain that—you had a building but it was taken away.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: We had a $2 million building.

CHAIR: What happened?

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: The new principal came along and moved us out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: At Lightning Ridge?

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Yes. The new principal came along and moved us out.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: When did that happen?

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Couple of years—three years, about four years.

Ms ASHBY: About three.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When you say you use your programs and go out to country, is that just for the Aboriginal kids or for all the kids?

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: No, non-Aboriginal kids will go as well.

Ms ASHBY: We do not like to discriminate because we want everyone to learn. We also take teachers out to country on Connecting to Country programs within the department. What I would really like—and this is part of the big picture for me in the future—is to have our own resource centre in the community. Instead of

travelling to Canberra or Sydney and looking at the archives there, we could try and build up a resource and have a building for it for running healing programs for men, women, children, and cultural programs. That is the big picture I see, having our own building and going out on country; having a place where community members can come in and have those resources on hand, instead of travelling to the cities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: A lot of people have said that to us in all the places we have been with this inquiry.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I want to start by thanking you. You told us how your language and your culture make you strong. It is important for us to hear that, because much of the feedback we have received is important. We have heard that so much was stripped away from the stolen generations and that restoring language is a critical part of the healing process. That has been really powerful for us. Both of you are at the forefront of this and it is something we would like to have rolled out around the State. How do you see language playing a role in healing? How can it heal not just future generations but possibly the ones who have suffered?

Ms ASHBY: I can only speak personally from my own experience and what I see out there working with language. I think it is a part of our identity; it is a part of our soul. Language is a part of culture, culture is a part of language—the two are married. If we do not know where we come from, we do not know where we are going. It is like a tree without roots; it won't grow. We have lost our identity. That is why this language journey we are on is important. On the journey we are trying to revitalise some of that language—not just language, revitalise some of the bushfoods and medicines, revitalise us as human beings and our culture. I think that is very important. When you see a language name—a lot of the properties around here are language names—that tells us a story. One word can tell us a story; it can tell us the identity of that place, whether it was a borer ground or a place of certain plants or a certain animal. One word—there are just so many layers to language. It goes deep—when I say "soul" that is how deep I am going.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Some things cannot be translated; some things you can only understand in that language.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Yes.

Ms ASHBY: Language is very powerful. It is not just a verbal communication; there were signs. We could look at this tour, we could look at a plant or we could look at rivers and that would tell us about country, that would tell us about people and who is from that area, who knows the stories for that area.

Ms MARY KENNEDY: Years ago a lot of nationalities, Aboriginal people, had different cultures. My parents came from Gingie. My father originally came from Brewarrina and they had to travel around to places, like Pilliga, and do some work there. They ended up on Gingie Mission because back in them days places were segregated. My grandmother came from Collarenebri and the Government moved them from Collarenebri over to Gingie Mission only because there was a school there for Aboriginal people. They were not allowed to attend the school back in them days.

I often wondered why my parents used to act the way they did, in a frightened, scared state. We were often told if we were to play on Gingie Mission we were not allowed to go alone further away. They would say, "You've got to get home before the sun come down, otherwise the white bogeyman will get you." I did not understand and that used to scare us. That scared me and every afternoon I made sure that we would run home. We had to get away and go back to our parents. It left us scared and I wondered why, back then, what all this was about with my parents. My parents weren't allowed to tell me how their life was back then.

My grandmother was sitting on the verandah, I was inside and unbeknown to them. Her and another lady, Bella Morgan, started talking in their own lingo. They was talking for a good while, and to listen to them talking my language—it was beautiful to hear. It was absolutely beautiful. I bumped something and they realised I was there. All of a sudden the language just stopped and they didn't proceed; they started talking back in English. I often wondered: Why would they not talk like that in front of me? Now I know why—because they were not allowed to pass the language down to us. We lost our language.

A lady who worked at St Josephs school here was going around and she was actually taking stories off people. One of them was my mother, my father, my aunty and my grandmother and she actually got their story down. I tried to go into getting a family tree happening. I just came across a brick wall because my

grandmother's birth certificate wasn't there. I didn't know where mother was. I didn't know my grandmother's mother, and I didn't know further down. It was upsetting to me because I came in and I couldn't find my roots where my mother's family come from. We were just disheartened.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Disheartened all right because, you know, our family worked on a lot of properties. Like a lot were born on a lot of properties and a lot were buried on a lot of properties. My family, like my mum, she came from Dungalear Station, which is between Lightning Ridge and Walgett, on a property there. My dad is from Mitchell in Queensland. He came down, fencing and whatever, but met up out there. My grandfather, our great grandfather—him and I are related—was a station worker, a stockman out on the properties. Each and every one of the Kennedy men was always stockmen and that, and that is where they took mum. Like my grandfather used to do a bullock team of wool from Dungalear over to Brenda Station which is over towards Goodooga, back around the other side and then take it over to Yooralla on a property and put it on a river boat. With the wool in those days they only used to have bullock teams.

He used to hide my mum in the woolpacks so when the PP board used to come, they couldn't find her. He used to take her up to Engeldore. There was a big mission up on Engeldore at the time. There is an old lady up there, old Mrs Dodge, who used to take all the kids out in the scrub for a week on end when the PP board used to come up. During that time they came back down and they grabbed my mum, they had found her in one of the wool packs, when my grandfather got back down there. We are saying like Gingie, at Gingie Station, the Walfords, the Kennedys, Burnside and Dungalear and Morgans and all these properties. We grew up as kids and then when we were grown up we went back and seen where they used to live. It was unbelievable.

Mary was saying about the language, I have two old aunts. Like Virginia's old grandmother was my aunty, and she spoke fluently the Gamilaraay language and the Yuwaalaraay language, her and old Daph Sharpie. It was like music to your ear, you know, when you hear them because my mum never spoke it because she was taken away. But working with Rhonda lately—I have been going down to TAFE in Dubbo where we are doing languages again—I know some of the words my old aunt used to say to me. But we are getting the language back in. Even my little granddaughter, a seven-year-old is starting to pick it up real quick. But it is good, you know, to have it there. Like I said these Indigenous kids—non-Indigenous kids at Lightning Ridge also the Yugoslav kids and that—there's three languages they've got. They was teaching and we was given the Aboriginal language, with our own language, plus English.

Ms ASHBY: In a place like Lightning Ridge it is multicultural. We learn about other cultures too and I think that's a part of that healing process too. Like we are learning about one another, where we come from and that form of identity. One of the things that gets me working in the school, and I hear it all the time, and it really digs at me with the stolen generation, is "Why don't you just get over it." It is the generation trauma that filters through us all. It's in our genes.

CHAIR: That is why this inquiry is being conducted and that is why we are hoping to hear from people about what can be done to help heal and recognise that.

Ms ASHBY: Do you know what I said to a couple of teachers: "Why don't you learn to understand?"

CHAIR: You spoke about education. We have the Bringing them Home report and the recommendations, and the NSW Government's response to the Bringing them Home report that clearly talked about the need for education and a resource kit within the schools.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Yes, I have the report Bringing them Home. I met one lady years ago who was working with Parks and Wildlife and then she started working with Link-Up, like finding the kids that was taken away, and this and that, or those who gave up their kids. She passed away with cancer but she gave me the report Bringing them Home and the stories of what happened to the kids, and this and that. Like I said, my mum was lucky; she was at Cootamundra compared to what happened at Parramatta. Parramatta was the worst place going for women. Did you hear what happened in there?

CHAIR: We have been to Cootamundra—

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: The Parramatta Girls Home, what really happened there was something disgraceful, shocking.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Were there Aboriginal girls there?

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: There were Aboriginal girls. It was really bad at Parramatta. The superintendent used to sit there and watch the women have showers, and make them strip in front of him. After they had a shower they used to do what they wanted to do with them—young girls, 13, 14, 11 and 12. They did all those things to them, you know? They were traumatised. It was really bad.

CHAIR: Those matters have been before the royal commission as well.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Yes, they were.

CHAIR: The Committee is looking at the history of actions that were meant to be taken to address the Bringing them Home report. One was about the education system and the resource kit. Will you clarify whether that resource kit still operates in the schools? Have you seen it? Has it been updated?

Ms ASHBY: No, I have never seen it. We've got the Ab-ed policy; we have all these policies there—no. It probably just sits on a desk or sits in a computer mind and never gets looked at. Maybe I am talking out of school here—well, I am.

CHAIR: We need to hear whether these recommendations were implemented.

Ms ASHBY: We need a resource package and engagement where we can engage those teachers to be able to pick that up and run with it. At the moment they're just pushing it aside because they just don't know how to work with it.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: What about the time I gave Lesley the report on mum? She sat there, this teacher, and she read the report on my mum and she was crying at the end of it. She said, you know, she couldn't get over it at the time I gave it to her to read what happened and where she was taken from. We just printed it out. There are girls from near Walgett, Junee, Cootamundra, Queanbeyan, Sydney, everywhere they put them. During that time also, they didn't have much education at Cootamundra girls home. No, they were just made to put on an apron and told, "You go and scrub that floor." It was only about eight years ago we went down for a reunion at Cootamundra girls home. On behalf of my mum I went down. During that time these three sisters, they were swearing, carrying on about the floor. They used to get on their hands and knees and scrub it. You know, it's all carpet. I said, "Where did you have your classes?" She said, "We was never sat down with a pen and paper."

CHAIR: We have heard the same story and that is why we want to look at the things that were meant to be done. If good things were put forward we want to make sure that they are embedded into the education system.

Ms ASHBY: Because we have high numbers of Aboriginal students out in these western schools it needs to be part of that cultural awareness when teachers come out here to be trained up. Even the stolen generation, that needs to be mentioned right through these schools here. There needs to be great awareness on Aboriginal history because a lot of those families that go into that school, a lot of those kids come from breakdown families. That stems to them government policies that were set on our people a long time ago and it still exists today. We need to look at some of those problems. Education, the most powerful tool we can have. Health; we need to have good health, have good minds and healthy bodies. We need to have good clean housing. The answer is in our communities.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: You have two or three because there is nowhere to live.

Ms MARY KENNEDY: You have 10 people living in the one house and there is not a lot of housing in Walgett. Still today there are a lot of families living under each other's roof.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: I remember living down the riverbank as a child.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: A comment Rhonda made earlier about the language and culture that were taught at the school and then you were no longer able to operate at the school, would you clarify which school and give us a bit more information about what happened?

Ms ASHBY: There is a base school that is in the language and culture nest and it looks after the administration funds. I work at the Gundie, it is outside the school.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Tell them why.

Ms ASHBY: We rent outside the school. There was not a place inside the school. I am okay with that because we are not going to get our mob into the schools, they are not going to walk into those schools feeling intimidated. We need to build that strength up in the community so we can walk in that school strong and proud. I do not think the answer is in that school for our people. Like I said, education is the tool, but I think we need to have a healthy community to walk into that school and that system proud, not feeling intimidated or inferior about institutions. This stems back to those government policies too, those institutions.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: The school has a six foot fence around it. They don't like that. Before it was carefree. A lot of people don't like going to the school. Two years ago we had about five Indigenous students who got their HSC—about two or three years ago. In the past few years none of them has because we have got to send them away to boarding school to get an education.

CHAIR: We have heard that.

Ms ASHBY: We have to remember we get a high turnover rate of teachers in western schools and principals come and go, so attitudes change with time. We might get a good principal in there that is good with helpful programs and the Aboriginal community, and then the next principal might not.

Ms MARY KENNEDY: He might work with you and the next one might not.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: That's right.

Ms ASHBY: We get a high turnover of teachers.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Do I understand that you would like to have as part of the curriculum a course in Aboriginal culture which would have things like language, history and the stolen generation as part of the education? Is that what you would recommend for this Committee to suggest?

Ms ASHBY: A more engaging resource package and Aboriginal people being a part of the decision making for that, not the hierarchy in the education system. We need Aboriginal people sitting down being a part of that resource package and the processing of that resource.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Do you want that resource in class for primary or high school?

Ms ASHBY: Absolutely. That is part of the Aboriginal Education and Training [AET] policy, to be taught, especially in those schools out west with a high Indigenous population.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: I reckon they should start with preschool kids: they are young and pick the language up so quick.

CHAIR: I think the intention is to embed it.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I have just one question based on all three of your experiences being deeply affected by the stolen generation. We are looking into reparations. Can you tell the Committee what you think are the most important things that we need to do when we are looking at the stolen generations in regard to reparation: Is it healing centres, is it a more public and personal apology to each individual, is it financial reparations, is it memorials? What are the most important things as far as you are concerned in regard to how the Government and the Parliament can make reparations?

Ms Mary KENNEDY: Understanding is one thing, having knowledge of our past.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Having the Aboriginal language taught.

Ms ASHBY: I would like to see proactive agencies within our community engaging in some of those socio-economic issues such as health, housing and education. I would like to see where we have got infrastructure for language and culture centres and Aboriginal people to be a part of that process of the stolen generation, that decision making. We need Aboriginal people sitting down with you mob.

Ms MARY KENNEDY: When I read about my parents and the way they lived back then, being taken away, not just taken out to the homes and that. Here in Walgett their words were "apprenticed out". I could not understand that—why the words "apprenticed out"? My mother had to be taken from her family to be put on the stations and to look after the station owner's property. They would be there for years.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Cleaning, washing, baby-sitting.

Ms MARY KENNEDY: Not having contact with their mother.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Even the word "apprentice" implies some level of choice, but there was no choice.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: There was no choice.

Ms Mary KENNEDY: There was no choice.

Ms MARY KENNEDY: There was no choice; they were just taken.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: And they worked for little or nothing. Even when I went down to the Cootamundra Girls Home there is this one cabinet there in the wall where they used to sit the bad kid, the girl that played up; she had to sit in this little dark room with a bucket. In that room there was all these shelves. When we went down for the meeting we went there, we walked in the room and there were person's parcels, there were shoeboxes, presents and letters from their parents but they never got to open them; it was not given to them.

Ms ASHBY: Tell them about the well.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: There is the well there, some of my old aunties said the girls used to come back who had been apprenticed out here on the station and they knew she was pregnant. The baby is crying, the baby is born, but the next day there is no baby. They all used to swear black and blue that there was a well there and they used to throw the baby down the well. When we walked around there they had put a building over this well.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It was covered up?

CHAIR: We were told that.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: At Cootamundra. My mum was lucky, she was apprenticed with doctors and veterinaries, but during that time from the adjoining properties some of the girls used to come over there at night time that had been sexually abused by the next door people and this and that. When you talked about cultural stuff I believe we need our language back, because that was taken from us first up. Not only that, food wise, people are more interested in our cultural awareness.

Ms ASHBY: Bush foods and medicines.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Bush foods and medicines and education, like we said.

Ms MARY KENNEDY: I am pretty lucky that a lady named Mrs Agar came here.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: Tell her what nationality she is.

Ms ASHBY: She is Czechoslovakian. She came to the St Joseph school that my mother and my aunties worked in with the schools with language and so forth. I am glad that she actually took down my parents' stories. That would have been lost altogether because my parents were not allowed to tell us anything at all. I am

very thankful to her. When I stumbled upon the book that she put out it surprised me and it made me feel so good. This is my parents' story of how it was back for them. It is very hard.

Ms ASHBY: What is the name of the book?

CHAIR: Do you still have the book?

Ms MARY KENNEDY: The Last Riverbank.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: It seems to me the most important thing is a genuine and honest acknowledgment of your history.

Aunty BRENDA McBRIDE: I want to say that it is all our responsibility to be a part of this process, of this journey—all of us.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the four schools you work with, how many Aboriginal teachers are there?

Ms ASHBY: Maybe about eight of the four schools.

CHAIR: Out of how many?

Ms ASHBY: A staff of roughly 200. That is just roughly.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You have to educate the politicians too.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: That is why you're here, Fred.

CHAIR: You will pleased to know that as part of the Bowraville inquiry, which you may have heard about, there has been a shift in Parliament's cultural awareness training for members of Parliament and staff who deal with Aboriginal issues. I think that is a very positive recognition that change is happening and respect and recognition is being given. We are hopeful that this inquiry will build on that approach and seek to deliver some positive outcomes.

Ms ASHBY: Didn't they have one of these committee inquiries, it was British—I think it was in the late 1900s or something. It was an inquiry committee just like yourselves here but it was set up over in England where children were taken away.

CHAIR: There have been so many.

Ms ASHBY: I was reading a little bit before I came today.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The British children who were shipped out to Australia.

Ms ASHBY: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That is correct.

Ms ASHBY: Yes, and I was thinking here we are in front of another committee.

CHAIR: It is an important time because there are a lot of very powerful inquiries and investigations going on around the country at the moment. There are some big issues to address for everyone but people genuinely want to recognise the past and the wrongdoings so that as a country we can respect it.

Ms ASHBY: I am so sorry. I have got my hand on the Bible here and I look up and I see Queen Elizabeth in a frame up above us there. But thank you for your time.

CHAIR: Thank you. You may have taken some questions on notice or when you leave here you might think that you should have said something else. If you feel that you want to make some further comment please contact the secretariat. Any additional information will be greatly appreciated.

Ms ASHBY: One last thing, when you sit down with this information with these inquiries I want you to sit down professionally how you are here today and I want you to think about family, because that is your core business too. You think about family.

CHAIR: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

KYLIE GILMORE, Practice Manager, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, sworn and examined:

CHRISTINE CORBY, Chief Executive Officer, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, and

RICCO LANE, Aboriginal Mental Health Program Worker, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, affirmed and examined:

Ms GILMORE: I have worked at the Aboriginal Medical Service for 15 years. I am the manager of the social and emotional wellbeing, drug and alcohol, mental health and Bringing Them Home programs.

Ms CORBY: I have been employed at the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service for nearly 30 years and I manage the whole program.

CHAIR: Do you have an opening statement to make?

Ms CORBY: The Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service has been operating since 1986 as the result of historical situations in our community where families have been isolated by birthing, by housing. I listened to the ladies earlier. Walgett in its early days—my mother comes from here, from Walgett, Collarenebri, and I listened to the stories of my elders where they say that racist behaviours and legislation prevented Aboriginal people from mixing with non-Aboriginal people. Down at the primary school it was called Crow's Corner because that was as far as Aboriginal people used to go. Whilst it may be a joke, that conversation and those comments are still part of our Aboriginal psyche, I suppose.

The history of Aboriginal people here is very piecemeal even though we had the Freedom Ride here. This is Gamilaraay country and when you land at the airport here it is home of Wolseley country, which is 1,506,987 sheep. It is no longer a shearing industry. It has changed its socio-economic growth here but it is a shame where councils still recognise that agriculture like that is the core business of any community. For Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service when it first opened its doors we always said we would treat everybody and we have done. So we see about 40 per cent non-Aboriginal people. We have five doctors now. We started as a small business.

We are hearing today about social and emotional wellbeing. Everything we do has an impact and recognises the stress and trauma that Aboriginal people experienced here in this community. It also recognises the isolation, how they felt in this community even though they lived here. Whilst we are talking about being taken away and the reparation for wages, there is also the people who lived here. I heard the ladies earlier say that it is just as difficult living here with your identity as it was being taken away.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you for joining us today. One of the questions we are dealing with is intergenerational trauma. It is about not just the effects on the people who were taken away but also the ones who remained and their children and grandchildren. Can you share some of your experiences from a medical perspective about the consequences for your community?

Mr LANE: With that trauma stuff you are talking about, a lot of people that I see come in can't recognise where it is from or how come they have got it. Like myself at the time, a lot of people have forgotten about the stolen generation. It is not taught in our schools or in our community by our elders because it is so taboo to talk about. It is so hard to pinpoint what sort of problems they come and see you about because unless you deal with it holistically around all the traumas you can think of you are shooting in the dark. They can't tell you what is wrong with them and we can't find out what is wrong with them because they can't process or know what the feelings are.

Ms GILMORE: Intergenerational trauma, you see it every day in Walgett. It exists in our primary schools, it exists in our preschools and it exists in our high schools. We see it on the street every day. Like Ricco, I probably agree that a lot of people do not understand why this intergenerational trauma happens. For us as health workers it is very difficult to deal with because you are somewhat under-resourced and understaffed to deal with it and you often do not know what is the best way to help. But it exists. It is very real. It is probably compounded because there are drug and alcohol issues. There are also violence issues with the intergenerational trauma. We do need strategies to address those as well because it is generational. It is just going down the line.

Ms CORBY: We actually had a conversation before we came here to get our stories together, to decide what are we going to talk about and what is important for us. What we said was identity. Not everybody knows they are Aboriginal. That is a sad thing because identity is everything. Certainly with Ricco's job working in mental health, to understand identity is your culture and if you have no culture you are nobody. To see some of our families that have been taken away, the stories that we have heard from our elders is that some of the people who went away, who were taken away, have never returned. So there is a huge loss. Again, I listened to what Rhonda said about your families in general; how would you feel if some of your children were taken away and there is a gap? We deal with it every day. We deal with it with behaviour. We deal with it with education, reluctance to go to school and challenging law enforcement.

The memories are still there with those who did not experience the stolen generation but the stories are told and passed down. I am 60 and there are people my age that will actually say, "Always look at person in shiny shoes," because that was the police officer that would come for them. They tell the stories and laugh about it but they actually used to hide in water barrels or go swim in the river. I cannot talk about my family being stolen, but you listen to the stories of our local people here and they do. They will not disclose it to non-Aboriginal people but we know it and we deal with it every day. The behaviour that presents at our organisations is not always a sore finger. It is in people's hearts and minds.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Ms Corby, what types of professionals do you have at the medical service centre?

Ms CORBY: With our organisation we have a vast range of GPs and specialist services. We have fly-in psychologists and counsellors, which is not adequate for Ricco, who is the only Aboriginal male here in Walgett to deal with mental health trauma, be it women's business, men's business or business for people that are older than him. For him to deal with older people is different to being a young man. For our staff we have quite a considerable amount of fly-in services, which is not suitable, but people choose not to live here and we cannot afford to keep them here. So we have dentists, podiatrists, midwifery services—

Ms GILMORE: Speech pathology—

Ms CORBY: Ears.

Ms GILMORE: —dermatology, respiratory, cardiology, endocrinology, diabetic educator, a dietician.

Ms CORBY: Quite a few. We should have brought a package for you. Sorry about that.

CHAIR: You can pass on additional information.

Ms CORBY: Yes. There is a lot.

CHAIR: That would be great.

Ms CORBY: We have grown over the years, and I think that is the difference. We started off with eight staff. We have been fortunate over the years. Some of the funding that was for public health has come to us as an NGO, so we do have a vast array of—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Is that Federal funding or State funding?

Ms CORBY: Both Federal and State.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Is there a pattern of behaviour that your psychologists have gathered that depicts somebody from the stolen generation? No?

Mr LANE: Well, everybody is different. The patterns that we get with a lot of the trauma from the stolen generation stuff is a lot of alcohol abuse, personal issues and confidence in themselves and just the all-round way they present themselves. They just do not care how they look, how they feel, what they have got to eat or whatnot because, like I said earlier, they have got these feelings but they cannot identify them. The easiest one to identify is the alcohol and drug problems that they have got, so they target that instead of the real problem at hand.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Following on from that, with the fly-in specialists that you get—and I will probably focus more on the counselling and mental health services because we were talking about that earlier with the elders group—how often do the psychologists and psychiatrists fly in? Is it once a week, once a month or as needed? Do you need it more? Is there a regular pattern?

Ms GILMORE: Ideally from a management perspective and also from a community perspective you would have one to two, a male and a female, based permanently in Walgett that actually lived in Walgett. Ideally they would be Aboriginal as opposed to non-Aboriginal. It would be lovely to have that. But the ability to recruit and retain someone with that skill base that can actually work with Aboriginal people who have experienced so much trauma is very difficult because often you are only partially funded and you cannot afford that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With what you have now, how often do you have a psychologist or a psychiatrist available?

Ms GILMORE: We have a psychologist every fortnight and a counsellor every fortnight. Because of the demand within the schools we have actually based one of our counsellors at the schools. Unfortunately they went on maternity leave in December but we hope to recruit to it. So they actually spend their entire two-day visit each fortnight within the schools as opposed to dealing with adults. With the other two psychologists, one comes in twice a month for one day, but again there are limited clinical hours because you are reliant on the fly-in/fly-out. So they get in at 9.30 if the plane is delayed then they fly out at 3 o'clock. So you are hampered a little bit by that. The other clinical psychologist comes in two days every fortnight. And again it is dependent on flights. You have to rely on the Royal Flying Doctor Service [RFDS] to be able to get them in and, unfortunately, often clinical psychologists are bumped for dermatology, a surgeon or someone like that. That is the reality that we deal with.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So if there is a clinical need that is deemed higher than psychology—

Ms GILMORE: And unfortunately often psychology is not as high as some of the other specialties.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Following on from what you said before in terms of drug and alcohol issues, that was also raised by earlier witnesses this morning. We were going to be speaking to somebody from the health district—unfortunately they were unable to come at the last minute—about what is offered in terms of drug and alcohol services and rehabilitation. Something that was really strongly evident when we were in Broken Hill yesterday and has also been mentioned today is the lack of rehabilitation services close to home—they are just not there and they are something that the community really needs. Would you agree with that?

Mr LANE: Yes.

Ms CORBY: Coincidentally, I have another hat as chairperson of the local community working party. What we discussed early last year that culminated in a community meeting was drug and alcohol and mental health, which was supported by the non-Aboriginal agencies like the police as well, because of the continued violence, antisocial behaviour and all those words you use about people who need help. What we did was we had a meeting of service providers and Aboriginal organisations in November and designed a plan between another member of the working party and myself. We are coming back next month, but the guts of the plan is we need a community facility—you know, you wish for the world—on the river for men, women, children and families. That is our ideal choice.

Whilst you may have a drug and alcohol rehabilitation service at Moree—and one at Brewarrina—it does not meet the needs that we have identified with the alcohol and also the drugs. What we would like to see—and we are going to lobby next month with Government officials and it would be nice to record it here—even though it is going to be based in Walgett it would cover a region, is that will be very multifunctional, not only catering for drug and alcohol but it will give a trade, some sort of industry that is relevant to this community, improving on the literacy and numeracy, and certainly looking after the family, reducing the violence, understanding why people behave the way they do, managing your anger and all the general good health and wellbeing that we would like to appreciate in our life.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: With the previous history in Walgett of racism—nationwide everyone knew about it—has that changed now? One of the suggestions from other witnesses is that the Walgett Shire Council should publicly apologise to the people of the stolen generation for what has happened to them and so on. Would that go down well?

Ms CORBY: I have lived here for about 40 years now, sir, and, as I say, this is my mother's country. And working in two Aboriginal organisations—one the Aboriginal Medical Service and one the Aboriginal Legal Service—I have always seen the shire be very isolated in dealing with Aboriginal people, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal businesses. Whilst we may raise the flag at NAIDOC, when you look at the group of people supporting NAIDOC it is predominantly Aboriginal people—very few non-Aboriginal community members. I was involved in the reconciliation action plan with the shire council. It has not moved forward for a long time. Whilst there may be an Aboriginal person on the shire council at the present time, that does not mean he should be the person to solve or address Aboriginal problems. As far as I can see, you would expect all the councillors to identify—those on the levee bank, the farming people and everyone; black, white and all the other cultures. At Lightning Ridge we have about 50 cultures now and we have quite a few mixed cultures here in Walgett. Long story short, they could really improve their relationships with Aboriginal people. An apology would be wonderful. We have had the freedom riders through here twice.

Again, looking at the collegiate relationships that should happen here to apologise, to actually appreciate that those people who came in 1965 made a mark in our community for us as Aboriginal people; we don't see that recognition. There should be something other than "Welcome to Wolseley country", a little bit of "Welcome to Gamilaroi country". But the Freedom Riders here in Moree—people tend to talk about Moree all the time because it was the pool, but here, what I understand from people who have told me, the bus was stopped and it wasn't a pleasant experience. I really do believe that there needs to be more public recognition. The shire councillors are the leaders in this community, and I don't believe they do much at all.

CHAIR: Are you saying that there is no consultative committee and no Aboriginal engagement plan between council and the Aboriginal community?

Ms CORBY: They have a plan but the implementation strategies to actually enforce the plan are not really public for us as agencies, let alone community people, no.

CHAIR: They do not have a consultative committee where they bring everyone together to discuss current—

Ms CORBY: The shire?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms CORBY: The only shire-driven committee, which is not really totally shire, is what they call the interagency and it is that—the agencies in Walgett. The Aboriginal agencies, the non-Aboriginal agencies or the visiting services that come in, they have an interagency that is shared by both the health service manager [HSM] at the hospital and one of the ladies who is a non-government officer [NGO] here in Walgett, and we have the meeting up at the shire council. But that in itself isn't from the councillors to the staff to have a consultation per se for whatever it may be.

CHAIR: Does that interagency group address stolen generations issues and intergenerational trauma in terms of how it affects all those other government agencies?

Ms CORBY: Definitely not. We as Aboriginal people here in this community have the working party, which is representative of Aboriginal agencies, and also Aboriginal groups—male, female and our young people. That is where Aboriginal issues are addressed and non-Aboriginal issues too because we have to live here. However, one would ask whether the shire councillors would actually address Aboriginal issues or Aboriginal services.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Representing Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, and given that this is an inquiry about reparations, what do you see as your priority for the Committee to recommend as part of its report?

Mr LANE: A lot of local people around this area are real big on getting their culture back, like they all said, but one of the biggest barriers is getting access to land where they can practise these things. Like it's all good getting payouts and money and stuff for reparation and what happened; we would be a lot better off with land where you can practise the ancient stuff—tool making, hunting, gathering, whatever—without having to jump through 20,000 hoops to get access to land to run a program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My question follows on from something I was asking earlier about how you get your specialists out here. I think the tender is out at the moment to get the commercial air service between Dubbo, here and Bourke. If that happens, will that be better for you because the Royal Flying Doctor Service [RFDS] becomes less of an issue? Is that what you expect or you don't know?

Ms CORBY: Back in December 2008 the commercial airline from Dubbo to Walgett ceased. At that time as an organisation we had quite a lot of staff who used to rely on it. So since that time—it is some seven years now—we as an organisation have been paying for a charter. We used to have it every fortnight and we couldn't afford it; we now have it twice a month. People come in on the second and fourth Monday and Wednesday of each month. What we offered in the early days was for other services to pay for seats as well, so we had magistrates coming up. We made it at a time so if you left on the flight at 6.30 a.m., got to Dubbo at 7.30 a.m., back on the plane at 8.00 a.m., and you would be at work at 9.00 a.m., but it's an additional expense. That is why we had to rely also on the RFDS, because we have so many fly-ins.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you still have that commercial charter now?

Ms CORBY: We have been doing it since December—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If a commercial flight did come back would that be better for you?

Ms CORBY: It depends on the time. It has to have that link, otherwise people lose out on days.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you need a specialist from Sydney to be able to come up and get home in the day. It is all about the timing.

Ms CORBY: Absolutely.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: From your professional experience how broad do you think the effects of the stolen generations have been on the Aboriginal community at Walgett? Do you think it has affected a small percentage? Do you think it has affected half? Do you think that the stolen generations and the intergenerational trauma it has caused has affected basically every family? How broad do you think it has been?

Ms CORBY: I have never seen so much racism in my life living here at Walgett. I have an English father and an Aboriginal mother. I can guarantee I have got to be either/or here. I just can't be a person. So I claim my mother's heritage. The racism exists everywhere, it has not reduced. I feel very sorry and, you know, not using that term loosely, for Aboriginal staff who have the skills, the qualifications and the capacity to go out and deal with the grief and loss. People do not understand what they are dealing with, as Ricco said. It is how to manage the sadness and the anger and the annoyance and the frustration that they feel being treated as second-class citizens—another loose term, but it is quite true. For us as an Aboriginal organisation we have one Aboriginal man, all our other Aboriginal health workers support him and they deal with the stress and the trauma from our clients but because he is the one qualified person, he is the one who cops it. So for our community, unfortunately, it is a way of life here and you have to deal with it.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Do you believe that the issues surrounding the stolen generations have affected the entire Aboriginal community in this area?

Ms CORBY: I believe so.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Ricco, do you agree with that?

Mr LANE: Yes.

Ms CORBY: And Kylie does not come from here. It is not as if she has lived this; she has walked into this from another State. So for her to come in as a midwife—

Ms GILMORE: I would say that it has definitely affected every generation.

Ms CORBY: She has delivered babies so she has seen that with mothers and fathers.

Ms GILMORE: It exists.

CHAIR: How does that then affect people being able to engage with other government services that they need? Are they forgoing their needs because of not feeling comfortable to engage with other services that are not predominantly Aboriginal services?

Ms GILMORE: I would say on occasion, yes.

CHAIR: We have heard of people being fearful.

Ms GILMORE: Unfortunately, I have been in Walgett for 15 years—yes, I started as the community midwife and moved into management. My experience with clients is that a lot of them don't feel comfortable going to the hospital for mental health issues and drug and alcohol issues. I have seen the judgement that happens. I am a nurse and it breaks my heart when I see the way that they are judged because they are presenting as requested. They don't know why but they get labelled as, you know, frequent flyers. It is just not appropriate. It affects everyone. Why would you go and access a service that treats you like a second-class citizen? You would not do it, and that is what you see.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have heard that elsewhere as well.

Ms GILMORE: The other thing is—there is only one Aboriginal nurse up there at the moment I think, Ricco?

Mr LANE: A lot of it—like what Kylie is saying with the hospital and us—as I see it comes down to the competition too. Like Kylie said, they won't go to the hospital by themselves and they sort of use myself and a few other people at the Aboriginal Medical Service [AMS] as a one-stop shop sort of stuff. When we go to the hospital and we want to work together with the people there, we constantly get chucked in our face, "What is your qualification? How do you know?" How can you get—a piece of paper can overrule life experiences really. You know, we deal with these people every single day; they see them maybe once a month. We are constantly getting bamboozled and saying, "You haven't got the qualification to make judgement, leave him with us." Next day he is out, back knocking on our door. How do we fix that?

CHAIR: You are doing incredible work in supporting the community. It sounds like there needs to be more support for what you do. Can you clarify whether training or apprenticeship programs or anything else is provided to have more Aboriginal people trained to work in these health fields? Do the State or Federal governments do that and does it work?

Ms CORBY: There is professional development through the TAFE system and other educational institutions. We have the Aboriginal Health College in Sydney. It is a pathway of learning where students can work on the job and can link up as a group. If the students come from this region they can also link up. There is camaraderie and confidence. They share the same services, client base and social issues. So there is professional development. Some of our staff cannot travel, so that is a difficulty.

CHAIR: Is technology being used?

Ms CORBY: We have videoconferencing. We are that way inclined now.

CHAIR: And it is good?

Ms CORBY: It helps, yes.

Ms GILMORE: Mental health, drug and alcohol and Aboriginal health workers probably have the highest burnout rate. They do not knock off at 5 o'clock each night; they are on call 24/7. People come to their houses after hours and all of that. I think it is a different perspective. We talked about the lack of respect for Aboriginal health workers in mental health and all of that. That is very real; I have seen it. Again, it comes from

mainstream services. They do not often understand what is going on with the clients and they will just dismiss what the Aboriginal health worker has to say. The training programs we use are very good. But, again, there is a high burnout rate.

CHAIR: Do you know whether non-indigenous health workers have training in cultural awareness, and particularly around the stolen generation?

Mr LANE: I have not met one who has.

CHAIR: Do you think it would make a big difference if they did have proper training and an understanding in their professional capacity when they encounter people? Would they understand more deeply what the issues may be?

Mr LANE: As long as they believe in the sadness and trauma that our people have gone through. It is not about a piece of paper that you stick on the wall.

CHAIR: Unfortunately we must conclude the hearing. If you are able to provide any further information to the Committee, that would be appreciated. If you think there is more you could have told us, please make contact. It has been an honour to spend the day in Walgett and to have this opportunity to hear from people. People have been so courageous and honest with the Committee. I hope that indicates some thrust in what we are doing. We hold that dearly and will deliver something that reflects your concerns and what you have put forward. Thank very much.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee adjourned at 2.43 p.m.