

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES
WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS**

At Sydney on Friday 28 August 2015

The Committee met at 10.45 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. B. Taylor (Chair)

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

The Hon. S. Mallard

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile

The Hon. Dr P. R. Phelps

The Hon. P. G. Sharpe

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Welcome to the first public hearing of the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs. Before I commence I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. Today we will hear from a range of stakeholders, including the authors of the "Dropping off the edge" report, the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW and the City of Sydney.

Before we commence, I will make some brief comments about the procedures for the hearing today. Today's hearing is open to the public and a transcript of today's proceedings will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the Legislative Council guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, while the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what they publish about these Committee proceedings.

It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to anything witnesses say outside of their evidence at this hearing. I therefore urge witnesses to be careful in any comments they make to the media or to others after they have completed giving their evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Media representatives who are not accredited to the parliamentary press gallery should approach the secretariat to sign a copy of the broadcasting guidelines.

There may be some questions that a witness could answer only if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. Witnesses are advised that in these circumstances they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days following receipt of the transcript. I remind everyone here today that Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of parliamentary privilege. I therefore request that witnesses focus on the issues raised by the terms of reference and avoid naming individuals unnecessarily. Witnesses are advised that any messages to Committee members should be delivered through the Committee secretariat staff. Finally, I remind everyone to please turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

SOPHIE TROWER, Policy Manager, Domestic Violence NSW, and

KAREN WILLIS, Board Member, Domestic Violence NSW and Chief Executive Officer, Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I welcome witnesses from Domestic Violence NSW. Thank you for coming here today. I invite you to make a short opening statement.

Ms TROWER: Good morning. I am the policy manager for Domestic Violence NSW and I am also a youth residential worker with young women who are homeless. First of all, I draw the attention of Committee members to the latest likely domestic violence homicide case—that of Jayde Kendall, a 17-year-old woman from Queensland. Her body was found yesterday. We pay our respects to her family today. Domestic Violence NSW is the state-wide peak body for specialist and domestic and family violence services. Domestic Violence NSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist domestic violence and family services and the women, children and communities they support. We are committed to facilitating and supporting an ongoing improvement and good practice within specialist domestic and family violence services.

Domestic violence is recognised as the single greatest preventable cause of death, ill health and disability for women aged under 45 in Australia. Our submission has worked from the premise that all New South Wales communities have high social needs when considered from the perspective of domestic and family violence service provision. There are very few service networks in New South Wales that are able to comprehensively meet the needs of women, children, young people and communities impacted by violence. If we are to do so properly then significant long-term investment in well-coordinated, co-designed government and non-government agency approaches is necessary.

As Committee members may already be aware, domestic and family violence costs the New South Wales economy approximately \$4.5 billion per annum. Given the prevalence and impact of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, we believe that all New South Wales citizens should expect to be able to access professional, tailored, specialist service responses located within their own communities. Domestic and family violence services and specialist practitioners should prioritise trauma specialist, culturally safe and client centred approaches—there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Appropriate responses require sophisticated case planning and review, safety planning and specialist skills.

Early in 2015 the NSW Women's Alliance prepared a blueprint for intergenerational change outlining a multipronged approach to service delivery, funding, policy development and investment; and Committee members have been provided with a copy of that. It is called "A Safer State". The recommendations provide pathways to achieving sustainable positive outcomes for people affected by domestic and family violence across the government and non-government sectors in New South Wales. These recommendations include a number of approaches relevant to the current inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs.

More often than not, communities with high social needs have a high correlation in domestic and family violence rates. While reporting abuse and seeking support is increasing within all communities, the corresponding critical investment has not grown to meet the demands of the system. The New South Wales specialist homelessness sector has gone through a major reform process recently called Going Home Staying Home. This has had an unprecedented impact upon the domestic and family violence sector. Our submission has focused on the lessons learnt through this process.

We propose that the New South Wales Government must commit to a thorough, coordinated and sustained investment in the government and non-government service sector if we are to see a positive shift in our statistics. There are three broad categories that we included in A Safer State. The first is strong, high-level messages from communities and government; the second is prevention and early intervention; and the third is a well-resourced, sustainable service and support system that can respond effectively to women, children and young people in communities impacted by domestic and family violence.

We have specifically addressed service coordination in communities with high social needs. Our submission has focused on the following areas: the first, concurrent government initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation that lack coordination across communities and service structures. There are currently multiple initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation in New South Wales. Going Home, Staying Home and It Stops Here are two examples of that. The second thing we have focused on is the

impact of competitive tendering on the New South Wales domestic and family violence sector and the price of competition for non-government organisations [NGOs]. Going Home, Staying Home, for example, has created significant trauma in change and turmoil throughout the NGO sector.

The third thing we have focused on is a shared vision to promote gender equity and the challenges caused by violence against women and girls in all New South Wales communities. The reality is that fostering a shared understanding that works across the diversity of communities is a difficult thing. There is a myriad of myths about domestic and family violence, including victim blaming, and they are perpetrated by communities and more often than not by the services servicing those communities as well. The fourth thing we have focused on is that domestic and family violence referral pathways in New South Wales are unclear and there are major gaps in service provision. In 2015, where you are located in New South Wales directly affects how you are supported after experiencing domestic and family violence. There is no consistent approach across the State.

The fifth thing we focused on is quality service coordination and the required nature of sustained and strategic investment. There has been an increase in demand and the impact of Federal funding cuts is yet to be discovered. The sixth thing we focused on is the lack of common practice standards across the community sector. Guidelines and practice standards for the domestic and family violence sector need to be developed for the sector and by the sector.

There are four other areas that we focused on. The first is the lack of affordable housing for women, children and young people escaping domestic violence. Women have lower incomes, spend longer periods out of the workforce, and for women experiencing domestic and family violence the impact is amplified. We need flexible, responsive trauma centred support. That is needed to help women rebuild their lives after experiencing domestic and family violence. Fragmented accountability for domestic and family violence and data that cannot be aggregated across Government departments or programs is a huge issue. Between 2007 and 2012, 768 children died. Family and Community Services [FACS] knew that domestic and family violence was prevalent in 61 per cent of those cases. There is a lack of strategic planning and it is just not good enough.

The impact of disadvantage, poverty and intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal communities is well known. The rate of reported domestic violence for Indigenous women is six times higher than that of non-Indigenous women. We need a long-term cross-departmental New South Wales Aboriginal family violence strategy—it is imperative. The last thing that we focused on is consistent perpetrator accountability. We need a strong, well-resourced and trauma-informed justice response. Women, children and young people impacted by domestic and family violence are a significant proportion of clients serviced within communities. It is therefore incomprehensible that we would not consider funding ongoing strategic processes that promote genuine capacity building within the sector and address the needs of clients impacted by trauma.

If evidence-based, place-based approaches are to be implemented, they have to include ongoing, sufficient, dedicated resources for NGO capacity building—a critical driver for improved outcomes for those at risk. If we are truly to place women, children and young people impacted by violence at the centre of our responses, government planning and resources must reflect and respond to local need. Ultimately, I close by saying: For a woman escaping domestic violence in New South Wales, their geographical location and the quality of local service interactions should not be a determinant of their safety.

CHAIR: Ms Trower, would you like to table this document and confirm it as a public document, then we can distribute it to all members?

Ms TROWER: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you very much for your submission. We appreciate the time that you have taken to submit that. My background is in nursing, so I am interested in looking at service coordination to see how we can do things a little better. I am very interested in what you have said about better measurement and better accountability. From your point of view, from the sphere of domestic violence, how could government organisations, NGOs and all the different service providers be better and more closely coordinated?

Ms WILLIS: We have a number of systems in the country that we could very closely look at. For example, at a Federal level all of the services for targeting Aboriginal communities have been brought together under the Prime Minister and Cabinet. I think there were 16 different programs spread across eight or nine different departments—do not quote me on that, but I think it was something like that—and they were all brought together under one administration within Prime Minister and Cabinet. So that is, I think, the first step.

What we have in New South Wales when it comes to sexual assault and domestic violence is a spread of responsibility across, certainly, police, Family and Community Services, Health and Attorney General's, and then there are numbers of other bits and pieces all over the place. At that strategic coordination level we have no coordination; we have silos. And often—over and over again—we find that one department is doing exactly the same as another or is doing the complete opposite in the same space and they are not talking to each other about it. So that is, I think, the first thing: we need to have that high-level coordination brought together under the Premier's control within his department.

The second thing is that we need to get rid of the divide between the services provided by non-government organisations [NGOs] and government agencies. They all need to be on the ground together at the start of a process, rather than government services waiting for the final sign-off of documents before consulting the NGO sector. Non-government organisations should be brought in in the first place, to look at the blueprints, the strategies and the key issues, to work with government to find solutions. An example of that is the yellow card process, which was initiated by communities. Communities, government and non-government services worked together on the domestic violence liaison committees to develop the yellow card concept. That underpinned the court support program that is being rolled out across the State.

We often talk about wraparound services. I am not a fan. There are opportunities in some locations but not in others. We need locally based solutions. Case coordination is also necessary, and that requires strategic positioning from the top down. It is also necessary to build the capacity of the different groups. Some NGOs do not get on with other NGOs. Some government departments do not get on with other government departments, and there are government NGOs that do not get on. We all need to get over that because we are here to provide services to those who are vulnerable as a result of domestic violence and sexual assault, and that must be our priority. The way to start doing that is to get people together to talk about solutions, rather than continuing to maintain separate funding, domestic violence or sexual assault services, criminal justice responses, trauma responses and housing responses. Let us put them all together and think about how to plan and coordinate. That will be more efficient and provide better services.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms TROWER: You mentioned data. We do not collect common data across New South Wales. We cannot aggregate statistics or compare one program with another. Last week I saw an outcomes framework that has been developed for specialist homelessness services. It has not been done in the same way as the frameworks for other programs. That requires an NGO with multiple programs to report in completely different ways. NGOs work with clients who often have the same issues. They are the same types of cohorts, but there is no collective vision. It would be nice to have statistics so that we could talk about improving upon them or so that we could talk about domestic and family violence in New South Wales in a more grounded way.

CHAIR: The Government has talked a lot about data collection, so watch this space. I now invite my colleagues to ask questions.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In your submission you strongly criticised the way that the competitive tendering process pits one organisation against another. What are some of the negative impacts of that, and what is the solution?

Ms WILLIS: The solution is to start with a statewide plan that says, "In this population, with this group of people, with these particular characteristics, these are the services that need to be provided." We know that organisations may already have been working in that area for 10, 20 or 50 years. They might be able to provide 50 or 90 per cent of the services that are required, but not 100 per cent. Rather putting in place something new, why not put the resources into working with that organisation to build its capacity to meet the demands of a growing and changing evidence-based system? That would build on existing knowledge, rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater every time a new plan is implemented, which is what competitive tendering does.

Ms TROWER: Small communities can have more than 50 services that have been encouraged to collaborate and coordinate their service delivery to individuals in that community. Competitive tendering requires them to turn around the relationships that they have developed—which is really hard to do in some areas—to chase a small amount of money. They then become competitors. That creates a negative environment in which to foster collaboration, which is ultimately what is needed in small communities. Rural and regional

areas depend on services having a good quality relationship. Competitive tendering turns that into a negative process.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You want to take into account the experience and contribution of an organisation, rather than just the dollars and cents.

Ms TROWER: Absolutely. It is about cultural change. The idea is to be able to support people. We do the same thing with families that experience domestic and family violence, and it is how we develop relationships with other services. We are respectful and culturally appropriate. We use a trauma-centred approach. Those factors need to be taken in consideration when thinking about how to make collaboration work. There is ultimately a power relationship between a government service that provides funds and an NGO. We talk about the abuse of power in domestic violence. We are trying to create a positive process, which cannot be done in an environment where there is a toxic undertone.

Ms WILLIS: The other problem with competitive tendering is that it often becomes a procurement process. It is about widgets or, to be crude, bums on seats. That is not a measure of quality service provision. Every individual who has experienced violence needs a tailored program to meet their particular needs. They must be at the centre of that and have considerable say in how it works. We know from trauma research that a client-centred, client empowerment approach is the only way to assist a person towards recovery. That is nationally and internationally accepted practice in addressing trauma.

That method takes time and requires quality intervention. People need to know what they are doing. It requires resourcing and support. If the attitude is "You have 5.4 minutes per client", we can do that but we will not make one ounce of difference to the safety and recovery of people who have experienced violence. The procurement process does not work in this instance.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are you saying that the reporting standards set by government departments are not only onerous for NGOs but inefficient in achieving the desired outcomes? Is the problem the time it takes to report against the standards?

Ms WILLIS: My position is that we have two major responsibilities. The first is to provide high-quality services to those who have a right to expect nothing less. In doing that, we are spending a lot of money, so the second responsibility is to be accountable and transparent. I do not have a problem with reporting processes. I find it difficult that we are required to report on widgets: "How many women did you see? How long did you see them for? How many occasions of service were there? What was their age range? What was their income?" That is all useful information; I am not arguing against that. But it does not monitor the quality of service delivery or the outcomes for that person as they move towards safety and recovery.

As Sophie mentioned, a number of robust evaluation processes can be used in service provision. They evaluate both the process and the outcome to ensure that we do what we say and that there are good outcomes for clients. Unfortunately, there is a lack of coordination of the types of evaluation that organisations use, which results in everybody and their dog deciding on the outcome measures or the process measures. Organisations may use a certain model but change aspects of it to fit their system, which immediately destroys the robustness of that research.

If we are looking at having a statewide approach to data collection, it cannot be only about collecting widgets. High-quality, robust, internationally accepted evaluation process and outcome measures should be implemented. That will ensure that we provide good quality services. That is the job. It will also allow us to identify where we need to improve the quality of services and develop an enhanced capacity to ensure that we are doing what we should be doing.

Ms TROWER: I will give an example. A domestic and family violence service in New South Wales might have money for specialist homelessness services. It might have money from the Brighter Futures program. It might have Children, Youth and Family Support money. It could have funding from Justice or from Women NSW. That is how it looks across the State. A small NGO with different buckets of funding has to report in a different way for each bucket. That is not conducive to efficiency.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Presumably you would also have to go through an application process for each amount of funding.

Ms TROWER: Of course. Then every one to three years we have to reapply, therefore destroying important relationships that have formed within that time. One recommendation for domestic and family violence services is that we need a minimum of five-year terms for this allocation program funding, not only to build the capacity but also to build the workforce. I was in the Shoalhaven on Tuesday. They have one worker who was doing trauma counselling for domestic and family violence victims, but since her workload has increased in the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service [WDVCAS] she is no longer doing that. She is trying to recruit for one position to provide that counselling and is finding it extremely difficult.

The workforce in the family and domestic violence sector is specialised but it is very small. You cannot build a workforce so you cannot sustain a workforce, and you cannot treat people with specialist services unless you give them that time. We often find out about the continuation of funding a month, two weeks a week before it ends. It is not good enough. We lose good staff all the time. Jobs in this space in rural and regional areas are available but they are very hard to fill. If you are going for a job with a non-government organisation [NGO] and a government job and they are similar roles—it is similar in the child protection space—you would go with the security and the increased—

Ms WILLIS: The extra \$40,000 a year.

Ms TROWER: The extra \$40,000 a year. We use a specialised workforce, and that is just not right.

Ms WILLIS: As an example, I have provided 23 reports for three key grants in our organisation in the last 12 months. Eleven of those were in the month of July.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That was for one agency?

Ms WILLIS: Two agencies, three different funding programs.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I feel it is a bit like groundhog day. We have to be honest. The holy grail of service coordination between Government organisations and non-government organisations and the challenges between population-based services and geography-based services is not something that anyone is doing well. I will give you the opportunity to point to some places where you think there has been progress so that the Committee can look at some good examples that have worked not only for the time they were funded but also perhaps have had more longevity in respect of change on the ground.

Ms TROWER: If you are looking at the It Stops Here reform and the idea of safer pathways, you may or may not be familiar with safety action meetings, which is a new process by which women and children are identified "at serious threat" by the police. That is a collaborative approach to be able to respond to people who have experienced domestic and family violence. If we are looking at that in isolation—there are six locations across the State—that might be a really good process and it is good to identify anyone who is at serious threat, obviously because we need to help them immediately—they need an immediate response from the service sector—but if we are looking at it in respect of being able to move forward as we go through all the changes across the State and there will be more safer pathways locations, we ultimately hit a brick wall because there are certain types of services that are available in areas to facilitate that process.

I will give you an example. A young woman in one of these areas has three children. They have been appropriately responded to and seen as "at serious threat". They are at immediate risk of grievous bodily harm or death. This is a serious situation. If you are in a rural, regional or remote area and you are a young woman with children in that situation and you need housing and counselling or trauma counselling for your children, you simply do not have access to that. The big wall that we are hitting consistently is affordable housing, which everybody will tell you throughout their submissions. We can help people so far, but for them to rebuild their lives and recover from trauma they need to have safe accommodation. When you are on a low income or have no income and you have children as well, you are put in an impossible situation. Older women and younger women are facing the realistic situation that there is nowhere for them to go.

We might have transitional properties. We can provide temporary accommodation. At the moment the Link2Home or the DV Line provides one night's accommodation until they get more formalised support. It is just not enough. We cannot then provide them with longer term accommodation to do that and the idea of being able to move them into the private rental market is a complete fallacy. How can you do that when you are earning not very much money or no money at all? Therefore, the ultimate barrier to leaving an abusive relationship is that you no longer have accommodation. If you are with your partner or husband and they are

paying for accommodation or they are significantly contributing to that, you cannot leave because of the idea of staying there and having a home—the home you have built as a family. However you can no longer stay. If we are helping them in these situations, we help them immediately, so we sort out their immediate needs. A safety action meeting is one example where that is working well, but we are hearing there are significantly more cases coming through the safety action meetings. Karen mentioned 5.4 minutes. That might be the only time allocated every two weeks to women at serious threat. We can help them at that time but we struggle to help them after that. They need long-term sustainable change to recover from that abuse.

Ms WILLIS: The national plan to reduce violence against women and their children is the other structural process going on, which is nowhere near quick enough for me, but I am a bit impatient in this space. I think it has the potential to continue to have a positive impact, perhaps a little bit by accident. Perhaps if it was by design it would move a bit faster. The national plan says that violence against women is now sexual assault, family and domestic violence; it is not two separate things. So services like 1800RESPECT have been established to work across those two areas. This is the first time that was done. Before we had sexual assault services and we had domestic family violence services and never the twain shall meet.

Not directly as a result of that but certainly as a result of the national plan there is now far more discussion across the two areas that this is actually a trauma response, regardless of whether the trauma is a result of domestic and family violence or sexual assault as trauma. So that is what we need to be working on. What we are seeing now, which is one thing that has occurred directly from that, is the establishment of the NSW Women's Alliance, which is an alliance of NGO services from the sexual assault and domestic violence sector, lead agencies in those spaces. Women are getting together on a monthly basis to talk about ideas and concepts.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Does that include Government agencies?

Ms WILLIS: No, that is NGO services.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Has there been an attempt to get those together?

Ms WILLIS: We invite our Government colleagues to meetings on a regular basis and have discussions about where we can work collaboratively with each other but at this stage it is an NGO alliance.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Thank you for your submission. I think we could spend the entire inquiry looking at your important area. I commend the work you do. In your submission, you state:

The move towards the localisation of service delivery in NSW's FaCS districts is a step towards placed-based planning and improved local coordination ...

Will you expand upon that? Macquarie Street from on high cannot deliver the services on the ground. I would like to explore that with you.

CHAIR: I am conscious of the time and there are still other questions. If you could keep your answers relevant to the question, that would be great.

Ms TROWER: Localisation is something that is happening across the State. In each district across the State they have much more control over how services are delivered and in what way they are developed and funded and resourced. There are benefits that come with localisation. Obviously it is important to have local knowledge and to incorporate that, but the losses that we find in that regard is like I mentioned before—your postcode should not determine your safety. As a result of localisation we have a very different type of domestic and family violence sector that has developed in all of these areas. Traditionally that could be because of the way funding was allocated and now they are trying to make it a more equitable spread of funding, and we understand that. Ultimately, instead of liaising with someone through the central office of Family and Community Services [FACS] about domestic and family violence issues, which we do, we now have to liaise with 15 different directors who have their own ideas and understandings about the gendered nature of violence.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Do the resources not concentrate where higher need is apparent, through localisation?

Ms TROWER: Localisation would identify that. What we are saying is because there is no bigger vision how that works we are going to have a disparate response to domestic violence.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You are talking about the State plan?

Ms TROWER: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Centralised administration, localised response I think is what you are suggesting.

Ms TROWER: Yes, and that works at the moment in principle, but in practice it is a different reality.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: There is no centralised strategy.

Ms WILLIS: With minimum standards for service provision.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for coming along and providing us with the opportunity to ask you some questions. The issue of endeavouring at a macro level, with the Government, to better coordinate how across departments these matters are dealt with, your submission is that it really has to be taken into the Department of Premier and Cabinet to be coordinated. Is that your submission?

Ms TROWER: Absolutely. That is one of the top recommendations in the Safer State. Premier and Cabinet need to drive this; it is a leadership issue as well. Elders within those communities as well as politicians have a very real responsibility to be able to push that message through. Late last year in 2014, as a result of the Going Home, Staying Home reforms, through the media, women who were impacted by violence were hearing that there was nowhere for them to go. That is an inappropriate, unintended consequence as a result of a reform process. Those things should not happen.

Ms WILLIS: In our organisation about a month ago now the Premier spoke very strongly about violence against women and his Government's concern. I think over the next week we probably had over two dozen callers who indicated they had heard that speech.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In terms of getting the actual cooperation across the key government departments that deal in this area, are you saying that that essentially needs to be brought together in the office of the Premier and Cabinet to make that work properly as opposed to just trying to coordinate them to do the work better?

Ms TROWER: At the moment the portfolio of Women has been moved into Health and, obviously, with the Attorney General's department and Family and Community Services they are all working in the space of dealing with that. So the only way to bring that all together—and that is one of the suggestions that we have in our blueprint—is to put that into Premier and Cabinet and drive that process so that there is coordination across government departments. That thing we were talking about, data collection and aggregatable data outcomes, they are all tied together so that we know what we are doing, how we are doing it and when we are doing it better and when we need to correct that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You used the example of the Commonwealth level Indigenous Affairs pulling into Prime Minister and Cabinet. Internationally speaking, are you familiar with any jurisdictions where this is done, in your judgement, quite well, where you have a centralised focus by a single point inside governments to deal with the issue of domestic and family violence?

Ms TROWER: The United Nations recognises that nobody is doing this perfectly. They had quite a good look at all of those. I think that there are probably some jurisdictions, such as in Canada and in the UK where there are similar types of systems, but nothing that would necessarily relate to New South Wales and how that works.

Ms WILLIS: I suppose two things that are sort of to the side but may be useful: certainly in Canada and in Victoria they have established independent bodies that report directly to, say, VicHealth in Victoria where they have done quite a lot of social research and social action research that has been reported directly. That is under the control of Premier. So, as a result of that, there have been some improvements in coordination and also some understanding of where there are problems. But, as Sophie said, let us make New South Wales the leader in this space; let us have the United Nations hold us up as the example.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The issues around the Going Home, Staying Home reforms drew sharp focus on the problems with competitive tendering. I understand that the Government is considering more processes through neighbourhood centres and the old community services grants program-type funding. Given that experience, are you seeing any change in the approach from the Government in relation to starting the joint planning that you talked about earlier—sitting in an area, mapping what is already there before going ahead—or do you anticipate we are just going to see another tender dropped out sometime soon with exactly the same problems?

Ms TROWER: I think that this time around, particularly the Department of Family and Community Services have been very wary of the criticism of the Going Home, Staying Home reforms. I think that there are really big lessons. Before the Going Home, Staying Home reform there was the community services grants program reform, which had a huge impact on the way services were delivered across New South Wales, and that in itself had lessons that were learnt through that process—I having been involved in that process—that were not applied in the Going Home, Staying Home process. There was a big disconnect between lessons learnt and delivering another reform.

I think that another reform after this—the early intervention reform that is intended to come shortly—there are lots of lessons learnt in that regard. I think that there will be a lot more caution provided to that. There should be genuine engagement, not just consultation. I think some of the things we saw through Going Home, Staying Home were consultations held on the Friday and papers released on the Monday. That is not an exaggeration; that actually happened. I think there is a genuine feeling—and Domestic Violence NSW were involved in some of these discussions—that there is a shift towards being more inclusive in the engagement process with non-government organisations. But there will still need to be a level of accountability to how that happens that continues throughout.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: In terms of that engagement, do we work beyond engagement—to joint planning? Is there anywhere where we are doing joint planning?

Ms WILLIS: This morning, while at the first meeting of the day I had a phone call—I have only got a message and have not got back to the person—from Minister Goward's office inviting me, and I am assuming also the CEO of Domestic Violence NSW, to sit on an intergovernmental committee to look at developing a blueprint for the prevention of sexual assault and domestic violence in New South Wales. We did know that the Minister was interested in involving us in that. Initially there was discussion about, "We will develop a blueprint and then we will consult", and we were saying, "No, no, no—get us in on that", so that is really exciting.

Also, NSW Health have also been looking at how the NGO services—mental health, sexual assault, women's health services, ACON services and so on—are funded. Minister Skinner has been quite clear that the NGO liaison committee that has been operating for two years now, which is government and NGOs working together, will be part of that consultation process all the way through. She has been quite clear that they have learnt some lessons from the Family and Community Services' experience of Going Home, Staying Home.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: From your experience, did the changes to the provocation law provide any positive help for women?

Ms WILLIS: I think we have got a little way to go before we know. As you know, from when an event occurs to when it hits the court to when we get an outcome is usually about an 18-month process. So since those laws have only recently come into being, there are probably not a lot of matters that have been heard under the laws at this stage. With any change in laws, I am always really keen to see the Legal Aid Commission put some research around that. Hopefully that is going to be part of that process. We do not know yet.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: In your submission I was interested to read that you identified a service delivery gap in your sector, that is, the perpetrators. You say, "There is currently no consistent referral pathway or service access in NSW for perpetrators of domestic and family violence". So you have identified a gap—I had not even thought of that. How do you feed that into the higher level echelons to see if you can get some services in that sector, being the peak body?

Ms TROWER: I guess from the most basic level, the idea that courts are mandating that men go through these behaviour change processes and there are no services—there are only 28 locations around the State that actually provide that—the idea that if you are being mandated to do it, people are under the assumption that those services are actually there, and they are not. That is a big concern.

Ms WILLIS: There has been a lot of research and evidence around behaviour change programs. Most of that work has been in the United States; it has been done on court-mandated programs or programs that are done within criminal justice processes and it has been done in group work environments. So it is of a very narrow space. Part two of it is that a lot of the evaluation is done by the people who are running the programs. I do not know about you but if I am getting paid \$250 an hour to run a program I am not going to say it does not work, am I? So there are a couple of problems and it is quite difficult to find some robust research around those programs.

I suppose the space that we are particularly interested in looking at in New South Wales is that what we do know about behaviour is our cognitions for females pretty much get set in concrete about 22, 23; for men, 24, 25. If we can identify behaviours before they get to that age and we can provide good quality interventions—one-on-one and in a group environment—we could quite possibly stop or reduce the violence before it gets to the place where people are going to end up in the criminal justice process.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: How do you feed the need for that service or increase the resources for that particular area of yours into government decision-making?

Ms TROWER: We strongly advocate that the men's behaviour change program network which is established in New South Wales is very small. This year it has suffered a big cut in funding. We advocate for minimum standards being consistently applied across the State and growing that area of work. We believe that that is of utmost importance. One of our big recommendations is that, in men's behaviour change programs, minimum standards should be reassessed at this stage. They have been in place for approximately 18 months or two years now. We also need to grow that area of work. We are making an assumption that that service is available across the State when, in fact, it is not.

Ms WILLIS: I would be hoping that the blueprint that the Minister is talking about will improve that holistically, looking at changing behaviours of those who use violence in relationships.

CHAIR: Ms Willis and Ms Trower, thank you very much for your time in coming in, and for the incredible work that you do. I hope that your consultation working towards the blueprint with the Minister is really fruitful. My heartfelt thanks go to you for your time and for your submission. We really appreciate it. If members have additional questions for you the committee secretariat will forward these to you. We request that any response be provided within 21 days if that is okay.

Ms TROWER: I thank honourable members for having us here today.

(The witnesses withdrew)

ILAN KATZ, Professor, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to start by making an opening statement. Please keep it to no longer than a couple of minutes so that we will have the time to ask you questions.

Professor KATZ: Our submission was about a piece of research that we undertook last year for the Department of Premier and Cabinet here in New South Wales. The topic of the research was the exchange of personal information by government or non-government departments or agencies. We looked at three specific case scenarios: the children welfare situation; exchange of information between schools when children move from one school to another; and, thirdly, the housing and accommodation support initiative, which is an adult mental health initiative, where people with mental health problems are housed by housing agencies and provided with support. We also looked at the Australian and international literature around information-sharing between agencies. I have done quite a lot of other research in this area but this particular submission was around this specific piece of research, which I will talk about today. I will not go into the findings, or anything like that, now. You can ask me about what we have found. I will comment on it as we go along.

CHAIR: Thank you for your document. It is an incredible document with a lot of information, and we really appreciate the work that you have done. I will start by asking you what you think are the barriers to information sharing between government and non-government agencies, and some solutions that you think we could be working towards.

Professor KATZ: From the literature we identified three domains or areas of barriers to and facilitators of information sharing. Those are: firstly, the policy or legal context in which information is exchanged; secondly, the technological situation or the way that information is held; and, thirdly, the organisational cultures within different agencies. We found that the third one, the organisational cultures, is the most important barrier to information exchange. Although you have to have appropriate legislation in place, and appropriate guidance—and technology can help or hinder information exchange—one of the barriers is around organisations or individual practitioners who are risk averse.

We found one or two issues, which I may talk about later, where there are technological problems. Where people are risk averse, the organisation may give the message to people practising that they should not share information with other organisations because it might affect their organisations. In other words, the organisation comes first and the client comes second in those situations. Organisations may have an over-determined view of privacy. So they interpret privacy in a way that means that they could never talk to anybody about anything to do with their clients because they are patients or clients and therefore any information is only for the organisation. The law does allow you to talk to other agencies about your clients, so that is a misinterpretation of the law, but some people believe that that is what the law says.

Those were, essentially, the main barriers. I will go quickly into the technological barriers. Those did not seem to be so important, partly because the technology has moved on so much over the years and this issue has been the same for several decades. There is a problem in New South Wales, particularly in health, where there is no common health record, and each health organisation has a separate record. That was considered to be a significant barrier. In the child welfare area—I think this is also well known—the technology that Community Services keeps their records in, KiDS, is not fit for purpose. I think they have some money to upgrade that. The information system for the wellbeing units which are established in education, health and police, is based on KiDS, and was therefore seen to be a barrier as well.

The only policy or legal barrier we found was that in the children's area there have been recent legislative changes which have facilitated information exchange. It is not so much the change in the law but the education around that change that facilitated better information exchange. In the adult sphere there has not been any change in legislation and therefore there was quite a lot of confusion around information exchange about adult clients—mentally ill people and people with disabilities, for example—because that degree of training and facilitation had not happened in that domain.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Of course, organisational culture is the hardest thing to change—policy legal do technological and require some capital upgrade. Is one possible solution a predisposition or an assumption that information should be disclosable to another agency unless it is specifically excluded from interagency use, perhaps by ministerial directive or a regulation?

Professor KATZ: I think that the key to information exchange—and actually we find quite pure practice in all these spheres around this—is to actually talk to the person before you exchange the information. So if you are concerned about a particular client rather than say, "Well, under section X, Y and Z I can disclose information", to say to the client, "Look, I think it is very important that the school knows this about your child", and explain why. In most situations that then facilitates appropriate information exchange. It builds up trust with the client and when you have got consent, there is no legal issue about exchanging information with the consent of the person involved. There are complexities—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is a fairly labour-intensive effort though?

Professor KATZ: It is.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Especially if there is the sort of large-scale transfer of information which would presumably be necessary to make the sorts of deficiencies that the previous witnesses were talking about?

Professor KATZ: Sorry, I did not hear the previous witnesses—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is okay.

Professor KATZ: But what I am talking about here is personal information about individual clients, patients or consumers where there is a concern and where a multiagency response or response by another agency is necessary for the clients, either for their safety or for better service provision. Obviously you cannot do what I have just said in every single case and there are cases where it can be dangerous to tell somebody that you are going to share information with somebody else—and I just heard a little bit about the last one. Domestic violence, for example, might be one situation like that.

In the school example that we looked: children are moving from one school to another and a child, for example, has committed a violent act in the previous school. The parent does not want to tell the next school because they do not want to give their child the reputation in the new school, but the school feels it important that the next school knows about it. In that situation it is better if the parent is actually informed, "Well, we think it is very important for your next school to know that."

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So it is information rather than an approval process necessarily?

Professor KATZ: Yes, we were talking about information exchange. That is right.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You were saying that some of the agencies are overreacting in not wanting to break the law or some requirement if they shared information. Has there been any interaction between those agencies and the Privacy Commissioner to have clarified what freedom is allowed; whether there is a great deal of freedom in sharing information to prevent this overreaction of secrecy?

Professor KATZ: Yes. We spoke to the Privacy Commissioner, in fact a couple of times, and people not do tend to approach the Privacy Commissioner under these circumstances. They were quite keen actually that more agencies do approach them because they are quite clear about when such information can be exchanged. In fact, we found that in South Australia the Ombudsman, who has this kind of responsibility, has produced some very, very good online guidance for agencies or for people who need to exchange information. The Privacy Commissioner here was quite keen when we spoke to her to do something quite similar here because in New South Wales there is no kind of central place that people can go to to get information about these sometimes very tricky situations.

Sometimes there is somebody within their school, hospital or something, sometimes there is not; and many people did not know who to go to to ask for advice about this situation. As I say, sometimes it is fairly straightforward, but there can be very, very tricky situations, particularly where third parties are involved and where it is not very clear-cut whether or not and what information should be exchanged.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Should guidelines be produced?

Professor KATZ: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Would you recommend that and could you produce those guidelines?

Professor KATZ: Yes. Guidelines could be produced. For example, in the child welfare situation, which is really my main area of research, when reporting to Community Services there is the reporters memorandum guidance and you could have something similar with information exchange. It is an online resource that people go through an algorithm and say, "If this happens, then you should do this and if not, get that." That, combined with the facility perhaps to approach the Privacy Commissioner in really tricky cases, would resolve a lot of the problems.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for coming along today to answer some of the Committee's questions. With respect to cross-border exchange of information, we are focused on how we can do this better in New South Wales—intrastate—but should we not be trying to deal with the national perspective as well? We know that population movement is frequent and common these days and has been growing over time. Is it important that we should be trying to drive this also at a national level or do you think that because New South Wales is such a large State our primary focus should be on improving things here in New South Wales?

Professor KATZ: The vast majority of situations are in New South Wales. Nevertheless, in certain locations actually there is a lot of cross-border information sharing and I know that there have been efforts to do this at a Commonwealth level in the child welfare area under the national framework for protecting Australia's children, so that is a Department of Social Services initiative. One of the things they have been doing is to try to facilitate better information exchange across borders—this is in the child protection area. They have made some progress and I think there have been some memorandums of understanding between New South Wales and Victoria, as well as Queensland.

But, yes, ideally there would be one regime that would cover the whole country because people do move around all the time and particularly as the more vulnerable people tend to move and the more dangerous people often move between jurisdictions. So that is the situation where information exchange across borders would be better. We did find that it is much more difficult to exchange information across jurisdictions.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I have one final question that is related. With respect to considerations in New South Wales, are there Commonwealth laws that need to be taken into account in critical areas on this issue of privacy?

Professor KATZ: Yes, there is a Commonwealth Privacy Act as well as New South Wales legislation and the New South Wales legislation has to take into account the Commonwealth legislation. That is what makes it very complex in some situations because you have Commonwealth legislation, New South Wales legislation, then you have guidance and policy documents and sometimes they are not exactly in alignment with each other. So it can be quite tricky in certain circumstances. In the majority of situations that does not occur but there are some examples where it can be very difficult because of these different legislative arrangements and each State and Territory has slightly different provisions as well.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Thank you, Professor. You touched on the not-for-profit sector competitive tendering reforms in New South Wales. Client information is intellectual property essentially in the sector now.

Professor KATZ: Yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Has that created an inhibition to share information about clients between not-for-profits, giving away a competitive advantage?

Professor KATZ: Yes, it has to a certain extent, but not in this particular area. When you get down to the issue that I am talking about now, which is about personal information about individual clients, that is not affected by competitive tendering.

On the other hand, in other work that we have done where you get agencies who shared broader data about themselves and how many clients—X, Y, Z—we have found that they have become quite protective of their own situation because, obviously, that then can have commercial implications. But that is not about the individuals; that is really about the agency and what they do, which is a slightly different issue.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Such as how many clients they have, and things like that?

Professor KATZ: Yes. Again, in the child welfare situation, all agencies are pushing towards—and I know the Government is pushing towards—outcome-based tendering, for example. Agencies themselves also are looking to measure outcomes of their interventions. Obviously, that is absolutely appropriate. But if you are an agency and you find that only 20 per cent or 30 per cent of your clients achieve the goals they set out to achieve—which is possible; it is very challenging in this area to achieve some of those situations—then you might be quite reluctant to share that with other agencies who may claim that 80 per cent of their clients achieve their goals, for example. Agencies are quite wary about sharing that sort of data, both with the Government and with each other.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is there a qualitative difference for disclosure purposes between agencies for information which the Government has obtained and information which the client has voluntarily disclosed? For example, my record of criminal convictions would be something which, presumably, is disclose-able between agencies because I have had no material input to into it and it is, if you like, created by public agencies; hence, other public agencies can use it. However, the number of times I might have checked myself into rehab and been unsuccessful for those programs is something which I might wish to tell to a social worker in the Department of Family and Community Services [DOCS] or to Health, but I might not want other agencies to know of that. Is there a qualitative difference, or do you think there should be a qualitative difference, in disclosure provisions between what is created by government and what is disclosed by the clients themselves?

Professor KATZ: Well, no, I do not think so because I think they both are information held about or by a particular individual. I think the issue there is not so much who generates the information but what it is going to be used for. I think routine disclosure of information like that is probably wrong: well, not wrong, but you would need very clear protocols about the circumstances under which information about people is disclosed between agencies. Firstly, how it is held by the other agency and what they use it for.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It may well be used to detriment. For example, if I told Health through a public health agency that I have a complete inability to make it through an alcohol rehabilitation program, DOCS might be absolutely keen to get their hands on that sort of information so that they can make a broad holistic decision on my ability to maintain my children.

Professor KATZ: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Whereas I might think that I only gave that information to Health for Health's purposes and it is going to work to my detriment. It might work to the advantage of my children, if I am incapable of looking after them.

Professor KATZ: You are identifying one of the tricky situations—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is why you are a professor and I am just a humble member of Parliament.

Professor KATZ: —which is about third party information. Actually, in a circumstance like yours, when it comes to the protection or the wellbeing of children chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons Act is quite clear that it would be justified. If an agency felt that that history was actually material to the protection or the wellbeing of a child, they would be justified in sharing that information, whatever you felt about it.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: "Felt" is a rather subjective term.

Professor KATZ: Or determine, I am sorry.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: "Determine" is still a subjective term. Maybe the problem is insuperable but I just wanted to flag to see if there is a way out of it.

Professor KATZ: Yes. There are always going to be grey areas. What you are raising is the question of the threshold.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Maybe that is where the Privacy Commissioner comes in.

Professor KATZ: DOCS or Community Services could claim that all information about anybody who has anything to do with the care of a child is relevant. You might argue that, actually, this is not actually relevant because that was 10 years ago and you have sorted your life out, and why do they need to know about this? That is where the Privacy Commissioner and others would come into play.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Dr Phelps was asking questions about where I am going with this question, too.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Great minds, Penny.

CHAIR: That is what it is.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am interested in what you speak of in relation to tensions about information sharing. It is very much from the perspective of the organisations themselves. I wonder if you can reflect a little on some of the issues that drive client resistance to sharing information. I think that Dr Phelps identified that quite well where there are competing tensions about wanting to be honest about particular issues, but there are significant implications about other agencies such as the police and Health as a result of the disclosure of that information and the way that it is shared. I am interested in what you know about how those can be overcome?

Professor KATZ: As we say in the report, I think the key to information sharing or appropriate information sharing is trust, and that is both trust between the agencies that are sharing information but in particular trust between the agency and the client. I think if the client understands, firstly, that the information is not going to be misused but is used for a specific purpose and for a purpose that is legitimate, then I think that overcomes some of the barriers. Going back to what I said before, if the worker explains to the client why the information is being exchanged and the purpose for which it is being used, that builds up that kind of trust.

I think what breaks down trust is when agencies do exchange the kind of information you were talking about, do not tell the person involved, and then the person finds out from some third person—"Oh, my child's school knew that I was in that rehab five years ago. How the hell did they know about that?" That is guaranteed to break down the trust with the school whereas if somebody said, "Look, I think it is very important that the school knows this or that", and you can discuss it with them—even if you disagree—it does build up a level of trust between people, I think. When people are suspicious it is either because they have personally had that experiences, which some people have had, or through gossip so they know of somebody or they think they know of somebody who knew somebody who at the school said something about them, or whatever it is.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I suspect it is an issue. In small communities I think it is a massive issue.

Professor KATZ: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: In relation to the number of people who are aware of your personal circumstances, I think anyone would be a bit hesitant about that. Is particularly groups? Some of the groups, particularly in the child protection space, are very disadvantaged. These people would have a high level of government intervention in their life. There might be DOCS, the police, Attorney-General's, and there is a whole lot going on there. Can you point to any research, other than the very sensible system that you have just outlined, that shows ways in which you can build trust or ameliorate some of those concerns for people in the system?

Professor KATZ: In some jurisdictions, particularly for example in the United Kingdom where I worked before I came here, they have a system whereby in the child protection system those agencies actually come together, sit around in a room with the family and discuss the issues with them, and come up with a joint plan with the family, I am not saying that that is a perfect solution because families can still feel intimidated and not very happy about it, but at least it is out there. At least they are actually talking to the relevant people from all the agencies involved. That is a routine process within child protection in the United Kingdom which we do not have in New South Wales. It is just one way of doing this.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You say in your submission that when a child moves to a new school the parents were to supply a comprehensive report on the child. Would the school transfer a file on that child to the new school with all the information?

Professor KATZ: Yes, but the parent is responsible for completing the information about the school and giving consent for the school to transfer information. So a school cannot transfer information to another school without parental consent for that information to be transferred, as far as I understand it.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Can they transfer a file?

Professor KATZ: I am not the lawyer on the team but that was my understanding.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: If the school has a file on a child can they transfer the file?

Professor KATZ: Not to my understanding, and that is particularly the case between sectors. So if a child is moving from Catholic to the State sector, for example, or independent to Catholic. So I think within the State sector that is much less of a problem because the files are kept centrally by the department, it is my understanding, whereas within other sectors it is kept in the school rather than by the department. Even within schools there are different levels of information in different components—that is another complexity here. For example, if a child sees the school psychologist, psychologists will keep their own notes and would not necessarily even make those notes available to the teacher or the principal. So it is not as if everybody in a school can just go and look at the file and find out anything about the child. There are levels of access to information, even within the specific school.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Is that policy or privacy law?

Professor KATZ: That is about privacy, but it is also about practice because children probably would not want to go to see the psychologist if they knew that everybody in the school could just look at their file.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I mean broader than the transfer of information from school to school and the limitations on that. Is that privacy law based restrictions or is it policy?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Department of Education policy.

Professor KATZ: No, that is based on Department of Education policy. Privacy law is a kind of overarching law that covers the whole thing but then each department has got their own procedures and what is underneath that.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Is it a good policy? Are you in favour of that policy?

Professor KATZ: Yes, what we found is that on the whole it works well. Going back to what I said before, the issue is we did not find any real problems with the legal side of it so the law in New South Wales seems to be quite appropriate but it is not applied uniformly across all situations. There are examples of very good practice and in the education sphere it is mainly good practice but there are cases where there are horror stories where information was not exchanged, for example, and children moved schools and then went on to beat up other people's children, who then sued the school. It can get very messy in certain circumstances. And that is not because of a problem with the law; it is a problem around interpreting the law by particular principals or people at the school.

CHAIR: So it is not so much that the law needs to be changed; it is about educating people on the appropriate use of the law that is the barrier at the moment?

Professor KATZ: That is right, yes. That is what we found particularly in the child welfare area where there has been a change in the law and that has been uniformly welcomed within that sector.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In terms of the policy that sits beneath the legislation with respect to government departments, with the work you did across the areas you looked at, was their comity in the policy documents that were being used to inform the people who work within the departments about a clear explanation of what the law provides for? Did you find that there were some differences? If you did, perhaps that might add to some of the reasons for sharing information.

Professor KATZ: As I said before, we found that some agencies have got quite good guidance but there is not a kind of one-stop shop within New South Wales for information exchange across agencies. So that

was our recommendation that there should be a web site or some guidance that cuts across different agencies. This is particular, for example, in the non-government sector where you have multiple non-government organisations, each with their own policies and procedures, but there is no really clear-cut guidance across the sector as to the appropriate way to respond. Some kind of central guidance, plus advice, a place where people can go for advice is what we thought would be appropriate.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Who should do that?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you believe that information gathered by non-government organisations should also fit into this broader web of information disclosure? Would it be a one-way process to government or a two-way process of government to non-government organisations as well?

Professor KATZ: It is already part of that. In all the scenarios that we looked at, say, for example, at schools it is not only about exchange of information with schools but many of those children interact with other agencies, firstly government agencies like Housing and the Department of Community Services, of course, but also many are involved with non-government organisations, similarly, obviously in child welfare and adult mental health. So non-government agencies are involved in all these situations. If they are providing human services then that information has a similar status in relation to the issue of information exchange to government agencies. The law is different as it applies to non-government agencies but the principles of the exchanging of information are quite similar.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But you only exchange it with the head agency for which you are contracted?

Professor KATZ: No, sometimes non-government agencies exchange information between each other. If you have got a particular family with the father going to one service and the mother is going to some other service and the children to a third service then they might feel that it is important to exchange information between themselves. The provisions, as I understand it, of the legislation apply in those situations.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You outlined what should be done to have guidelines. Who should do that?

Professor KATZ: I guess the most appropriate person would be the Privacy Commissioner. That is the best place to do something like that.

CHAIR: Thank you for your incredible body of work, which the Committee is really grateful to receive as part of this inquiry. If the Committee has any additional questions the Secretariat will forward them to you and we request that a response would be provided within 21 days to the Committee?

Professor KATZ: Of course.

(The witness withdrew)

JULIE PRIDEAUX, Executive Director, Advocacy and Strategic Communications, Jesuit Social Services, and

TONY VINSON, Report Author, Dropping Off the Edge, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today. Would you like to start by making a short statement? If so, please keep it to no more than a couple of minutes to allow us time for questions.

Ms PRIDEAUX: On behalf of Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, I thank you for the opportunity to come and discuss our report with you today. As you may know, this is the fourth of four Dropping Off the Edge reports over a period of roughly 15 years. The first two reports concentrated on New South Wales and Victoria, and the subsequent two have addressed the national picture. But, as Professor Vinson will explain, these are not comparative pictures; they are State snapshots, basically. We are extremely concerned at the similarities of findings across the 15 years that we have been doing these reports. Professor Vinson will speak in much more depth about that, but you can see from the information we have given you that the findings are persistent and entrenched disadvantage in these communities. As Professor Vinson will explain, some of the communities move about a bit, but essentially we are looking at the same picture over a very long period of time. This is a real concern to our agencies.

We have developed what you have in front of you, an advocacy statement that says to you that we need a long-term horizon to resolve this problem, that it is complex, that it requires governments across government electoral cycles to address, that it needs a collaborative approach and a community-driven approach because each community will have a different set of issues and a different set of problems. We would call on governments to work closely with those communities to find those solutions. We have talked in our advocacy statement about tailored, targeted and integrated solutions. We think we are not only addressing social issues, community development issues and coordinated service issues, but economic development issues that require individual community and macro responses. So Tony is a much better person to talk to about the findings and also some of the theory that sits behind that sort of advocacy position so I will hand over to him.

Professor VINSON: As mentioned by my colleague, there have been four studies of a comparable nature over a 15-year period. Initially they focused on Victoria and New South Wales but later extended to the whole of Australia. The method that we have used has been to go to the literature, to our experience and to other research conducted and ask, "What are the tools that will help to open up this subject of the concentration or otherwise of disadvantage at a community level?" On that basis, there are 22 indicators that have been used in the most recent report—all of which there is literature support for in the sense that these matters covered by the indicators compromise life opportunities for those caught up with them.

The next thing to say about New South Wales is that we have used 621 postcode areas as the basis of the study. So what we have done is to apply 21 indicators in New South Wales. As it turned out, and through no fault of the Department of Family and Community Services, there was a delay in getting information on one of the indicators—"confirmed maltreatment of children". What has been highlighted is that, as with all other jurisdictions in the country with the exception of the Northern Territory, you only need a relatively small number of locations to account for a very substantial proportion of the top ranking places across the whole of the jurisdiction. To make that a bit more concrete, 6 per cent of the postcodes in New South Wales will account for 49.5 per cent of the top ranking places across all of those indicators.

When you look at the places that are multiply disadvantaged a certain profile appears, which has marked similarities to those in the rest of the country. In those areas that are most likely to have multiple disadvantages you will find high rates of criminal conviction, unemployment, domestic violence, prison admissions, lack of post school qualifications, juvenile offending, and young adults not in full-time work or education and training. They are the most prominent of the indicators which cluster within the multiply disadvantaged areas.

This very brief synopsis will conclude, as far as my initial statement is concerned, by looking at a statistical means that we have employed on each of the four occasions to compact a whole set of rankings and ratings for areas down to a single index that tells you about the vulnerability of each location to the wide range of different forms of disadvantage. It is a technical matter which I could go into, but I suspect that you will not want me to. It simply sums across all of the different indicators and gives a single figure to tell you what the position of that place is. When you do that, you produce lists on that basis, which you already have, to which we

attach the greatest importance in terms of the 12 most disadvantaged places in each of the jurisdictions. That is putting it generally.

For New South Wales the figure is at page 4 of the "Dropping off the edge" report summary. The most compelling thing about those ratings, particularly the first 12, is that nine of the 12 places were on the same shortlist 15 years ago. So there has not been much movement. The other three are still highly ranked but just not within that first bracket of the top 12 places. In many other ways there has been sustained evidence of the slow-to-move nature of these rankings. We have used correlation coefficients in the past and found coefficients of a scale that you do not ordinarily experience in social affairs—showing that not much changes between each of the periods when the studies have been conducted. There are things that could be said about what needs to be done, but I am sure you are going to elicit that from us in discussion.

Let me say just one further thing. We make a case for looking at this difficulty in terms of not only the needs of individuals and families, which is the common way we talk about it, but also the overall community as an entity in its own right. We have evidence from Victoria in particular that there are qualitative improvements or changes in the degree of social cohesion within an area when you have people involved in exercises, no matter how slight to begin with, which develop what the researchers now call collective efficacy—that is, a conviction amongst people that they are not condemned to live permanently under these conditions and that their children in particular can advance. I should add that the picture even this time is not one of total unmitigated gloom. Here and there you can find places which have had a history of ranking highly on the indicators but where National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] test results show you that something is beginning to happen, particularly at the year 3 level. I shall stop there.

CHAIR: I would love to ask you some questions, and I am sure other Committee members would too. Professor Vinson, thank you for this incredible body of work. It really is incredibly informative. Picking up on your last point about education and NAPLAN results, you have given us an amazing amount of evidence about the problems and the issues and how they intertwined. I am interested in what your opinion is on recommendations to come out of this Committee whereby we can start addressing those things through service coordination. Is education one of the things that you feel could change the community? I love the way you talked about the community.

Professor VINSON: Yes. I had the privilege, a few years ago now, of chairing an inquiry—a community-based one really, but with great collaboration from the political sector—into the public education system in New South Wales. I have had a pretty colourful and extensive work life, reaching even to the headship of the NSW Department of Corrective Services. But I have seldom, if ever, been pulled up as sharply as I was to see little three- and four-year-olds who were, by virtue of them totally lacking in the precursors of education—knowing what a book is, knowing what to do with a pencil, giving a little attention to somebody who is trying to explain something to them—turning up to commence their formal education and not being able to sit.

It was to the point where other students, particularly in far-flung parts of the State, would say to me confidentially, "If you want to improve things, get rid of him, him and him." There were not many "hers" included, the Committee will be pleased to hear. What they were alluding to was that from the very beginning these children were set up to fail. When that happens they can, to use a colloquialism, get up the noses of not only their teachers and others in official positions but also their fellow students, who find their displays of frustration a total distraction to education.

I think it is sensible and appropriate for me to name a place here today. I have been following the wellbeing of a place in southern Newcastle, Windale, for 40 years now, and seldom has there been a sign of progress. What has delighted me has been to see that out of the 621 postcodes that we have looked at, for year 3 reading results you have to go all the way down to about 500 now to place Windale. I look at what has been happening in that place. During a period of rather intense interest on the part of the education department and with the very strong involvement of the regional director and all connected with the school, what happened was that the parents got totally involved in the school with listening to the kids read. The men who did not feel they were up to that would work on ground works, but you got this closeness of contact between the school as a hub of the community and the families, supported then by a whole lot of different services that operated out from the school.

All this lies behind this really important breakthrough—not a breakthrough in the sense that all the other problems have gone away, but the next generation in that location is on a happier course. Those kids were brought up to the school when they were three, familiarised with what goes on in school, encouraged to take an

interest—and the parents, of course. I think I will probably stop at that point. To me, the important thing is getting youngsters off to being at least somewhere near taws, somewhere near the starting line. Rather than just letting them come in and, despite the best efforts that I have witnessed of people in the school system, never managing to bridge that gap so that other problems overlay the education per se. And by the end of mid-primary one's mind goes to: "How sad. We'll be dealing with these kids in another sphere later."

CHAIR: Looking at that vulnerability within a family and with the children, perhaps agencies need to share information and say, "Look, these children may be at risk. We need to make sure they get to good early childhood education to start breaking that cycle."

Professor VINSON: Yes. These services need to be clustered around the school. I have had the experience of setting up a mentoring scheme at an inner city school here in Sydney. What you can do is attract the attention that supplements the goodwill and the best efforts of the teachers—no complaints there, as far as I am concerned.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is that Darlington primary?

Professor VINSON: No, that was—what do you call it? I am having what they call a senior's moment.

Ms PRIDEAUX: Don't worry about that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I have those all the time. It is Friday.

CHAIR: If I had half your brain power, I would be happy, Professor.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Take that on notice.

Professor VINSON: I will think of it in a moment.

Ms PRIDEAUX: Can I just make one more comment in relation to early childhood intervention? We have just recently been contacted by Murdoch Childrens Research Institute in Melbourne to advise us about the work they have been doing with the community in Burnie in Tasmania, that in fact they are really seeing some very, very positive results from that. I am not across all the details—I have not met them—but just giving you some examples of evidence-based approaches. It is, I understand, just what Tony is saying: It is about working very early, very collaboratively with the parents, closely nurturing that and looking after the young people's education needs. It sounds like a really good model.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Professor VINSON: The school was in Alexandria.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Alexandria Park.

Professor VINSON: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you, Professor Vinson. I have actually been watching this work for 15 years. I was working for a Minister in the previous Labor Government when you did that first amount of work. I saw that there were attempts to put new investment into those communities recognising that—I cannot remember the name of the program. I am very disappointed to see the results, that 15 years later there is no change. How do governments continue to get this so wrong in the way we are trying to address the very clear and specific issues identified in these communities?

Professor VINSON: I hesitate to say "get it wrong", because there have been in some instances quite sincere efforts made to be helpful. I think it is more the limited nature of what has been undertaken in terms of time. When that first report came out we had good access to people who mattered as far as resourcing these areas was concerned. But very often they would say, "All right. We will put something special in. We will put a facilitator in to work with the local community and we will do that for two or three years." If it is possible to say—and I can say it—many of the areas that are high ranking now were so placed 40 years ago, so it is pretty

over-optimistic to believe that one, two or three years is going to make a big difference. I actually think Australia, let alone the governance of New South Wales, has yet to have demonstrated to it—I am yet to have it demonstrated to me—that you can actually turn a community around when you are operating on that sort of timetable.

Perhaps one of the problems has been too wide a spread. If we could just work intensively in a few of those areas and learn from the experience, that would be better, in my book, than simply taking a smaller dosage to a whole lot of different communities. Beyond that, there are two things, apart from timing itself, that I would say will help improve the situation. One—and this is coming out of a lot of international research—is that, in the mental health field and more particularly in the field of countercriminality, if you can engage the community as *qua* community then the other inputs that are made to families and individuals take on added efficacy. There must exist a climate where people can see small improvements, where participation by ordinary folk with the support and at times even cultivated leadership of external authorities—all of that—can become more effective. The term that is being used is collective efficacy.

Our research in Victoria, for a period, amassed a great amount of information about the social cohesion in different locations. Sadly—this group here would know about a change of government—things get changed. I made a plea to the new Victorian Government to build on that wonderful reserve of information that is still there so that we can more carefully look at what appears to be the case—that is that you lift the volunteering, lift the participation in local events, develop more trust in those who are living around you and things like that. Build that and our evidence is that you get a diminution in things that we would all wish to see not operating—jailing, kids being maltreated and so on.

So I think the first thing is to emphasise that. Among the handouts, I believe, is a single page which says: "The four dimensions of community capacity." With colleagues I have done a lot of research work on this and looked at our own experience. In a book that I will encourage the librarian downstairs to acquire, one has listed four sets of indicators which oblige people to think beyond the individual and the family at how the locality as a grouping in its own right is operating. It is based on research. It addresses both the leadership aspects—the style of leadership that seems to be most beneficial—and, in a practical way, the capacity of the community to attain those resources that are needed to implement the plans that are formulated.

Around the State there are communities that are not well off but the mayor or a local resident has been savvy about exploiting opportunities to attract services to the community. Beyond that, there are two internal components. One is integration. The other is maintaining direction, energy and motivation. I do not want to turn this into a lecture; I just draw your attention to those components. If they are in place, as they are in Mildura—a place I have been much involved with—then you are able to see that the community is operating strongly in one respect but not so well in another and you begin to do things which strengthen the community.

At the end of the session I will provide the secretariat with a summary. We have long assumed that if we build up the connections between local organisations, along the lines that you suggested, it will produce better results in mental health services and so on. For years I have been searching for tangible evidence that that is so. One or two studies have looked at it and quantified the improvements that have resulted. Contrary to popular expectation, where services were most effective they were usually channelled through one agency. That is counterintuitive, but there is strong evidence for it. If you make one organisation pivotal for contracting and for setting the criteria by which to judge the outcomes, you get a much more integrated service system that benefits people.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you very much for the good work you have done, Professor. It is wonderful.

Professor VINSON: Thank you.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I have long been concerned about disadvantaged Aboriginal communities. I have visited many of them. The list of disadvantaged areas includes Aboriginal communities. Can the evidence be broken down further to show that Aboriginal communities are more disadvantaged?

Professor VINSON: Yes. I remember you making that comment on an earlier occasion.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Yes.

Professor VINSON: We have gathered separate information on the demography of those areas, including Aboriginal background. In a short time we will put out a supplement that makes that point. We did not want to include it in the definition of "disadvantaged area" because people would rightly say that we started with the presumption that a place is disadvantaged to have Aboriginal people there. We have based our calculation on the 21 more commonly used indicators, but now we are ready to characterise the disadvantaged areas, independently arrived at, where there is an Aboriginal population.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You will look at the make-up of those areas.

Professor VINSON: That is right. A number of organisations working in Bourke and elsewhere are awaiting that information.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Professor, I echo the comments of my colleagues. Thank you for the work you have done. I am a big supporter of developing collective efficacy to strengthen communities. Which agency would take the lead on that? There are State, local government and church agencies. Does one size fit all? Who takes the lead?

Professor VINSON: I have observed, as I am sure everyone here has, that one of the enemies of collaboration between organisations is persistent rivalry and a desire to remain positioned for the next Government grant.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: That is what we are looking at here.

Professor VINSON: I have thought about this. The lead agency should be a government agency. But to spread responsibility around would be a good way to avoid the idea that rivals are positioning themselves to capitalise on Government grants because they are convinced that their work is the most important—and, besides which, they have 10 salaries to find. They are the bread-and-butter issues that get in the way. I believe there should be a mix of responsibility. I suggest that the Committee look at the study that I provided details of. A supplementary study in the Netherlands came to the same conclusions. In places where a government agency is taking the lead, with other agencies sharing responsibility, there has been agreement about the goals they are pursuing. The approach is: "We cannot do everything. What are the things we are going to pursue?" That brings about a unity of purpose among the organisations.

The second factor is to have a range of criteria to judge which arrangement works best. The studies have not ruled out a more dispersed distribution of authority and goal setting at the experimental stage. But they have found that the model that works best is to have agreement that one agency will deal with government bodies or sources of funding. In agreement with the other organisations, it will set the goals. For the first time, there is a chance to monitor whether there really is collaboration under that arrangement. At the moment, one would sadly have to acknowledge that in some locations there is rivalry and competition, rather than collaboration.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: To what extent is a cultural acceptance of one's social disadvantage an impediment to one's cohort and future generations moving out of that social disadvantage?

Professor VINSON: Some decades ago, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, of which I was the director at the time, undertook to make a contribution on that. It measured the extent to which people in the most disadvantaged areas of Newcastle displayed, to a measurable degree, an attitude of resignation.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: An attitude of "and ever more shall be so".

Professor VINSON: Yes. That was displayed in a wide range of activities, from shopping to fertility to the upbringing of children. A few high-quality services existed at that time to assist families in that city. Those services were used by more favourably situated families. Keeping body and soul together was the limitation on existence. I concur with what you have said. That is why exercises in collaboration among ordinary folk, no matter how small the improvements, are turning out to be a critical factor in dealing with a range of social issues. That is what the research is showing.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Could you comment on something that I noticed about those postcodes that have increased substantially in their band—in other words, they have gone from higher levels of disadvantage to lower levels of advantage. They include Wellington, Urunga, Forster, Harrington, Casino,

Nambucca Heads, Coraki and Kempsey. Most of those places are on the coast and would have significant increases in activity caused by tree changers and tourism. Surely economic activity is more likely to pull a community out of social disadvantage than any number of social service schemes?

Professor VINSON: That is so. I would not wish to prioritise one over the other, but my instant apparent agreement was because a recurring aspect of the most disadvantaged places is unemployment. It can only be helpful to create economic opportunities. Sometimes that is not going to happen by way of ordinary market forces. In another sphere during a period when I was quite closely related to housing, we found the scope existed with leadership of that department at the time that it was pretty focused on these issues to convert so many opportunities by way of servicing the estates into positions. Not necessarily the person being a local resident, but on the basis that this company was providing a service it should provide an employment opportunity on one of the other estates.

We have evidence of that working rather better in Victoria and it has been sustained in New South Wales. The reverse of the situation is, if we take Broadmeadows in Victoria, the closure of the car assembling plant will have a devastating effect on an already highly disadvantaged location. It cross-references to other spheres of policy, not just welfare. I agree with you to that extent, but I would not necessarily say that my experience teaches me that you can then withdraw services on the basis of those initiatives, at least not in the short term but you would hope to in the longer term.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I agree, but you can keep pouring money into social services in a particular area—and I did some quick figures. Excluding Villawood, if you took the remaining postcodes in band one and band two, for the sake of \$1 billion—literally one-seventieth of the current New South Wales budget—you could pay every man, woman and child \$40,000 a year.

Professor VINSON: And confirm them in their passivity.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Would they spend? Would they create economic activity? If you had a nuclear family of husband, wife; wife, wife; husband, husband—let us be inclusive—and two kids, \$160,000 a year household income will inevitably produce some sort of economic activity which will then have a multiplier effect later on?

Professor VINSON: This was an absolute conviction of Mr Keynes, was it not, that you could do things like that. I am afraid the multiplicity of strands that hold people to a way of life cannot be severed by changes in one limited respect. I would not encourage what you have just said for the reason that—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: For the same reason Noel Pearson rejects it: It is sit-down money.

Professor VINSON: That and we really need to get those communities—I am not now wishing to put everything on their shoulders. This has been created over a long period, but it is less a matter of judgement and more a matter of psychology that we need to get them involved in working on their own localities as well as making sure—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I agree, but the question has always been how. How does this happen successfully?

Professor VINSON: Yes. It remains the question. I am prepared to admit that I have not yet seen one turnaround. But when I am confronted by the evidence that we are gathering in Victoria—but more particularly on the world stage—after decades of confirming the high level of criminality of some areas, to see positive changes coming about in that regard as people work more in a way with one another that builds trust and confidence, no matter how meagre that might seem to an outsider, but having some confidence, then that is the way I would encourage people to go.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: This issue may not be addressed specifically in the report but rather tangentially. Is it your observation that governments may be inadvertently, through policy settings, creating new areas where we could have communities like this? I have been looking specifically at communities and, sadly, the tardiness of those communities to move out and move up. Through growing population and the way in which we are planning our cities and communities, do you think we are making any fundamental mistakes where we could be inadvertently setting up future communities or postcodes that could fall into this category in the future?

Professor VINSON: Yes. There would be an understandable way of countering it. That is, if the population moving to those areas—and this might well apply to some of those places on the North Coast that were mentioned earlier—are people who are not well-skilled, cannot afford housing in the metropolitan area and so on, then that entails a risk of creating situations where, over time, there will be a lowering of morale, that sense of resignation that we talked about earlier. It would be a very wise social investment not costing \$160,000 at the current rate for community workers to make sure that in the early developmental stages in those places a fair bit of community building happened to set a pattern which will be resistant to that resigned fatalistic outlook, which is a recurring hallmark of disadvantaged areas. Preventative action could be taken.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I guess that is what I was getting at. Your argument would be that to counter the scenarios of those communities that are so impoverished and have a range of complex difficulties, getting in on the ground floor in respect of the planning at local, State and Commonwealth government levels could focus on stimulating and developing vibrant, healthy, integrated communities?

Professor VINSON: That is right. Mildura, where I have done a fair bit of work over the past decade, is the most socially integrated place I have ever come across. When you give recurring surveys of, "If you had the opportunity would you like to move out of this place?"—to take the most extreme question—and others about attachment—"liking" and so on—it is almost off the board. One can see how that developed in the first instance. I do not want to go into the history of Mildura, but a couple of very enterprising gentlemen from California saw promising-looking terrain and thought, "We can irrigate this place and we can make it prosperous." When you think of the problems that now beset Mildura, and you are still getting that kind of reading despite the downturn economically, its difficulties with water and so on, that convinces me that to get off to a good start—not unlike education—will make you resilient in the face of other difficulties that come later.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I refer to one of your earlier recommendations that a lead government agency should be given the authority in the most disadvantaged area. What agency would you suggest and which agencies have the skills? How do they develop the skills?

Professor VINSON: That is right. Nothing that we are talking about today is a push-over. It is difficult. Again, my mind goes back to Mildura where there is an organisation called Mallee Family Care and its tentacles spread out across a large proportion of the land in Victoria. The other organisations look to it to perform that role and grants have been obtained recently to get common computer systems to increase the collaboration between the agencies and so on. I think that place with its long history, and it is much-trusted, is a good starting point. That will not be true in many other areas.

All I can say on that is what I think I said earlier that I would be wary to avoid thoughts, given the culture that exists in this area of society, that no-one is wilfully exploiting an opportunity to become dictatorial. I would mix it up. There is every reason why a government agency need not necessarily be the lead agency in many instances. It will have a character and a set of responsibilities and accountabilities that we will continue to mark it, I hope, but there could be a non-government agency, as long as it is trusted.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I accept that this is probably a very leading question. I also followed your work in relation to pre-school education. If you were to recommend to this Committee the best intervention that government could make to turn this around, is it your view that investing in high-quality pre-school education within these communities is one of the best things we can do?

Professor VINSON: It would be the first thing I would recommend. It would not be the sole thing but it would be the first thing I would recommend.

CHAIR: Professor Vinson and Ms Prideaux, thank you very much for joining us today. It has been extremely informative. May I ask you if you could take a question on notice? I have just been consulting with the Hon. Greg Donnelly, the Deputy Chair, and I was wondering if you could go away and think about this. We were thinking about doing a site visit to a community. Could you suggest somewhere where you think some positive change has happened that would be interesting for us to see and hear about, perhaps one that was more entrenched? Could you think about that and suggest something to us? We would be very grateful to receive that.

Professor VINSON: Yes. That would be something we could do fairly quickly.

CHAIR: Would you like us to table the documents you have distributed and can you please confirm if those are public documents?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: At least one of them is because I pulled it off the website this morning.

Ms PRIDEAUX: All of these ones with the "DOTE" headings are public documents. This document Professor Vinson prepared yesterday and that is not public on the website.

CHAIR: Are you happy for that to be published?

Professor VINSON: I would like it to be distributed.

Ms PRIDEAUX: That was only done recently.

CHAIR: If there are any other questions besides the ones we have asked you we will ask the Committee secretariat to forward those to you and we request that you answer those within 21 days. My very sincere thanks to you both for your commitment in what you are doing; it is pretty amazing stuff.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

ANN HOBAN, Director, City Life, City of Sydney,

CHRISTINE McBRIDE, Manager, Social Programs and Services, City of Sydney, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make a short statement? If you do so, please keep it to just a few minutes so that we have plenty of time to ask you questions.

Ms HOBAN: I have a relatively short statement. It basically covers the gist of our submission, which you may have already read. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I probably do not need to go into the context of the Sydney of City. I imagine that you know we are 26 square kilometres in size, we have 200,000 residents, and that over one million people come into the city per day. Nearly half our residents were born overseas; many are from countries where English is not the first language. We are home to one of Sydney's largest populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

More than half of our households are in rental dwellings, and we estimate that about 10 per cent of these are in social housing properties. The city includes communities experiencing high social needs, such as social housing tenants, families experiencing disadvantage, young people at risk, international students, older people and others at risk of social isolation. People experiencing homelessness is a pretty big issue for us in the city. We respond to social need from a whole-of-community perspective, through a lens of social sustainability rather than focusing on the needs of separate target groups. The principles of social sustainability aim to build resilient communities that are equipped to help themselves and that are also able to reach out and support one another and grow stronger through shocks and ongoing stresses.

We consider that broader, holistic, community-based responses are important in effective service delivery. Many of our activities to support collective social wellbeing and resilience are outside the bounds of our statutory role. We deliver a range of programs and services that meet broad based community needs, including for people with high social needs. These include subsidised childcare places for disadvantaged children; services for at-risk young people disengaged from education or employment; homelessness services; support or lifestyle programs for older people; community transport; meals on wheels; community programs supporting new residents in urban renewal areas, overseas-born residents and international students; community health and safety initiatives, programs including harm minimisation, and crime prevention strategies and campaigns.

We strongly support the need for coordinated service models to reduce social need and also to promote safer and more sustainable communities. The implementation and success of coordinated service responses is varied in the city. In particular, there is a gap in collaboration across all levels of government and the non-government sector in delivering proactive and preventive community-strengthening strategies—as opposed to reactive actions.

We think that data collection and information sharing are key issues. For example, we believe that the State and Federal governments do not have any data available on supply and demand for early childhood education and care needs in local communities. As a result, we undertake our own analysis of supply and demand for child care on a pretty regular basis. We are then able to plan proactively for the delivery of new services, particularly in high population growth areas. Ours is a hugely high population growth area. It is fortunate that we have the resources to do this but we know that a lot of other local governments do not have the resources to do that.

Substantial community engagement is also critical to understanding and planning for the needs of communities. Local governments typically have a deep understanding of their local communities. We regularly engage with local communities to understand their needs and wants, through formal strategic engagement process and, importantly, through regular operational activities. For example, we employ public space liaison officers, who reach out every day to people sleeping rough in our local area—and also to businesses and residents who suffer the impacts of people sleeping rough—to determine the needs and to link the rough sleepers with support services and to provide feedback into strategic planning around those areas.

The city's social housing outreach worker engages with local social housing tenants and coordinates community meetings on social housing estates. This direct and ongoing engagement with high-needs groups gives the city an in-depth understanding of needs and up-to-date knowledge of changes and emerging issues. That is really important for proactive planning.

At a broader level, we participate in and convene a number of interagency forums—for example, in the areas of homelessness, youth and older citizens. In our view, interagency forums are useful for information-sharing, but they could be better used to develop and deliver effective service responses. These interagency forms are convened around funding type and target group—for example, older people or youth. While this is important for information-sharing, referral and professional development, the forums are not well structured to actively address complex local issues. For example, interagency meetings about services for over-55s bring together services providing specialised federally funded aged-care services.

However, a forum convened around an issue such as risk of social isolation for older people might bring together a completely different set of stakeholders—health, mental health, volunteer organisations, community transport, meals on wheels, social activity support groups—who could collaboratively plan and actively address this issue. Currently, it is not clear how interagency forums are effectively addressing service needs in the community to deliver these kinds of outcomes.

We think that there are a few barriers to effective coordination. One is that there is not an agreed common purpose across all levels of government and NGOs. We believe that there is not effective data and information-sharing. There could be a better willingness and commitment of all organisations to participate in a partnership process—I will talk about that in a minute—and there needs to be a lead organisation. It is really important that there is a common purpose and goal, and that it is based on robust and shared evidence so that the resources of stakeholders are all well directed and you get a better bang for your buck. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Government's Going Home Staying Home reform of homelessness services funding, for example, was, in large part, designed to reduce inner city drift. We talked a lot about that during the consultations. There is a tendency for people to come to the inner city when they experience homelessness rather than staying in their community of origin. There has been a lot of discussion around that. But the rationale and evidence-based approach was not shared and communication was limited.

We actually asked if there had been any evidence that the proposed outcomes would result in that and we were told that there had been a pilot study done but we did not really ever get to hear what the outcome of that was. We asked for it but it did not come our way. I understand it was undertaken by a non-government organisation [NGO] so they may have had difficulty releasing the information. To have shared that information would have really helped us all understand what we were doing and whether what we were doing was right. So this impacts on stakeholder confidence in the process and willingness to participate. A poor evidence base also risks establishing collaborative efforts that do not succeed.

The current funding approaches can be a barrier to effective coordination. Funding processes are competitive and are focused on meeting targets and outputs—such as numbers of clients and hours of service limit the ability for services to focus on how those services are provided. This drives some services to be guarded about sharing caseloads and information about successful practices and affects service providers' willingness and capacity to work collaboratively. We consider the participation in issues-based collaborative service delivery should be both resourced and required as a core key performance indicator [KPI] in funding contracts—how well are you partnering with other organisations? Where are you getting synergies? Where are you working with other groups to actually get efficiencies in cross-coordination? That would be a really good KPI that we would like to see.

It is one of the things that I am working on with my own team at the City of Sydney—how do we develop our own partnership capability to drive better outcomes? It does not necessarily mean more funding because if you can get better outcomes then you can just make sure that that collaboration is funded. That is what we would hope anyway. In addition, lead agencies need to be mandated and resourced to take on a leadership role, or we all at least need to agree on who is a lead agency and give them that authority—that sort of authorising environment between us all.

Differing jurisdictional boundaries also impact on collaboration. We really welcome the introduction of consistent boundaries across the State's Health, Education, Family and Community Services [FACS] departments. That is going to help us a lot. It is worth noting that the city crosses two of those districts, often doubling the coordination required and we appreciate the efforts certainly of FACS in identifying a lead district that is responsible for working with the city. This significantly streamlines the coordination process. Finally, State and Federal funding is commonly focused around a target group—people with a disability, older people,

children in need of protection and so on. Little regard is given to the way that funding decisions based on targets play out at a local level. The Going Home Staying Home reform that I mentioned before is an example of that.

While some thought was given to the process of a mix of specialist homelessness services to be allocated to each region, we did not get the sense that there was joined-up thinking about strategically funding other services that rough sleepers are likely to need, such as health, mental health, employment services, financial support, drug and alcohol addiction services and exit from prison support. If funding had been conceived through a truly collaborative approach like this, then the service landscape and outcomes might be quite different. That is basically a summary of our submission.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. We will now ask questions.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: I should say that I was on the City of Sydney council from 2003 to 2012 and Ms Hoban was the Director during the whole time that I was there.

Ms HOBAN: Yes, for a good part of that time.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We have a very good working relationship and I have a great deal of respect for the staff of the council and the work they do, so I am pleased you have made a submission. I assume that Committee members have read the recommendations from the City of Sydney. I am interested in exploring leadership in communities and seeing how the council is pulling together the different agencies. You have spoken also about the mapping of services. I remember the crisis with Redfern-Waterloo. We did not really know who was there and it took a while to work that out. Can you comment on that on behalf of the council, as the de facto lead agency in the area for the NGOs, and how you have mapped the services to ascertain the gaps and overlaps?

Ms HOBAN: I am not sure that I can say that we have mapped all the services because it is quite a complex issue. There is a question of: Are the services physically in the city and then do they operate nationally or statewide or do they just have their head office in the city but the actual service operation happens somewhere else? I do not think we have covered that yet, have we?

Ms McBRIDE: We have done some service mapping as it relates to a particular issue that we might feel we wanted to address, so from project to project from time to time we have done that. For example, I think we looked into services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as part of the Eora journey work that the city is doing, so on a project-by-project basis but in truly understanding the breadth of social services across the City of Sydney, those complexities make it very difficult to do that.

Ms HOBAN: I think I could fairly say that we would know where every child care centre is in the City of Sydney. As Ms McBride says, it is the areas that we particularly focus on. We are working on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development strategy so we engaged a consultant to look at all the services that were available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our local government area around social and economic support and for the 2,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents that we have, there were 192 services. You have to think that if there are 192 services available to that type of group, why is there still a problem? So clearly something is not working well.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You outlined in your presentation the Act and where council picks up in the area of healthy communities and so forth. The City of Sydney is incredibly well resourced—

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: —compared to any other council. Most other councils cannot do the work you do?

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: They do not have the resources to be a leader. Would you be an advocate for local government getting more opportunity to be a leader in their communities based on the experiences of the City of Sydney or do think the State agency should be doing it?

Ms HOBAN: I think there needs to be clarity really; that is what I would argue for and wherever it rests that is where the funding should go. Clearly local government is very good at place-based, deep local engagement and is, I would say certainly from our perspective, an absolute willing partner in these kinds of things. I think you need to look at the issue. For instance, around homelessness, there are probably two or three principal causes of homelessness. One is lack of affordable housing in Sydney; it is just a major drama. So where does the responsibility sit for making sure that we have a good housing mix in the city? That is where the lead agency should be with that. Another key issue around homelessness is drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, domestic violence—a number of those issues should rest with health agencies and they should take the lead around those kinds of issues.

One example we have given in our submission is some work that we are doing in Belmore Park and Wentworth Park around rough sleepers there. We have coordinated a number of agencies, with the willing participation of FACS, and FACS has brought in a number of other State government agencies and we are doing a really intensive program in those areas. I think that is the kind of thing that you need. So there is the kind of ongoing systemic coordination that you need and then there is the responsive coordination that you need as issues come up and drop back again. You said something before when you are talking about mapping? I cannot remember what it was. I did not answer it, whatever it was.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Take it on notice. I will find it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On pages 16 and 17 of your submission you comment on some housing initiatives, the "90 Homes for 90 Lives" initiative, and over the page you refer to an initiative in Queensland. Would you like to take this opportunity to talk more about specific projects and initiatives that are worthy of consideration, bearing in mind the problem of affordable housing in Sydney?

Ms McBRIDE: I think homelessness, for us, is a good example. It is certainly one where we spend a lot of our time. Probably the work in Belmont and Wentworth parks are good examples of situations in which collaborative efforts, without extra funding or extra resources, have actually delivered results. Certainly there is the by far greater issue of housing and the big projects that the city has been involved in—so 90 homes for 90 lives—which provided funding for head leases.

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

Ms McBRIDE: Then there was the Camperdown project, Platform 70, which delivered a building, and it required that additional capital investment, I suppose. There is certainly evidence in homelessness where that larger capital and major investment needs to be made. There is also background to be made, though, in collaboration that does not require additional resourcing, and that is what we are seeing in the smaller projects that we had doing—for example, in the parks. We are bringing together the services that are funded already for the programs that they are there to deliver through Family and Community Services but also other agencies. The police are involved and fire services will be involved soon.

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

Ms McBRIDE: There will be a range of organisations who come together and who have an interest either in the client group or in the safety, wellbeing and use of the park. We will bring them together to identify all those things that Ms Hoban said before—a common goal and purpose and a lead agency. Usually what we found works is an intensive time-limited period of activity, but then people can do a big push and then feel like they can move on and they are not going to be locked into it forever. That has given us some good results, particularly with the Department of Family and Community Services on board with that. It has really opened up to changing the way that they operate their practices by being flexible about them having their services available to the people at that time in that location where we are going to make that push. That is certainly seen as having some good results in terms of housing larger numbers of people than we would have ordinarily.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Did you go knocking on their door and say to them that this is something we would like to explore with you?

Ms McBRIDE: Yes.

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

Ms McBRIDE: Particularly as those locations became hot spots, as we call them, for us and as concerns about community safety and health were increasing in those locations. They have been the triggers for us, traditionally.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Given the size and the capacity of the Council of the City Of Sydney I guess you do look at major cities around the world.

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You at least examine or try to keep up-to-date with initiatives and thinking that they adopt to better provide delivery of their services. I suppose some cities might be relatively good in one area and perhaps not in another, but in terms of international best practice for delivery of services in larger cities, is there any standout city that seems to keep emerging?

Ms HOBAN: I am not sure in terms of service coordination. You are right: There are some cities that are better at some things than others. London is a standout in terms of development of affordable housing, and affordable housing is at the root of so many social issues in most modern cities. You referred before to Platform 70 and 90 homes for 90 lives. The biggest problem with rough sleeping is long-term supported sustained housing. Even when we go into the park, work with people, get them into services and we get them into temporary accommodation, the difficulty is the long-term accommodation and supported long-term accommodation. That is where the shortage is.

I think the Going Home, Staying Home reform was right in as much as you want to try to turn off the tap. One way in which you can turn off the tap is by fixing housing affordability so that people do not just fall out of housing just because they cannot afford to pay the rent for one reason or another. If we can keep people in housing in the first place, but then also provide supported housing for rough sleepers, that helps to deliver the outcomes that you want. Are you aware of any other cities on service coordination?

Ms McBRIDE: No.

Ms HOBAN: I confess we have not really looked into that specifically. We have looked into issues like homelessness and housing.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: As you know it is a State Government-created problem by evicting the residents from Millers Point. What has been the role of the Council of the City of Sydney in assisting the residents, many of whom are aged and very, very unhappy?

Ms HOBAN: We have extended the community centre service that we have in Millers Point. We have opened it for longer hours and provided more opportunities for people to gather there, to meet and resolve their issues. We have been looking after them, providing spaces for the local community itself to meet to try to sort out its own way forward. We have funded a local community group to do that—to meet and to come up with a program that they would like to put forward by way of advocacy to government and support for the local housing tenants.

We have also funded the Redfern Legal Centre to provide legal support for the housing tenants in the process of working through relocation and new tenancies with the Department of Housing. We know that they have dealt with some issues that Housing had not considered where Housing had thought that they had offered a good property to a tenant. It was good, except that that tenant had a disability and could not get to the local railway station, or there was something outside the tenancy that needed support. The Redfern Legal Centre supported the tenant through that process.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: One of my observations is that the Government seems to have overlooked that there is an actual village community there, which has been broken up. That is where the despair is coming from. It is not so much getting another housing unit out at Bankstown or Liverpool. They have been forced to move out of this group where many aged people were supporting each other.

Ms HOBAN: Our council and our Lord Mayor have advocated on behalf of that community and have requested that consideration be given to keeping the community together.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Is there any way of the council being involved in the Sirius Building being retained?

Ms HOBAN: I think the State Government has decided what it is going to do with that building. Are you suggesting that we should buy the building?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Yes. That might be an idea. I do not know what it would cost, of course.

Ms HOBAN: I suspect it would—

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You are the council, Reverend Nile. Clover would love that.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I think the Government should give it to you to supervise its operation.

Ms HOBAN: We are not a community housing provider organisation and we do not run social housing. Social housing is a responsibility of the State Government.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do you have any recommendations about what should be done?

Ms HOBAN: We did recommend that at least that people might be moved into Sirius and out of their larger property so that the larger properties could be sold, and at least retain a sense of community for those people who did want to stay in the Sirius Building. But I do not think that that has happened. I think that Sirius is almost empty now.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do you have any idea what the Government might be planning to do with the building?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: While this is very interesting, it does not actually fit within the terms of reference of this inquiry.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It does. It is about providing accommodation for aged residents at Millers Point. It is affordable housing. I know a joke was made about the council buying it, but there is a suggestion that the State Government might be going to sell it.

CHAIR: Has the question been answered for you, Reverend Nile?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Obviously, the council is not directly involved with the Sirius Building.

CHAIR: In terms of your reference to interagencies in your submission, when you have those interagency meetings, do you talk about specific issues and specific clients that you are servicing, or is it more just a general discussion of issues?

Ms McBRIDE: The majority is more general. Mostly those forums are not appropriate for discussion of the individual clients, due to confidentiality and privacy issues.

CHAIR: Okay.

Ms McBRIDE: Those forums sit differently and people have case coordination meetings that are specific for discussions around individuals. These are broader forums. They do a number of things. They help agencies who provide like services to share information about who's who. They know how to do information and referral and share practice.

CHAIR: I know you were not here earlier, so it is really hard for you when I refer to previous evidence, but we heard from a professor from the University of New South Wales who has done a lot of research into sharing of information and service coordination. My background is in nursing and council so I understand the privacy issues. I cannot discuss that with you because of client confidentiality. However, the

professor is actually saying that that is not what the legislation is saying. It is a lot more flexible in terms of that than we imagine. It is about educating the service providers that they actually can, once consent has been given. In your submission and in your opening statement you gave an example of 190 odd services look at issues affecting Aboriginal people. I am from the country so I cannot even fathom that—I salivate at the thought of more than one organisation to help. Do we need to move towards that?

Ms HOBAN: I think you are right. I think it is possible to share information, you just have to have protocols around it and people have to have an agreed methodology of working together. And there are degrees and degrees of information as well too, so yes, there is a case co-ordination role but there is also just a service delivery role as well too. You do not necessarily need individual client information, you just use aggregated client information. One of the things that the inter-agencies aim to do is to make sure that they are duplicating effort so they at least know what clients they are dealing with, and what sorts of different kinds of programs they are running for those clients.

CHAIR: I imagine it would be very hard not to duplicate service if people are not talking about the issue that the client is facing.

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

CHAIR: That matter has arisen in another Committee inquiry into puppy farms where the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League would turn up at the same house with an accusation of animal cruelty.

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I want to clarify some of your evidence. Did you say there are 194 separate programs for the 2,000 Aboriginal people in the City of Sydney?

Ms HOBAN: They do not necessarily target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But they are available.

Ms HOBAN: Yes, across social and economic support.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Maybe I am particularly sensitive but that seems like an awfully large number of programs.

Ms HOBAN: I agree.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So much so that they would fratricide against each other. Surely there would be a vast opportunity for economies of scale. Going back to the DOTE report, which I am not sure you have seen, it lists characteristics of multiply disadvantaged locations—and I am sure there would be some in Sydney; I could think of Darlington, Redfern, Surry Hills, Woolloomooloo to a lesser extent. Criminal convictions, unemployment, domestic violence, lack of qualification, education and young adults disengaged strikes me as six key areas perhaps being serviced by 194 separate programs. There must be a role for consolidation surely.

Ms HOBAN: I think it is important to understand that those services may well be national services or statewide services it is just that they are also available. Because we are a capital city pretty much everything that goes on in the State happens in the capital city, so whether they operate on a daily basis in the city? I know, for instance, we have done some work into food services in the city for rough sleepers, for people who are homeless and there is a vast number of those. There are also ones we do not even know about really, people who just turn up. Yes, you are right, I think there is a case for much better co-ordination and much better understanding of what everybody is doing, and kind of mapping it out.

I cannot recall off the top of my head what the groupings were but many of those are government funded organisations so I think that is a good place to start to look. I do not even mean within FACS, but FACS needs to look at all the ones that they fund. But FACS and Health might want to do a bit of compare and contrast as well too.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I am going to say openly, it strikes me that there are a lot of mini empires who essentially replicate what other organisations do and are unwilling to give up any of that planning, power and status which they have themselves. For example, four different Catholic social agencies have made submissions to this Committee. My immediate response would be why would there not just be a single Catholic social agency which could, through economies of scale, cut back on back-off staff and have more on the frontline.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We cannot control that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We cannot control that but surely we should have a system where we do not have 194 separate programs. How many of those 2,000 people realise the extent of the programs that are available to them whereas if there were one lead agency, or one reference point or one point you could at least then have a degree of knowledge on the part of the recipients. Surely that is what the program should be about. It should be programs focussed on clients rather than the little empires of the various social agencies.

Ms HOBAN: Absolutely, everything should be client focussed there is no question about that. I think it comes back to the comment that we made about having a common purpose, agreeing on what is the objective that we are all trying to achieve and, therefore, what individual parts are about in that whole co-ordinated program.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On pages 15 and 16 of your submission you refer to a lack of client awareness of services and the related issue of privacy law. Do you want to make any other points about the client awareness challenge of various services and privacy law?

Ms McBRIDE: I think probably the main point for us is that services at the moment, and the way they are funded, are often funded around a target group and perhaps not funded around an issue and that makes the pathways difficult for people to find. If you are experiencing a complex set of six issues then you perhaps need to navigate six systems. If you can bring all those players together in a collaborative response that is targeted around the issue rather than a type of person then those pathways should theoretically be easier to navigate.

Ms HOBAN: I think, for instance, the work we are doing in Belmore Park is an example of that. Because we have people from Health, Mental Health, Police, FACS, Housing, Welfare and a whole range of agencies—and our staff are the people on the ground; our public space liaison officers are people who actually know the individuals who are in that park and have a good sense of who those individuals are, why are there, what their background is, where they are connected, where they have come from—then if you have got the co-ordination group you can then determine for each individual who should be the lead that takes that issue on board. If there is a drug and alcohol issue, and that is the principal reason that they are in the park, then you might deal with that. If they are dealing drugs then the police come in. I think it is probably something really more along those lines that we are trying to get at.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Do you get the same scenario in Belmore Park as you do in Woolloomooloo—the honeypot is not a really good term—when the services are concentrated, and more services turn up, not-for-profit and government, more people in need turn up? I read that the original rough sleepers in Belmore Park have largely been housed and new people have arrived. Has that occurred at Belmore Park as it happened in Woolloomooloo?

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It attracts people because the services are there.

Ms HOBAN: I am not sure that that is the case. It is right in front of a railway station.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It wasn't there before historically.

Ms HOBAN: No, I know but I think the fact that we have had this difficulty with the tents that has been the issue. People kind of feel there is permission to have a tent there—implied permission because we have not taken the tents away. We did take them away in Wentworth Park, but that was slightly easier although it was still a difficult process because we could work with those rough sleepers and get them to agree if there were concerns around the tents. We got most of them housed. We took the tents away. Unfortunately they are starting to build up again. At Belmore Park it has been a much more volatile group and a much more dangerous group to

deal with and, as a result it has been much more difficult to negotiate with them to take away the tents. Even though some of them get housed—there is one particular family group, I think, an Aboriginal family group that is still there. But to be honest with you they are very transient. Most of them are there not for more than two weeks and they just keep coming and going. There is a lot of donation of tents and clothing and things by well-meaning members of the general public directed to the rough sleepers.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The same people coming and going?

Ms HOBAN: No, different people.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Different people coming and going?

Ms HOBAN: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do we know where they are going? Are they going to permanent accommodation?

Ms HOBAN: No, to temporary accommodation. Some back to where they came from, and others we do not know where they go. We do know that FACS has been trying very hard to get them into temporary accommodation. They have been doing that down in Woolloomooloo as well but unfortunately because it is temporary they are starting to come back, whereas in Belmore Park it is a different cohort of people.

Ms McBRIDE: The learning for us in terms of service coordination in those scenarios has been that even the couple of kilometres between Woolloomooloo and Wentworth Park and Belmore Park make a huge difference in the way the issues play out in those locations and the response you need to make. We have tailored the response in different ways for each location. That is within the same issue within a couple of kilometres.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am not sure whether you are involved with some of the problems at Redfern at the moment, which seems to be calming down. Are you involved at all with the housing problem there?

Ms HOBAN: Which one? The tent embassy? Which particular problem—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Presumably the redevelopment of the old Block.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The redevelopment, yes.

Ms HOBAN: The tent embassy on The Block. No. We have a community centre there, and it is open and it operates very effectively for the whole community. It has a strong Aboriginal presence in that community, but we have not had a lot to do with it.

CHAIR: A central theme that has come through in many submissions is about competitive tendering and the length of funding grants. Regardless of which government is in, that has always been a continuous and difficult thing. Do you think that, perhaps in these areas of high social need that require good service coordination to get better outcomes and to be client focussed to get those outcomes, we need to look at longer funding terms—say, past the term of a government—for grants to try to have an impact to get outcomes?

Ms HOBAN: To be honest, this is something we are looking at ourselves because we are a grant giver as well. Yes, there are some programs that need a minimum amount of time to get traction on them. In our case, for example, we give accommodation grants and we give cheap rent in some of our properties. We absolutely give longer terms to childcare centres than we do to other service providers because we know that you need that consistency. Apart from anything else, the childcare operator invests a certain amount into the start-up of that operation and they need a longer term lease in order to get the payback from that to make their business model work. But I think so, as long as whatever it is you are funding is well thought out in the first place; as long as it is evidence based, it is collaborative, it is cooperative, you are clear about what the indicators are that you are trying to achieve, and you have an evaluation process that is worked up before you even fund it.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But the corollary for that would mean larger, longer grants but for fewer recipients, would it not?

Ms HOBAN: Not necessarily—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Longer grants for the same number of recipient organisations will mean an increase in expenditure over the longer term.

Ms HOBAN: It would be the same annual amount. It is just over a longer period. It is not that you would necessarily be funding more in a given year.

CHAIR: Thank you for attending this hearing. If we have any additional questions for you, the Committee secretariat will forward them to you, and we request that a response be provided within 21 days. Is that all right?

Ms HOBAN: Yes, of course.

CHAIR: I understand how busy you are, and writing another submission, but we truly appreciate it. Thank you for taking the time out of your day to attend this hearing.

(The witnesses withdrew)

TRACY HOWE, Chief Executive Officer, NCOSS, sworn and examined, and

YA'EL FRISCH, Research and Policy Officer, NCOSS, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Ms HOWE: Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. As you know, NCOSS has made a comprehensive submission to the inquiry, so I would like to use the opportunity of this address to talk about positioning New South Wales for success in our approach for responses to people with high social needs. NCOSS has spent the past six weeks travelling around New South Wales so we have a fresh position or fresh knowledge, hearing from our members in remote, rural, regional and metropolitan areas. We see a strong social services sector that works together in many areas in a coordinated way to respond to the communities they work in. People, you have probably already heard, as the theme presenting at these services rarely come with one issue. Often they might come for a voucher to pay for an energy bill but may also be struggling with a range of concurrent issues related to the risk of homelessness, unemployment, mental ill health and relationship stress. Those are a few of the often presenting issues.

Our sector, as we have seen, uses well developed networks. They create relationships of trust and knowledge of local services to link people in these situations with the support they need. We are in a time of constraint and often insecure funding so services often feel they are struggling to respond. That is the feedback we are getting. But even so we are seeing some good adaptation and offerings from services. For example, in the areas where emergency accommodation for women is 300 kilometres away, a local women's health centre may offer showers for women who are sleeping rough; others offer meals or provide swags. Of course, they wish they could do more but it is about being nuanced and flexible to community.

NCOSS wants New South Wales to be ready and resourced for success. If the New South Wales Government prioritises action to address an issue such as domestic violence or disability inclusion as examples, we need a sector resourced appropriately to respond. For instance, the New South Wales Government has proposed a domestic violence disclosure scheme—it is still in development—which aims to enable people who want to find out, particularly women, if their partner has a previous conviction for domestic violence offences, then she can make a decision about what to do in that situation. However, given that the woman may go forward to seek this advice, and there is no evidence of a previous offence, it alerts services that this woman has concerns of some description to approach and it is a perfect time to step in and provide a coordinated response and see if she needs support.

It is important that the supports as well as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme are actually adequately resourced to succeed, and this means provision of long-term funding and some kind of surety around the funding of the services. It is not necessarily about more money but it is about having some security in a timeframe. Staying with this example, and I will be brief, this funding should recognise and value not only expertise about domestic violence but also knowledge of the sector in a local context, which we have seen in our travels is quite different depending on the region. For example, there may not be a specialist women's service in a region where you might want to go to one in a time of need—and that might not be where the coordination point is.

Domestic violence may be a key issue but responding to it can and often does trigger a range of responses or needs, including housing, children services, child protection, education, women's health, disability services and the list is on. Domestic violence services are effective at coordinating these processes. We know there are services out there which are very good at this. Often the models of funding ignore the value that is in the relationship. It almost has its own value. If we think of it as a dollar amount, it is the time when trust has built up to create that coordinated response. And expertise is obviously built up over that time.

These factors really position organisations, or should position them, to deliver an effective, coordinated approach that is integral to providing solid outcomes for clients and value for money over and above, say, a very good tender in a tender process. There is a value to what is already there. Increasingly, and we know this has been coming through in the evidence before this inquiry, we are hearing about competitive tendering and short-term project funding possibly discouraging services that have worked well. They may have retreated to a more siloed approach. They have to put more effort into seeking funding as a funding cycle comes closer to cessation, and not losing out on their funding to an existing competitor becomes a focus of the service system. It takes people away from their area of expertise.

Competition is not inherently bad, and the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] does not say that. But if you look at the example of a woman leaving a domestic violence situation in a small country town, she would be much more likely to get a good outcome from a service that is trusted and that has had a long relationship with the police, health workers and other local service providers. So our process for funding these services must place a value on what we would call for the purposes of this the "service capital" when making economic decisions about where to direct funding. This value means there is a more level playing field for competition and offsets some of the advantage that those resourced to employ professional tender writers currently have. NCOSS is currently working on a set of principles and a framework for how we can work with government on procurement, contracting reform and regulation. We look forward to coming up with solutions. I look forward to making further recommendations to government based on this work later in the year.

Finally, NCOSS really wants to be ready for success to meet the agenda for disability inclusion. Our proposal is for a \$5 million New South Wales disability inclusion fund that shows how the sector and the New South Wales Government can work together creatively with a modern approach to meet shared aims. Success in this area will make New South Wales a place that really works for people with a disability and show that the focus is on not just disability services but also New South Wales services like transport, education and health—and a system that works for everyone and is a level playing field.

CHAIR: Thank you, I will start with some questions. You certainly echoed things that were said this morning by the policy manager and a board member of Domestic Violence NSW in terms of value and not looking at things in terms of, say, occasions of service but rather the value of the service and all the things you just mentioned. We have heard a lot, and there is a lot in the submission, about what the problems are. I think we universally agree that there has to be a better way, and people have been trying to find that for a long time. I would like to hear what you think some of the solutions might be around better service coordination.

Ms HOWE: I think there is a starting point. I would like to think that before a funding reform process or agenda is considered there is a really intensive bird's eye view of what is going on in a particular region or districts and what is already working. I think what we need to do is to actually figure out what the landscape is, because there is often a perverse result when you go in with a very good idea about a reform agenda. It might even have extra funding attached. But it can have the actual opposite effect by dismantling what is already there. In short, I think it is about having a really good look at what is already happening. I do not know that that is always done in a reform agenda, particularly because of cross-agency issues.

CHAIR: Ms Howe, you just said you have spent six weeks out in a regional area.

Ms HOWE: Yes.

CHAIR: That is fantastic. Good on you for going out there. What did you see that was working really well and effectively? I am not talking about extra funding; I am talking about using what we have already and making it better. What have you seen that is working out there that you can tell us about and share with us?

Ms HOWE: Every local community has different pools of funding or different services. So you might go to a district and find it only has a family support service and not a refuge. But it might also have a women's health centre and an Aboriginal-specific service. What has happened over time is that those organisations, which know each other and know their community, have come together with responses. They have relationships with the police, for example. They can speak to the local police and say, "What were the domestic violence jobs last night?" There is a really organic and nuanced approach to managing families, who are often already known, for best responses. That is already happening.

What I would say, and this is not meant to be negative but it is a voice of concern, is that often you have a reform that comes in and seeks to overlay a service system like that with a new idea or a new funding approach. It has the effect of dismantling what is already happening, because everyone says, "Oh, we have to do this new shiny thing." What I am seeing is that there are really good networks and service systems. But they are very anxious. They are worried about what is coming. We think that with tender processes and funding arrangements you have to look at least a five-year period of time just so you can really bed it down and get on with the work. We are seeing people who are just are antsy and anxious. They are worried about who is going to form a consortium in the next tender process. Distrust or mistrust starts to percolate through the community whereas historically they have been really solid.

For example, in one particular area under the Going Home Staying Home reforms one of the big charities was successful in a tender process. If you listen to the media, they say that is a disaster and that is a bad outcome. But this particular charity then subcontracted to an existing service in the town. So the big charity has never set foot in the town, in effect. They have subcontracted to a small organisation which is well equipped, networked and trusted to continue on with that work. They can provide that homelessness support. That has worked well. So I think it is about really encouraging a breaking down of the walls, and trying to open up trust to say, "Where are the opportunities where we do not break up the fabric that is already there."

CHAIR: But we know that in a lot of these areas the fabric already there is not getting the outcomes that we want. I do not want to monopolise the questioning so I will pass to Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Following up on that question about funding, there has been a lot of criticism of the whole competitive funding process, and you have included some criticism in your submission. What then is the other solution? How does a government fund these activities and organisations?

Ms HOWE: There are a variety of approaches you could adopt. I think the first thing is that we need to have some nuance that recognises what is already there. Often there is an attempt in a tender process to have the tenders reflect some regional specificity. However, it would probably be better, as I said before, to see what is actually in that area already. There is a real distrust of the concept of a fly-in, fly-out organisation—the concept that big organisations swoop in one day a week to a remote community or are only available at certain times; it is not flexible and there is no trust.

The other thing is that they are coming into a community where they have not built up the relationship. So it would go back to what I said before about getting the value, figuring out where the capital already exists and where that network already exists and then saying, "Well, maybe the tenders need to be built in such a way that there is some kind of negotiation between people to get the best outcome." It is not like buying cars, as you would appreciate. It is not like getting the best price on a fleet of vehicles. We are looking at a really sensitive and region-specific fabric that has created itself around the people in our community.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I imagine those bigger organisations, as you say, who might just come in from outside can make a very attractive tender, down to the unit price, so to speak.

Ms HOWE: Yes, I would say that in that example I gave where the big organisation was successful. But they had the delicacy and the foresight to say, "There is a really good service in the area who could do this for us. We do not even have to set foot in this town." I think Ya'el Frisch was going to say something too.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Maybe we should have funded that existing group.

Ms HOWE: That is it.

Ms FRISCH: That is why we recommended giving a weighting in the tender to local knowledge, which would acknowledge that expertise within the tender process—if there was a tender. The other thing that we found that was difficult is that organisations are not given funding to adapt to the reform processes, such as building consortia that often have no training and expertise to do this. We find that 70 per cent of mergers fail in one year because they are not properly organised. There needs to be time and funding to get these new models of funding up and running.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: So the tenders should have some provision for those factors: experience, long-term—

Ms FRISCH: And local knowledge.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Local knowledge.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What about success? You can deliver services until the cows come home, but if you have a service that actually destroys the need for its own existence, that is surely the optimal service to be fund managed.

Ms HOWE: Certainly. It is not to say that every service is perfect, but what NCOSS is really trying to say is that we definitely need to look at where there are existing networks, trust and relationships that actually

provide that real "filling the gap" service to people. It is not to say that you should just fund services and they should not produce outcomes, because that does not help the most vulnerable in the community. It is about efficiency. Often what we are potentially missing is the existing efficiency, because a tender comes in and it is written very well, it prosecutes a case for a great process and a fabulous service that they will provide, and the locals are going, "Oh, it's already happening." And in fact—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And even if it is a great process it only gets funded for two years, so you will never be able to evaluate how great it is.

Ms HOWE: That is right. I think it is time for a little bit of bravery and positivity, in a way, and bipartisanship—for us all to come together and say, "How do we make it work?", negotiate tender outcomes, look at that social capital that comes from existing networks and really try to rebuild the trust with the community. They are doing such good work. Ya'el makes a good point that they are not often prepared for what a consortium or a lead agency looks like and all of this sort of stuff. That should just be housekeeping that they are supported with, because the real value—the jewel in the crown—is the work they are already doing that should be supported to exist. I would say that that housekeeping stuff is the Government's responsibility to deal with, and when that is dealt with they can get on with the business they are good at and actually expand.

Ms FRISCH: I add that it should be a model of success in the service area that you are looking at. We have all sorts of organisations that have never run a women's service—they have been successful in another area but they do not have the expertise to do that—and the same with disability services. There are nuances in the service areas. That is why we also recommend the weighting for cultural sensitivity and sensitivity to the community group that we are dealing with—women facing domestic violence, people with a disability—because it is specific within the service areas.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I agree, but you also face the problem that excessive fragmentation is going to disperse funds. There are undoubtedly benefits from economies of scale. You do not have to have the same back office services that you do. Perhaps the most effective organisation would be 10,000 separate small organisations, each intimately tailored to their demographic and to their regional perspectives, but that is an impossible situation to adequately fund. For example, we heard from the previous testimony that for the roughly 2,000 people of Aboriginal background in the City of Sydney there are 194 separate programs. That strikes me as a lot of duplication for getting rid of the seven key dominant characteristics of disadvantage.

Ms HOWE: I have a comment to make. I spent some time out in the far west and there was a similar story. I must say that the Aboriginal community are sick of it too. They are sick of the fact that there are so many services that are funded—and maybe it is not driven from the local community and the local community needs. It may not look like 58 fragmented services based in four outlying bigger towns who come in one day a week or one day a fortnight. Certainly what we are seeing is a real opportunity.

It goes back to the theme that we would really stick with, which is that we need to look at what is happening locally and what the local needs are, because you might find that that creates the very economies of scale you are alluding to, to get the better outcomes. The funding instruments and agencies have to take a little bit of responsibility for recognising that they may fund an education program, an out-of-home care program, a homelessness program and all of these—and you guys all work in the same buildings. There needs to be that talking together there too, because it is a whole community response to a person. People do not fit into boxes—I am sure you have heard that theme come through too.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I like the concept of weighting—I think it is a very good idea—but how would the weighting work in terms of the practical decision to apply a limited amount of funds to a particular organisation, not to fund that organisation or to only give them partial funding? How does the weighting work in the decision-making process of the tender?

Ms HOWE: I have got an idea—maybe go to Ya'el after me. For example, you might spend four months trying to find your networks. That is four months where the organisation has not even got its foot in the door. They might have had a great tender and a great outcome is seen in economies of scale and value for money. But if it takes you four months to even get an interagency or a group together and you are not known in community, it could be four months to get to that point and for the first year you still have no trust or validity in community. So it is almost like your service is not past the starting gates. That has a weighting in itself. If you look at a service system that already exists, a local response, they can say—this interagency, this group, this consortia—"We can deliver this now."

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: How do you get over the situation of then effectively locking out new and better ideas? You might have a group which has been there for 20 years and has been successfully funded for 20 years, but in terms of actual impact has been of negligible benefit to the community. It has just existed because there has been nothing better.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: And that has happened.

Ms HOWE: Sure. I would say it is not an either/or situation. There is nothing to say that there should not be some way of encouraging new ideas, philanthropics, whatever it is, some new thinking around social impact and the demonstrating of dollar value for the outcomes you achieve and still honouring, supporting, including and bringing along what exists there already. That has to be a better outcome rather than just saying it is one thing or another. I think there is a place for both.

Ms FRISCH: I think that our recommendation focused on the fact that we would like it considered. The practicalities of weighting may vary, but if it were considered as one of the criteria, as well as innovation, then at least respect would be paid to that. It might not be determinative, but at least it would have been considered.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So it is not at the moment?

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It is not unique for tenders to have weighting—not just for social services but for things like road base. To have weighting for different components is not a unique idea.

Ms HOWE: It may not be explicit, but it is implicit in the way questions are framed. If it is up-front and is seen to have the same capital value as a piece of land to develop then that is important. It recognises that the fabric already exists to build upon. That is not to say that organisations cannot be innovative. An organisation may have to speak to how it will innovate because the service needs to move in a new direction. They can do both.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you both for coming in this afternoon. Page 10 of your submission talks about a matter that was raised by witnesses earlier today, which is privacy issues, or the capacity to readily transfer information about clients. Your specific recommendation would be for the Privacy Commissioner to produce guidance on the transfer of client records for organisations that are closing or transferring a service. You say that that guidance should be promoted and distributed broadly. At the moment, what do organisations look to discern the best way to do that? Is an unwritten pro forma used, or is the process ad hoc? Would you elaborate?

Ms HOWE: We do not have a great deal of evidence about it, but we hear anecdotally that it depends on the circumstances of the case. For example, if a refuge changes to another provider, guidance may be sought through FACS about the sharing of equipment or information in client files. That does not mean that that happens all the time. We do not really know about the sharing of private information because there is no clear direction on it. That concerns me. We need to ensure client confidentiality, particularly in families with domestic violence and safety issues. The corollary is that you want to ensure that services do the best job and have the capacity to take on board the work needed to look after a complex family with longstanding support needs. There needs to be firm instruction and guidance. That is not the area of expertise of NCOSS, but people have asked for guidance.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Is part of the problem the uncertainty of interpreting State and Commonwealth privacy legislation?

Ms HOWE: Yes. We discussed this before we came to the hearing. The situation varies, depending on whether it falls under Health funding or is co-funded by the State and Federal Governments. Sometimes part of the information about a client belongs to a different part of a program. If the Privacy Commissioner were to give clear direction, it would not need to be as complex as it is currently.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: From your earlier testimony, it seems that information sharing is already happening informally. If a police sergeant calls the local women's refuge and says, "By the way, there was domestic violence at 23 Smith Street," that is not strictly within the bounds of privacy considerations.

Ms HOWE: Everyone knows the family. They have already been working with them.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: There is a relationship there that says, "This is of such a nature that I can do this."

Ms HOWE: They already know.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It would be better if that were formalised.

Ms HOWE: That is it. The police are not breaching protocols in those cases because the families may already be known to the services. The family members know the refuge workers or the women from the local support service or the women's health doctor. It is not as if the police are telling tales out of school or breaching protocol, but some clear direction is needed. Police love direction and clarity, so it would be very good for them to have that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Page 9 of your submission, under the heading "Funding and contract issues", says:

Real costs not covered

The 2015 *State of the Sector Report* reinforces that organisations believe that funding does not cover the full costs of service delivery.

The use of the word "believe" is curious. Is there evidence that that is the case, or is it supposition?

Ms HOWE: Their belief is based in the fact that the money does not stretch to allow them to do all the things that they want to.

Ms FRISCH: The State of the Sector survey was commissioned by NCOSS and undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre. About 100 organisations responded to various questions, including about that. The organisations either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: The question used the word "believe".

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That was the form of the question. Thank you for that.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: You made a strong point in your submission about competitive tendering, as have other witnesses today. I had experience of the sector for two years and saw the restructuring that occurred in south-west Sydney because of competitive tendering. I will not name the organisation, but, as an example, a youth services provider in south-west Sydney did not win a tender. A larger, regional organisation did. Their budget went up, so there was an increase in funding overall. There are economies of scale in reviewing the way things are structured. The talented staff in the smaller organisation were not made redundant; they found jobs in a new organisation.

Ms HOWE: That happens often.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: There is new management, with new thinking and new ways of doing things. Is it not the case that competitive tendering is a transitional process? I fully accept the weighting argument. Perhaps the period of funding needs to be longer. But is competitive tendering not a transitional process in a market-based economy to test people's ideas, to test the capacity of organisations to deliver and to allow new entrants into the market? A witness talked earlier today about the trauma that they are experiencing from the competitive tender process. I thought that was an emotional term to use. I know that any change in a job is traumatic. Do you think there is an up side?

Ms HOWE: Do you rip off a bandaid and stave off the damage? That is what competitive tendering can do. Then the market corrects itself, good staff are hired and in the end it all works out. This is why NCOSS is working to determine a fair procurement process. There has to be a middle ground. We must try to ameliorate the impact by expecting measurement, evaluation and outcomes. Organisations must expect to work in a professional way, with good governance and skilled staff. As you have acknowledged, it is important to recognise what is already there. It is a grey area that needs work. NCOSS, on behalf of its members, is very keen

to come up with recommendations for principles that have a softer approach, to try to avoid wrecking what already exists.

"Trauma" is a strong word. It is a feeling felt often by community when they see that things have shifted so violently in a way when they need not necessarily be that way. As I said in the example, a big organisation with economies of scale and a really flash tender never step foot in that community and use what was already there. But the organisation that is already there has to use a different framework, demonstrate outcomes and work in different ways because they are working in a new environment but they still exist. It is not like we said, "Well, you are small and you are not efficient." The efficiencies have been ironed out with negotiation and it should be looking at what is already there in each community. Because so often what is happening in the name of efficiency or reform is really upsetting things so badly that it is really hard to recalibrate. Change is inevitable and communities have to reflect and respond but we really want to try and not be black or white about it.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: My point is that we are well into that transition and most of the trauma and upheaval should be behind the sector and we should be seeing new organisations or existing ones settling into their roles. Is that not the case? You must have seen the end of that.

Ms FRISCH: I very much think there is still distrust between organisations and in the community. Trust is a crucial factor here. Perhaps it will be better in the future but it is not there yet. There is a feeling of distrust and relationships being undermined.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: We heard that earlier today from a witness.

Ms HOWE: You do not have to do it in a way that it is win or lose. There has to be a better way that reflects, responds and respects the market, the outcomes and those principles of value for money but that also respects the specialisation that exists. In fact, even if that was not a perfect service, it is a really strong network and service system that has value. How do we build it up and connect it and make it work and provide avenues and pathways for an environment where innovation can occur so that new ways of responding to community can occur? I do not think it is either/or. I am sure it is not.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Would you say there has been a poorer quality of service because of the competitive tendering process?

Ms HOWE: I could not say that, no.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: It is probably too early to say that.

Ms HOWE: Too early, yes. I would not feel confident to say that.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: When will you know?

Ms HOWE: I do not think it will become apparent. The other thing is it depends what further reform looks like, because then it becomes muddy. It is a hard question to answer. I am not trying to evade the answer. It is going to be hard to articulate until we know, for example, there is potential reform for early intervention and there is the National Disability Insurance Scheme rollout. How that looks will impact on this bit of reform that has happened here. Timing is a hard one to answer. I know there is possibility for the Government and the sector and the community—at the end of the day that is why we do this; it is for the people—to work together to try to soften the approach and be more locally based and efficient. At the end of the day that is efficient.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: This is a broad question. If you would like to think about it and take it on notice, that is fine. The members of the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] also comment about the way in which outcomes are measured or judged as being successful or otherwise. Is there a general consensus about the methodology that is used to measure improvements with respect to looking at a disadvantaged community and seeing whether or not progress is being made, or are we still debating how we measure these things to determine whether or not progress is being made?

Ms HOWE: There is some solid work being done by a variety of our members. It depends what you are measuring. It is still an area that is under review and discussion, but measuring outcomes for vulnerable members of our community is front and centre of almost all of our members now. They are totally aware it is

appropriate. They are able to contemplate that and to look for frameworks from which they can work within. It is an area that is not a fine science and there is a variety of models. However, it is now accepted practice—and even if it is not practised yet it is accepted by our broader membership—that it is certainly an area that they should be contemplating when they deliver their work in the community. I do not know if Ya'el wants to add anything.

Ms FRISCH: No, nothing to add to that.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: There seems to be a problem with the length of a two-year grant.

Ms HOWE: Yes, you are only just getting the training wheels off in the first year and then you are thinking, "Well, we have only got another year to go." It is not enough time to really demonstrate that any milestones have been met or longevity around the service.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What should it be?

Ms HOWE: I would think a minimum of five years.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Five-year grants.

The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD: Are they all two years?

Ms HOWE: There is a variety. Some grants are 12 months and some are three years.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My question is about examples. It seems to me that reform happens in government but we are relying on the non-government sector to deliver it. I am interested in your thoughts about joint planning at the front end. Can you point to any examples where it is happening or where you would like to see it happening? I am thinking about early intervention. The lessons learned from Going Home, Staying Home should tell everyone that that service needed to be more up-front. Regarding joint planning, is there anywhere you feel like your sector is getting in on the ground floor before reforms go through?

Ms HOWE: I can talk to Going Home, Staying Home and say that there was an effort. In the beginning, if you look back at a co-design approach and showcasing, there were a lot of consultations around the State showcasing work where it was working really well. The wheels fell off again. It will come up, in my view, at the procurement stage. It was as if the discussion stopped and it became like the idea, "We are not buying a fleet of cars at the best price". It is almost as if procurement should be a co-design process too that looks to what is existing in that community.

We are very fearful and read narrowly the procurement guidelines and there was a fear that there was competitive edge or that the market was not working in the way it should be—"we can't let them know this is what is happening there". It is actually good common sense to say maybe there is a big charity and three small local services and a Rotary club who want to come together because they already work together. Why do we not frame a tender around them and not consider this in the same way you would purchase the best tables or chairs or cars? I think that is where the wheels fell off with Going Home, Staying Home. I think that is a real shame because if it had continued right through you could have looked at what was happening on the ground. Let us pull it together and work around that.

CHAIR: Thank you. The Committee secretariat will forward to you any additional questions from members. We request that a response be given in 21 days. Thank you very much for your submission and for the time you have taken out of your day to attend the inquiry today. We very much appreciate it.

Ms HOWE: Thank you.

Ms FRISCH: Thank you.

The Committee adjourned at 3.28 p.m.